

Re-examining Tricky Dick and the Pink Lady:
Helen Gahagan Douglas, Gender, and New Deal Liberalism in the
United States Senate Election in California, 1950

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the 1950 United States Senate election in California that pitted the New Deal liberal Helen Gahagan Douglas against the hard-line anti-communist Richard Nixon. By considering the election within the context of a changing economic landscape, and the push to re-traditionalize gender norms following the upheaval of wartime the Douglas vs. Nixon senate race is a powerful example of how the subtle use of gender and sexism in political contests has historically been used to discredit women candidates. In this thesis I work to situate the Douglas vs. Nixon race within the broader nexus of American anti-communism and the politics of containment while combatting some of the historical myths surrounding Douglas to demonstrate the extent to which gender and the re-orientation of liberal political philosophy in the postwar period contributed to the political defeat of one of the most promising political women of the twentieth century.

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Introduction

When I began this project early in the fall of 2016, I, like so many others, watched as the American Presidential election played out across our screens. In both the primary and general campaigns, subtle references to Hillary Clinton's gender infused the conversations of her candidacy. Whether it be Donald Trump's suggestion that Clinton "doesn't have the stamina" or "presidential look,"¹ or the fixation of news outlets, pundits, and opinion makers on Clinton's wardrobe, voice, or supposed shortcoming as a wife and mother, the 2016 Presidential election demonstrated that sexism is alive and well in American politics.

Within the past year the virulent sexism and general public distortion of the "issues" during the Trump – Clinton presidential race has become a touchstone in American political and cultural history. However, prior to the most recent presidential election the 1950 Senate Campaign that pitted the anti-communist conservative Richard Nixon against the New Deal liberal Helen Gahagan Douglas occupied a similar position in the American historical narrative. Given the prominence of both Nixon and Douglas in 1950, the campaign attracted national attention and sparked nation-wide debates, as two candidates representing polar opposite political philosophies in one of the most dangerous years of the Cold War, vied for a seat in the U.S. Senate.

Much of the contemporary, as well as historical, attention the campaign received has identified the sexism and red-baiting as expressions of Nixon's personal politics without considering the broader constellation of forces that made his campaign appealing

¹ Sophie Tatum, "Trump: Clinton 'doesn't have the stamina' to be president" *CNN Politics*, September 27, 2016. Accessed January 25th, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2016/09/27/politics/donald-trump-hillary-clinton-stamina/index.html>

to the California voter. Women political agents have always had to face sexism in justifying the presence of women in the public sphere, but they have fared even worse in periods of national insecurity: following wars—when the pressure for re-traditionalization of social norms is perhaps greatest—or during economic crises.

If we remember the campaign in a manner that suits the Nixonian narrative, the defeat of Douglas simply becomes an example of the extremist reactionary politics of the Second Red Scare. The problem with this narrative stem from the fact that Nixon's overt use of sexism, misrepresentation, and red-baiting are positioned as the primary factors leading to Douglas's defeat without considering the broader shifts in the postwar liberal community. As a devote New Dealer, Douglas remained committed to the bold idealism of the interwar liberal community. Often advocating for expanded social security, the maintenance of wartime price-controls, and affordable housing Douglas worked to solidify the gains of Roosevelt's New Deal administration in the postwar period, carrying on the vision of a moral economy that worked in the interests of The People. However, the shift in liberal political philosophy and policy that occurred following the 1948 election and the "shocks" of 1949 increasingly marked Douglas as a political outsider within her own party, as Cold War fears marginalized economic and social reform in favour of establishing a security regime aimed at combatting the visible and invisible threat of world communism.

Chapter 1: Setting the Stage: Helen Gahagan Douglas, the Cultural Cold War, and the Legacy of True Womanhood

An Introduction to the United States Senate Election in California, 1950

After three successful terms representing California's 14th district, Douglas announced her intention to challenge the incumbent Senate Democrat, Sheridan Downey, for his seat in the United States Senate. Although Douglas had been a popular figure in the House of Representatives the social and political landscape of the emergent Cold War necessitated that she prove her patriotism and commitment to fighting the Communist conspiracy at home and abroad. As one of the few remaining New Deal liberals in the House, Douglas believed that the most effective way to fight communism was to address the core conditions that made the ideology appealing. Proposing programs that promised the full and responsible development of Californian resources and industry Douglas was committed to advancing legislation that was in the people's interest.

The political styling that had proved so effective for Douglas throughout her six-years in Congress had a markedly different effect in the context of America in 1950. Coming up against a nationally recognized hard-line anti-Communist, Richard Nixon, in the general campaign placed Douglas at a disadvantage in a cultural and political climate that valorized "toughness", political realism, and patriotism. Similarly, Nixon's (exaggerated) role in the Alger Hiss case and vocal support for the investigations of the House Un-American Activities Committee proved his position as a hard-line anti-Communist. While Douglas stood in support of all major Cold War legislation put forth by the Truman administration, throughout the campaign Nixon's misrepresentation of her official voting record made it appear that Douglas was, at least, a weak link in the fight

against Communism. Although Nixon never explicitly claimed that she was a Communist, Douglas recalled that at the time “the entire Nixon campaign was deliberately designed to create the impression that I was communist or at least quote communistic unquote.”²

While the issue of communism proved to be the most salient in the 1950 Senate election, as it was in many others across the country, the Nixon-Douglas campaign likewise took place during a moment when public perceptions of women were shifting. American Cold War ideology’s glorification of the home and housewife as symbols of American security, prosperity, and women’s patriotism challenged Douglas’s presence in the political sphere and claim to civic authority.

Essentialized conceptions of gender permeated political and cultural discourses of the Cold War era and, in many ways, transformed public perceptions of gender identity and expression. Ideologies of masculinity—or manliness—rooted in ideas of self-containment, rationality, and independence reflected the broader motivations of American containment politics. Where as masculinity in the political realm carried the implication of rational thinking, self-discipline, and independence, femininity generally implied emotive and irrational thinking, frivolity, and an over-reliance on the community.

The gendered implications of red scare populist politics have been thoroughly explored in existing histories, but women’s Cold War narratives have tended to maintain a separation between the public and private spheres, predominantly focusing on how Cold War ideology affected “The Home.” Such a narrow focus on women’s experiences

² Correspondence from Helen Gahagan Douglas to Peter Edison, 19 September 1957, Box 173, Folder 14, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center Congressional and Political Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.

often fail to account for the many ways public women—specifically political women—encountered public perceptions of women while navigating the traditionally masculine space they occupied as elected representatives.

During the 1950 Senate campaign Helen Gahagan Douglas faced the dual challenge of preserving her individual femininity, thus establishing herself as a patriotic American woman, while simultaneously asserting her own political toughness to gain entry into a political space that dealt directly with the exclusive masculine decision-making processes affecting American foreign policy and international affairs. While attempting to strike this delicate balance, Douglas endured an unrelenting attack on her patriotism and commitment to fighting communist infiltration. Douglas is by no means exceptional in her experience of political red-baiting. However, the amalgamation of forces that coalesced in the 1950 United States Senate campaign in California speak to a larger historical trend in which rapid change in the domestic social order prompted a shift towards a politics of gender conservatism, antiradicalism, and ascriptive Americanism intended to contain dissent and reassert control.

The Douglas-Nixon Senate race is a powerful example of how the subtle use of gender and sexism in political contests has historically been used to discredit women candidates. Although it was her *politics* that were positioned as dangerous the subtle use of sexism reinforced the claim that Douglas did not belong in the role of United States Senator.

Cold War Liberalism and the “Soft” New Deal

Following the war, the political and intellectual climate of the U.S. remained briefly hospitable to the bold idealism of the New Deal Era. Armed with the theories of

the Thorsten Veblen and John Maynard Keynes postwar liberals were committed to the pushing beyond the limits of the New Deal social and economic policy, backing the ideas of full employment, increased productivity, comprehensive healthcare, and increased funds for education programs to name a few.³ However, the shifting political climate that valued realism as a measured approach to politics and policy similarly challenged leaders to maintain reputations as pragmatic, tough-minded individuals which often led to many accepting limited reform.

This ultimately resulted in the reorientation of American liberal philosophy to reflect the *toughness* necessitated by the emergent Cold War. During the postwar period Democrats began to distance themselves from the politics of the 1930s that President Truman recalled as “years of weakness and indecision” of which the World War was an “evil result.”⁴ Following the Second World War Democrats were particularly vulnerable to charges of “softness” because of associations that characterized the “bleeding heart” liberalism of the New Deal and Popular Front as inherently soft on communism.

In liberal and conservative anti-communist rhetoric, “softness” carried with it the implied association with feminine traits, behaviours, or ways of being. During the 1940s and 1950s the popular epitaph of the “bleeding heart” liberal came to epitomize feminine liberalism, often drawing allusions to idealistic, utopian, irrational, beliefs out of touch with the political realism that dictated congressional politics.⁵ In a period when political discourses symbolically invoked gender in narratives of security and patriotism and “the

³ Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in A Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s*. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), 27-28.

⁴ President Harry S. Truman, The President’s Farewell Address to the American People, 15 January 1953, Public Papers of Harry S. Truman 1945-1953, Digital Collection, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum. Independence, Missouri, the United States of America.

⁵ Kyle A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), 38.

feminine everywhere came to serve as the losing term,”⁶ women who operated in the public arena of American politics were placed in a precarious position by the very fact that she was a woman.

The Cultural Cold War and American Women

Writing in 1946, Eleanor Roosevelt, told the readers of her six-day a week newspaper column “My Day” that “the next few years are very critical years” for the future of democracy and the maintenance of peace.

We in this country who believe in democracy and in a free-enterprise system will have to justify...the claims which we make of our system of government and our political and economic way of life. There are two strong contenders in the world today for the backing of the people – Communism and our form of democracy – and the proof of the pudding is in the eating.⁷

The ability of the U.S. to function as a global hegemon rested on the continuous projection of American cultural superiority which relied on visual representations of strength and wealth, the vitality and freedom of American institutions, and the attractiveness of mass consumption which all contributed to “selling” the idea of America to the world.⁸ Believing the “American way of life” to be superior to that offered under Communism, part of the fighting the Cold War was the exportation of American culture. Cultural ambassadors, American art, film, and literature were incorporated into the

⁶ Suzanne Clarke, *Cold Warriors: Manliness on Trial in the Rhetoric of the West*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 90.

⁷ Eleanor Roosevelt, My Day by Eleanor Roosevelt, 3 April 1946, The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project [online], The George Washington University. Washington, D.C. United States of America.

ideological offensive of American Cold War strategy and used to spread the ideas and values of democracy the world over. The cultural struggle of the Cold War permeated domestic life and became part of the everyday iconography of American culture.

Studies of the cultural Cold War are necessarily expansive, incorporating transnational, racialized, classed, and gendered perspectives. I am primarily concerned with the broader implications of a patriarchal *culture* for public women. I have thus chosen to narrow my analysis to focus on the gendered implications of the domestic Cold War, especially as it pertains to women's ability to access political power.

In her award-winning book, *Notes from A Feminist Killjoy*, the writer and professor of English Literature Erin Wunker describes patriarchal culture as that in which “masculinity—in people and in things—is privileged as inherently foundational to other states of being.” This privilege is then reinforced through systems, institutions, and social interactions becoming “so entrenched in our psyches and ways of moving through the world” that it appears natural to our ways of thinking and being.⁹ Patriarchal culture and language define the prevailing approach to national security during the Cold War, duplicating the masculine/feminine, active/passive, and public/private dualism to represent the nation during the fight against communism.

American Cold War ideology buttressed a patriarchal culture that valorized domesticity as the most natural expression of “true” womanhood and equality. As Betty Friedan writes in *The Feminine Mystique*, as “a housewife and mother, she [woman] was respected as a full and equal partner to man in his world. She was free to choose automobiles, clothes, appliances, supermarkets; she had everything that women ever

⁹Erin Wunker, *Notes from a Feminist Killjoy: Essays on everyday life*, (Toronto: Book Thug, 2017), 21-22.

dreamed of.”¹⁰ Women’s ability to remain in the home and embrace their “natural” roles as wife and mother was positioned as a virtue of modern American capitalism. American Cold War ideology that envisioned women primarily as figures of the domestic sphere encouraged the cultural belief that the “highest value and only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity.”¹¹

Although many women broke down barriers and achieved positions of leadership and political power the prevailing masculinist view of public and political life continued to sustain a patriarchal political culture. Within this cultural space, women who embodied a tough approach to politics and adopted the principles of realism, pragmatism, objectivity, and the protestant work ethic maintained an air of toughness that could temporarily transcend gender expectations.¹² Together these traits and behaviours coalesce to form what could be considered a political femininity that defined the parameters of a woman’s ability to move through the traditional masculine arena of congressional politics. When read alongside the narrative of national security which relied on a certain degree of gender conservatism, female politicians and were accommodated within electoral politics to the extent that they were viewed to be performing the “housekeeping” of government work.

True Womanhood and The Legacy of the Separate Spheres Ideology

While it is possible under patriarchy for women to be elected to positions of leadership and wield significant political power, it is most often achieved in congruence

¹⁰ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1963; 1997), 18.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 43.

¹² Elizabeth A. Collins, “Red-Baiting Public Women: Gender, Loyalty, and Red Scare Politics.” (PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2008), 16.

with designated social roles that conform to the idealized image of “woman.” In the American context this image is predominantly associated with the values of Republican motherhood that metaphorically position women as “mothers” of the nation, responsible for the reproductive and domestic labour performed in the “private” sphere of home; under this particular conception a woman’s authority has traditionally been derived from her roles as wife and mother through which she became the “equal” complementary partner of man. Writing in 1986, the pioneering historian of women, Gerda Lerner, asserted that under this ideology “Republican women were now to be sovereign in the domestic sphere, even as men more firmly claimed the public sphere, including economic life, as their exclusive domain.”¹³ Just as the ideology of separate spheres delineated the boundaries of male and female activity, the “cult of true womanhood” established a set of prescriptions outlining acceptable female behaviour; while women were expected to be involved with charitable activities outside of the home, their primary responsibility was the care and nurturing of their children and men to whose service they were expected to sacrifice all personal ambition.¹⁴

The establishment of separate spheres of the gendered activity has historically excluded women from participating in elite decision-making circles, but it is not uncommon for them to become leaders through their involvement with issues surrounding healthcare, child poverty, and social policy which are generally imagined as

¹³ Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Volume I, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 28.

¹⁴ The establishment of separate spheres and the gendered ideology which it represents infuses the entire institutional and cultural apparatus of American society as its distinctions between acceptable realms of gendered activity are institutionalized through social and labour processes. Perhaps one of the most significant and lasting effects of the separate sphere ideology is the extent to which the economic arrangements it encouraged established men in the role of “breadwinner” essentially making many women economically dependant on men. For more on the separate spheres and women’s efforts to establish professional fields of women’s work see Robyn Muncy, *Creating A Female Domain in American Reform, 1890-1935*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

political fields that directly affect the home and family. Historically when women have sought power beyond the culturally defined parameters of women's politics they have faced the difficult task of both conforming to socially designated roles of women while simultaneously asserting their own strength or political "toughness." When women move beyond the world of the "social" it becomes clear that the ideals defining the "nature" of women stand in direct conflict to the standards of professional conduct. Women are expected to internalize tendencies urged towards "passivity, humility, [and] self sacrifice" where as the professionalism of the public (and political) world "demanded activity, confidence, and self-assertion."¹⁵ Striking the delicate balance between passivity and activity, humility and confidence, and self-sacrifice and self-assertion required professional women to walk a fine line between the masculine and feminine world. The necessity of this balance is subsequently heightened in the official world of electoral politics where women, presumably, leverage their roles as wives and mothers to occupy a space that would otherwise be filled by a man assumed to be in natural possession of traits required for good governance.

Women's civic involvement was encouraged under the cultural propaganda exported by the U.S. government; however, the bounds delineating women's acceptable presence in the public sphere often confined women to local, community-based organizations where they could, as Eleanor Roosevelt encouraged, "form the thinking of their communities" and "guard our freedoms on the community level."¹⁶ Even when

¹⁵ *Ibid*, xiii.

¹⁶ Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day by Eleanor Roosevelt," 10 September 1947, The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project [Online], The George Washington University.

women sought public roles beyond their immediate community it was expected that they concentrated their energies on those problems assumed to directly affect the family.

For much of her political career Helen Gahagan Douglas remained firmly situated in the realm of social policy, often advocating for fair housing policy and rent-control, the development of a comprehensive healthcare policy, expanded social security, price controls, and civil rights. In her political life, Helen Gahagan Douglas became “inevitably identified in the nation’s heart and mind” with the “homely, down-to-earth issues” of “housing, rent-control, and cost of living.”¹⁷ Being associated with these issues helped to identify Douglas as a woman who exercised her civic authority responsibly, prioritizing the “domestic” politics that directly affected the American family

As tensions between the United States and Soviet Union increased, and domestic paranoia of internal subversion proliferated, Douglas supported all major Cold War programs put forth by the Truman administration. However, Douglas’s support for the administration’s programs did not divert her attention from continuing to push for expanded social reforms and the maintenance of New Deal philosophy in the postwar period. As topics of military expansion, domestic preparedness, and economic support for non-communist countries began to dominate debates in Congress, many political women continued to advocate progressive causes including price controls, civilian control of nuclear technology, veteran’s rights, and affordable housing policy. Anti-communist conservatives resented the “old-girls network” of female New Dealers who often worked

¹⁷ Remarks of the Honorable Chester Holifield, “California’s National Figure: an appreciation of a colleague” printed in the *Congressional Record*, 19 June 1948, Box 158, Folder 7, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

together to garner support for one another's causes.¹⁸ The women's focus, as well as that of New Deal men, on progressive social policy brought the suspicion of anti-Communists and conservative democrats who resented the disturbance in images of domestic bliss central to continual projection of American cultural superiority in the cultural Cold War.

Gender ideology represents a single, but significant, force that informed anti-communist and security politics between 1947 and the late 1980s. Understanding that masculinity and femininity are themselves unstable categories, this thesis is historically situated in a moment when the rigid gender binary had not yet been significantly troubled: the presumed stability of gender identity influenced popular conceptions of gender expression, sexuality, health, and mental stability. Similarly, the iconography of the period which constantly affirms the legitimacy of established gender norms, as well as the ideological work of social scientists and psychologists centering sexuality and psychoanalysis as methods for understanding individual behaviour reflects the extent to which society recognized, and was troubled by, those who represented a challenge to these norms. As such, I acknowledge that I am predominantly working within the bounds of the period's reductive narratives of gender and gender performance, which prescribed specific traits and behaviours that, over time, became inextricably linked to the idea of domestic stability.

Key Concepts and Chapter Organization

As this thesis deals primarily with the topics of gender, security, and loyalty it is important to establish how each concept will be used. In this thesis I understand gender to be the concept that describes the social organization of the relationship between the sexes

¹⁸ Landon R. Y. Storrs, "Attacking the Washington 'Femmocracy': Antifeminism in the Cold War Campaign against 'Communists in Government'," *Feminist Studies*, 33:1, (Spring 2007), 134.

and the continual reproduction of roles for sexed individuals. Similarly, following Joan Wallach Scott's famous definition, I will presume that in political discourse "gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power...politics constructs gender, and gender constructs politics."¹⁹

Although I will be referring to "masculinity" and "femininity" in the singular sense it is important to acknowledge that what I am dealing with are not two universal ideologies of gender. Similarly, it is not to say that ideologies of gender manifested in the same way in all socio-political or geographical contexts in this period. However, histories of the Euro-American world during this period do reveal a tendency towards universalizing conceptions of sex and gender, if even strategically, that often attempted to subsume the complexities of race, class, and sexuality through a sexually defined idea of "woman."

In most works pertaining to the Cold War "McCarthyism" is used to refer to a politics of paranoia and fear which collapsed domestic and international threat of communist subversion into an undifferentiated mass. However, the term red scare politics will be used to reflect the widespread nature of anti-Communist politics that manifest across the political spectrum.

As the introductory chapter to my thesis, I have worked to provide a general overview and contextual framework which situates my topic in a particular historical moment, calling to mind a few of the most important social and political forces that coalesce in the 1950 Senate campaign that will be the topic of my final chapter. The second chapter, "The New Deal, Gender, and the Emergent Cold War: A

¹⁹ Joan Wallach Scott. "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis." *The American Historical Review*. 91:5 (December 1986), 1069-1070.

Historiographical Perspective,” will situate my research in the existing historiography on the topic of gender, culture, the Cold War and outline the theoretical framework that structured my reading the Douglas-Nixon campaign in connection with the broader political climate of the early Cold War. The third chapter, “The Gentlewoman from California,” will provide a semi-biographical introduction to Helen Gahagan Douglas that outlines her gradual politicization and some of her most significant contributions as a member of Congress. Given the centrality of communism in the 1950 campaign, Douglas’s stance on communism and the alleged threat posed by an imagined international communist conspiracy will be the subject of chapter 4, “Douglas, Communism and National Security.” Through this chapter I will work to situate Douglas’s anti-communism within the broader nexus of American anti-communism and the politics of containment while also combatting some of the historical myths surrounding Douglas based on the Nixon’s campaign distortion of her official record. The fifth and final chapter will focus on the 1950 campaign and will apply the theory and perspective developed within the preceding chapters. It is my intention that in organizing my thesis in this manner, with each chapter focusing on a single, but important, element of Douglas ultimately made controversial during the campaign, the extent to which gender and American insecurity contributed to the political defeat of one of the most promising political women of the twentieth century will be made clear.

Chapter 2: The New Deal, Gender, and the Emergent Cold War: A Historiographical Perspective

Introduction

Reflecting on his time in office, President Harry S. Truman speculated that history would come to remember his term as “the years when the ‘Cold War’ began to overshadow our lives.”²⁰ A cursory glance at the historical record would show that President Truman was, at least in some respects, correct. Since the early 1960s the Cold War, and the cultural and economic politics that developed as part of the policy of containment, has occupied an important space both within the academy and American popular culture. While interpretations have shifted alongside changes in the geo-political and domestic climate the prevailing narrative of the American Cold War perspective remains that of the heroic struggle, with at times rigid lines delineating “us” and “them.”²¹ While such a clear cut good/bad, us/them distinction is not present in all narratives of the Cold War, especially those chronicling U.S. imperialism and the domestic Red Scare, it is the one that prevails in popular histories and the iconography that translate and package the general Cold War narrative for mass popular consumption.

The prominence of the heroic narrative in popular histories and culture is significant if one believes that, to paraphrase the historian Alan Nadel, one of the ways history is created is through the repetition of narratives which become referential signs of

²⁰ President Harry S. Truman, The President’s Farewell Address to the American People, 15 January 1953, Public Papers of Harry S. Truman 1945-1953, Digital Collection, Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum.

²¹ Drawn from the early work of Arthur M. Schlesinger and his influential book *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, [1949], 1962). Given the centrality of Schlesinger’s text in the history of Cold War liberalism, *The Vital Center* and its role in popularizing the hard and soft rhetoric of anti-Communism amongst liberal circles will be the subject of further discussion in the following section. The placement here is meant to represent an understanding that at the time rigid lines establishing the “sides” of the Cold War were not just a product of the conservative or reactionary right, but held sway with moderate “vital center” liberals as well.

reality, and create a hierarchy of historical visibility that shape our collective memories of particular times, places, people, and events.²² The political trials of Hollywood stars in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee, the Lavender Purge, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the fall of the Berlin Wall are just some of the points of reference used to construct histories of the Cold War. While my project does not assume to fully interrogate or challenge this narrative, I recognize that to write the history of any moment situated in the Cold War is to place one's self in conversation with the existing literature that sustains this narrative. Given the robust body of scholarship that defines the field of Cold War studies I have elected to include only those works that have proven essential for the research and writing of my thesis.

Early Cold War Literature

During the 1930s, American liberal philosophy was strongly influenced by the reform liberalism of the New Deal. In the midst of the worst economic crisis in U.S. history, New Deal liberalism took as its base assumption that the greatest problems facing the nation were rooted in the structures of industrial capitalism.²³ Through the efforts of Roosevelt administration and the New Deal, the 1930s and 1940s produced a shift in American political economy as “big government” partnered with “big business” to essentially create a mixed economy where the government took an active role in providing for the basic needs of American citizens.²⁴

²² Alan Nadel, *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 24.5

²³ Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 5.

²⁴ Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 72.

As such, any study of Cold War era politics typically begins with a reading of Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s influential book *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*.²⁵ Published in 1949, the text reflects Schlesinger's contributions to the reorientation of liberal theory away from those of the 1930s and Popular Front. Later positioned as a work of liberal revisionist history by Kyle A. Cuordileone in *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (2005), Schlesinger's text can be read alongside Richard Hofstadter's *The American Political Tradition* (1948), which similarly worked to distance liberal political philosophy from that of the New Deal era. According to Hofstadter, at the heart of American political philosophy is a shared belief in the sanctity of private property, economic individualism, and the value of competition that successfully merge capitalist culture with the essential virtues of man. This shared commitment fosters what Hofstadter identified as "a kind of mute organic consistency" within American politics that, while conflicting on methodology, presume the structures of capitalism to be the most natural expression of human nature.²⁶

During the 1930s, New Deal liberals and intellectuals had demonstrated a deliberate interest in questioning the fundamental working arrangements of American capitalism. Reflecting the tradition of "reform" liberalism that emphasized the interconnectedness of society, New Deal liberals accepted that in order to foster an economic and social world that would avoid the crises triggered by the economic collapse of 1929 a new system would need to be formed that recognized the need to protect

²⁵ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, [1949], 1962).

²⁶ Maintaining the presumed naturalism of social and interpersonal relationships under capitalism continually reproduce and normalize racial, gender, class, and sexual hierarchies. For Richard Hofstadter's original writing see the introduction to *The American Political Tradition*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1948), viii.

individuals, communities, and the government from the overreaches of corporate power.²⁷ Within this spirit, the Popular Front was largely conceptualized as an extension of popular liberal politics during the 1930s and early 1940s. Emerging during the Great Depression, the Popular Front forged a somewhat unlikely alliance between liberals, progressives, and communists in an effort to fight the spread of fascism emerging in Europe. The alliance between Popular Front organizations and the New Deal Democratic Party resulted in a breakthrough moment of American social democracy.²⁸ This moment shaped a new social and political consciousness in the U.S. and fostered a civic culture where both the government and social movements worked for good of “The People.”

Both Hofstadter and Schlesinger worked to distance postwar liberalism from the philosophy of the 1930s, which was framed as out of step with the contemporary realist paradigm. Schlesinger explicitly notes this shifting political landscape in his introduction to a later edition of *The Vital Center* as he recalls writing the majority of the text during a “moment when the liberal community was engaged in the double task of redefining its attitude towards the phenomenon of communism and, partly in consequence, of restructuring the bases of liberal political philosophy.”²⁹ While the social and political climate immediately following the war remained hospitable to the bold idealism of the New Deal, in working to temper the effects of capitalism and partnering with Popular Front organizations, New Deal Democrats had become vulnerable to attacks from conservatives and Republicans who claimed that the New Deal advanced socialistic models of economic planning. Schlesinger himself laments that capitalism had “visibly

²⁷ Brinkley, *End of Reform*, 7.

²⁸ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Verso, 1998), 10.

²⁹ Schlesinger, *The Vital Center*, ix.

begun to lose the qualities which have made it great: the zest for competition, the delight in risk taking, [and] the bold creative vigor” that inspired the American Dream.³⁰ In defining the “vital center” for the postwar period, Schlesinger, at times, actively disengages the liberal community from the actions and philosophy of the interwar period.

Second to the Schlesinger’s *Vital Center* is the intellectual work of American sociologist Daniel Bell whose interest in examining the political conformity of the 1950s inspired one of his most influential works. Carrying on in the tradition encouraged by Schlesinger in 1949, Bell continues to center piecemeal, pragmatic liberalism in his work, opposing utopian ideologies from the perspective of one who is not conservative but anti-ideology. Written and published during the height of the Cold War, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas*³¹ and *The Radical Right*³² offer some of the earliest sociological analyses of the dichotomized political culture of the period and offer tentative explanations for its effectiveness legitimating the systemic violation of civil liberties. Published in 1960, Bell’s *End of Ideology* contains a series of essays written throughout the 1950s examining the failure of ideology—read socialism and Communism—to restructure the global political economy and critiqued the utopian ideologies popular during the 19th century for their failure to remake the world under their vision. In *End of Ideology* Bell reflects on the emergent theory of mass society which he positions as “the most influential social theory in the Western World today.”³³ Bell conceptualizes of this society as a mechanical unit and “apparatus” which

³⁰ Schlesinger Jr. *Vital Center*, 26.

³¹ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology on the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*. (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960).

³² Daniel Bell, ed. *The Radical Right: The New American Right, Expanded and Updated*. (New York: Doubleday Press, 1964).

³³ Bell, *End of Ideology*, 21.

“impresses its style on man” and “makes life mathematical and precise.”³⁴ In his analysis of McCarthyism, Bell identifies both a small group of “soured politicians” and the general anxiety surrounding the alleged erosion of American masculinity as the primary support network that allowed the extremist politics of McCarthy to gain mainstream cultural visibility.³⁵ However, while critical of McCarthy and the politics of his supporters, Bell was similarly suspicious of Popular Front culture which he identified as a tactic used by 1930s Moscow to infiltrate and influence American society.³⁶

While the general subjects of each essay addressing the conditions of American society are useful sources when attempting to understand the intellectual and political climate of the 1950s, Bell’s brief but pointed discussion of the role of the family in the American system is particularly applicable to the broader aims of my research. While discussing capitalism as a social system, Bell deliberately notes that it is “through the family” that power has historically been transmitted and the breakdown in the relation between property and family over the past 75 years has contributed to crises within the system itself. In his analysis, Bell takes care to note that “emancipation of women, in one sense” directly led to the “disappearance of one of the stable aspects of bourgeoisie society,” whereby marriage functioned both as a way of regulating the relation between the sexes and distributing property.³⁷

While *The End of Ideology* presented a series of Bell’s own essays, *The Radical Right* incorporated multiple works by some the period’s leading liberal intellectuals including Schlesinger and the historian Richard Hofstadter. Originally published as *The*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 101.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 284.

³⁷ For more, see Bell, *End of Ideology*, 37-38.

New American Right, the 1964 *Radical Right* incorporated additional essays and expanded on the original work. The collection presented a broad analysis of 1950s political culture and demonstrates how the leading liberal intellectuals of the time understood the politics of the Cold War and connected McCarthyism to the underlying tensions of American political life and culture. Whereas Bell understood McCarthyism to be “primarily an atmosphere of fear generated by a one-man swashbuckler cutting a wide swath through the headlines,” he asserted that the politics of fear primarily gained their power through agitation within Congress and state legislatures that used the power of government agencies to assert power;³⁸ Talcott Parsons’s submission characterized the era’s political climate to be “a relatively acute system of the strains which accompany a major change in the situation and structure of American society”;³⁹ Richard Hofstadter and Seymour Martin Lipset viewed the same conditions to be a social phenomenon born from a form of status politics that gave expression to the anxieties felt by particular groups in society concerned with defending their new positions in a postwar society.⁴⁰ While different in their approach, each contributor to Bell’s text identified social anxieties resulting from major shifts in the political, economic, and social landscapes to be the trigger that launch McCarthy and the politics of fear, paranoia, and the conformity into the mainstream of American politics.

Bell’s texts are important windows into the political and social climate that characterized the early Cold War period and has retroactively been conceptualized as the decade of the Cold War consensus. The culture of conformity that defines popular

³⁸ Bell, *Radical Right*, 4.

³⁹ Talcott Parsons, “Social Strains in America (1955),” in *The Radical Right*, 209.

⁴⁰ Bell, *Radical Right*, viiii.

understanding of the 1950s is typically considered to be the result of a process of privatization and depoliticization fostered by a Cold War climate that positioned dissident politics as anti-American.⁴¹ Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, while somewhat unorthodox to include as part of early Cold War canon, directly engaged with the climate that similarly interested those like Bell and Schlesinger but considered its implications from an albeit privileged woman's point of view. Within Cold War ideology, the celebration of the American housewife portrayed a society that had achieved such a level of development and material power that women were free to accept "their own nature" instead of "trying to be like men" and working primarily outside of the home.⁴² Under these cultural conditions, women who appeared discontent with domestic life were presumed to be "neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women" to be pitied by those who had "learned that truly feminine women" do not aspire to lead a public life outside of her roles as wife and mother.⁴³ Although valuable for the contribution of women's narratives to an otherwise masculinist story, Friedan's analysis failed to acknowledge the experiences of working-class women and women of colour who have historically worked outside of the home and did not have access to the privilege of the women covered in Friedan's text.

The politics of fear and paranoia that contributed to this culture of conformity are indicative of what Richard Hofstadter termed the "paranoid style" of American politics. Hofstadter's 1964 essay, and title article in a book by the same name, published in *Harper's Magazine* identified a historical pattern in the American political tradition that

⁴¹ Amy Swerdlow, "Ladies Day at the Capitol: Women Strike for Peace versus HUAC," *Feminist Studies*, 8:3, (Autumn 1982), 514.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 16.

marked as “dangerous” those ideas thought to threaten a uniquely *American* way of life. Hofstadter’s *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* focused on exploring a particular “style of mind” of a small majority in American politics whose politics possess a particular trend towards “heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy.”⁴⁴ Hofstadter was intrigued by the way animosities and the opinion of a small minority could be politically leveraged to garner popular support for a political movement. Those whom he believed to be in possession of this paranoid style were most often involved in minority movements whose personal political stylings incorporated a form of fragile nationalism that claimed to be defending something uniquely “American.” Drawing on Hofstadter’s initial work, I understand the red scare politics of the Cold War to be representative of deep-rooted anxieties surrounding race, sex, gender, class structures that re-emerged in moments of uncertainty and instability.

Using the work of Schlesinger, Bell, Hofstadter, and Friedan as a point of departure for my own research contributes to the broader effort of my thesis to identify the role of Cold War liberal perspectives in popularizing a gendered perception of security that relied on prevailing assumptions of the biological “nature” of men and women. While not explicitly dealt with by Schlesinger and Bell, their focus on the individual often invokes the ideas of hegemonic masculinity and femininity to conceptualize security and the individual contributions expected of loyal citizens in the fight against communism. In both the work of Schlesinger and Bell the male/masculine is centered in depictions of strength and security, and routinely invokes the deeply gendered

⁴⁴ Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics: and other essays*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 3.

protector/protected relationship imagined between men and women as a metaphor for national defence.

Friedan's work, although centering the experience of predominantly white, educated, heterosexual, middle-class housewives is valuable for a contemporary understanding of how the gendered politics of security and anti-Communism directly affected the lives and consciousness of women. Accepting that Friedan's work speaks to a very specific subset of women, it is necessary to extrapolate from the themes presented in her work to conceptualize how this cultural climate would skew public perceptions of prominent political women who did not fit neatly into the categorical box of housewife-mother. When thinking of women's public roles, and the standards by which they were judged to conform to acceptable gender norm, it stands to reason that those traits that identified political toughness or masculinity would have complimentary feminine understandings. Using the work of Schlesinger and Bell opens a door for an understanding of political femininity that incorporated characteristics, traits, behaviours, and beliefs beyond those associated with the cult of domesticity which would position a woman as "strong" when occupying a traditionally male role.

Gendering the Cold War

Following what historian Peter Novick has termed the "epistemological turn" of the early 1960s, the U.S. academic community produced some of the earliest attempts to more critically analyze the politics and culture of the early Cold War, as scholars pushed beyond the "idealized positivist and empiricist image" that believed researchers to be

isolated from social influences and therefore objective.⁴⁵ This shift in scholarly practice is reflected in Cold War literature as sociologists, political scientists, and historians turned their attention to ideology and the social influences in the construction of Cold War culture. Moreover, the changes wrought by the consciousness raising efforts of second-wave feminists gave rise to an entire new field of study in the 1960s and 1970s. Inspired, at least in part, by the Marxist bottom-up social history that decentered economic elites and increasingly aware of the glaring absence of women in historical narratives female academics (always in small numbers at the time) worked to establish women's history as its own historical focus. Similarly, the work of feminist scholars and activists emerging from the New Left, women's movement, and women's liberation movement provided an accessible language and theoretical framework linking the contemporary experiences of women—and men—under patriarchy to those of historical women.

Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was the breakthrough consciousness-raising classic of early second-wave feminism. A number of popular feminist writing emerging from the early women's movement assisted in shaping and informing the consciousness of millions of American women and pushed the boundaries of acceptable scholarship centering women's experiences in their analysis. For example, Gerda Lerner's seminal text, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, was foundational in understanding patriarchy as a historical process by which women were continuously made subordinate to men. Lerner's classic was successful in its effort to disrupt the prevailing interpretation of patriarchy as "ahistorical, eternal, invisible, and unchanging,"⁴⁶ yet the biological determinism

⁴⁵ Mark Solovey, "Project Camelot and the 1960s Epistemological Revolution: Rethinking the Politics Patronage-Social Science Nexus," *Social Studies of Science*, 31:2 (April 2001), 173.

⁴⁶ Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 28

threaded into Lerner's early text identifies some of the more problematic tendencies of early analysis of women. That said, Lerner's text was important for understanding the ways sexual categories are continually remade under patriarchy to sustain women's subordination.

The historical lens of early women's historians similarly shifted the historical gaze to uncover the contributions of women as significant historical actors. Exploring the feminized worlds of history which, unsurprisingly, often centered on the home and the domestic sphere in its analysis, scholars such as Elaine Tyler May contributed to the canon of Cold War literature with her work examining the militarization of the home under the banner of national security and the gendered implications of Cold War culture. May's *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (1988) historicized the American family to show how Cold War ideology and domestic re-traditionalization reinforced one another, making the family a centrepiece of anti-communist politics.⁴⁷ A landmark book for its focus on the family and Cold War ideology, May's book was integral to understanding how "domestic containment", as she called it, played out in the lives of women and families who otherwise are sidelined in the official political histories of the period. Identifying McCarthyism as a phenomenon fueled by the "suspicion of new secularism, materialism, bureaucratic collectivism, and consumerism" which was said to epitomize "the potential 'decadence' of New Deal liberalism",⁴⁸ May argued for the inherent political role and history of the family in American society and begins to show the gendered implications of red-scare politics.

⁴⁷ Elaine Tyler May. *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, (New York: Basic Books, 1988).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

More recently, Laura McEnaney's book *Civil Defence Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (2000) looks at the slow and gradual processes through which civil defence was transformed and instituted through a family-home-centric approach to the nuclear threat. By placing the family at the center of discourses, the home became the (de)militarized centre of civilian defence and the front yard became the front line.⁴⁹ McEnaney examines the way national security was gendered to connect the "normal" duties of the housewife to that of defence against nuclear attack and the way public discourses of national "security" were rearticulated to posit every change in the global world as a possible threat to the U.S.. McEnaney's important book uses the private politics of the domestic to interrogate and link the public politics of the Cold War and look at the phantasmagoria of panic, fear, and paranoia that fed the psychological Cold War.

However, there were ways in which women could leverage this idealized womanhood in the public sphere to legitimize their claim to speak authoritatively on issues of national defense and security. As Amy Swerdlow outlines in her 1993 book, *Women Strike for Peace*,⁵⁰ the women involved in the Women Strike for Peace (WSP) protest invoked their socially designated role as mother to legitimize their place in public debates of the nuclear threat.

Despite the increased attention given to women's Cold War historical narratives, the narrow focus on the home and domesticity obscure and, in some instances, erase the political efforts of women who did not function primarily within the domestic sphere.

⁴⁹ Laura McEnaney. *Civil Defence Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁵⁰ Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

Following developments in feminist theory “gender” was introduced as a category of analysis that could be used to explore networks and relations of power as well as the production of structuring norms.

The expansion of women’s narratives, as well as a focus on the historical and social construction of gender, became the focus of a new generation of historians and social scientists interested in the histories of gender and sexuality. Developments in feminist and gender theory created the space for scholars to interrogate the identity categories that, for much of history, have been presumed stable. By invoking gender as a term of categorical analysis we shift our focus beyond the traditional masculine/feminine, male/female binary to emphasize an entire system of social organization.⁵¹ Although the term “gender” is often conflated with the study of women, the shift in analytical focus allowed for the questioning of the male experience and construction of masculinity, thus establishing a rift within the community of historians of women.

Preceding much of the literature that would be produced throughout the 1990s was Barbara Ehrenreich’s 1984 book, *The Hearts of Men*.⁵² Ehrenreich’s work examines the evolution of masculinity and male identity from the 1950s onward and looks to the culture of conformity fostered throughout the decade as a possible source for the preserved crisis in masculinity that concerned contemporary scholars. While positioning conformity to prevailing norms of masculinity and male identity as an emasculating force, Ehrenreich similarly incorporates an analysis of the women’s position in relation to their male counterparts. In *The Hearts of Men*, Ehrenreich argues that the stifling culture

⁵¹ Joan Wallach Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *The American Historical Review*, 91:5, (December 1986), 1053-1075.

⁵² Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*, (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1984).

of domesticity that affected so many women was a result of shifts in political economic philosophy. Having tied American business and capitalism to the idea of patriotic Americanism itself, women were the only scapegoat left to be held responsible for the emasculation of American men. As Ehrenreich writes, “in the fifties, a whole posse-full of angry male writers took out after the American women; if it wasn’t the corporation that had emasculated American men, it must have been her.”⁵³ Masculinity as politics influenced the political culture and social structures of Congress, as well as the development of foreign and domestic policy. Through a series of narratives made similar under the concept of containment these patriotic gender identities became one means of cultivating national unity and defining the boundaries between dangerous and non-dangerous, security and insecurity, belonging and otherness.

To identify the extent to which gender and sexual politics affected policy and institutional culture in Congress, the works of Robert J. Dean and Kyle A. Cuordileone represent essential reading in studies of Cold War masculinity and political culture.⁵⁴ Dean’s 2001 book *Imperial Brotherhood* firmly situates patrician masculinity at the center of American political culture throughout the 1950s and reaching its peak influence through the administrations of Kennedy and Johnson. A discursive meditation on the ramifications of culture, class, and gender in the policy making process, *Imperial Brotherhood* argued that “because sex and gender roles are fundamental elements of social order, Cold War contests over political inclusion place a strong emphasis on

⁵³ *Ibid*, 37.

⁵⁴ For more on the affect of gender and sexual politics on policy and institutional culture see the work of Andy Rotter, Geoff Smith, and Frank Costigliola. For historians of gender and foreign policy, see Kristin Hoganson, Emily Rosenberg, Brenda Plummer and Laura Belmonte, See also Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998).

sexuality and the ‘perversion’ of sexual norms.”⁵⁵ Building on the earlier work of historians of sexuality, most prominently John D’Emilio’s classic *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: the making of a homosexual minority in the United States, 1940-1970*,⁵⁶ Dean inserted his work into a broader conversation of historical scholarship by reasserting that “gender, sexuality, and the production and control of sexual secrets played a central role in many political struggles of the Red Scare era.”⁵⁷

Published four years after Dean’s first book, Cuordileone’s *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* extends Dean’s work by emphasizing the centrality of political masculinity in the initial organization of liberal anti-communist political philosophy. *Manhood and American Political Culture* presses the narrative presented in Schlesinger Jr.’s *The Vital Center* through an interrogation of the text’s gendered language and imagery. Key to Cuordileone’s book is a prolonged discussion of the association of feminine traits with weakness and susceptibility to subversion which was constructed alongside the stigmatization of homosexuality in the political sphere. When read together, Dean and Cuordileone produce a convincing narrative that firmly situated gender in relation to anti-communism and red scare politics.

Both Dean and Cuordileone’s work follows the cultural turn in diplomatic history precipitated by the end of the Cold War, as cultural theory gradually began to influence the direction of some—but by no means all—historical practice. However, despite the turn towards a focus on race, gender, and class in diplomatic history, there remained

⁵⁵ Robert Dean. *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 66-67.

⁵⁶ John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: the making of a homosexual minority in the United States, 1949-1970*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

⁵⁷ Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood*, 65.

fewer works centering the political experience of women beyond the “Great Women” of the Cold War.

Red Baiting Public Women

Although situated during the First Red Scare (1918-1920), Kim E. Neilson’s *Un-American Womanhood*, examining the intersections of gender, race, class during the post-World War One crack down on radicalism, remains one of the most highly cited in discussions of the affect of red scare politics on public women broadly speaking.⁵⁸ Her work is integral to understanding the historical connection of anti-feminist and anti-radicalism in American conservative political philosophy, which often positions the visible performance of traditional gender roles at the bedrock of national stability and established a working definition of “Americanism” that incorporates anti-feminism into its analysis.

Similarly, Neilson’s “What’s a Political Man to Do?” identified three of the most prevalent heroic identities that could be adopted by men during the first red scare in as a public performance of patriotism. These roles and their reliance on an essentialized femininity carried into the second red scare and played an equally significant role in the construction of a hyper-masculine political culture. In developing a theoretical framework for this thesis, I build on the work of Neilson and her idea of patriotic masculinities to understand how gendered patriotic narratives functioned during the early Cold War. Most recently, Erica J. Ryan’s 2015 book, *Red War on the Family*,⁵⁹ re-

⁵⁸ Kim E. Neilson, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare*, (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001).

⁵⁹ Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998).

examines the family politics of the first red scare and the politicization of the family as a safeguard against the threat of radical subversion. While each work is essential in Cold War studies of women and femininity the primary focus on domesticity must be re-purposed for conversations of women's politics outside of the home.

Red-baiting public women was not particular to the postwar period; indeed, most of the literature examining it centers on the experiences of women following the First World War, or, sometimes, Hollywood's most visible female stars. However, the work of Ellen Schrecker and Landon R.Y Storrs have greatly contributed to connecting anti-feminism and anti-radicalism to the broader history of the Cold War and demonstrated how anti-communism provide a vehicle to articulate the supposed naturalness and necessity of traditional gender roles. In her influential book, *Many Are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America*, Schrecker sees McCarthyism as embodying the paranoia and fear that is often seen in American politics that scapegoats and demonizes marginalized political groups. Similarly, she looks at how the issue of communism was transformed from a political debate into a central issue of national security. Landon R.Y Storrs' 2003 article, "Red Scare Politics and the Suppression of Popular Front Feminism" specifically focuses the discussion of red scare politics on the experiences of political women by examining the loyalty case of Mary Dublin Keyserling. Storrs shows how internalized fears of being labelled a subversive often led individuals to sanitize their own personal narratives and politics by presenting a version of themselves that would be viewed as acceptable under the political climate of McCarthyism.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Landon R.Y. Storrs, "Attacking the Washington 'Femmocracy': Antifeminism in the Cold War Campaign against 'Communists in Government'". *Feminist Studies*. 33:1 (Spring 2007): 118 - 152.

As important as all these works have been, the unpublished dissertation written by Elizabeth A. Collins provides the theoretical and methodological framework that principally inspires this thesis. Collins's "Red-Baiting Public Women: Gender, Loyalty, and Red Scare Politics" (2008) looks at the role of gender in red scare loyalty cases and how five different women were "smeared" and the essentialist ideas about gender and femininity that went into painting the women "pink." Collins makes use of frameworks developed in earlier studies of the anti-feminist backlash and red-baiting of women in 1918-1920 while deliberately staying out of the domestic sphere. Her dissertation is critical in considering the long history and formulaic ritual of red-baiting public women, and how this helped to shape the public's perception of women in public service roles generally.

A Historiographical Look at Helen Gahagan Douglas

Although a prominent and popular figure throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Helen Gahagan Douglas has received little historical or analytical attention apart from her now infamous campaign against Richard Nixon. Mentions of Douglas appear occasionally in some histories, specifically those focused on the implications of women's representation in Congress. Following John F. Kennedy's defeat of Richard Nixon in 1960, Douglas enjoyed a brief moment of public visibility as those who remembered the events of the 1950s Senate race sought Douglas's opinion on Nixon's campaign or personal response to his loss. On the subject of her defeat Douglas was notably reserved, often responding that as the "defeated candidate" any remarks she made on the subject would not be received as "unprejudiced" and that "those who lived through it do not need to be told

about it.”⁶¹ During an interview for the Helen Gahagan Douglas Oral History Project in 1977, Amelia Fry, who conducted interviews for the project, recalled a comment made by Douglas who lamented that anytime “Richard Nixon does anything, I’m besieged by the press. It’s been like we were Siamese twins all these years.”⁶² Others still wrote to Douglas to re-affirm their own support of her past political career and, as one supporter noted, extending their congratulations that she had finally been “avenged for the foul, dirty campaign Nixon waged against you a few years ago.”⁶³ After appearing on the cover of *Ms. Magazine* in 1973, Douglas became a cultural touchstone, an early example of feminist possibility despite the fact that she herself never identified as a feminist. It is perhaps more accurate to describe Douglas and her relationship to feminism and women’s rights generally as reflecting a form of female consciousness that emerged from the popular front feminism of the 1930s and early 1940s.

However, in the limited literature that surrounds Douglas, two sources appear to have set the foundation for studies of her life and political career. Apart from the diverse collection of Douglas’s papers housed at the Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center at the University of Oklahoma, in 1981 the *Helen Gahagan Douglas Oral History Project* provided some of the most in-depth recollections of Douglas directly

⁶¹ Correspondence of Helen Gahagan Douglas to John W. Sorelle, 5 January 1960, Box 173, Folder 14, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

⁶² Helen Gahagan Douglas quoted by Amelia Fry during a 1977 interview with Charles A. Hogan. See “Helen Gahagan Douglas – The United Nations Non-Governmental Section and the Declaration of Human Rights,” in Helen Gahagan Douglas Oral History Project, Volume II, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, (1981), 240.

⁶³ Contained in the personal papers of Helen Gahagan Douglas are a series of postcards and letters she received following the 1960 Presidential election that express their support for both Douglas and feeling of vindication that Nixon had finally had his political ascension halted. The quote I have used here is taken from one such letter written by Mark S. Shaine to Helen Gahagan Douglas on the 9th of November 1960. This letter, as well as many others, can be found in the Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Box 173, Folder 12, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

from those who knew her best. Of the four-volume set, the first two volumes, the “Political Campaigns” and “Congressional Years” are the most important in gaining insight into Douglas the woman and Douglas the politician. The second source was her autobiography, published shortly after her death in 1980 following a long battle with cancer. *A Full Life*, as it was titled, represented Douglas’ own contribution to reclaiming and shaping her own historical narrative.⁶⁴ Written during her on-going battle with cancer, *A Full Life* gives Douglas’ perspective on formative events in her childhood, her role as Congresswoman during the 80th-82nd Congresses, and her later contributions to American politics. However, like most autobiographical accounts, her writing presents a sanitized version of her own political past, opting to skim over, obscure, or alter the narratives of particular moments of importance. It is notable that she claims that she was never treated any differently—in politics or on the stage—because she was a woman. Much like Ingrid Winther Scobie, the historian responsible for the historical-biographical account of Douglas’s life, I found Douglas’s personal reflections to be fairly anodyne, actively removing some of the more controversial or complex moments of her political career from her own narrative. Scobie’s 1992 biography, *Centre Stage: Helen Gahagan Douglas, A Life*, goes further in critically analyzing Douglas as a historical figure. She situates Douglas’ three careers—actress, opera singer, and politician—and rebellious childhood spirit in the context of her later political persona as a member of the House of Representatives.⁶⁵ This is a balanced take on Douglas’s life and politics, if at times becoming too attached to the author’s own experiences as a mother and wife who feels

⁶⁴ Helen Gahagan Douglas, *A Full Life: Helen Gahagan Douglas*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1982).

⁶⁵ Ingrid Winther Scobie, *Center Stage: Helen Gahagan Douglas, A Life*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

she was made to neglect her professional life in service to her family. Scobie's book is the definitive source on Gahagan Douglas and deftly merges biography with historical analysis.

More recently, Margaret M.S. Lowry's 2003 analysis of Douglas's rhetorical stylings critically examined her most famous address to the House, "My Democratic Credo"⁶⁶. In a speech intended to re-affirm her position as a staunch New Deal liberal and anti-communist, Douglas, Lowry argues, mobilized a particular form of political rhetoric rooted in Enlightenment philosophy that contributed to the maintenance of gendered political discourses. In adopting the rhetorical styling and referential tendency of her male colleagues, Douglas used a form of political rhetoric that established a binary discourse of strength and rationalism wherein the male/masculine is almost always positioned in the affirmative.⁶⁷ Lowry is thus somewhat critical of Douglas and her politics, especially where they concern women's rights. She views Douglas as self-contradictory: advocating traditional gender roles while refusing to conform to them herself and demonstrating a willingness to speak on behalf of marginalized peoples but unwilling to change systems so that they may speak for themselves.⁶⁸ While Lowry was correct in positioning Douglas as what we may term a progressive, she similarly applies a level of presentism in her work that contributes to a miscommunication of Douglas's political philosophy and action. What Lowry's rightly identifies is the extent to which women in Congress had to adopt traditional masculine traits, behaviours, and ways of

⁶⁶ A discussion of Douglas' speech is contained in the fourth chapter, "Helen Gahagan Douglas and Communism."

⁶⁷ Margaret M.S. Lowry, "Pretty and therefore 'Pink': Helen Gahagan Douglas and the Rhetorical Constraints of US Political Discourse," *Rhetoric Review*, 22:3, (2003), 285.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 292.

being, while maintaining their femininity, in order to be taken seriously by their male colleagues. Lowry may find that hypocritical, but as a mode of political survival it was common among most pioneers of social change. Douglas *both* affirmed and challenged gender norms as an influential political woman. While many women used maternalist arguments to enter social reform movements or claim positions of public power, Douglas often moved through her political life insisting on her inherent equal value to her male counterparts *beyond* the authority she claimed as a wife and mother.

In addition to the academic literature, two trade books cover the life of Helen Gahagan Douglas and the 1950 campaign and are often included in the historiographical literature surrounding Douglas. Sally Denton's *The Pink Lady: The Many Lives of Helen Gahagan Douglas* and Greg Mitchell's *Tricky Dick and the Pink Lady: Richard Nixon vs. Helen Gahagan Douglas – Sexual Politics and the Red Scare, 1950*. While popular sources on Douglas and the Senate campaign, both books were written by journalists who emphasized the political sensationalism of the story over the more mundane events.

Chapter 3: The Gentlewoman from California

Introduction

Helen Gahagan Douglas was the third of five children born to parents Walter and Lillian on the 25th of November 1900, in Boonton, New Jersey. Her father, a well-respected engineer and contractor, owned and operated a successful construction business, W.H. Gahagan Inc, in Brooklyn, New York, while her mother Lillian tended to the family and maintained her job as a local schoolteacher. According to Helen's account, the Gahagan children were raised in a family steeped in the upper-middle class sentiments of the early twentieth century: hard work, education, and respectability were the guiding principles in the Gahagan home.⁶⁹ Despite her aversion to formal education, Helen Gahagan⁷⁰ graduated from the prestigious Berkeley School for Girls and was then admitted to Barnard College where she remained for two years before leaving to pursue a career in the theatre.

She spent most of the 1920s on the stage, a celebrated Broadway actress, and by 1927 had made the transition from Broadway actress to opera singer. Her appearances in both the United States and Europe convinced critics that the talented actress had a voice to match. Douglas returned to the Broadway stage in a 1930 production of *Now or Never*, starring opposite a yet unknown actor, Melvyn Douglas (nee Hesselberg), whom she married the following year and had two children, Peter (b. 1933) and Mary Helen (b.

⁶⁹ Douglas. *A Full Life*, 4.

⁷⁰ In the first sections of this chapter I will make deliberate use of Helen's birth name, Gahagan, in acknowledgment of the fact that it was not until her 1944 campaign that she began referring to herself as Helen Gahagan Douglas. Prior to 1944 Helen Gahagan opted to maintain her own name to identify herself and her work as separate from that of her husband, Melvyn Douglas. In making deliberate use of both names I hope to amplify the subtle sexism and patriarchal pressures embedded within a patriarchal (political) culture that ties a woman's identity to her most immediate male kin.

1938). The couple moved to California in 1931 when Melvyn was offered the male lead in the Hollywood production of *Now or Never* opposite Gloria Swanson.

Although the term “Dust Bowl” would not be used until 1935, the Gahagan-Douglas’s move to California coincided with the onset of the decade long drought that destroyed farming land across the United States plains beginning in 1932. The socio-economic affects on farming communities were further intensified by the on-going economic crisis of the Great Depression. With an abundance of time on her hands Gahagan became involved in local political work, focusing her efforts on public service and alleviating the struggles of migrant and farm workers. Her efforts on behalf of migrant and farm labourers, including fundraising for local camps, earned her the respect of labour organizations and New Deal liberals who would later become allies in her political career. Gahagan balanced her operatic career through the 1930s, often having to travel to Europe to perform, with her relief work and increasing associations with the Hollywood political scene. Although tangentially involved with the organizational work of Hollywood actor-activists, Gahagan’s connection Hollywood politics came mostly through her husband, Melvyn, who quickly became one of the leading men of the anti-communist left and a prominent supporter of President Franklin Roosevelt and his New Deal administration.

Hollywood and the New Deal

New Deal liberalism took as its base assumption that the greatest problems facing the nation were rooted in the structures of industrial capitalism.⁷¹ The deliberate interest

⁷¹ Brinkley, *End of Reform*, 5.

in interrogating the structures of capitalism infused Hollywood politics and connected the labour struggles of Hollywood to the broader reform liberalism of the New Deal.

Although memorialized as the golden age of film, Hollywood in the 1930s was greatly affected by the politics and conditions of the Great Depression. Melvyn, as well as many other prominent film stars, would become active in anti-fascist politics as the world watched the rise of fascist regimes in Italy, Spain, and Germany. Alongside this rising anti-fascist sentiment was a growing class-conscious critique of the conditions under which actors, writers, and others within the industry laboured. In the midst of the worst economic crisis in U.S. history, many liberal Hollywood figures found the politics of the New Deal and Popular Front appealing.

On the West Coast, Hollywood became the central cultural apparatus of the New Deal and Popular Front, housing many of decade's key cultural front organizations like the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League of which Melvyn and Helen were founding members.⁷² The alliance between Popular Front organizations and the New Deal Democratic Party resulted in a breakthrough moment of American social democracy and shaped a new social and political consciousness in the U.S. that fostered a civic culture where both the government and social movements worked for good of "The People."⁷³ Under this culture, New Deal liberalism advanced a vision of a moral economy that would effectively temper the affects of capitalism on the average American citizen.⁷⁴

⁷² Ingrid Winther Scobie, "Helen Gahagan Douglas: Broadway Star as California Politician," *California History*, 66:4, (December 1987), 247. For more on the rich cultural history of the New Deal and Popular Front see Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 18.

⁷³ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 10.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

While Melvyn was politicized through the domestic politics of Hollywood and the New Deal, Gahagan underwent quite a different process. Raised in a traditionally Republican home, she was never one to be described as political. Her partnership with her husband encouraged her to become more informed on topics of political importance, but it was not until she was directly confronted with the hardships of the Great Depression and threat of Nazism that she truly became committed, in a political sense, to social justice and welfare. Her moment of politicization came while preparing to perform *Tosca* in Vienna in 1938. Married to a Jewish man, Gahagan was horrified at the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism and the casual acceptance of Nazi ideology by her closest associates in Vienna. After being confronted with the reality of growing fascist sympathies in Europe Douglas cancelled all remaining engagements and returned to the U.S. From this moment on, although remaining at a distance, she began lending her name and support to various anti-fascist, anti-Nazi groups.

Helen the Democrat

The combination of her work with migrant labourers and the close friendship she and Melvyn had developed with the Roosevelts contributed to her appointment to the national advisory committee on the Works Progress Administration, the California state committee of the National Youth Association and, from 1942 to 1943, the board of the California Housing and Planning Association.⁷⁵ Additionally, she worked as a member of the Steinbeck Committee to establish a farmworkers union and advocated for fair wages

⁷⁵ United States House of Representatives, "Douglas, Helen Gahagan," *The People of the People's House* <http://history.house.gov/People/Detail/12399>, Accessed September 2017.

and working conditions.⁷⁶ Using her the skills and notoriety she had developed as an actress, Gahagan began cultivating support for social and economic legislation becoming more directly involved in politics because, “I saw the possibility, if we all sat back and did nothing, of a world in which there would no longer be any stages for actors to act on.”⁷⁷

Her most significant position prior to becoming a Representative to the United States Congress was as a California Democratic national committeewoman, which she held between 1940 and 1944. Through this post she became the vice-chair of the California Democratic central committee and head of the Women’s Division, two roles that had remained separate until Gahagan’s tenure. Her rapid political ascension, while undoubtedly aided by her transference of skills acquired as an actress, was due in part to the remarkable air of fascination that seemed to follow Gahagan into her many ventures. Alias de Sola, a lifelong friend, recalled that the physical presence of Gahagan prompted one to “sense that curious quickening the moment she came into a room, a tall radiant woman with quite unreasonable beauty and an air of going somewhere very fast.”⁷⁸ What many described as an “aura” that surrounded the budding politician gave Gahagan a particular appeal when she made public appearances. According to Tilford Dudley, a labour lawyer who worked for President Franklin Roosevelt and the assistant director of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) political action committee, Gahagan

⁷⁶ Douglas, *A Full Life*, 145.

⁷⁷ Shirley Washington, *Outstanding Women Members of Congress* (Washington, D.C: U.S. Capitol Historical Society, 1995), 24.

⁷⁸ Alias de Sola, “Helen Gahagan Douglas: As I Knew Her,” Box 172, Folder 1, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

possessed “a humour and eloquence” that could inject life into a room and “lift an audience emotionally,” a unique and powerful quality for a politician in any age.⁷⁹

By 1944, Gahagan’s popularity amongst New Deal liberals was such that when Thomas Ford, the incumbent Democrat in California’s 14th District, announced his intention to retire, she was put forward to take his place. Gahagan’s celebrity, charm, and political wit made her an appealing candidate but, it was ultimately her commitment to the Roosevelts and the New Deal that identified her as potentially useful for Washington Democrats. For the liberal community, the war allowed many to begin envisioning what a postwar economy, indeed a postwar world, might look like.⁸⁰ In liberal circles, one of the defining issues of the 1944 election cycle was Roosevelt’s running mate. At the 1944 Democratic convention vice-president Henry Wallace was dropped from the Democratic ticket and replaced by Harry S. Truman, a Senate Democrat from Missouri. Roosevelt’s increasing health struggles made conservative Democrats wary of the incumbent vice-president Wallace, who many party leaders viewed as too left-wing to be next in line for the presidency. Truman, a moderate Democrat and widely known within the party for his time as chairman of the Senate wartime committee, was put forward by party leaders as an acceptable alternative to Wallace.

Replacing Wallace on the Democratic ticket reflected the gradual disappearance of New Dealers from positions of power and influence within the Democratic Party.⁸¹

However, within the legislative bodies of the Congress, there was still a need to retain

⁷⁹ Tilford E. Dudley, “Helen Gahagan Douglas – The Reaction of Union Men,” an oral history conducted 1977 by Fern Ingersoll, in Helen Gahagan Douglas Oral History Project, Volume I, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1981), 71.

⁸⁰ Pells, *Liberal Mind*, 30.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

strong political allies willing to fight for the Democratic platform. While initially prompted by President Roosevelt during one of her many informal White House visits, Helen Gahagan decided to run for the Ford's seat to ensure that the New Deal would not lose a political ally in Congress.

She entered the race—the only woman out of eight candidates—with the full support of Ford and handily won the primary with a total of 14,000 votes. Gahagan narrowly defeated the Republican William Campbell in the general election, but her campaign raised a number of issues that would remain central to her political platform for the entirety of her congressional career. As a candidate running in a primarily low income and black district, Gahagan repeatedly appealed to African American voters advocating for civil rights as well as labour rights, a revitalized farm security program, and unemployment insurance for returning soldiers.

Alongside shifts in the political climate, Gahagan entered the political world during a moment of cultural and economic transition that would directly affected public perceptions of women's activity in the public sphere. Wartime propaganda had presented conflicting images of women, invoking the figure of the woman to represent both the victim and the cause of war. Propaganda frequently portrayed women as both figures in need of protection—often metaphorically representing the values and ideals American soldiers fought for or being violated by caricatures of enemy forces—or as the figure of temptation, drawing American men to war.⁸²

The mobilization of restricting gendered narratives during periods of national uncertainty is not uncommon in the broader history of state nationalism. Joanne Nagel

⁸² Sherry, *Shadow of War*, 132.

examines nationalist politics as a masculine enterprise and asserts that nationalist narratives are designed to unite the nation behind common visions of nationhood that typically position women symbolically within the national culture and discourse as objects to be defended, and thus to motivate the actions of male protectors.⁸³

Central to nationalist narratives in within American political culture is the valorisation of the cult of domesticity, which constructs women's patriotic narratives. Within these nationalist narratives, women's domestic roles and labour are positioned as the moral center of the nation. Moreover, women's contributions to the wartime economy, especially as workers in war industries, was viewed as an extension of women's reproductive domestic work; temporarily filling traditionally male roles to reproduce the industrial and domestic conditions that buttressed the American war effort. Conceptualizing the war as an external imposition that interceded in the regular operations of American society, women's industrial work during the war was understood as a temporary, but necessary, readjustment of societal norms that could be put back in place once the external threat was removed.⁸⁴

It is not new to assert that the Second World War contributed to the breakdown of social and cultural barriers to women's employment outside of the home. However, what is not often acknowledged is the extent to which this employment was understood to be a temporary necessity required to meet the production standards of modern warfare. Following the war, it was widely believed that the postwar world would return to "normal" as men returned to from service.

⁸³ Joane Nagel, "Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2:21, (1998): 242-269.

⁸⁴ Sherry, *Shadow of War*, ix.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 was a direct effort of the federal government to establish the economic conditions that supported the postwar return to normalcy. Intended to assist veterans transition from war to peacetime conditions the Servicemen's Readjustment Act—alternatively referred to as the G. I Bill—afforded millions of men (and some women) unprecedented access to capital, government assistance, and resources. In addition to social security benefits and increased access to education, the G.I Bill provided helped to finance veterans mortgages—speeding up the postwar process of suburbanization—government assisted in financing mortgages, and helped to “buttress a male-directed family economy” by giving men disproportionate access to capital, credit, and placed male-breadwinners in a position of control over family finances.⁸⁵

While the gendered implications of a piece of redistributive legislation may not have been intended, it is none the less important that the structures and values that influence the construction and implementation of such efforts be accounted for. Underwriting the good intentions of the G.I Bill is the presumption that men are primarily responsible for the economic stability and security of the family. This hold implications for the broader structuring workplace culture and wages that go beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is important to acknowledge how measures like the G.I Bill engender the postwar economy and subsequently shape the gender and social norms of the postwar period. Under these conditions the Cold War's valorization of the home and domesticity can be connection to the broader economic landscape of the postwar period. Even though

⁸⁵ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004), 137.

many women remained in forms of paid employment following the war workplace structures reinforced the idea that a woman's primary duty was to her home and family.

The implications of this postwar cultural and economic landscape for public women are subtle. With the increased political and cultural visibility of women during the war, their continued presence in the public sphere in the postwar world placed them in a culturally precarious position. As Michael Sherry notes, the comparative experiences of men and women during wartime allowed conservative and right-wing spokesmen and politicians to rhetorically position women as the beneficiaries of a war in which men were the primary victims.⁸⁶

As the U.S. began "fighting" for peace in the postwar period, women's presence in public life became a source of debate. As Cynthia Enloe famously argued, a portion of the state's power rests on its presumed ability to "control women as symbols, consumers, workers, and emotional comforters."⁸⁷ Encouraging women's return to the home through postwar economic policy, like the G.I Bill, reflects just one way that state power worked to reinforce social structures and norms premised on the unequal distribution of wealth, resources, and power between men and women.⁸⁸

It is during this moment of transition that Helen Gahagan announced her candidacy for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. From the outset of her political career Helen Gahagan proved an easy target for red-baiting. Her theatrical background,

⁸⁶ Sherry, *Shadow of War*, 27

⁸⁷ Cynthia Enloe quoted in Swerdlow, "Engendering International Relations," 161.

⁸⁸ Other important factors shaping the social and political landscape in 1944 include the deep-seated anxiety that the transition from a wartime production economy would result in the return of the Depression. Similarly, growing hostility to the New Deal buttressed by the "conservative coalition" between southern Democrats and Republicans tempered many of the more idealistic ambitions of postwar liberalism, encouraging piecemeal, gradual reform in an effort to reflect a realist, pragmatic approach to the problems of the postwar world.

unconventional family, and fierce advocacy of the New Deal's "socialistic" ideals positioned her as a prime suspect for red-baiters. Where as the war had prompted many liberals to readjust their conception of political reality to reflect the new ideological world of the postwar period, Helen Gahagan remained firmly committed to the initial ideals of the New Deal. For her political beliefs Gahagan faced significant resistance from the state's press including the *L.A Times*, which referred to the congressional candidate as "muddle headed" and "radical", alongside accusations that she was directly affiliated with the political action committee of the Congress of Industrial Organizations.⁸⁹

Despite this resistance, in 1944 this "tall, beautiful woman of 42" who had a background as a "celebrated actress and singer," became the first Hollywood star to successfully transition from the theatrical to political stage.⁹⁰ Additionally, bearing no relation to any current male politicians, past or present, she was also one of the few women elected to the House without the benefits of widowhood.⁹¹ After her election to the House of Representatives in 1944, she represented one of the increasingly small group of voices within the House working to push New Deal social and economic legislation into the postwar era.

⁸⁹ Douglas, *Full Life*, 190.

⁹⁰ Description of Helen Gahagan Douglas to be used in press coverage, October 1944, Box 158, Folder 3a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

⁹¹ Historically 44 percent of the women who served in Congress between 1917 and 1944 held the benefit of widowhood meaning that the Congresswoman could profess a connection either through marriage or kinship to a male politician. Often the woman assumed the seat of her husband or male kin who died while serving their term. For more on the topic of widowhood see Linda Van Ingen, "'If we can nominate her, she is a cinch to elect': Helen Gahagan Douglas and the Gendered Politics of Accommodation, 1940-1944." *Journal of Women's History*. 24:3. (Fall 2012), 148.

Running as a Woman

Gahagan's candidacy also brought attention for its possible implications for women's political equality, with only a handful of women then serving as Representatives. However, when questioned about women's role in politics, Gahagan responded by saying, "politics is a job that needs doing—by anyone who [is] interested enough to train for it and work at it. It's like housekeeping...whether the job is done by men or women is not important—only whether the job is done well or badly."⁹² Captured in this statement is the gender-blind position that Gahagan would frequently adopt throughout her time in Congress that often misses the many ways Congress, like most other institutions, was arranged in and operated through deeply patriarchal processes based on the premise of male and masculine political agency being foundational to all other ways of being.

While Gahagan did not often like to acknowledge or play up the "woman angle," her campaign staff were often highly attuned to the poignancy of her candidacy and how her gender necessitated a certain political articulation in order to cast her as a qualified candidate. One of the first steps taken to accomplish this goal was basic: deciding what name would be put on the posters, pamphlets, and ballots. Counter to the prevailing customs of the time, she had not taken Melvyn's name after they were married in 1931. Her decision to remain Helen Gahagan was, in part, motivated by a desire to maintain a career separate from her husband given that they were both working in the same field. At the suggestion of her campaign manager, Ed Lybeck, in 1944 she publicly became Helen

⁹² Hope Chamberlin, *A Minority of Members: Women in the U.S. Congress*, (New York: Praeger, 1973), 183.

Gahagan Douglas.⁹³ Adopting Melvyn's name better represented the idealized American family and allowed her to gain credibility on military matters through Melvyn's military service during both wars.⁹⁴ Similarly, since the First Red Scare (1919-1920), the primary method available for a woman to re-assert her patriotism was to emphasise the physical work she has performed for the country during wartime and her own personal sacrifice in sending her son - in Douglas's case husband - to fight.⁹⁵

As a woman who held neither veteran status nor conformed to the idealized image of the American housewife Douglas was already an unconventional figure when entering national politics. As such, part and parcel of making Douglas politically palatable was reaffirming her identity as wife and mother, the two roles through which American women could be expected to contribute most directly to the national well-being. In women's magazines and in political coverage readers were assured that "nine tenths of this beautiful congressional candidate fulfills the traditional standards of being a dutiful and loving wife, devoted mother, and useful citizen."⁹⁶ During the campaign coverage of Douglas made it clear that "for the past two years the actress-singer-politician has added 'housewife' to her list of occupations, for she has been doing her own housework and taking care of her children."⁹⁷ Douglas's ability to manage family life, fame, and her pseudo-political career became a selling point meant to assuage potential voters' concern that a life in politics would negatively affect the Douglas household. However, while

⁹³ From this moment on I will refer to Helen Gahagan by the name she adopted for her political career "Helen Gahagan Douglas."

⁹⁴ Scobie, *Center Stage*, 150.

⁹⁵ Kim E. Neilson. "The Security of the Nation: Anti-Radicalism and Gender in the Red Scare of 1918 – 1928," (PhD Dissertation, University of Iowa, 1996), 82.

⁹⁶ Article written by Florence Homolka for *Script* magazine titled "Our Covergirl," 12 April 1944, Box 158, Folder 3b, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

Douglas did participate in the running and upkeep of her own home, her efforts were actually buttressed by a household staff that included a secretary (Helen's cousin, Walter Pick), a gardener, Helen's personal assistant Evelyn Chavoor, a cook, and a houseboy.⁹⁸ This, however, was frequently downplayed come election season when Douglas would once again assume the public narrative of competent and fulfilled wife and mother.

In securing the support of Democratic women, Douglas also had to make up ground for the controversy that surrounded her appointment as head of the Women's Division and vice-chair of the California Democratic Central Committee. At the time, the greatest position of influence a woman could achieve within official party structures—apart from becoming Representative—was to become a National Committeewoman. Each state and territory were expected to elect one man and one woman to the position, who would then be voted into office by the national delegates.⁹⁹ As was the custom, each woman would customarily be put forward from the membership of California's organized political women as a reward for years of dedicated service. The year of Douglas's appointment, long time division member Nettie Jones had been slated as the women's choice to serve as chairperson. Douglas's appointment to both positions not only flouted institutional custom but merged two organized bodies through which separate women could achieve some semblance of political power and influence.

Caring little for legislative or institutional processes, Douglas accepted both positions even though she was “never active in the Women's Division except as a

⁹⁸ Evelyn Chavoor, “Twenty-Four-Hour-A-Day Support Person,” an oral history conducted 1976 and 1977 by Fern Ingersoll, in Helen Gahagan Douglas Oral History Project, Volume II: The Congress Years, 1946-1950, (Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library: University of California, Berkeley, 1981), 235.

⁹⁹ Van Ingen, *Gendered Politics*, 71.

member of the National Committee.”¹⁰⁰ Douglas’s willingness to defer to the male leadership and her loyalty to the male establishment over California’s organized women compromised the political status of the women within the party.¹⁰¹ In aligning the Women’s Division with the male establishment, she demonstrated an ignorance of women’s political activity in the Party and how these women had made space for themselves in politics as women.¹⁰² While the tensions within the community of organized women lessened with time and as Douglas made a reputation for herself, there were those who remained hesitant to vote for a woman they felt did not understand or reflect the values of California’s organized women.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the question of political utility. Apart from her wit and ability to use her celebrity to bring support for causes and support for Roosevelt, why Douglas? What made the actress-singer-social welfare advocate a prime candidate for congressional Democrats? While her commitment to the New Deal and willingness to defer to the structures of male party leadership built her political credibility as she demonstrated her willingness to claim power within the traditional bounds of women’s political activity, the answer could in fact be quite simple: Clare Booth Luce. Throughout the early 1940s and during her first term in Congress, Douglas became useful to party leaders as they sought to balance the number of female representatives in Congress so as not to be outdone by the Republicans. More importantly, the Democrats sought a woman capable enough to take on the formidable Republican Congresswoman

¹⁰⁰ India Edwards, “California Democrats – A View from Washington,” Interview with India Edwards, an oral history conducted 1978 by Gabrielle Morris, in Helen Gahagan Douglas Oral History Project, Volume I, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1981), 7.

¹⁰¹ Van Ingen, *Gendered Politics*, 104.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 142.

Clare Booth Luce, wife of the influential magazine publisher Henry R. Luce. In a 1944 article covering Douglas's campaign, Florence Homolka speculated that "deep in the hearts of many democrats is the wish the Helen may be elected just so she can go down to Washington and tangle with Clare Booth Luce; the Californian's backers believe that with her logic, tenacity, and passionate activity she could slay the republican Luce in no time."¹⁰³ While Ford valued Douglas as a political ally, the fact that she would be "invaluable combatting La Luce" who Ford saw as "just a wise-cracking nit wit" no man could confront "without being too rough."¹⁰⁴ What Homolka brushed off as "just a womanish angle" was, in fact, the one of the primary motivations in bringing Douglas to Washington.¹⁰⁵

The Political Stylings of Helen Gahagan Douglas

Congresswoman Douglas had no intention of following the customary folkways of Congress. Although assisted by a number of fast friendships and political alliances she had formed during her early work with the party Douglas actively positioned herself as an outsider in Congress content with being known as the people's person who fought for principles and the dignity of the common person.¹⁰⁶ While it is true that Douglas focused much of her attention on pushing domestic reforms and social welfare legislation that addressed the housing crisis, rising inflation, veterans' and labour rights, as well as

¹⁰³ "Our Covergirl" article written by Florence Homolka for Script magazine, 12 April 1944, Box 158, Folder 3a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Ford quoted in Scobie, *Center Stage*, 146.

¹⁰⁵ "Our Covergirl" article written by Florence Homolka for Script magazine, 12 April 1944, Box 158, Folder 3a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁰⁶ Scobie, *Center Stage*, 169.

African American civil rights, her primary focus from the moment she set foot in the House of Representatives was the singular topic of foreign affairs.

For six years Douglas's sole committee appointment was to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs (HCFA) where she found a sufficient outlet for her belief in the utter necessity of maintaining an internationalist perspective in American foreign policy. Her appointment to the HCFA was unusual, as it rarely hosted any first-term representatives, much less women who were typically assigned to committees related to social welfare and consumer interests. Given the peculiarity of Douglas's first-term appointment, there were those, like Representative from California Chester (Chet) Holifield who suspected that her close friendship with the Roosevelts had a hand in her accommodation. When asked years later about Mrs. Roosevelt's possible influence in Douglas's career in the House, Holifield replied that although Eleanor "never swung her weight around in a political way for individuals," he was "sure that Mrs. Roosevelt, being a woman, and Helen, being a woman, that she would have helped Helen."¹⁰⁷ As a member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, she often stood in vocal support of American leadership in the building of multilateral institutions, such as the United Nations.

Douglas's interest in foreign policy threaded through nearly every action, speech, or appearance she made in the House. As the pressures of the Cold War began marginalizing issues of domestic reform and to divert resources and attention to national and international security, Douglas often chastised the House for pretending "to recognize our responsibility for international relations and for the advancement of

¹⁰⁷ Chester E. Holifield, "Helen Gahagan Douglas – Perspectives of a Southern California Colleague," an oral history conducted 1978 by Ingrid Winther Scobie, in Helen Gahagan Douglas Oral History Project, Volume II, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1981), 178.

Democracy,” while simultaneously offering tax cuts and draining social programs that “may very well jeopardize our ability to carry out those solemn obligations.”¹⁰⁸ This does not mean that Douglas prioritized domestic reform over international relief efforts. Indeed, she understood the two to be inextricably linked.

However, even her closest of allies in the House could, at times, find her approach to politics unsettling. As Holifield recalled, “she was too emotional. She was very excitable, and she had very strong convictions [and] she would speak them out in such a way that it was a confrontation. It wasn’t a philosophical debate.”¹⁰⁹ The postwar period encouraged politicians to adopt a “realistic” temper during debates which often undercut more impassioned arguments.¹¹⁰ However, Holifield’s characterization of Douglas’s political styling reflect a trend in political culture that dismisses or undercuts women’s contributions precisely because they are presumed to emanate from an emotional rather than rationale understanding of politics and social welfare. However, Douglas’s passionate political style drew many admirers who commended her *personal* presentation while remaining somewhat detached from the political implications of her arguments. Claude Pepper, a democrat from Florida who would similarly face intense red-baiting in 1950, described Douglas as “one of the greatest and loveliest ladies our land has ever known” who “contributed enormously to helping people walk on higher ground.”¹¹¹ Even Eleanor Roosevelt drew attention to Douglas’s “charming personality” when offering her

¹⁰⁸ Statement of Helen Gahagan Douglas in the House of Representatives on the Knutson Tax Bill, 26 March 1948, Box 158, Folder 1, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁰⁹ Chester E. Holifield in Helen Gahagan Douglas Project, 183.

¹¹⁰ Sherry, *Shadow of War*, 56.

¹¹¹ Claude Pepper quoted in Scobie, “Broadway Star as California Politician,” 243.

a compliment on an article written by Douglas who, in Roosevelt's perspective, "expresses herself delightfully."¹¹²

Although somewhat of an outsider in the House, Douglas did benefit from a certain level of privilege that few women in politics were afforded. Her previous celebrity afforded her a certain level of "assurance that frequently women in Congress do not have." According to Rachel Bell this assurance that her voice carried weight in both political and public discussions allowed her to be "listened to in a way that other women have not been."¹¹³ As Scobie notes, Douglas tended towards an "egotistical evaluation" of her own performance, often envisioning herself as the most conscientious member of Congress.¹¹⁴ This assurance gave Douglas tentative authority to contribute meaningfully to debates outside the traditional realm of women's politics and assert herself in a manner that reflected her own gender-blind perspective of Congressional conduct.

Whether she actively acknowledged it or not, Douglas still faced the challenge of being a woman in a traditionally masculine space. When the occasion suited her, she would invoke her womanhood and femininity as a means of asserting moral authority or injecting a woman's perspective on issues that clearly affected the home, family, and domestic conditions. To say that Douglas was ingenious in her selective invocation would be to actively ignore the long and complex history that has linked the politics of domesticity, womanhood, consumerism to political power. Women, especially professional women, tended to be taken more seriously when they focused their attention

¹¹² Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day by Eleanor Roosevelt," 12 May 1948, The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project [online], The George Washington University.

¹¹³ Rachel Bell, "Helen Gahagan Douglas and Foreign Policy," an oral history conducted 1977 by Fern Ingersoll, in Helen Gahagan Douglas Oral History Project, Volume II: The Congressional Years, 1945-1950, (Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library: University of California, Berkeley, 1981), 40.

¹¹⁴ Scobie, "Broadway Star as California Politician," 258.

and advocacy on domestic and consumer issues.¹¹⁵ However, by placing men in control of family finances in the postwar period women's civic authority as purchaser-citizens was weakened. Similarly, the language increasing used to describe the "soft" liberalism of the New Deal associated "weakness" with femininity and framed women's consumer activism and focus on price-controls as out of date, effectively lessening women's civic authority and reducing political activism in the postwar period.¹¹⁶

This did not stop Douglas from deliberately invoking her feminine identity to articulate the continued need for wartime price-controls in the postwar period. Popularly known as the Market Basket speech, Douglas marched onto the House floor in May of 1948 carrying a basket filled with \$17.36 worth of groceries as a prop for her discussion of the cost of living.¹¹⁷ Carrying the basket full of groceries, Douglas proceeded to articulate the affects of inflation on the home from the perspective of a wife and mother charged with buying the weekly groceries. Using the groceries as visual markers of postwar price inflation Douglas pointed out that under the Office of Price Administration "a pound of butter cost 65 cents in 1946" which increased to 82 cents in 1947 before reaching its current cost of 93 cents in 1948.¹¹⁸ While a memorable speech for her theatrical style, the Market Basket Speech was the result of several women's collaboration to examine how the shifting economic climate affected the domestic life of the nation. However, contemporary press coverage did not reflect the later popularity of the speech that would become a symbolic focal point of Douglas's 1950 Senate

¹¹⁵ Landon R.Y Storrs, "Left Feminism, the Consumer Movement, and Red Scare Politics in the United States, 1935-1960," *Journal of Women's History*, 18:3, (Fall 2006), 48.

¹¹⁶ For more see Lizabeth Cohen's, *Consumers' Republic*, 136.

¹¹⁷ Short article titled "Object Lesson" published in *Vestkuston*, 20 May 1948, California Digital Newspaper Collection, Center for Bibliographic Studies and Research, University of California, Riverside.

¹¹⁸ Eleanor Roosevelt, "My Day by Eleanor Roosevelt," 12 May 1948, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project [online], The George Washington University.

campaign. Writing in her My Day column, Eleanor Roosevelt remarked that she “was rather surprised that [she] had not seen more in the newspapers about” Douglas’s speech on the cost of living in 1948.¹¹⁹ Indeed most of the contemporary coverage elevated the theatrical novelty rather than economic aspects of Douglas’s Market Basket Speech.

Quick to acknowledge her womanhood when it served her politically, Douglas could also be ignorant of the structural forces that prevent women from competing on an equal footing with men in the political world. Believing that more women must be represented in the electoral process, she was adamant that when doing so women must be “willing to compete on equal footing with men and expect no favors.”¹²⁰ What Douglas conceptualized as “favors” might be better understood as processes of institutional and cultural reform that dismantle systemic patriarchal sexism. However, Douglas’s statement reflects the implied expectation that while in Congress women were to perform what Linda Van Ingen referred to as a “gender-straddle” where in they adopted a masculine ethos to assert a kind of gender-neutrality while simultaneously articulating their politics through the avenues presented in the “woman question” and posing for pictures doing traditionally feminine things; perhaps, carrying a market basket onto the house floor to speak on the topic of inflation?¹²¹

Re-Election in a Rapidly Shifting Political World

The year 1946 probably marked the beginning of the end for postwar New Deal liberalism and Popular Front culture. In addition to the election of a Republican

¹¹⁹ Eleanor Roosevelt, My Day by Eleanor Roosevelt, 11 May 1948, Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project [online], The George Washington University.

¹²⁰ Text of address delivered by Helen Gahagan Douglas the Business and Professional Women’s Club on “Women’s Status in a Changing World,” 20 February 1950, Box 173, Folder 3, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center Congressional and Political Collections, University of Oklahoma.

¹²¹ Van Ingen, *Gendered Politics*, 48.

controlled Congress for the first time since 1932, and despite the shifting political climate, Douglas was easily re-elected to her seat. When she stood for re-election in 1946 her popularity within her own district was such that she did not even campaign, apart from a post-card mailed to each constituent outlining her current work as alternate delegate to the first assembly of the United Nations.¹²² The political atmosphere of the Congress once again shifted following the upset of the 1948 Presidential election.¹²³ Although they had captured the White House, Democrats suffered significant set backs in the House, as their official majority came to an end and their numbers dropped to 188 seats to the Republican's 256.¹²⁴ Although Douglas was re-elected again in 1948 the change in atmosphere and power dispersal we see following 1948 narrowed the space for women like Douglas who refused to change how she presented herself or her ideas to the country.

Douglas had become a popular figure with voters and Representatives alike over the course of three terms. By 1950 Douglas had earned a reputation as a “positive, forthright liberal, New Deal, Fair Deal, and regular Democrat with exceptional ability.”¹²⁵ She was praised for her “keen intelligence, mental and moral integrity, and honest efforts to legislate constructively for the benefit of the people,” and had her political conduct described as “statesmanship of a high order.”¹²⁶ Regardless of the

¹²² Evelyn Chavoor, “Twenty-Four-Hour-A-Day Support Person,” in the Helen Gahagan Douglas Project, 252.

¹²³ Given the implications of the 1948 presidential election for postwar liberalism and anti-Communism my discussion of election itself will be part of the broader analysis of the fourth chapter of my thesis examining Douglas and the politics of liberal anti-Communism.

¹²⁴ Scobie, *Center Stage*, 204.

¹²⁵ Cuthbert Olsen quoted for Douglas Campaign Press Release to daily newspapers, 1950, Box 157, Folder 8a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹²⁶ Remarks of the Honorable Chester Holifield, “California’s National Figure: an appreciation of a colleague,” *Congressional Record*, 19 June 1948, Box 158, Folder 7, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

increasingly bipolar of the political atmosphere as Cold War tensions increased, and the threat of domestic subversion appeared ever-present, Douglas had no intention of adapting or shifting her politics to fit the new parameters of congressional debate.

Chapter 4: Douglas, Communism, and National Security

Introduction

Between 1948 and 1950 Douglas established herself as a staunch defender of American democracy but did so in a way that increasingly positioned her outside the bounds of legitimate political discourse. By routinely challenging the constitutionality of instituting loyalty oaths in federal and public workplaces as well as the unchecked power of the House Un-American Activities Committee, Douglas distanced herself from the most prominent methods of domestic containment that were positioned as necessary for the preservation of American freedom and security. Despite her opposition Douglas always spoke from a position that stood in firm opposition to communism and the organizational model proposed under its influence. While Douglas's stance was not exceptional, what marked Douglas as different from her colleagues was her unwillingness to give the unpopular political ideology more credit than it is due. Especially in the American context, The Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) was never a particularly large organization although it did experience a brief moment of popularity during the Great Depression as it set about providing immediate relief to the working-class and organizing rent strikes to prevent the evictions of those who could no longer pay their rent. However, this popularity was mitigated through the alliance between the New Deal democratic administration and moderate labour organizations.

In this chapter I explore the politics of containment and anti-communism as it relates to political conceptions of national security and situate Douglas's approach to communism within the broader political climate. It is my intention that this chapter provide a more nuanced understanding of Douglas's "soft attitude towards

communism”¹²⁷ that would become central and most persuasive in the 1950 Senate campaign against Richard Nixon. Although her stance is by no means unique, I have chosen to emphasize Douglas’s perspective given the lack of attention to her politics outside of the 1950 campaign. I will begin by briefly looking at the most important legislative and political efforts to contain subversive influences in the U.S., before engaging in an examination of Douglas’s anti-communism and its implications for her political reputation.

As Loyalty Oaths, loyalty hearings, espionage cases, and paranoia spread across the U.S. congresswoman Douglas’s concern, first and foremost, was “for the great body of loyal Americans who are entitled to live without fear, to think independently, to express their thoughts freely, and to differ with their neighbours,” not the political expediency that was often framed as being hard-on-communism.¹²⁸ Since setting foot in the House, Douglas had identified herself as a conscientious objector to proposed policy and security measures that rested on the indefinite suspension of an individual’s constitutionally enshrined rights and freedoms as an American citizen. Programs and policy framed as expressions of American strength, durability, and democratic commitment were, to Douglas, direct challenges to many of the idealized principles the U.S. claimed to represent. During her six years as a U.S. congresswoman she believed that the strength of Americans, and the strength of American democracy, was reflected

¹²⁷ Nixon campaign material quoting Bernard Brenna Chairman of California Nixon for Senator committee, 30 August 1950, Box 173, Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹²⁸ As previously addressed in my second chapter, the very distinction between “hard” and “soft” power that stresses *toughness* in both foreign and domestic policy mobilizes a charged language of sexual difference that routinely positions the “feminine” or “soft” in a subordinate position; For reference to Douglas’s quote see Helen Gahagan Douglas speaking on the Woods Bill, 8 September 1950, Box 157, Folder 9, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma..

not in reactionary efforts to outlaw an unpopular political ideology but was derived from a devotion to “liberty, to freedom, [and] to truth,” and remained unwilling to “sacrifice nor prejudice that strength by actions urged upon us by short-sighted and cringing little men with no real faith in America.”¹²⁹

Loyalty Under Truman

Many programs have been associated with the Cold War hunt for communists, but the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) is most prominent in contemporary memory and cultural depictions of the Cold War period. Despite its cultural salience, HUAC, as it was organized during the 1940s and 1950s, was just one piece of a larger effort to expose, publicize, and influence public opinions and understandings of communist ideology and its alleged threat to American society.

Part of the U.S. strategy of containment was to drain communist ideology of any positive associations and, instead, represent the ideology as a uniquely repressive force that removed individual agency. Recognizing that the Soviet Union’s peace campaigns and championing of colonized peoples to be something that might “find favourable responses in vulnerable segments of society” in the Free World, NSC-68 recommended that every effort “to identify the Soviet System with communism” must be made to prevent public sympathies.¹³⁰ The deliberate manipulation of public perception and understanding of communism reflected the primary objective of American officials to

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ “A Report to the National Security Council – NSC 68”, 14- 15, April 12, 1950. President’s Secretary’s File. Truman Papers. Digital Collection. Harry S. Truman Presidential Library & Museum. Independence, Missouri.

“make ourselves strong, both in the way in which we affirm our values in the conduct of our social life, and in the development of our military and economic strength.”¹³¹

Although fears of domestic subversion were evident throughout the war a marked shift in U.S. conceptions of communism is evident in 1945. First, growing international tensions within the Grand Alliance awakened older fears of the Soviet Union, now a powerful military force astride Europe, and one animated by an anti-capitalist and passionately internationalist ideology. Second, in this atmosphere of growing diplomatic tensions, the defection of former Soviet intelligence officer Igor Gouzenko in Ottawa, exposed the existence of a Soviet spy-ring operating in Canada. The Gouzenko Affair created an atmosphere of anxiety and paranoia as spy trials begin to transform a relatively unpopular ideology into an invisible threat whose operatives could look just like anyone else.¹³² HUAC represents a single, but powerful, piece of the broader security apparatus established to contain and control public perceptions of Communism while simultaneously serving as a visual reminder of the American government’s commitment to fighting the invisible threat of internal subversion.

Established as a standing committee in 1938, HUAC was charged with investigating the personal ties and beliefs of individuals suspected of engaging in subversive activities. Although HUAC is perhaps the most notorious committee of its kind its precursors, beginning with the Overman committee in 1919, all held similar mandates of ensuring the domestic security of the U.S. by rooting out communists, radicals, and subversive persons that represented a threat to domestic stability and established socio-economic hierarchies. When made a standing committee of the House

¹³¹ *Ibid.* 9.

¹³² Van Ingen, “If we can nominate her, she’s a cinch to elect,” 142.

in 1945 the committee of nine representatives was officially charged with the duty to investigate suspected threats of subversion and focused the majority of its attention on individuals who were believed to occupy a position of influence in U.S. society. HUAC's public profile increased following its establishment as a standing committee of the House and subsequent investigations of alleged subversive persons in Hollywood. As Michael Denning notes in *The Cultural Front*, the 1947 Hollywood hearing are significant not only for their public visibility, but as a marker that can be used to historically date the postwar attack on New Deal and Popular Front culture.¹³³

It is fitting in terms of Douglas' story that the committee really got its start investigating Hollywood. For nine-days starting in the fall of 1947 HUAC conducted hearings into alleged subversive individuals working in the Hollywood film industry. A year earlier, *The Hollywood Reporter* had published a story naming a large number of communist or communist sympathizers. HUAC called many of them to Washington to determine if Hollywood had been infiltrated by communist propaganda. During the hearings, invoking the Fifth Amendment became a routine procedure for those who refused to name names or answer questions. Ten individuals, who became known as the Hollywood Ten and were led by the screenwriter Dalton Trumbo, refused to co-operate with the committee and were held in contempt of Congress. On November 24th, 1947 Congress voted 346 to 17 to approve sanctions against the Hollywood Ten who were then sentenced to one year in jail. Douglas was one of the 17 who voted in opposition. While many alleged that her opposition stemmed from personal ties with the witnesses and a sympathy for the Hollywood community, Douglas took her "stand in defence of the

¹³³ Denning, *The Cultural Front*, 19.

principles of justice, not in defence of Hollywood or any individual or any individuals behaviour before the House Committee on Un-American Activities.”¹³⁴ On the very same day, Douglas called on Congress to “take steps immediately to protect innocent people from the invasion of their civil liberties instead of evoking the condemnation not only of liberal opinions, but of sober minded conservative opinion” and began working on a bill that would guaranteed the rights of individuals subpoenaed as witnesses before congressional committees.¹³⁵

The Hollywood hearings and the investigation of Alger Hiss commencing in 1948, amplified existing fears of internal subversion and positioned the committee and its members as heroic figures, leading the fight against domestic subversion. Opposition to HUAC and its increasingly unregulated exercise of arbitrary political power was fierce, of course, yet the political climate by 1950 was such that positioning the committees critics as “soft” or red became an reliable method of defending and legitimizing the actions of the committee and its members.

As previously mentioned, 1948 was a pivotal year in American Cold War history. Perhaps the most important event in relation to Douglas’s political life was the stunning political upset that saw Harry S. Truman elected the 33rd President of the United States. Following the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1945 and the shifting political climate it was widely assumed that the Republican Thomas E. Dewey, three-time Governor of New York, would be elected President and usher in a Republican White House after fifteen years of Democratic control. However, Truman’s campaign,

¹³⁴ Statement by Helen Gahagan Douglas on Un-American Activities Committee, 24 November 1947, Box 158, Folder 3a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

masterfully imagined by Truman's political advisor Clark Clifford, proved effective enough to rally Democratic support and resulted in one of the biggest political upsets of modern American history. Part and parcel of Clifford's strategy was re-articulating the Democrats platform so that it drifted more firmly towards the "Vital Center" of Cold War liberalism.

When Truman assumed office in 1945, he had been faced with the challenge of simultaneously shoring up the support networks with converted Democratic voters while strengthening the damaged ties with Southern Democrats allied with moderate and conservative Republicans. Truman assumed the role of the president at a moment when the Democratic Party began the process of re-orientating liberal political philosophy for the post-war/emerging Cold War period. During the 1948 election Truman's campaign focused on establishing Truman as a hard-on-communism candidate.

An effective method of doing this was the outright redbaiting of Henry Wallace, the Presidential nominee for the Progressive Party. Wallace based his presidential bid on a platform that advocated for desegregation, national health insurance, an expansion of the welfare state, and a continuation of peaceful co-existence with the Soviet Union. His challenge to Truman represents a clash in two popular, yet increasingly conflicting, conceptions of American liberalism. While an extended discussion of this ideological aspect of the 1948 campaign goes beyond the scope of this thesis it is important to note how the Truman campaign confronted Wallace as a political opponent. In the now famous memorandum written by Clifford outlining the "course of political conduct for the Administration extending from November 1947 to November 1948"¹³⁶ Truman's

¹³⁶ Clark Clifford, Memorandum to President Harry S. Truman, November 19th, 1947, Political File, Clifford Papers, Truman Library [online]. Independence, Missouri, United States of America.

advisor made it clear that the most affective method to defeat Wallace would be “to identify him and isolate him in the public mind with the communists.”¹³⁷ While the issue of domestic communism was “merely a sideshow”¹³⁸ it was the issue on which Wallace was most vulnerable to attack. However, given Wallace’s appeal to youth voters “who [were] attracted by his idealism ... and who regard war as the one evil greater than any other,”¹³⁹ Clifford suggested that Wallace be put “under attack whenever the moment is psychologically correct”¹⁴⁰ so as not to risk alienating potential voters.

In the context of 1948, discrediting Wallace strengthened Truman’s claim to the political legacy of the Democratic Party while simultaneously articulating the shift in liberal political philosophy away from the idealism of the New Deal towards the realist approach of Truman’s Fair Deal. In 1948, Truman’s primary object was to consolidate “the traditional Democratic alliance between the South and West” and positioning the president as a strong opponent in the mounting fight against communism.¹⁴¹

Throughout the 1948 election cycle Douglas remained firmly committed to the Democratic Party and President Truman’s political platform regardless of her long-standing friendship with Wallace and a number of his supporters. Prior to 1948 Douglas, like many others, did not go to great lengths to distance herself from Wallace as he became a vocal critic of Truman. In fact, their friendship and political alliance was such that she was approached to run on the Progressive Party ticket in 1948 and received the “full support of the National Wallace for President Committee” for her congressional re-

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

election campaign.¹⁴² Upon learning of the endorsement, Douglas publicly revoked the support of the Progressive Party asserting that “I did not seek their endorsement and I do not desire it.” Refuting the party’s support on the grounds that she supported the “Marshal Plan and believed the present Russian attitude in international affairs is a threat to world peace,” she firmly aligned herself with the aims of the current administration.¹⁴³ While this friendship would become an early angle through which red-baiters accused Douglas of harbouring communist sympathies, her deference to Truman and the Democratic Party insulated her from more serious public persecution.

The 1948 election represents a pivotal moment not only as a moment of political upset, but for its role in shaping American Cold War policy and public understanding of Cold War conditions. The Truman-Wallace challenge demonstrates the willingness of Democrats to engage in many of the same tactics as their Republican counterparts when the moment was strategically beneficial. Therefore, when considering the American response to communism, it is necessary to be conscious of how the Democrats under Truman shaped liberal anti-communist politics and how this affected popular understandings of the political tensions of the Cold War and the supposed threat of domestic communism.¹⁴⁴

Truman’s anti-communist policies were effective because they were rooted in the everyday common-sense assumptions that underwrote popular American conceptions of man, human nature, the state, freedom, and tyranny.¹⁴⁵ Following his election, one of

¹⁴² “Leftists Ready to Support Helen,” *Madera Tribune*, 27 March 1948, California Digital Newspaper Collections, University of California, Riverside.

¹⁴³ “Mrs. Douglas Repudiates Progressive Party,” in the *Madera Tribune*, 4 October 1948, California Newspaper Collections, University of California, Riverside.

¹⁴⁴ Elizabeth Edwards Spalding, *The First Cold Warrior: Harry Truman, Containment, and the Remaking of Liberal Internationalism*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 2.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Truman's first acts demonstrating his tough-on-communism approach was the implementation of a loyalty program designed to root out communist influence in the federal government. Executive Order 9835, commonly referred to as the Loyalty Order, officially established the parameters of acceptable dissent. Under it, all federal employees could be subjected to "loyalty screenings", which could subsequently result in official investigations if suspect information appeared. The findings of these investigations could lead to the termination of an individual's employment in federal and public services if reasonable doubt were raised in regard to their loyalty.

As a political maneuver to gain support for his anti-communist policies and quiet the objections of conservative Republicans the Loyalty Order was effective. Although it was met with swift and vocal opposition from many progressive and New Deal liberals, Loyalty Oath programs proliferated around the country through state governments, institutions, and private organizations. One such case was the adoption of a loyalty oath as a requirement for employment at the state University of California, Douglas's home state. On September 23rd, 1949 *The Daily Bruin* reported that "by unanimous voice vote the southern section of the academic senate meeting at UCLA yesterday passed a resolution which 'request(ed) the privilege of affirming their loyalty to the principles of free constitutional government, by subscribing voluntarily to the oath of loyalty sworn by officers of public trust in the State of California.'"¹⁴⁶

Ultimately the result of all this was a chilling of dissent as well as intellectual and political freedom that had long been considered an inalienable right to (some of) those

¹⁴⁶ "Senate passes on oath: Academic body adopts state loyalty pledge," *The Daily Bruin*, 23 September 1949, California Digital Newspaper Collections, University of California, Riverside.

living within a liberal democracy.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, Truman's loyalty program created a rigid, dualist understanding of loyalty and security that would play a critical part in American Cold War politics. Most significantly, the principles and program established through Executive Order 9835 would be upheld and re-instituted through President Eisenhower's Executive Order 10450 signed in April of 1953.¹⁴⁸

To no one's great surprise, Helen Gahagan Douglas emerged as a vocal opponent to Truman's loyalty program and all subsequent versions of it. Douglas believed that that in accepting the loyalty oath program, the U.S. government was accepting totalitarian principles antithetical to the morals and structuring principles of liberal democracy.¹⁴⁹ Speaking at the time of its enactment, she lambasted the criteria by which loyalty would be measured, given that "the standard against which it is directed to judge employee loyalty could be made to fit anyone who ever had a progressive idea or ever advocated social reform."¹⁵⁰ However, when asked for her frank opinion on the effectiveness of loyalty oaths in measuring individual loyalty to the nation, Douglas responded that "one must be terribly naïve to believe that any persons engaged in subversive underground activity would be deterred by the necessity of taking an oath to which he privately does not subscribe."¹⁵¹

Douglas's stance on HUAC and Truman's Loyalty program would later be used as evidence supporting the claim that she was "soft" or sympathetic towards communism.

¹⁴⁷ Andrea Friedman, "The Strange Career of Annie Lee Moss: Rethinking Race, Gender, and McCarthyism," *The Journal of American History*, 94:2, (September 2007), 448.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Patrick Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: television, McCarthyism, and American Culture*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 22

¹⁴⁹ Douglas, *A Full Life*, 261.

¹⁵⁰ Excerpt from Douglas's Blue Book quoting the Congressional Record on the, 15 July 1947, 1950, Box 172, Folder 1, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁵¹ Helen Gahagan Douglas answers questions for *The California Sun*, 3 March 1950, Box 157, Folder 8a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

The *Desert Sun* reported that although she was “certainly no communist” she was a “sincere radical” as evidenced by her “left-wing” record.¹⁵² Recalling her opposition to HUAC in 1947, the same publication portrayed Douglas as “one of the 12 who never missed an opportunity to obliterate the Un-American Activities Committee.”¹⁵³ The *Coronado Eagle and Journal* similarly viewed Douglas as “far to the left in her beliefs and her actions” claiming that if she were elected to the U.S. Senate then they would have elected an “individual who so obviously is friendly and favourable to those who are plotting for the overthrow of the American way of life.”¹⁵⁴

HUAC and the Loyalty oaths played a major role in constructing domestic understandings of containment, the foreign policy increasingly followed by the Truman administration became the primary method of establishing and maintaining U.S. influence on a global scale. During the early stages of the Cold War, U.S. economic power became the central tool of U.S. foreign policy in enforcing the containment policies presented by Truman in 1947. Asserting that the “seeds of totalitarian regimes are nurtured by misery and want” the Truman Doctrine advocated for direct financial support for Greece and Turkey so that the seeds of totalitarianism, and communist expansion, could not grow “in the evil soil of poverty and strife.”¹⁵⁵ Economic policy and financial aid was one of the primary methods used to appeal to and support states within the sphere of Communist influence, including financial assistance provided to Greece and

¹⁵² “Gallantry at the Polls,” in the *Desert Sun*, 15 September 1950, California Digital Newspaper Collections, University of California, Riverside.

¹⁵³ “Politically Speaking” by Ethel Gillet Whitehorn in the *Desert Sun* referring to Douglas’s vote against sanctioning the Hollywood Ten, 7 April 1950, California Digital Newspaper Collections, Riverside.

¹⁵⁴ “Voters Should Study Record of Helen Gahagan Douglas” in the *Coronado Eagle and Journal*, 28 September 1950, California Digital Newspaper Collections, University of California, Riverside.

¹⁵⁵ Recommendation for Assistance to Greece and Turkey, Address of the President of the United States delivered to a joint session of Congress, 12, March 1947, Elsy Papers, Harry S. Truman Administration, Truman Library [online], Independence, Missouri.

Turkey, China following the revolution, and (North) Korea. The European Recovery Program, or the Marshall Plan, is perhaps one of the most explicit ways in which economic policy functioned to secure U.S. interests. The explicit intention of the ERP was to assist in European re-building efforts and prevent the spread of Communism into areas devastated by war that could potentially find the ideals of Communism an effective organizational model upon which nations could be re-built.

The construction of U.S. foreign economic policy reflected the growing temper of anti-communism in the United States. The implications of containment and domestic anti-communism for New Deal liberals, like Helen Gahagan Douglas who refused to adjust their political visions and priorities to fit the whims of an unstable political climate in which fear and paranoia of both ideological and physical threats underscored the daily operations of Congress were many. Although McCarthy and his contemporaries relied on the strength of public opinion to legitimize their claims, the official channels which were exercised in service to rooting out the communists in our midst were established, maintained, and legitimized through the acts of men and women in Congress who voted to uphold decisions, expand powers, and at times prevent the further violation of constitutionally protected rights and freedoms.

By 1949, the situation was such that “no logical citizen” could be thought to underestimate the dangers posed by potential subversion.¹⁵⁶ Those who were perceived to deny or underestimate the threat of communism, or the risk posed by those who sympathized with its agents, were assumed to be a liability and danger to the security of the U.S. in the Cold War. There were those, such as Arthur Schlesinger Jr., who lamented

¹⁵⁶ Schlesinger Jr., *Vital Center*, 129.

the fact that on multiple occasions the government had been “restrained from outlawing the Communist Party” and resented those who felt that “it is somehow below the belt even to report on communist party activities or to identify its influence.”¹⁵⁷ Unable to officially outlaw communist ideology or membership in the Communist Party, the official means of confronting domestic communism was to quiet dissenting voices of those suspected of subversive activities by exposing their sympathies or beliefs and having them tried in the court of public opinion. Even the more official civil proceedings conducted by HUAC took place in an highly—and intentionally—public setting, many of them being televised for Americans to witness. The belief in the necessity of exposure was founded on the premise that the revelation and publication of disloyalty or subversive status was the best way to undermine the communist threat and remove the power of agents who assumed to prefer to conduct their business in secret.¹⁵⁸

Douglas’s Democratic Credo

On March 29th, 1946, at the start of her first term in Congress, Douglas rose in the House of Representatives to make her position on communism exceedingly clear: “Mr. Speaker, I think we all know that communism is no real threat to the democratic institutions of our country.”¹⁵⁹ As far as opening statements go, this is about as true to the point of Douglas’s famous speech as one can hope to get. Aptly titled “My Democratic

¹⁵⁷ Although the Smith Act of 1940 officially outlawed parties that advocated the violent overthrow of the U.S. government. Originally aimed at Nazis, in 1949 the Smith Act was used to legitimize the arrest of the leaders of American Communist Party. It is notable that when making the arrests Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the only woman leader of the CPUSA was not arrested alongside the male leadership but included in a subsequent round of arrests targeting lower-level figures.; for quote see Schlesinger Jr., *Vital Center*, 102.

¹⁵⁸ M. J. Heale, *McCarthy’s America: Red Scare Politics in the State and Nation, 1935-1965*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 11.

¹⁵⁹ Text of Helen Gahagan Douglas’s My Democratic Credo, 29 March 1946, Box 158, Folder 3a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

Credo,” the speech Douglas delivered addressed what she believed to be the “very dangerous” and “irresponsible way the term ‘communism’ is falsely used to label” programs and political beliefs that advocate fairness, equality, and democratic social welfare.¹⁶⁰

From Douglas’s perspective, the U.S. and Western world should be “interested in communism as a system that challenges democracy,” but acknowledge that the “great mass of American people will never exchange democracy for communism as long as democracy fulfills its purpose.”¹⁶¹ It is on this foundation, on making democracy work for the American people, that Douglas built her personal philosophy and approach to communism: “The best way to keep communism out of our country is to keep democracy in it.”¹⁶² Keeping democracy alive and effective in the U.S. during the postwar period involved protecting the individual rights and freedoms of citizens; it meant allowing for freedom of thought, political association and speech regardless of its content; it meant ensuring the continuation of social and economic programs that sought to ameliorate the conditions of the down-trodden; but, above all, it meant using the combined domestic and foreign influence of the U.S. to support the creation of conditions that would lead to lasting peace without first resorting to war and paranoid behaviour.¹⁶³

Douglas used her time on the floor to “talk about democracy”, the kind that, as she put it, she “strive[s] to live daily—democracy, which is the only form of society in which I believe—the principles of which were fed to me with my first spoon of cereal—

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ For more see the full text of Douglas’s “My Democratic Credo.”

democracy, which my forefathers helped establish on this great country.”¹⁶⁴ In an analysis of Douglas’s “My Democratic Credo,” Margaret M.S Lowry identified what she termed the “rhetorical cross-dressing” utilized by Douglas to project and assert authority when speaking outside the realm of a woman’s traditional political sphere.¹⁶⁵ As Lowry argues, throughout the speech Douglas, like many women, adopted a masculine Enlightenment discourse as a method of creating an ethos of rationality, objectivity, and didactic representation.¹⁶⁶

While Douglas’s speech is notable for her early and open challenge to a system of governance that increasingly revoked many of the rights, freedoms, and privileges she associated with American democracy, the situation out of which the speech was born bears mentioning. By 1946 it had become practice for many representatives, Democrats and Republicans, to dismiss a handful of liberal democrats as hold-overs from the idealist and reformist days of the New Deal. In fact, the hallway on which the majority of these representative’s offices were located was colloquially referred to as Red Gulch.¹⁶⁷ As an inhabitant of Red Gulch, Douglas had grown accustomed to the occasional barb thrown her way insinuating her status as a soft-hearted, gullible liberal promoting socialistic ideas. She was moved to publicly assert her own position on communism on the House floor following a particularly heated debate in which Congressman John E. Rankin, a Democrat from Mississippi, gestured towards Douglas and her compatriots while dismissing “these communists.” The visual implication that she would be publically

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Lowry, “Pretty and Therefor ‘Pink’, “290.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Sally Denton, *The Pink Lady: The Many Lives of Helen Gahagan Douglas*, (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009): 108.

referred to by a member of the House (and fellow Democrat no less) as a communist during official proceedings incensed Douglas to the point that she immediately rose and demanded “to know if the gentleman from Mississippi is addressing me”, to which, after multiple prompts, Congressman Rankin clarified that he was not addressing the gentlewoman from California.¹⁶⁸

Apart from her 1946 speech, Douglas made her own stance on communism clear through the programs and initiatives she chose to support, and on what conditions she would give that support. Upon entering the House, she immediately latched onto the issue of atomic energy, working tirelessly alongside Senate democrat Brien McMahon to produce what would become the Atomic Energy Act of 1946 that placed the nuclear energy and information developed through the Manhattan Project under civilian control through the Atomic Energy Commission. The other cause that captured Douglas’ attention during her first term in Congress was the liberal internationalist promise presented by the founding of the United Nations. Firmly believing the UN to be the best avenue towards achieving world peace, she dedicated much of her early political career to supporting its establishment. Designated as an alternate delegate to the First General Assembly of the United Nations in 1946, Douglas was put in a position where she could both play an active role in shaping UN procedure and policy as well as come into contact with foreign politicians who would become both allies and mentors.

From 1946 to 1950 Douglas demonstrated an acute awareness of the climate of fear and paranoia fostered by domestic and foreign containment politics. Addressing the House during a debate on the European Recovery Program in 1947, she acknowledged

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

that while financial assistance was necessary, “money and goods alone are not enough” to combat and contain communism. Congress needed to “stop building a psychosis of fear” around communism and encourage people to maintain “faith in the future—and faith in the ability of men to build.”¹⁶⁹ Additionally, she adamantly opposed presenting financial aid programs as part of U.S. containment, believing it to be the moral obligation of a country financially equipped to offer such aid.¹⁷⁰ To conditionally present aid as part of a politically motivated policy of containment signified a gross offence to democracy itself to a woman who believed, as she told the Democratic National Committee, that “to identify democracy as a system of economic processes is an insult to America. Democracy is an idea concerning people—their dignity and their worth.”¹⁷¹

The answer to the communist challenge was not to be found “by abolishing our traditional democratic methods. Certainly not by setting in motion a wave of hysteria – the end of which no one can see. Certainly not by wordy speeches against communism,” but through an “all out campaign against misery, want, and ignorance.”¹⁷² Social and economic policy lay at the heart of Douglas’s anti-communist philosophy and was coupled with an acute awareness of how the domestic conditions of the U.S. affected its international reputation. Paradoxically, Douglas contended that the ever increasing efforts to contain and control domestic communism were doing “harm to our position” in the world and created the impression “that we are rotting with communists and that isn’t

¹⁶⁹ Excerpt from the Blue Book, (dated) 5 December 1947, Box 158, Folder 3a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁷⁰ Douglas, *A Full Life*, 267.

¹⁷¹ Helen Gahagan Douglas Speech to Democratic National Convention, pg. 3, 13 July 1948, Box 158, Folder 4, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁷² Helen Gahagan Douglas Statement to the House Un-American Activities Committee, November 1947, Box 158, Folder 3a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

true.”¹⁷³ “The irrational fear of communism” that swept across the country was “being deliberately used in many quarters to blind us to our real problems.”¹⁷⁴ It was by acknowledging and addressing these “real problems” that Douglas proposed the American government fight communism by addressing the conditions that made the ideology appealing. Her belief in addressing domestic inequality while fighting communism became a focal point in her 1950 Senate campaign platform: “Communist imperialism can be checked by guns, but it can only be defeated by corrections of conditions under which communism breeds.”¹⁷⁵ Addressing her supporters in August 1950, Douglas told them that although “we are living in a difficult period, where fears and hysteria are built up in order that we won’t think” it does not “mean that we can’t think” or “that we need be befuddled” into accepting political repression and the marginalization of domestic reform commitments.¹⁷⁶

Douglas’s stance on communism as a political and social issue ran counter to prevailing discourses of anti-communism and national security. To Douglas the idea of freedom included “not only justice before the courts” or the “freedom to think what you please and say what you please, but it is the same freedom as the next fellow to earn your living – not just the right for a few folks to have the right of earning a living.”¹⁷⁷ Being branded un-American, a controversial personality, a fellow-traveller, or anything that

¹⁷³ Press release compiled by Frank Wingham, [1950], Box 157, Folder 8a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁷⁴ Text of Helen Gahagan’s My Democratic Credo, 29 March 1946, Box 158, Folder 3a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁷⁵ Platform of Helen Gahagan Douglas, pg. 2, 1950, Box 172, Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁷⁶ An Address given by HGD before the Twentieth National Convention Oil Workers International Union CIO, 18 August 1950, Box 158, Folder 2, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

might indicate one as being “disloyal” carried the risk of being terminated from one’s job and being unable to find other employment. Perhaps most famously, the Hollywood Blacklist effectively worked to keep actors, writers, producers, and other individuals involved with film out work so that they could not use film as a vehicle of spreading ideology. Similarly, the purge of federal employees under Truman’s loyalty oath program blacklisted hundreds of people who found it hard to find a job once the reason for their termination became known. To be branded a communist, or one of the many identifiers indicating one as being soft-on-communism was to become a social and economic pariah and often excluded from more stable forms of employment. While she did not often articulate her challenge to communism in terms of employment, Douglas stood to keep alive the vision imagined by President Roosevelt’s economic bill of rights (proposed in 1944) and understood the implications of anti-communist politics as directly affecting the right of an individual to a decent and reliable income.

By 1950 Douglas was “nauseated and sick to death of the violent and deliberate way the words communism and socialism have been forged into a weapon and used against those who organize and raise their voices in defence of democratic ideals.”¹⁷⁸ In 1946 she told the House that despite the change in climate and government, “the war that Franklin D. Roosevelt talked about in 1936 is still going on. It is, as he said ‘a war for the survival of democracy,’ and the battle should not rage around the bogus issue of communism but around the real issue of monopoly and the exploitation of the people and their resources.”¹⁷⁹ Her adamant belief that the rhetoric of anti-communism operated as a

¹⁷⁸ Text of Helen Gahagan Douglas’s My Democratic Credo, 29 March 1956, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

political smokescreen that obscured the economic and social problems that continued to affect American's in the Cold War would not only became central to her congressional stance against unconstitutional anti-communist legislation, but a strategic tool in her 1950s campaign.

Chapter 5: Helen Gahagan Douglas Versus Richard Nixon, 1950

Introduction

Helen Gahagan Douglas's initial challenge of the incumbent Senate Democrat Sheridan Downey for his seat in the United States Senate quickly became one of the most important Senate campaigns in the country. As one reporter explained, "when a House Democrat runs against a Senate Democrat, it's political news." The challenge becomes "even more intriguing" when "the House member is a lady, especially a *delectable* (emphasis added) one like Helen Gahagan Douglas."¹⁸⁰

While well intentioned, statements like the one above, written by Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Edward A. Harris, demonstrate a key site of analysis. Routine references to Douglas's physical, gendered body contribute to the processes by which Douglas was continually "made" as woman in the public mind. Descriptions of physicality and individual temperament that would not similarly be made when describing her male opponents, set her apart from what was presumed to be normal in political life. While this had both positive and negative implications, her inescapable status as woman-politician must be understood in the context of political narratives that sustained the binary relationship between the sexes and constructed coherent gender categories that could be understood by the public and symbolically incorporated into nationalist narratives congruent with the aims of containment. In the case of women, a political premium was placed on the externalization of a particular conception of femininity that centered on domesticity and "true" womanhood.

¹⁸⁰ "Helen Gahagan Douglas Wants to be A Senator...And Should Be!" by Edward A. Harris, 10 December 1949, Box 172. Folder 5, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

Much like her previous campaigns, Douglas rarely drew attention to herself unless it was understood as strategically beneficial to do so. When speaking to women's groups or asserting her moral authority, Douglas typically invoked the imagery and symbolism of the home, emphasizing her role as wife and mother. However, unlike her previous campaigns, she did not have the overwhelming support of her party nor was she able to maintain previous levels of popular support due to the doubt sowed by campaigns of vilification, misrepresentation, and some of the most elaborate red-baiting efforts the country had seen in decades. Similarly, the rift within the Democratic Party made visible during the primary campaign exposed the internal conflicts of a liberal community in the process of re-orienting its political philosophy for the post-war/Cold War era.

Unsurprisingly, the gender politics that infused the campaign itself reflect a moment of cultural conflict where women were accepted into public life but often only to the extent that they conformed to specific cultural scripts that outlined behaviours, presentation, and the limits of women's public involvement. This period in American history is notable for the many ways that prevailing assumptions of gender and belonging did not reflect the social, economic, or political reality of the time. Women had been present in Congress for nearly four decades, albeit in small numbers; the war had upended many ideas of ability and belonging as women filled traditionally male spaces and carried a new sense of independence into the postwar period; women had demonstrated their ability to organize around specific causes and connect them to broader questions of inequality that transcended sexual and racial divides. To put it bluntly, women had moved into the public sphere and had no intention of being put in their place. However, as conditions improved for many women, they also became more arduous for

others, especially for individual women who had been identified in the public eye as exceptional or achieving a level of individual success beyond what was typically expected of women in similar positions.

Regardless of time period, it has often been the case that when a woman achieves a level of individual success or power that identifies them as a “great woman” in her field, she typically becomes subject to intense public scrutiny. Her actions, speech, personal presentation, and ideas are examined and critiqued by both men and women who then judge as to whether she is a “true” woman possessing traits worthy of emulation. Women whose identities are grounded in traditionally feminine traits and behaviours are held up as exemplary and became points of comparison used to measure the acceptability of other women seeking entrance into positions of power and influence. These women served as a kind of public representation of various forms of womanhood and femininity that, if mirrored by others, would affirm their status as women and allow them to move through the world with as little conflict as possible.

Such is the case of Douglas who, by 1950, had established herself as an exceptional woman in her field, with significant political and cultural power and visibility; to quote Eleanor Roosevelt, in California Helen Gahagan Douglas was “the symbol in this state of a woman who ... has gained a position of leadership” and used her influence responsibly.¹⁸¹ Additionally, a citizen known only as Mrs. McAdoo asserted that Douglas was “one of the few women in America who has earned the right to the title of statesmen, a rare combination of courageous fighter and clear thinker.”¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Eleanor Roosevelt, *My Day* by Eleanor Roosevelt, 11 March 1949, The ER Papers Project, The George Brown University.

¹⁸² Letter from Mrs. McAdoo to Helen Gahagan Douglas, 1950, Box 173, Folder 3, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

The power and status she had accumulated as a Congresswoman would be amplified if she were elected to the United States Senate where, in a body of ninety-six Margaret Chase Smith (Republican) was the sole female member.¹⁸³ During her six years in Congress Douglas had shown little interest in adhering to the gendered relations of Congress that typically confined women to the “domestic” politics of the social world. While relentless red-baiting and smear campaigns were launched against both men and women in the postwar period, few could be said to rival the one targeting Douglas.

While the gendered component of this campaign has traditionally proven the focal point for historical analysis, in this chapter I demonstrate how, in addition to gender, the red-baiting of Douglas reflects a shift in Cold War political culture that helped marginalize domestic reform by using the language of anti-communism to obscure the economic and social challenges addressed by Douglas’s platform. Similarly, when we connect Douglas’s campaign to the broader climate of 1950, where Vital Center liberals positioned those like Douglas as too politically left to balance reform with containment, it becomes possible to understand how statements associating her with feminine or soft-hearted liberalism would carry political weight with voters. Framing Douglas’s concerns as either frivolous or extraneous to major policy debates helped to marginalize a political platform and figure who pushed beyond the narrow parameters of political debate. Douglas’ social and economic platform grew straight out of the New Deal’s concern with resource conservation and the fair distribution of economic benefits from development. This led her, for example, to focus on defending the 160-acre limit outlined in the

¹⁸³ By 1950 only seven women had served as United States Senators, five of whom were appointed to their positions, with only one, Hattie Caraway, seeking official election to the role before Smith’s election in 1948. Prior to Margaret Chase Smith, Hattie Caraway was the longest serving woman in the United States Senate. She although she sought re-nomination in 1945 she was unsuccessful.

Reclamation Law of 1902, on concerns for Californian resource development and industry, and on resisting the influence of powerful monopolies. When challenged to defend her voting record, which her opponents claimed demonstrated her failure to fight communism at home and abroad, Douglas worked to refocus the conversation to address not only issues of domestic inequality but the climate of fear and anxiety that obscured the problems of American citizens.

The Douglas Platform

After announcing her candidacy in late 1949, Douglas presented Californian voters with a platform centering what journalist Edward A. Harris referred to as the “ready-made issue” of the Central Valley controversy and the more general “issue of special interests versus the public trust.”¹⁸⁴ In Douglas’s mind, her decision to challenge the incumbent Senate Democrat Downey, who had held his seat for over a decade, offered the people of California an opportunity to be “represented by a senator who does more than pay lip service to the Democratic platform” and likewise had the “energy and courage and...freedom from outside commitments, to fight as well as vote for the principles of that platform”¹⁸⁵ One too many times had Senator Downey “sided with self-serving private interests” but his decade’s long political career had earned him “the right to be retired to private life”¹⁸⁶ and allow a new face to take on the mantle of representing the state of California. As congresswoman Douglas had earned recognition as the “Fair

¹⁸⁴ “Helen Gahagan Douglas Wants to be a Senator...And Should Be!” by Edward A. Harris, 10 December 1949, Box 172, Folder 5, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁸⁵ Helen Gahagan Douglas Campaign Literature, “Helen Gahagan Douglas for United States Senator”, 1950, Box 57, Folder 8a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma. folder 8a.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Deal personified”, having backed some of the most progressive legislation put forth in the House and often “serving as a rallying point for more cautious liberals.”¹⁸⁷

What Douglas chose to highlight in her campaign reflected her status as a politician committed to the ideals of the New Deal, as well as Truman’s Fair Deal, that sought to advance the public good by balancing private and public interests. This was developed most thoroughly in her stance on the development of Californian and American natural resources. It reflected her belief that “the great natural resources of this State and of the Nation ... should be conserved and developed for the use of all the people.”¹⁸⁸ One of the ways this could be done was by maintaining the 160-acre limitation of the Reclamation Act of 1902 and encourage responsible resource development so that “the small businessman and the small farmer” were afforded an “equal share in the benefits of development which he is not able to finance independently.”¹⁸⁹ Under the Reclamation Law of 1902, farms that received water from federally funded water programs could not exceed 160-acres per owner, or 300-acres for a husband and wife.¹⁹⁰ For years Californian businesses had been pushing the government to disband the limitation and adopt a law similar to Colorado’s “Big Thompson” law that came into affect while Harold Ickes served as Secretary of the Interior. This law abridged the 160-acre limitation for the use of the Big Thompson water project to the benefit of the sugar beet industry and large agricultural land owners who claimed that dividing land into 160-acre sections did not allow the land to become

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Douglas Natural Resources Plan: Platform for 1950, 1950, Box 173, Folder 8, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Arthur Goldschmidt, “Helen Gahagan Douglas – Congressional Ally in Water and Power, “ an oral history conducted in 1978 by Amelia Fry, in Helen Gahagan Douglas Oral History Project, Volume II, (Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkley, 1981.) 59

profitable.¹⁹¹ This, however, detracted from the original intent of the 160 acre limitation to protect the family farm from monopoly interests and maintain a way of life that many assume to be central to American identity in the West. Douglas' defence of the original act reflected an almost Jeffersonian commitment to traditional farm life as the soul of American life. Throughout the early primary campaign Douglas often challenged her incumbent opponent on the grounds that he had "waged a continuous and unrelenting fight for the corporation farmers and private utilities in their effort to break down the Reclamation Law of 1902."¹⁹² However, her focus on the 160-acre limitation was also a gateway into articulating her broader position in the continual struggle between private and public interests in the development of Californian resources and economy.

Debates over the status of the 1902 Act were part and parcel of a broader debate surrounding the Central Valley Project and the allocation of funds for its completion. Begun in 1933, the Central Valley Project was intended to irrigate and provide municipal water to California's Central Valley. Proposing that the majority of the costs be covered through the revenue generated by the payments of power and water users, Douglas proposed that, with "strict application of the 160-acre provision and the other provisions of the Reclamation Law" intended to "safeguard against speculation and monopolisation of land," the completion of the Central Valley Project would protect the small family farm as well as the small family business.¹⁹³ Continuing her advocacy for responsible development and maintenance of the public trust, Douglas proposed that Californian forests be "managed on a sustained-yield basis so that they will continue to form an

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Douglas Campaign Opening, 29 February 1950, Box 173, Folder 3, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 2

economic base for a large part of our population” just as the California beaches and mountain wilderness “be preserved as public recreation areas where the peoples of our cities can enjoy outdoor recreation at a reasonable cost.”¹⁹⁴ On May 2, 1950, just over a month before the primary election was due to take place, Douglas staked her position as the “only candidate in this race who stands for the full development of industry in California.”¹⁹⁵ Her opponents, she believed, represented and legitimated the efforts of special interests—oil, lumber, and industrial agriculture specifically—“to convince the people of California that monopoly is better than development” in the prolonged opposition to Central Valley Project.¹⁹⁶ Such a firm stance and proclaiming her intention to “work for the interests of the people and not for the maintenance of monopoly,”¹⁹⁷ in opposition to powerful oil, lumber, and farming interests and shifted support of monied interests and wealthy political backers in the direction of her opponents.

In both the primary and general campaigns, funding would be a major issue for the Douglas campaign. Without the support of major industry, the majority of Douglas’s funds came from labour unions and individual donations which left her with limited campaign funds to be put towards producing literature, general advertisements, and buying radio time.

Douglas’s years in Congress tirelessly fighting for what she, and many others, believed to be the public good had earned her the reputation as the people’s champion, a candidate that could be trusted to vote according to her principles and was not easily

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Douglas Platform position on Industry and Power, 1950, Box 173, Folder 8, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

swayed by the promises of powerful political and financial backers. When officially launching her campaign, Douglas invoked this status as she credited the people themselves as the motivation behind her candidacy: “It was because of your personal urgings, your hundreds of letters and telegrams, your offers of assistance that I decided to make the race.”¹⁹⁸ It was in the interests of the people that she challenged a Senator she believed had become stagnant and ineffectual yet was “rounding out his 12th year as Senator from California.”¹⁹⁹ On one issue Douglas did award Downey significant credit:

He has waged a continuous and unrelenting fight for the corporations and the private utilities in their efforts to break down the Reclamation Law of 1902 – against the advice and desires of California’s veterans, California’s farmer’s, California’s labor organizations and California’s church groups. For the last six years he has been unceasing and untiring in his efforts to secure the repeal of the 160 acres limitation – despite the pledges of the Democratic Party platform and of President Truman and despite the demonstrated wish of the overwhelming majority of California’s citizens.²⁰⁰

Outlining her own achievements in Congress, Douglas highlighted her continuous fight for low-income housing, work for the behalf of civil rights, the maintenance of price and rent controls into the post-war period, work on atomic energy and, generally speaking, her efforts to “strengthen our democratic society and to extend the benefits of our free enterprise system” and the “enactment of this economic bill of rights to which our party

¹⁹⁸ Speech of Helen Gahagan Douglas Officially Opening her campaign, 25 February 1950, Box 173, Folder 3, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

is committed”²⁰¹ By invoking the New Deal language of class warfare Douglas connected her platform to a broader reform tradition that went against the grain of the emergent Cold War preoccupation with national security as the primary objective of the postwar period. While she remained unsure of how much publicity and campaign materials she could afford without the backing of wealthy investors Douglas assured the people that come what may, “this will be your campaign, your fight and that when I am elected I shall be your Senator, elected on the platform that you have written and that you have endorsed. A platform that was drawn to promote the ‘general welfare’ at home and ‘peace’ in the world.”²⁰²

Douglas identified herself as an active candidate with the time, energy, and desire to work for Californians in the Senate. However, she would need more than a strong record on domestic social and economic policy to convince voters of her credentials; she needed to prove she had the wit and political know-how to navigate the complex world of U.S. foreign affairs. Here she chose to highlight what she considered to be her largest contribution to U.S. foreign affairs, serving as an alternate delegate to the first United States delegation to the United Nations where she “supported relief measures for the stricken countries of the world during and immediately after the war.”²⁰³ But before Douglas could leave her mark on U.S. foreign policy, she had to get past the Democratic Party’s California gate-keepers.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 3-5.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 7.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 6.

The California Primary: Downey, Douglas, and Boddy

According to her personal assistant and confidant, Evelyn Chavoor, in 1950, Douglas believed that “she was going to educate the whole state of California about the water resources of California, and the 160 acre limitation, and what was being done to destroy it.”²⁰⁴ Once the campaign began it became clear that the topic of natural resource development and domestic reform would not be the salient topic she had hoped. As an unabashedly proud New Deal liberal who imagined herself as following in the tradition of Franklin Roosevelt and her close friend and mentor Eleanor, Douglas’s philosophy and refusal to sacrifice principle for political expediency was continually framed as “dangerous if not downright disloyal by some rock-ribbed Republicans.”²⁰⁵ Although it would be the red-baiting of her Republican opponent in the general election that would become most infamous the most damaging red-baiting smear campaign Douglas faced would come from within the ranks of her own party.

Two months into the primary campaign Senator Downey withdrew from the race citing ill-health and officially retired from political life. Manchester Boddy quickly filed to take his place. Boddy, an influential newspaper publisher controlling the *Los Angeles Daily News* had twice been approached by Democrats to run for elected office, which he refused claiming that he simply had no interest in holding political office. As a newspaper man, Boddy helmed one of the only papers in the state willing to give Roosevelt and the New Deal sympathetic coverage, often writing in support of proposed social and economic programs. Similarly, while almost all of the Californian papers had

²⁰⁴ Evelyn Chavoor in Helen Gahagan Douglas Project, 285.

²⁰⁵ “Helen Gahagan Douglas Wants to be a Senator...And Should Be!” by Edward A. Harris, 10 December 1949, Box 172, Folder 5, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma..

opposed Douglas's past campaigns she had become dependant on Boddy's *Los Angeles Daily News* for coverage of her campaign.²⁰⁶ Following his entry into the campaign, Douglas subsequently lost the support of his paper, establishing a virtual media blackout of her official campaign activities.

The race between Boddy and Douglas began as a civil contest between two opponents who shared some similarities in their platforms. Both Douglas and Boddy claimed to represent the everyday, average American, prioritized debates concerning the ownership of hydroelectricity, and displayed a commitment to the 160-acre limitation. While Boddy was a popular figure among the general public and drew support from a number of local labour unions, his late entry into the race left his campaign disorganized and without a vision for a coherent economic program for California's economy.

When announcing his support for Boddy during a statewide broadcast on May 22, 1950 Sheridan Downey claimed that despite three terms in Congress, Helen Gahagan Douglas was not qualified to be a United States Senator. In a rather ironic, yet not unpredictable, statement Downey claimed that Douglas's record "clearly shows very little hard work, no important influence on legislation, and almost nothing in the way of solid achievement.

The fact that Mrs. Douglas has continued to bask in the warm glow of publicity and propaganda should not confuse any voters as to what the real facts are."²⁰⁷ During the final month of the race Boddy's campaign focused on positioning Douglas as a left-radical that could not be trusted to represent the interests of the American people.

²⁰⁶ Douglas. *A Full Life*. 293.

²⁰⁷ Irwin Gellman, *The Contender: Richard Nixon, The Congress Years, 1946 to 1952*, (New York: Free Press, 1999), 301-302.

The most damaging attacks came from the pages of Boddy's paper, the *Los Angeles Daily News* and its affiliates, that began referring to Douglas and her campaign using language that left little doubt as to her status as one of the political "red hots" of the Democratic Party, routinely referring to her as "decidedly pink", "pink shading to deep red," and dubbing her "the pink lady."²⁰⁸ The *Herald Express* described Douglas as a "red radical" whose "entire voting career in Congress" confirmed her radical stand.²⁰⁹ The *Desert Sun* accused Douglas of "weeping crocodile tears" over veterans rights after she "turned her back on them" in 1945 by voting "against the emergency bill" which had been an "incurable insult to the State of California."²¹⁰ Much like the moniker of "the pink lady", the strategy to align Douglas with Vito Marcantonio, in the public mind originated in Boddy's campaign only to be later appropriated and deployed by Nixon in his infamous Pink Sheet.²¹¹ Printed using red ink, Boddy claimed that Douglas had "too often teamed up with the notorious extreme radical, Vito Marcantonio of New York City, on votes that seem more in the interest of Soviet Russia than of the United States"

Against the advice of her campaign staff and confidants, Douglas ignored Boddy believing that the voters would see through the thinly veiled acts of political desperation. Although Douglas ultimately defeated Boddy in the primaries, she was left with a number of political scars that proved too deep to repair before facing Richard Nixon, the young and promising anti-communist protégé of Joseph McCarthy, in the general election. The

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ "California Primary Shows Radicalism Losing Popularity" in the *Herald Express*, 6 June 1950, Box 173 Folder 10, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²¹⁰ Ethel Gillett Whitehorn, "Politically Speaking," *Desert Sun*, 7 April 1950, California Digital Newspaper Collection, University of California, Riverside.

²¹¹ A Representative from New York's 18th District. Marcantonio was a member of the American Labor Party and a self-declared democratic-socialist. By 1950 Marcantonio was often framed as voting in accordance with the Communist Party line.

tactics employed by Boddy set the stage for what would become one of the dirtiest campaigns in American history. As Alvin Meyers, one of the founders of the Young Democrats of California who worked on Douglas's senatorial campaign, saw fit to describe it, "Boddy may not have beat her in the primary, but he sure as hell helped defeat her in the general."²¹² Moving into the general election, the *Herald Express* once again made its position clear, proclaiming that after the primary the American people had to choose between "an American progressive and a siren in a 'beautiful' red dress," lamenting that "middle of the road Manchester Boddy was a sacrifice to the pink lady of the hustings."²¹³

Tricky Dick and the Pink Lady

In 1950, Nixon and Douglas inhabited polar opposition positions on the political spectrum. While Douglas favoured the strengthening of the welfare state, Nixon stood for de-regulation, private interests, and minimal government involvement in regulating economic activity. Similarly, while Douglas favoured targeted and reasonable efforts to remove known communists from government and public employment that equally protected the constitutional rights of American citizens, Nixon backed sweeping anti-communist legislation and the complete outlawing of Communist ideology.

The political and cultural shift that occurred between the primary election and the opening of the general campaign made the issue of communism more salient than ever.

²¹² Alvin Meyers, "Helen Gahagan Douglas and the Campaigns for Congress," an oral history conducted in 1978 by Ingrid Winther Scobie, in Helen Gahagan Douglas Oral History Project, Volume II, (Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1981), 228.

²¹³ "California Primary Shows Radicalism Losing Popularity" in the *Herald Express*, 6 June 1950, Box 173 Folder 10, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

The primary contests were decided on June 9th, 1950 just over two weeks before the North Korean invasion of South Korea on June 25th, 1950. The United States responded immediately—and initially without Congressional authorization—by securing a UN Security Council resolution that justified U.S. military intervention on June 27. Suddenly a conflict that had been experienced primarily as ideological propaganda wars became an armed conflict, changing domestic experience and understandings of the Cold War on a global stage. When she began her campaign for the United States Senate there was not a doubt in Helen Gahagan Douglas’s mind that she would win, but “the Korean war changed everybody’s calculations.”²¹⁴

Douglas attempted to present a strong front to avoid being forced into a defensive position, assuming that her opponent would try to “distort my record of militant support for the Democratic program of President Roosevelt and President Truman.”²¹⁵ Douglas openly challenged both the integrity and voting record of Richard Nixon while simultaneously re-articulating her platform in a manner that reflected her efforts to protect under conception of American interests at home and abroad. Douglas warned voters to be vigilant, as the opposing campaign would “misrepresent the reactionary record of my opponent” to appeal to Republicans, Democrats, and undecided voters.²¹⁶

Just as Boddy, and later Nixon, drew parallels between the voting patterns of Douglas and Marcantonio, Douglas attempted to use the same strategy to influence public opinion of Nixon’s supposedly hard line anti-communist voting record. Included in her

²¹⁴ Letter from Helen Gahagan Douglas to Shirley H. Realini, 26 May 1962, Box 173, Folder 14, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²¹⁵ Helen Gahagan Douglas, Address given over California Radio broadcast on 6 September 1950, Box 173, Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.* 1.

opening address was the charge that Nixon, along with Marcantonio, “voted last year to cut in half the funds for military assistance to the Atlantic Treaty Nations” and on January 10th 1950 “voted again with Mr. Marcantonio, to deny economic aid to Korea.”²¹⁷ Throughout the campaign both Nixon and Douglas attempted to position the other as un-American, but only one had the explicit record of fighting communism in a direct and digestible way. According to Nixon’s campaign manager Murray Chotiner, Douglas put herself in a vulnerable position when she openly challenged Nixon on his voting record on the issue of communism “because she could not sell the people of California that she would be a better fighter against communism than Dick Nixon. She made the fatal mistake of attacking our strength instead of sticking to attacking our weaknesses.”²¹⁸ While challenging Nixon’s record on communism was not her only strategy, it ultimately assisted the Nixon campaign in drawing the focus of the election away from issues on which he was perceived to be vulnerable. On legislation targeting economic and social inequalities, Douglas claimed that Nixon was yet another in a long line of politicians who acted in the interests of private industry. Listing his failures, Douglas chastised Nixon for his opposition to “effective housing legislation, resource development, anti-monopoly legislation, fair tax legislation, and adequate assistance to agriculture.”²¹⁹

Douglas cast a wide net in her criticism of Nixon and his voting record, pointing to a number of important issues on which he clearly opposed reforms in favour of

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

²¹⁸ Chotiner quoted in Roger Morris, *Richard Milhous Nixon: The Rise of An American Politician*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990), 572,

²¹⁹ Helen Gahagan Douglas, Address given over California Radio broadcast on 6 September 1950, Box 173, Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

maintaining the power of monopolies. When confronting the man who claimed to have “broken the Hiss case” Douglas targeted her criticism on the most recent piece of legislation proposed to combat subversion and fight communism, the Mundt-Nixon bill. Passed in the House as the Subversive Activities Control Act of 1948, the bill sought to require every member of the Communist Party to register with the Attorney General thereby creating a list of known communists and subversive organizations. While Nixon framed the Act as the next step in furthering government control of communists and forcing communists and front organizations into the open the Act’s opponents, including Vito Marcantonio, raised concerns of its constitutionality given that provisions within the Act would directly violate citizen’s freedom of speech, thought, and association. Amidst massive public debate and protest the Mundt-Nixon bill ultimately failed to pass in the Senate and was not enacted into law.

The Mundt-Nixon bill lived on beyond 1948 and was re-introduced in 1950 as the Mundt-Ferguson bill or the Subversive Activities Control Bill. Essentially unchanged since its first introduction the political climate in 1950 was much more likely to produce a favourable outcome. Following 1949 the Democratic administration set about re-examining its approach to combatting international and internal communist subversion. In this context proposed legislation that would theoretically give the government more controls over subversive persons and organizations could easily be incorporated into a security framework that sought to project a sense of strength, stability, and security both at home and abroad. Although the political climate had shifted the viewpoints of some of the earlier critiques of the Mundt-Nixon bill had not. Standing in the House to speak on the proposed bill on the 29th of August, 1950 Congresswoman Douglas argued that “those

who are now effectively enforcing the laws against subversives have told us that certain gaps and loopholes must be closed in existing statues for the complete protection of the country.” While Douglas stood in “support of legislation specifically and reasonably directed toward that objective” she refused to “sacrifice the liberty of the American people on an alter of hysteria erected by those without vision, without faith, without courage, who cringe in fear before a handful of crackpots and their traitorous communist cronies.”²²⁰

Regardless of her position in the Senate race, and against the advice of both her campaign advisors and allies within the House, Douglas was one of the twenty representatives that voted against the bill. Recognizing that a vote in opposition would open her to a new level of red-baiting from Nixon and his supporters Douglas explained her vote to the House and, by extension, the voters as yet another instance where she stood firm in her principles and opposed a measure she believed would put the great mass of loyal American’s at risk. By casting her vote against the Mundt bill Douglas saw herself as casting her ballot in support of “the rights and privileges of American citizens under the Constitution”²²¹ Refusing to be “stampeded by hysteria nor...waiver for political expediency” Douglas cast her ballot knowing that her “record and [her] conscious are clear.”²²²

She proudly proclaimed her history of opposing legislation that would infringe on the rights of all American’s in the pursuit of a narrow goal of rooting out communists and subversives. While, ensuring her own opposition to communism and desire to see

²²⁰ HGD Speech on the Mundt-Nixon {Ferguson} bill, 29 August 1950, Box 172, Folder 1, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*

communists removed from positions of influence, Douglas reiterated her support of legislation protecting the institutional and public integrity of the U.S. from those who sought their downfall: “America must be protects against spies and saboteurs and traitors. I stand squarely behind the laws to suppress their activities, but I will not sell American liberties down the river of fear conjured up by the Mundts and the Nixons, the McCarthys and the Cains.”²²³ Douglas remained committed to the furtherance of economic and social policy that served the dual purpose of ameliorating the living conditions of Californians while also containing communism by attacking the conditions that she believed made communism appealing. For her, the freedom that anti-communist politics claimed to be protecting did not “flourish midst poverty, paupers oaths, slums, and despair.”²²⁴

Following the politically charged opening of the general campaign, Douglas sought to refocus public attention on the core issues of water, power, and social reform. However, the die had been cast and communism was firmly established as the decisive issue of the campaign. Confident that her record would speak for itself, Douglas paid little attention to Nixon or his campaign rhetoric apart from a generic warning to voters that the opposition would attempt to misrepresent the official record to cast their candidate in move favourable light. Douglas assured her supporters that, try as they may, the “opposition cannot change the facts. It cannot erase the record.”²²⁵ They may not have

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Text of Speech delivered by Helen Gahagan Douglas, 1950, Box 172, Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²²⁵ Helen Gahagan Douglas, Address given over California Radio broadcast on 6 September 1950, Box 173, Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

been able to change or erase the official records, but the path had been cleared by Boddy in the primary for its distortion.

From Nixon's perspective, Douglas fit the description of what he would later define as a subversive or soft person in his book *Six Crises*. Her public and political record would qualify Douglas as being possession of "a mindset" which makes an individual "singularly vulnerable to the communist popular front appeal under the banner of social justice."²²⁶ Although *Six Crises* would not be published until 1962, in it Nixon clearly articulated a description of what he assumed to be a subversive or at risk person, that fit the political profile of Douglas and many of her New Deal colleagues who had been politicized by the popular front politics of the New Deal. In the Fourth Report issued by the California Senate Fact Finding Committee on Un-American Activities it was claimed that "behind a propaganda barrage of progress, reform and liberal slogans, the communists formally pursue a formal, dogmatic, organized program of infiltration" to advance "propaganda for revolution in the country where they live."²²⁷ Identifying these persons was supposedly difficult for "the average American, trained in the ideals of fair play and good sportsmanship."²²⁸ The ability of communists and subversive persons to hide in plain sight and mask their alleged plans for revolution and infiltration in the language of social justice was "one of the major reasons why communists are constantly successful in either capturing and disturbing groups whenever it serves the purpose of the party line."²²⁹

²²⁶ Quoted in William Henry Chafe, *Private Lives/Public Consequences: Personality and Politics in Modern America*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 247.

²²⁷ California Legislature, "Fourth Report of the Senate Fact Finding Committee on Un-American Activities (1948): Communist Front Organizations," The Senate, (Prelinger Library, San Francisco California, 2006), 23.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, 26.

²²⁹ *Ibid*.

Part of the Nixon campaign, although not directly coming from “official” channels was to establish Douglas in the public mind as part of the international communist conspiracy to infiltrate and control the Democratic Party. Douglas’s support from labour unions, past involvement in the popular front politics of Hollywood, political past of her husband Melvyn—who had appeared in front of HUAC—and her mention in communist newspapers including the *Daily Worker* were all held up as evidence of her role in the broader communist conspiracy.

Douglas was not the only woman, of course, to come under suspicion for her politics. When Senator McCarthy made his infamous speech in Wheeling, Virginia in 1950 in which he claimed to have a list of subversive persons in government—including Truman’s chief economic advisor Leon Keyserling and his wife Mary Dublin Keyserling—a wave of anxiety swept across the nation.²³⁰ As efforts to root out internal subversion were re-invigorated, the networks that individuals belonged to came under suspicion. In the case of Mary Keyserling and her husband, attention was focused on the loose network of female experts, officials, and advocates that had advanced in government positions and often worked together to construct legislation attacking social inequalities.²³¹

Reflecting on the campaign the night before the election, Douglas told voters that, “they launched here, as in other states, a campaign of vilification, mudslinging and smearing against virtually all Democrats that has no parallel in the history of the

²³⁰ Landon R. Y. Storrs, “Red Scare Politics and the Suppression of Popular Front Feminism: The Loyalty Investigation of Mary Dublin Keyserling.” *The Journal of American History*. 90:2 (Sept 2003), 491.

²³¹ *Ibid.* 492.

Nation.”²³² From the outset of the campaign, the entirety of Nixon’s campaign strategy relied on the deployment of half-truths and manipulation of his opponent’s public statements, carefully planted innuendos, and the use of guilt by association to discredit his opponents.²³³

Ironically, though, at the onset of the campaign Nixon claimed he wanted to avoid the tactics that had come to characterize elections since 1948. Then, after staking the moral high ground, he admitted that, “to the extent that Mrs. Douglas does not reveal, or conceals, her record, I feel that I have an obligation to *expose* that record to the voters of California so that they can decide whether they want her to speak for them in the United States Senate.”²³⁴ As Iwan Morgan notes, in his political career Nixon developed a particularly efficient pattern of smearing his opponent while publicly claiming that he was not doing so.²³⁵ Douglas’ voting tendencies were a matter of public record, but by invoking the politics of exposure Nixon and his campaign connected themselves to the broader efforts to “expose” subversives and communists. It implied, without saying so, that Douglas was concealing something and therefore to oppose her could be connected with the larger aim of protecting the U.S. from communists and subversives.

Much like Downey in the primary election, Nixon claimed that Douglas’ record “disqualifies her from representing the people in the United States Senate.”²³⁶ Basing his assertion on a series of qualifications that demanded the next Senator “have a real

²³² Douglas Pre-Election Statement to *Independent Review*, November 1950, Box 157, Folder 9, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²³³ Chafe, *Private Lives*, 239.

²³⁴ Nixon’s Kickoff Speech, 18 September 1950, Box 173, Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²³⁵ Morgan, *Nixon*, 19.

²³⁶ Nixon’s Kickoff Speech, 18 September 1950, Box 173, Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

understanding of the International Communist conspiracy ... the experience and background which are essential for the development of a strong and consistent foreign policy” as well as an “understanding of national defence problems”²³⁷ Highlighting Douglas’s opposition to the House Un-American Activities Committee, Nixon claimed that “if she had had her way, the Communist conspiracy in the United States would never have been exposed.”²³⁸

Let’s Look at the Record

In her influential study of McCarthyism, *Many Are the Crimes*, Ellen Schrecker notes that one of the key characteristics of the Cold War red scare was the wave of political repression that silenced New Dealers as they were forced to become preoccupied with their own self-defence.²³⁹ By 1950, the communists-in-government issue had become a powerful tool in the Republican arsenal when confronting and challenging old New Dealers, as well as the liberal community more broadly.

Many of the issues that divided Nixon and Douglas, of course, were specific to California, although they carried traces of wider ideological debates. On the matter of water and power, including the future of the Central Valley Project, Nixon made it clear that “we must not allow progress to be retarded by quarrelling among ourselves over such questions as whether power should be furnished by public or private interests, and whether water delivery should be limited to persons owning 160 acres or less.”²⁴⁰ The

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes*, 367.

²⁴⁰ Excerpts from Nixon speaker’s handbook on Power and Water, 1950, Box 173, Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

tone of the statement in conjunction with the general campaign platform of Richard Nixon cast issues such as the 160-acre limitation and the debate between public and private interests as petty matters of the political technicalities.

Military assistance programs, international aid, and the House Un-American Activities Committee became focal points of the Nixon campaign. In a campaign flyer claiming to provide the “Facts” a side by side comparison showed that Nixon had “voted for all military programs, including Korea and Formosa, to stop the spread of Communism” while his opponent had “voted against the Selective Services Act of 1948. Favored giving the atom bomb secret away. Voted against aid to Greece and Turkey [and] opposed aid to [Nationalist] China.”²⁴¹ Framing each candidate’s voting record in this manner, devoid of context, positioned Nixon as the one who clearly worked to protect Americans and others from communism and subversion while Douglas had opposed landmark legislation and aid programs (introduced by her own party no less) designed to contain and roll back communism abroad. Nixon used the issue of Communism to ground the rest of his planks and attacks on Douglas’s record.

On the domestic front, Nixon’s campaign literature framed Nixon as “champion of free enterprise and constitutional government, a National figure in the fight to halt inroads of Communism and to make our country secure.”²⁴² Attacking Douglas as being opposed to the American free enterprise (read capitalist) system was a tried strategy when confronting the New Deal liberal congresswoman. Her advocacy on behalf of increased government intervention in regulating the economy, providing healthcare insurance to

²⁴¹ Nixon Campaign Material, “Facts” flyer, 1950, Box 172, Folder 2, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁴² Nixon Campaign Material, “The Choice” 1950, Box 172, Folder 2, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

citizens, increasing social security, and backing minimum wage legislation that would raise the minimum wage to 75 cents, had all functioned as topics that her detractors would emphasize when claiming Douglas was somehow against free enterprise. Nixon established a clear choice for Californian voters, they could send a “courageous and fearless” candidate to the Senate who would do “all in his power to prevent any foreign ideology from overthrowing our constitutional form of government”²⁴³ or they could elect an “extreme left-winger, who wants more federal controls, and who had consistently fought to prevent exposure and control of communists in this country.”²⁴⁴

Nixon’s manipulation of Douglas’ record did not go unnoticed or unchallenged. James E. Walker identified Nixon’s campaign as part of a larger “communist scare program” that relied on the use of “innuendo, lies, and vilification bordering on sedition” and framing the “Mundt-Nixon anti-communist bill” as essential for American welfare.²⁴⁵ The reporter Elmer E. Davis stated that although Nixon’s literature “doesn’t SAY that Mrs. Douglas is a communist; but the innuendo is left there.”²⁴⁶ Although this implication is clear in the majority of Nixon’s campaign literature and promotional material, it was made most explicit through what has infamously been dubbed the Pink Sheet. Released mere weeks before voters were set to cast their ballots in November, the Pink Sheet listed (on pink paper, in case the point be missed) “various measures in Congress, on which Mrs. Douglas and the party-liner Marcantonio have voted the same way,” and referenced

²⁴³ Nixon Campaign Material, “Facts” Flyer, Box 172, Folder 2, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁴⁴ Nixon Campaign Material, “The Choice” Flyer Box 172, Folder 2, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁴⁵ “Helen Gahagan Douglas, Richard M. Nixon on Communism” by James E. Walker in the *Santa Ana Register*, 25 October 1950, Box 173, Folder 5, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁴⁶ Elmer Davis, radio broadcast transcript, 30 October 1950, Box 173 folder 5. Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

a collection of “bills where the relation to national defence” was to the informed voter “invisible except with a microscope.”²⁴⁷ Totalling some 354 times that Douglas had voted in the same manner as Vito Marcantonio, the effect of the Pink Sheet was to effectively identify Douglas as either a communist herself or a naively idealistic politician whose dedication to social justice cause marked her as a liability if sent to the United States Senate. Claiming to summarize the entirety of her voting record in Congress, the Pink Sheet purported to show how Douglas “Votes Against Un-American Activities,” “Votes Against Loyalty and Security Legislation,” displayed “Communist Line Foreign Policy Votes,” voted “Against Congressional Investigation of Communists and Other Illegal Activities” and voted “Against National Defence.”²⁴⁸ Although Douglas made no immediate response to the Pink Sheet, her private copy is specifically marked in a manner that suggests a laughable indifference to the claims Nixon made in it. However, Douglas’s indifference proved to be the final blow in a campaign that had taken its toll on the reputation of the “gentlewoman” from California. The effectiveness of Nixon’s campaign forced the Douglas campaign into a defensive position. Douglas herself stated that despite her best efforts to draw attention to the immediate social and economic problems faced by Californians the issue of communism had become “the most important issue in this campaign. Even more important than our Foreign Policy, even more important than the direction our domestic policies take, is the necessity of repudiating this attempt by unscrupulous men, hungry for political power, to subvert the very basis of

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ Richard Nixon, The Pink Sheet, 1950, Box 173, Folder 8, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

Democracy.”²⁴⁹ Despite the shift in focus, Douglas was not content to let Nixon’s efforts to smear her political record go unchallenged.

Refuting Nixon

Bound in blue paper, a pile of legal sized documents chronicled each and every vote cast by Douglas that Nixon claimed to be opposed to American anti-communist efforts. What became known as the Blue Book became an essential feature of Douglas’s campaign and the primary method used by Douglas to combat the misinformation spread by Nixon, offering explanations of her positions and decision-making processes to explain why she voted the way she did. In the Blue Book she attempted to show voters that she had “always fought totalitarianism in all its forms” and had often joined “with the President in fighting against those extremists who now urge us to adopt police state measures.”²⁵⁰

Douglas was forced to confront many of her past statements that, when repeated in the context of 1950 and the Korean War, appeared to convey a blasé ambivalence to national security on Douglas’s part. This included facing up to her 1946 statement that communism posed no real threat to American institutions. In an early address Douglas pointed to the fact that her “opponent’s literature makes much of a statement I made in 1946. The statement was this, ‘I think we all know that communism is no real threat to the institutions of this country.’”²⁵¹ Douglas neither amended nor refuted her past

²⁴⁹ Douglas statement, 1950, Box 172 Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁵⁰ Excerpt from the Blue Book, 1950, Box 172 Folder 4, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

statement, rather choosing to “repeat it now with all the force and strength” at her command.²⁵²

Despite being put on the defensive, Douglas did not stop her criticism of Nixon and the politics he represented, choosing to see his campaign of misrepresentation as his tactics as an “annoyance rather than hardship.”²⁵³ For her commitment to her principles and politics Douglas earned a large and devoted group of supporters. In an article comparing Nixon and Douglas’s approach to communism Walker again praised Douglas for her refusal “to be delivered from her steadfast adherence to established American principles” and urged every voter “who values American freedom and tradition” to back Douglas come November.²⁵⁴ Similarly, when approached by the Douglas campaign to speak in support of their candidate Joseph F. Donohue told voters that after careful examination of each candidate’s voting records it was his opinion “that Mrs. Douglas has done more to destroy communism in America by making democracy work in America, than any other single member of Congress.”²⁵⁵ By Donohue’s estimation, “those who are the tools or who are sympathetic to the aims of Soviet Russia regard Helen Douglas as one of their most aggressive and effective enemies in America,” and that “time and time again their efforts to take over and submit liberal and humanitarian movements in American have been thwarted by the courageous and far-sighted efforts of Mrs. Douglas.”²⁵⁶ Tom Jones stated that he would “be angrier than I am if I didn’t realize that

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ Letter from Helen Gahagan Douglas to Shirley H. Realini, 26 May 1962, Box 173, Folder 14, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center Congressional and Political Collections, University of Oklahoma.

²⁵⁴ James E. Walker, “Helen Gahagan Douglas, Richard M. Nixon on Communism,” *Santa Ana Register*, 25 October 1950, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁵⁵ Notes on Joseph F. Donohue, September 1950, Box 172, Folder 9, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.* .

this is an act of desperation on the part of the opposition to Helen Douglas, angered by the reports of her certain victory.”²⁵⁷ A month before the election Douglas herself spoke during a statewide radio broadcast condemning the men who “were not interested in public service ... and are interested solely in public office” whom she charged with “the high crime of conspiring to sell the welfare of the American people down the river of personal ambition.”²⁵⁸

Making the Personal Political

While the campaign alone is enough to warrant analysis on the grounds of political ideology, the particular race between Nixon and Douglas was further complicated by the very fact that, as he put it, Nixon was “confronted with an unusual situation. My opponent is a woman.”²⁵⁹ Given the lack of female representation in the Senate, much less the success rate of women who campaigned for their seats, it was unclear for many how to conceptualize Douglas’s candidacy. As Nixon noted, many of his advisors warned him that “to criticize a woman might cost the election” implying, ironically, that women in politics were exempt from political criticism or direct confrontation from men based solely on the fact that they were women.²⁶⁰ When considering that the Senate was 99 percent male, the introduction of another woman—and a Democrat, at that—could complicate Senate proceedings if Douglas showed a similar disregard for the gendered practices of the Senate as she had while in Congress.

²⁵⁷ Tom Jones quoted in Press Release to the *Independent Review*, 24 May 1950, Box 157, Folder 8a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁵⁸ HGD Radio Broadcast transcript, 6 October 1950, Box 157, Folder 9, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁵⁹ Richard Nixon “Kick Off” Speech, 18 September 1950, Box 173, Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

However, Nixon came to the decision that although his “opponent is a woman ... she is also asking the people of California to send her as a representative to the United States Senate, where she could make decisions affecting their very lives.”²⁶¹ Following the outbreak of the Korean War, the initial public reaction was filtered through an overriding anger towards communism and those who appeared to sympathize with its causes. Even those who spoke in support of Douglas attempted to frame her sex and gender identity in a manner that would assuage fears of voters wary about voting a woman into one of the most powerful positions in the nation.

While campaigning for Douglas vice-president Albert Barkley told listeners that “we need a woman of her experience, her outlook, her vision, her ability, her loyalty to democratic ideals in the Senate.”²⁶² While he actively asserted her political capability for the role, Barkley did so by emphasising her connection to the roles of wife and mother in relation to good governance. He asked voters to remember that “if we have bad government in this country ... the housewife, the mother, is the first to realize that fact—because it is she who nurses the children—given them that tender care and that solicitude which is part of the preparation for citizenship in the future.”²⁶³ Emphasizing her loyalty to democratic ideals Barkley similarly implied her loyalty to male party structures and leaders. Additionally, there were those who sought to affirm that Douglas possessed the stamina necessary to balance her duties as wife, mother, and politician. In a release to San

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² Campaign Speech in support of Helen Gahagan Douglas from VP Albert Barkley, 1950, Box 172, Folder 2, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

Diego papers Douglas's campaign wrote that for any other person, man and woman alike, "her schedule would be a killing one," but Douglas "seems to thrive on it."²⁶⁴

Part of regulating and controlling public perceptions of Douglas's womanhood was interrogating her ability to perform the very expressions most aligned with her identity as a woman: her competency as a wife and mother. The unconventional nature of the Douglas household became a point of contention in the campaign. Firstly, while political spouses (read wives) were expected to accompany and care for their partners on the campaign trail it was not clear how the typical relationship would be presented when the candidate was a woman. As it was, Melvyn did not make any significant appearances during Douglas's campaign except for a single speech delivered the night before the election. Similarly, before the campaign, the couple put out a joint statement intended to present a "short resume of [their] political activity in [their] endeavour to help preserve the free enterprise system."²⁶⁵ Melvyn's politics and past political associations were examined and interrogated in a manner that Pat Nixon's political past was not. Moreover, whereas Douglas could be politically harmed by the commitments, statements, and past actions of her husband, she could also absorb a degree of legitimacy through his experiences, specifically his military experience. In their joint statement, the couple drew attention to the fact that despite being "over age" with "two dependant children and a mother to care for" Melvyn enlisted to serve during the Second World War.²⁶⁶ They also emphasized the patriotic, self-sacrificing motives of Melvyn as they noted his enlistment

²⁶⁴ Douglas campaign release, 1950, Box 157, Folder 8a, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁶⁵ Statement of Melvyn and Helen Douglas on political activity, 1950, Box 172, Folder 7, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

depended on that willingness of a doctor to “turn his head in order to permit” Melvyn’s service, given the fact that he had scars on his lungs that would otherwise have prevented him from enlisting.²⁶⁷ Associating herself with Melvyn’s military service gave Douglas a foundation on which to claim authority on military matters because of her own sacrifice made to the nation through her husband’s military service. It also helped establish the unimpeachable patriotism of the family.

Politicizing the family dynamics of the Nixon and Douglas households carried symbolic political weight in a moment when national security and the illusion of domestic bliss and stability were more intertwined than ever. As Robert Dean noted in *Imperial Brotherhood*, in republicanism, marital virtue was inseparable from masculine civic and political virtue.²⁶⁸ While never done explicitly, the symbolic difference presented in the respective campaigns of family life reflected the extent to which each candidate successfully conformed to hegemonic gender ideologies that delineated prevailing ideas of health, stability, and belonging. Richard and Pat Nixon toured the state together in their family car, invoking the imagery and symbolic power associated with the traditional American family. Douglas, however, travelled and appeared alone, as her husband was filming in different locations and her children were either housed in boarding schools or in the care of other women. Melvyn’s lack of involvement in the campaign is understandable if one considered the assumed dynamic of men and women in American politics where the husband is traditionally the candidate. When women were put forward for positions of political power, it was usually done following the death of their husbands or because they were of an age when their immediate duties as a mother

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁸ Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood*, 380.

had been fulfilled and the children were fully grown. In Douglas's case neither was true. The Douglas children, ages 17 and 12, remained in the primary care of their parents with the youngest child, Mary Helen, just entering into her years of early womanhood and, assumedly, in need of her mother's full attention.

While her record in Congress made her a *political* woman, Douglas had to continually re-assert her status as a *civilian* woman that was both separate and actively involved in the domestic world. While covering her primary campaign the *Mountain View Express* held Douglas up as "an example of a woman adjusted completely to her role as woman-citizen" who admirably demonstrated that "political activity need not rob a woman of her femininity and that a career of acting need not submerge naturalness."²⁶⁹ Similarly, Nixon's campaign tried to use her theatrical past to paint her as a politicians uniquely equipped to conceal her "true" motivations from the public and thus to question her "new role as foe of communism."²⁷⁰ Asserting that the people of California had "cast their actress-candidate in a new role" Bernard Bernstein symbolically referenced her past as a means of casting doubt on her present day motivation:

How can Helen Gahagan Douglas, capable actress that she is, take up so strange a role as a foe of Communism? And why does she, when she so deservedly earned the title of "the pink lady"? Perhaps she has just heard of the chameleon that changes color to suit conditions, or perhaps Helen Douglas has decided pink isn't becoming any more, or at least while we are in bloody war with Communists. If Helen Douglas in her new role can divert enough Californians from her record,

²⁶⁹ "A Woman's Way Around" by Bernadette in the *Mountain View Express*, April 1950, Box 173, folder 7, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁷⁰ Statement by Bernard Bernstein, August 1950, Box 173, Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

she can be elected United States Senator, and the Communist Daily Worker will have one of its “heroes” in the body of Congress which passes on the nation’s foreign policy.²⁷¹

The extent of the smear campaign that Douglas’s husband was moved to make a speech defending his wife on the even of the November election. In that speech, Melvyn addressed how for year the couple had “worked side by side, honestly, frankly, and openly, on the side of human decency...against dictatorship, against fascism, against Communism,” regardless of its form.²⁷² On the point of Douglas’s past as an actress, Melvyn assured voters that “while she was an actress, she raised two children, and while she was an actress and raised two children, she read the newspapers and listened to the radio and her heart bled.”²⁷³ Rarely would a candidate’s spouse be called on to make a formal statement attesting to the character of their partner and fitness for office. However, in the case of Douglas, her status as woman placed her outside the boundaries of traditional political conduct in an age of great insecurity. Her husband thought it necessary to vouch for her political character.

Douglas uniquely inhabited the cultural space of both woman and citizen. As a woman with significant cultural visibility and political power, she was held up for examination in a trial by headline that successfully undermined six years of political work based on her commitment to ideals that, in most other contexts, would have been worthy of emulation. Decades after the campaign, many of her closest allies firmly believed that had Douglas remained in the House she would quickly have become one of

²⁷¹ *Ibid.* 2

²⁷² Melvyn Pre-election Speech, 6 November 1950, Box 173, Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma.

²⁷³ *Ibid.* 3.

its most respected and powerful members who likely would have continued on to chair the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Of course, this cannot be known, but it is suggestive of the degree of respect she had earned as a Representative.

The effectiveness of Nixon's campaign ultimately led to a decisive victory for the hard-line anti-communist candidate, surpassing Douglas by over a million votes on November 7th, 1950. Despite the mounting visible support for Nixon during the campaign the initial reaction of Douglas's campaign staff was shock. While conducting interviews for the Helen Gahagan Douglas Oral History Project some interviewees offered what they believed to be the reasons for Douglas's defeat. Byron Lindsay boiled it down to the typical chauvinism of men who "couldn't quite comprehend somebody that attractive also being that competent, that aware, and being able to be as effective in the political field as she was."²⁷⁴ Recalling her interactions with Douglas's campaign staff India Edwards noted that "it seemed to me that Helen's people...were not very realistic in their approach to the enormity of the state." In her view, Douglas's supporters "allowed their admiration and worship ... of Helen Gahagan Douglas to do away with any common-sense they might have had."²⁷⁵ Edward's view is reaffirmed by Helen Lustig, who noted that that was the thing about Douglas's campaign: "so many of the people were real idealists, they had such faith in her as one who would carry out their ideals."²⁷⁶ Much of the initial reaction to Douglas's loss reflected Edwards opinion that the blind loyalty of

²⁷⁴ Byron Lindsay, "Helen Gahagan Douglas and the Campaign in San Diego and Imperial Counties," and oral history conducted in 1976 by Eleanor Glaser, in Helen Gahagan Douglas Oral History Project, Volume II, (Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkley, 1981) 133.

²⁷⁵ India Edwards, "View from Washington" in the Helen Gahagan Douglas Project, 16-18.

²⁷⁶ Helen O'Lustig, "Executive Secretary for Helen Gahagan Douglas's 1950 Campaign in San Diego and Imperial Counties," an oral history conducted in 1976 by Eleanor Glaser, in Helen Gahagan Douglas Oral History Project, Volume II, (Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkley, 1981) 174.

those surrounding Douglas insulated the campaign from the wider political landscape and obscured any understand of how effectively Nixon's campaign could connect with the average Californian voter.

After Douglas retreated from official political life, never again standing for official office. Following the election, it was rumoured that Douglas would be given a political appointment in the Truman administration as a show of support for the defeated candidate. However, the controversy surrounding the "pink lady" was such that in the political climate of the 1950s Douglas, as Edwards noted, could not have been appointed dogcatcher.²⁷⁷ Douglas refused to speak about the campaign for well over a decade. However, questions about Nixon's tactics and the veracity of his claims continued to follow Douglas for the remainder of her life. Rarely did she give an answer. However, responding to a letter from a writer interested in researching the campaign Douglas gave one of her most candid responses to Nixon's efforts to position her in the public mind with the Communist Party. Referring to a pamphlet that called into question her status as a Democrat based on her political record, Douglas quipped "What was I supposed to be? A Republican?"²⁷⁸

Douglas returned to the stage in 1952, attempting to reignite her former operatic career. However, after nearly a decade off the stage and no voice training Douglas was unable to recreate her initial successes. Although following her defeat Douglas stated that "I personally shall continue to work for the Democratic party platform" she essentially

²⁷⁷ Greg Mitchell, *Tricky Dick and the Pink Lady*, (New York: Random House Books, 1998), 255.

²⁷⁸ Letter from Helen Gahagan Douglas to Peter Edson, 1958, Box 173, Folder 6, Helen Gahagan Douglas Collection, Carl Albert Center Congressional and Political Collections, University of Oklahoma.

disappeared from political life.²⁷⁹ Her next major political appearance came in 1960 as she campaigned for John F. Kennedy. She continued to be a vocal advocate for nuclear disarmament and peaceful negotiations with the Soviet Union and stood in opposition to U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Despite her continued private political efforts, the figure of Helen Gahagan Douglas has been inextricably tied to the political legacy of Richard Nixon.

Much like Hillary Clinton has become inextricably tied to the figure of Donald Trump, being called upon for comment during every new political scandal, Helen Gahagan Douglas was similarly linked to Richard Nixon. While she was called for comment whenever Nixon did anything newsworthy, Douglas also selectively appeared in support of candidates that stood in opposition to Nixon accumulating further political power. In addition to campaigning for Kennedy in 1960, Douglas was actively involved in in the 1972 McGovern campaign that attempted to block Nixon's re-election. Although she would not inhabit any significant political positions Douglas remained a highly visible figure in American political culture. Her final moment of political visibility before her death in 1980 came during the Watergate scandal that would ultimately lead to Nixon's resignation from the Presidency. As news of the scandal broke bumper stickers began appearing around California that read, "Don't blame me, I voted for Helen Gahagan Douglas."²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ "Mrs. Douglas will work for party" in the *Madera Tribune*, 8 November 1950, California Digital Newspaper Collection, University of California, Riverside.

²⁸⁰ Karina Longworth, She: Richard Nixon and Helen Gahagan Douglas, You Must Remember This Actress, Panoply Media, podcast audio, 11 April 2016, <http://www.youmustrememberthispodcast.com/episodes/2016/4/9/she-richard-nixon-helen-gahagan-douglas-the-blacklist-episode-9>

Conclusion

Although significant contributions have been made since the early 1980s Cold War histories, especially as they pertain to the “high politics” of Congress, remain predominantly centered on the male and masculine perspective. This is not surprising considering that political and international relations theory has historically constructed models of the state and human activity from the male perspective.²⁸¹ As such, studies of the gendered implications of red scare politics have similarly privileged this perspective when exploring the pre-conceptions and stereotypes used to discursively position men as “soft” on communism.

Given that women have historically been excluded from elite decision-making circles and underrepresented in political institutions it is necessary to conceptualize of women’s experiences as political actors differently from their male counterparts. While political repression during the Cold War is rightfully conceptualized through official acts of censorship, marginalization, and blacklisting I argue that the narrowly defined category of womanhood and female citizenship should be included when incorporating the experiences of political women into our understanding the Cold War.

The masculinist Nixonian narrative that sustains popular histories of the 1950 U.S. Senate election in California has obscured the broader historical significance not only of the campaign itself, but Helen Gahagan Douglas. While the gendered component is an important element in any analysis of the campaign it is of similar importance that we begin to understand Douglas, and other women like her, beyond their gender. Yes, as

²⁸¹ Amy Swerdlow, “Engendering International Relations Theory: The Feminist Standpoint,” *Journal of Women’s History*, 7:2, (Summer 1995), 161.

a woman in politics asking for entrance into the exclusive masculine-decision making circles directly affecting foreign policy Douglas was unconventional. However, as a devote New Deal liberal unwilling to climatize her politics to the postwar period Helen Gahagan Douglas likewise represents a challenge to the postwar political philosophy of the liberal community. The combination of her politics and gender coalesced to position her outside the bounds of both women's politics and the postwar "Vital Center" liberal community more generally.

It has been my intention that this thesis serve two purposes. First, recognizing that Douglas's voice and agency has historically been minimized in histories of the 1950 election I worked to recover her perspective and reassert her own political agency as a woman who held significant cultural and political power. Second, I wanted to push the narrative of the election itself beyond just a gendered analysis by connecting it to a broader historical moment when economic, social, and political landscapes were being reshaped for the postwar – and subsequent Cold War – period. It is easy for things to be lost in translation, especially in moments of widespread uncertainty. However, for too long it has been the stories, experiences, and contributions of women that slip through the metaphorical floor boards of history. In *Twilight of the Social* (2012), American scholar and cultural critic Henry Giroux wrote that in our contemporary political climate "thinking about past and future has collapsed into a presentism in which the delete button, the other normalization of a punishing inequality ... erase[s] any notion of historical consciousness and any vestige of social and moral responsibility."²⁸² When thinking about the past and how historical forces have shaped our present world it is

²⁸² Henry Giroux, *Twilight of the Social: Resurgent Politics in the Age of Dispositionality*, (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2012), 38.

important that we critically examine the stories and experiences that are elevated in popular historical memory.

Historically situated in a moment when public attitudes of women in public life were shifting alongside changes in the economic and cultural landscape the events of the 1950 U.S. Senate election in California is a powerful example of how subtle sexism has historically undercut women's political authority and access to political power. However, the campaign also reveals the extent to which the effort to distance the postwar liberal community from the politics of the interwar period contributed to the dynamics of the election. As both her person and her politics were discursively positioned as "soft" when the contemporary political climate valorized toughness and political realism Helen Gahagan Douglas remained committed to carrying the vision of the New Deal into the postwar world.

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