

FORUM: FEAR AND LOATHING

## Rage Against the Administrative State

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In 1963 the historian Richard Hofstadter argued that movements animated by a “paranoid style”—characterized by “heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy”—had been a recurring feature of American politics. Practitioners of the paranoid style, he explained, mobilized angry minorities to defend a nation, culture, or way of life supposedly under siege. Hofstadter’s examples ranged across the centuries, but his point of departure was the right-wing anticommunism of his own era, especially as embodied by Senator Joseph McCarthy (R-WI), who had seized the political limelight in 1950 by charging that successive Democratic administrations permitted communists to infiltrate the U.S. State Department.<sup>1</sup> The red scare predated McCarthy, but it was McCarthy’s brazen attacks on “Communists in government” that electrified a mass following and powered the widening purges.

Threats to national security were real, but, as Hofstadter put it, crusaders like McCarthy “seemed to care little for the difference between a Communist and a unicorn.” Their goal was “not anything so simply rational as to turn up spies or prevent espionage ... but to discharge resentments and frustrations ... whose roots lay elsewhere than in the Communist issue itself.” Among those tangled roots, Hofstadter identified hatred of the New Deal, the United Nations, Jews, African Americans, and the federal income tax.<sup>2</sup> Other scholars, too, have found that red scares did not correlate with the strength of a communist threat; rather, they erupted when rapid change threatened social hierarchies—the class order in Detroit, or religious authority in Boston, or white supremacy in Atlanta. Across the board, red scares were animated by resentment of the administrative state and its perceived role in upending the social order.<sup>3</sup> That resentment, it turns out, was gendered, as well as racialized.

Congressional conservatives had been charging since the late 1930s that communists were infiltrating the U.S. government, but the possibility seemed more credible and frightening in light of the Alger Hiss case and other postwar espionage revelations. In 1947, President Truman reluctantly authorized the federal employee loyalty program, which by 1956 would screen over five million federal employees for communist affiliations. Investigators hunted not only for ties to allegedly subversive groups but also for subversive “tendencies”—which, depending on the informant, might include a married woman’s use of her birth name, homosexuality, interracial socializing, or “sympathy for the underdog.” The stigma of investigation, regardless of outcome,

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<sup>1</sup>Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York, 1965), 3–4, 23–9; quote 3.

<sup>2</sup>This is from Hofstadter’s closely related work of the same period, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York, 1963), 41–2.

<sup>3</sup>M. J. Heale, *McCarthy’s Americans: Red Scare Politics in State and Nation, 1935–1965* (Athens, GA, 1998). For historiographical discussion, see Landon R. Y. Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (Princeton, NJ, 2012), and Storrs, “McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia in American History* (Oxford, 2016), <http://americanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-6?rskey=zd7q6q&result=11> (accessed Sept. 28, 2017).

destroyed careers and families. It also suffocated social democratic policy options, as experts hesitated to advocate measures that might be labeled un-American. The federal loyalty program was not effective at catching spies. Instead, it helped right-wing activists to conflate the communist threat with the federal bureaucracy itself, and to resurrect old suspicions that the federal government, like communism, threatened the white, Christian, patriarchal family.

Attacks on the integrity of the federal civil service followed in a long and gendered tradition. Since the “snivel service” reform battles of the 1880s, proponents of limited government had invoked the American ideal of rugged individualism to cast government employees as incompetent, morally suspect dependents on taxpayers. They questioned the manliness of male civil servants, portraying them as non-entrepreneurial weaklings who followed rules for modest pay rather than taking risks in pursuit of profit. That the federal workforce was sexually integrated earlier than others brought further moral suspicion upon both male and female employees.<sup>4</sup>

When national security threats have coincided with economic and social upheaval, more Americans have been susceptible to partisan alarms that government employees were subverting the American way, not least through challenging “proper” social hierarchies. The first red scare followed not only the Bolshevik Revolution but also waves of Jewish and Catholic immigration, women’s enfranchisement, labor strikes, and terrorist bombings. That red scare targeted not only immigrants, but also women’s reform organizations and the government labor and welfare agencies they helped to create. Super-patriots claimed that the Bolsheviks had “nationalized” women, forcing them to take paid employment and give their children to the state. From that perspective, health and labor laws for women and children looked like creeping socialism because they empowered bureaucrats at the expense of male heads of household and employers. Worse still, some of the bureaucrats were female.<sup>5</sup> The view that communism took away men’s proper control over women’s labor and sexual conduct became a powerful tool for mobilizing popular suspicion of government regulatory and redistributive programs—and those who administered them.

By the time of the second red scare, the government workforce had expanded, as a result of the Great Depression and World War II, and it also had diversified. Highly educated women, along with Jews and African Americans, found that the government would hire them when corporations and universities would not. By 1947, women comprised 45 percent of federal employees in Washington. The majority remained at the clerical level, but women (most of them white) held roughly 3 percent of high-ranking, supervisory positions, a marked change from a few decades earlier. High-ranking women were disproportionately likely to face disloyalty allegations. Two of McCarthy’s nine initial cases involved women: Dorothy Kenyon, a former judge who had been the State Department’s delegate to the UN Commission on the Status of Women, and Esther Brunauer, an international affairs expert who was State’s liaison to UNESCO.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Landon R. Y. Storrs, “The Ugly History Behind Trump’s Attacks on Civil Servants,” *Politico*, Mar. 26, 2017, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/03/history-trump-attacks-civil-service-federal-workers-mccarthy-214951> (accessed Sept. 28, 2017); Cindy Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service: Middle-Class Workers in Victorian America* (New York, 1987); Margaret C. Rung, *Servants of the State: Managing Diversity and Democracy in the Federal Workforce, 1933–1953* (Athens, GA, 2002); David K. Johnston, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago, 2004).

<sup>5</sup>Kim E. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare* (Columbus, OH, 2001); Erica J. Ryan, *Red War on the Family: Sex, Gender, and Americanism in the First Red Scare* (Philadelphia, 2014); Nancy F. Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT, 1987). On the state as a constraint on the power of male heads of household, see also Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston, 1880–1960* (New York, 1988); and Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, “A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State,” *Signs* 19, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 309–36.

<sup>6</sup>Storrs, *Second Red Scare*.

The evidence against Kenyon and Brunauer was silly (as red-hunters privately admitted), but for McCarthy's supporters, the cases confirmed his innuendoes about gender deviance at State and in the wider civil service. The increased complexity of government in the nuclear age had expanded the authority of government experts, and some resented the rise of "know-it-alls" and "eggheads." Men like McCarthy and Senator Richard Nixon (R-CA) told their constituents that the "striped-pants diplomats" at State stood for the patrician East Coast establishment. Their Ivy League degrees and social exclusivity suggested condescension, and homoeroticism too. Their internationalism hinted at a lack of patriotism. McCarthy claimed that "Communists and queers" at State had aided the communist victory in China, and he called for running the "prancing mimics of the Moscow party line" out of government.<sup>7</sup>

Radio and newspaper allies joined conservative legislators in mocking government experts as "short-haired women and long-haired men" who meddled in citizens' private business. They suggested that government employment inverted gender roles, leading to debauchery and communism. In the 1951 best-seller *Washington Confidential*, the Hearst tabloid journalists Jack Lait and Lee Mortimer described Washington as a "femmocracy" of "sex-starved government gals," who got promotions by sleeping with the few government men who were neither "eunuchs" nor "pansies." Public employees supposedly enjoyed frequent orgies as well as lifetime security on the "perennial payroll." Communist agents blackmailed the participants into espionage by filming their "interracial, inter-middle-sex mélanges."<sup>8</sup>

The latter phrase exemplifies how right-wing propagandists aroused reactionary populist suspicions that government employment undermined both race and gender distinctions. The second red scare erupted, like the first, when women and people of color were fighting to maintain toeholds they had gained during a major war, and when a newly powerful federal government was making efforts, albeit ambivalent ones, to support that fight. Lait and Mortimer wrote that Washington was not only a femmocracy, it was "Negro Heaven," where employers could not fire blacks for fear of antagonizing Eleanor Roosevelt, and where "under Negro occupancy, some of the best dwellings in Washington ... now look like the slums the Fair Dealers decry."<sup>9</sup> Although Eleanor Roosevelt was unable to persuade her husband to support a federal anti-lynching bill, and although Truman was unable to make the wartime Fair Employment Practices Commission permanent, they had tried. Given the Communist Party's calls for race and sex equality, this was, to many on the right, further evidence of the slippery slope from New Deal liberalism to communism.

Right-wing revulsion at the blurring of race and gender boundaries proved inextricable from the fear of interracial sex—specifically, the fear of sex between black men and white women. Because of government employment at equal pay, "the income is high for females," Lait and Mortimer claimed; white women supposedly paid "colored" servicemen and janitors for sex. Loyalty boards asked white female administrators about their hiring of "mixed" staff. The conservative journalist Westbrook Pegler stated that the New Deal public works administrator Harry Hopkins wanted to compel "a genteel, moral woman ... to keep boarding-house for any riff-raff that might be billeted upon her." The implication was that liberal social policies, and the perverts who administered them, interfered with white men's ability to "protect" their wives and daughters.<sup>10</sup>

Alarms about the rape of white women have been a recurring feature of the politics of fear and loathing. Scholarship on black men's disfranchisement in the 1890s, on lynching, on the first red scare and Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, and on white resistance to school desegregation

<sup>7</sup>The Hiss case made the State Department an obvious target, but the attacks on State also reflected a clash of rival masculinities. See Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst, MA, 2001). See also Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*; Johnson, *Lavender Scare*.

<sup>8</sup>Storrs, *Second Red Scare*, 86–95.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 92–5.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 95–6.

rulings demonstrates that right-wing anticommunists, xenophobes, and racists across time have mobilized support—and not just from poor and working class whites—by invoking the need to protect white women, or, more accurately, to prevent social or sexual relationships between white women and men of color. Recall that segregationists mobilized against the *Brown* decision by invoking the specter of “sweet little [white] girls” forced to sit next to “big overgrown [male] Negroes.”<sup>11</sup> The corollary has been undermining the patriarchal authority of men of color, often by refusing to punish white men’s assault of women of color.<sup>12</sup> As rights movements forced the government to address the inequalities that were masked as “protection,” some whites, especially but not only men, came to see the state itself as the enemy.

Today, too, demagogues rally support for a wider right-wing agenda by inciting white men to protect white women and children from the intersecting threats of multiculturalism and gender fluidity, both supposedly abetted by leftists in government. White nationalist propaganda on social media convinced the Charleston murderer Dylann Roof that black men sought to rape white women. As a presidential candidate, Donald Trump portrayed Mexican immigrants as rapists (and said the African American male incumbent was a foreign-born Muslim). Southern Republicans oppose transgender rights bills on the grounds that men pretending to be women will molest girls and women in bathrooms. A North Carolina white man shot up a Washington pizzeria after alt-right websites convinced him Hillary Clinton ran a pedophile ring there. Clinton was anathema to the alt-right for many reasons, but being a woman and a feminist topped the list.<sup>13</sup> Tellingly, the favorite epithet of Trump’s online followers is “cuck,” short for cuckold: a man who permits his wife to sleep with other men. A shared loathing of female independence is uniting distinct groups of angry white men, and some white female allies, into a common alt-right identity.<sup>14</sup> Economic anxiety is an insufficient explanation for this phenomenon.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup>This was the former Chief Justice Earl Warren quoting President Eisenhower, but Ike did not invent the image. Earl Warren, *The Memoirs of Earl Warren* (New York, 1977), 291. The phrase “forced integration,” which President Nixon later put to good use during anti-busing protests, had a sexual connotation.

<sup>12</sup>Glenda Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996); Crystal Feinster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA, 2011); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women’s Campaign Against Lynching* (New York, 1979); Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*; Nancy K. MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York, 1994); Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York, 2010).

<sup>13</sup>Worse yet, from the white patriarchal nationalist perspective, Clinton was an *international* feminist, who had taken her feminism abroad as First Lady (see her 1995 address, “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights,” UN 4<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Women, Beijing) and as Secretary of State. The gender equality programs she promoted at the State Department were among President Trump’s first targets.

<sup>14</sup>This is from a linguistic analysis of Reddit’s The\_Donald community, whose 450,000 followers are reportedly Trump’s “most rabid online following.” Other favorite epithets are “SJW,” for social justice warrior (usually a feminist or antiracist), “snowflake” (a female or insufficiently masculine type who insists on “political correctness”), and “pearl clutcher” (an expert who warns of potentially disastrous policy outcomes). See Tim Squirrel, “Linguistic Data Analysis of 3 Billion Reddit Comments shows the Alt-Right is Getting Stronger,” *Quartz*, Aug. 18, 2017, [https://qz.com/1056319/what-is-the-alt-right-a-linguistic-data-analysis-of-3-billion-reddit-comments-shows-a-disparate-group-that-is-quickly-uniting/?utm\\_source=parVOX](https://qz.com/1056319/what-is-the-alt-right-a-linguistic-data-analysis-of-3-billion-reddit-comments-shows-a-disparate-group-that-is-quickly-uniting/?utm_source=parVOX) (accessed Oct. 25, 2017). Scholarship on right-wing women includes Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley, CA, 1991); Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York, 2017); Mary Brennan, *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade Against Communism* (Boulder, CO, 2008); Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, NJ, 2012). More recent examples include Ann Coulter and Lana Lokteff; see Seyward Darby, “The Rise of the Valkyries,” *Harper’s*, Sept. 2017, 25–33.

<sup>15</sup>It appears that voting for Trump corresponded more closely with educational level than with income, and only about one-third of Trump voters earned less than the national median; Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu, “It’s Time to Bust the Myth: Most Trump Voters Were Not Working Class,” *News and Observer (Raleigh, NC)*, June

Movements in “the paranoid style” have not been unique to American history, as Hofstadter noted, nor are they exclusively the purview of the right. But right-wing Americans—as especially strong adherents to religious fundamentalism and the persistent myth of American self-reliance—have proved most susceptible to theories that government experts are conspiring to dispossess them of power in their households and in the competitive marketplace.<sup>16</sup> In 1962, Hofstadter’s contemporary, the welfare policy expert and former New Dealer Elizabeth Wickenden, honed in on this dynamic, observing that right-wing radicals used the communist threat to promote “nostalgia for an imagined lost society based on the virtues of rugged individualism.” In Wickenden’s view, the hallmark of the right was its denial of “the essential interdependence of modern life.”<sup>17</sup> To disarm the demagogues, American citizens might begin by recognizing the right’s effort to divide them into makers and takers, or winners and losers, for what it is. From the days of the second Klan to the second red scare to the current moment, opportunists have tapped into resentment of challenges to white male supremacy in order to gain support for gutting government, or redirecting it to serve private interests.

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10, 2017, <http://www.newsobserver.com/opinion/op-ed/article155489679.html> (accessed Oct. 25, 2017). Studies of the alt-right suggest that racial and gendered views have been more central to that movement’s appeal than economic resentment. See Angela Nagle, “The Lost Boys,” *Atlantic*, December 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/12/brotherhood-of-losers/544158/> (accessed Jan. 12, 2018). Back in the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan was powered less by poor whites than by middling white men who feared downward mobility as well as the loss of control over their daughters; MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*.

<sup>16</sup>On distrust of government experts, see Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*; and, for the more recent period, Beverly Gage, “Free Agents,” *New York Times Magazine*, May 28, 2017, 13. It also seems that reduced investment in public education (a conservative policy objective) may be producing more “low-information voters”; the United States recently ranked twenty-first of twenty-three OECD countries on literacy levels of teenagers; see Emma Luxton, “Which Countries Have the Best Literacy and Numeracy Rates?” *World Economic Forum*, Feb. 3, 2016, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/02/which-countries-have-the-best-literacy-and-numeracy-rates/> (accessed Sept. 28, 2017).

<sup>17</sup>Elizabeth Wickenden, “Social Welfare and the Radical Right,” outline for unidentified presentation, Jan 26, 1962, quoted in Storrs, *Second Red Scare*, 249.