

Communists, Eggheads, and Queers: The Politics of Gender and Sexuality in  
the United States Presidential Election of 1952

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By

Amy Elizabeth Biedermann

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Communists, Eggheads, and Queers: The Politics of Gender and Sexuality in  
the United States Presidential Election of 1952

Approved:

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Dr. Heather C. Galloway  
Director, Mitte Honors Program

Approved:

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Dr. Mary Brennan  
Department of History  
Supervising Professor

The United States presidential election of 1952 was one the Democratic Party did not expect to win, and as their foresight correctly predicted, they did not. General Eisenhower seemed to be universally popular and the Democratic Party was out of favor with the American public after a turbulent twenty year White House tenure. Knowing they would be hard pressed to overcome the odds favoring the opposition, the Democratic Party drafted Illinois governor Adlai Stevenson to sacrifice himself on the ballot in an attempt to keep the party in office. Stevenson's noted reluctance to accept his own party's nomination seemed indicative of his own doubts as to whether he could overcome the odds stacked in Eisenhower's favor.<sup>1</sup>

Even though a Republican victory seemed imminent, members of the conservative opposition devoted much of the campaign to smear tactics aimed at Stevenson's masculinity. Portraying Stevenson as less manly than his Republican counterparts was especially useful in this particular election as the burgeoning dangers of the Second Red Scare inspired a new degree of fear and uncertainty in the American public. The opposition's campaign against Stevenson thus implied that only a real man could handle the nation's most pressing problems—namely the threat of domestic communism and the stalemate in Korea.<sup>2</sup>

For these reasons, the campaign of 1952 has been described as “a high water mark in the history of dirty politics in America.”<sup>3</sup> Throughout the course of the campaign, Stevenson found himself portrayed by the opposition as an effeminate, intellectually aloof

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<sup>1</sup> Adlai Stevenson. *Major Campaign Speeches of Adlai E. Stevenson*. (New York: Random House, 1953), 7-10.

<sup>2</sup> “Communism, Corruption, and Korea” was the Republican Party's platform in the election of 1952.

<sup>3</sup> K. A. Cuordileone. *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 91.

communist sympathizer. In this way, Stevenson's maligned image during the presidential race of 1952 can be used to examine the relationship between Cold War politics and the changing perceptions of masculinity and intellectualism in post-war America. Though views of masculinity were in fact changing, much of the opposition's gay-baiting stemmed from politicians' need to blame the postwar problems of the United States on something tangible—the ideological nature of the Red Scare meant that many people were fighting an enemy they could not identify nor really understand. Consequently, candidates reduced political issues to sentiments easily understood by the masses. The attacks on Stevenson's masculinity, and to a lesser degree, his intellectualism, are indicative of such reductions.

Failing to carry even his home state of Illinois and winning only nine others in the Electoral College (and none outside the South), Stevenson lost the election due to a number of variables. The enormous appeal of Eisenhower crossed traditional party lines in such a way that accrediting Ike's victory to a single cause would be inaccurate and misleading. Certainly, his reputation as the hero of D-Day comforted people concerned about the hostilities in Asia and Europe. Additionally, the American public seemed ready for a change after two decades of continuous Democratic rule.

The aim of this analysis, however, is not to explain Eisenhower's victory and Stevenson's loss, but to examine the way his opponents and the press used attacks on Stevenson's masculinity to undermine his campaign as well as his credibility. By linking effeminate characteristics and intellectual abilities to a vaguely-defined radicalism, Republicans reduced the complex issues of the campaign to symbols the public understood. In the process, this study seeks to examine relevant scholarship and provide a portrait of Stevenson as he was described in the press of the time. Articles and editorials from the

Chicago *Tribune*, the New York *Daily News*, and *The Nation* along with speeches and television spots by Stevenson, Eisenhower, and other politicians will serve as the basis for this portrait.

Although both the elections of 1952 and 1956 featured Eisenhower and Stevenson running as the Republican and Democratic candidates for president, this study focuses on the first campaign for a number of reasons. First, the only significant personnel change between the two elections was the replacement of Stevenson's 1952 Vice Presidential running-mate John Sparkman with Estes Kefauver in 1956. President Eisenhower and Vice President Richard Nixon would be re-elected in 1956 carrying more states than they had won in the previous election. Secondly, examining the election of 1952 allows for the inclusion of Senator Joe McCarthy at the height of his influence. By 1956 McCarthy had been censured by the Senate and was no longer a force in national politics. Lastly, the federal government's "Lavender Scare" of the early 1950s had largely dissipated by 1956. This government-sponsored purge of homosexuals from the U.S. State Department connects the three ideas this study seeks to explore: intellectualism, leftist politics, and perceived sexual perversion.<sup>4</sup>

Past American presidential elections have seen a similar dichotomy between battling candidates: the Eastern dandy versus the man's man of the West. The idea of the East Coast establishment has long been linked to the image of the effete intellectual. Similar in several ways to the election of 1952 was that of 1840 in which war hero William Henry Harrison of Ohio was elected over incumbent and New York native Martin Van Buren. Like Eisenhower in 1952, Harrison won the electorate's confidence with his appeal to the

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<sup>4</sup> David Johnson. *The Lavender Scare*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

everyday man and his recent war hero accomplishments. Criticized for his fancy dress and elitist air, Van Buren was the target of the opposition's lesser known campaign slogan, "Van Van, you're a used up man."<sup>5</sup>

Particular to the election of 1952 (and subsequently 1956) was the equation of un-masculine attributes with political subversiveness. Drawing his metaphorical line in the sand, Senator McCarthy denounced the "communists and queers" in the U.S. State Department as the source of America's most urgent threat to national security.<sup>6</sup> Further displaying his penchant for underhanded politics, McCarthy several times referred to Stevenson as "Alger," invoking the name that had recently become a boon the Republican Party, enabling them to smear the previous Democratic administrations with allegations of spies amidst their ranks.<sup>7</sup> The combination of Stevenson's liberal politics, divorced martial status, and Eastern education allowed the opposition to color him as both politically and sexually deviant.

The degree to which the attacks on Stevenson's masculinity were taken seriously varies from source to source. Perhaps few of Stevenson's accusers seriously thought him to be a homosexual—he had children from his previous marriage, was often in the company of women, and in some circles was known as a habitual womanizer.<sup>8</sup> Other sources suggest that the idea of Stevenson as a homosexual was indeed taken seriously and believed by

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<sup>5</sup> "On the Stump With Harrison" *New York Times*, October 27, 1899, sec. III page 2.

"Tippecanoe and Tyler Too" was the Whig Party's most celebrated campaign slogan from the election of 1840.

<sup>6</sup> Christopher M. Finan. *From the Palmer Raids to the Patriot Act*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 153.

<sup>7</sup> Murray B. Levin. *Political Hysteria in America: The Democratic Capacity for Repression*. (New York: Basic Books Inc, 1971), 54.

<sup>8</sup> Athan Theoharis, "'Operation Adlai/Adeline': How the FBI Gaybaited Stevenson," *The Nation*, May 7, 1990.

some.<sup>9</sup> Kurt Gentry's biography of J. Edgar Hoover includes a description of Stevenson's FBI file, replete with statements describing Stevenson's homosexual encounters and police evasions.<sup>10</sup> Whether in earnest or in jest, the attacks on Stevenson's masculinity do become meaningful when they are examined in conjunction with the additional accusations made against him—namely that he had suspicious political alliances and was perceived by some as a haughty intellectual.

Though their backgrounds were as dissimilar as their battling parties, both Eisenhower and Stevenson had one telling thing in common: neither initially aspired to be the president of the United States. Both had to be talked into running for office and each consented only after several requests by their respective parties. The Democratic Party and the GOP each had regionally popular candidates that leaned either too far right or too far left to win a national endorsement. The Democratic Party had been in office for twenty years and sought to maintain their hold over the executive. Believing it was now their due, Republicans rallied behind their campaign slogan "Time for a Change." Aware of the stakes of such an election, both parties needed candidates that would bridge the gap between the liberal and conservative factions that threatened to divide them. For this reason, it was noted throughout the campaign that the voters were not given a true choice of candidate; the politics of both Stevenson and Eisenhower appeared relatively similar.<sup>11</sup>

The Adlai Stevenson who ran for president in 1952 was actually Adlai Stevenson II. His grandfather, Adlai Stevenson I, was a senator from Illinois and was elected Vice

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>10</sup> K. A. Cuordileone. *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 92.

<sup>11</sup> Editorials appearing in *The Nation* from April 26 and October 18 of 1952 describe Stevenson as "a Democratic Dewey" with a "safe brand of party-line liberalism." Denounced in *The Nation* for defending the Smith Act, Stevenson and Eisenhower were both accused of "exaggerating both the danger of communism in America and the measures required to deal with it."

President under Grover Cleveland in 1892. He also ran as the Vice Presidential candidate under William Jennings Bryan on the Democratic ticket in 1900 (Bryan had run for president as a Populist in the previous election). This was also the year that Stevenson's grandson Adlai II was born. Thus, young Adlai II grew up in the midst of great politicians and even mentioned a meeting with then President Woodrow Wilson in his adolescence.<sup>12</sup> Stevenson attended Princeton and Harvard before receiving his law degree from Northwestern University and served in a civilian capacity in Europe and Washington during the Second World War. He worked with the newly founded United Nations until his return to Illinois in 1947.

At the time of Stevenson's gubernatorial election in 1948, the Republican Party dominated politics in Illinois: the state had only elected three Democratic governors since the Civil War.<sup>13</sup> Despite these odds and the fact that he was largely unknown in state and local politics, Stevenson won the governorship with the largest plurality in the state's history. Shortly after becoming governor, Stevenson and his wife, heiress Ellen Borden, divorced. A seemingly model governor, Stevenson spent his term ridding the state of bureaucratic waste and political corruption and intended to seek re-election in 1952.

Eisenhower's political training came from a very different source. Born in Texas ten years before Stevenson in 1890, Dwight Eisenhower and his family eventually settled in Abilene, Kansas. An average student but an above average athlete, Eisenhower enrolled in the United States Military Academy at West Point at the age of twenty. His big military break came when he was assigned to the staff of General Douglas MacArthur, then protecting American interests in the Philippines. He continued to rise through the ranks of

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<sup>12</sup> Jill Kneerim, ed. *Adlai Stevenson's Public Years*. (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1966), 17.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.



the military after he was sent to Washington where he learned under the tutelage of General George C. Marshall. Head of the American invasion of North Africa and Sicily during World War II, Eisenhower was later made the Supreme Commander of Allied forces in Europe. His greatest military achievement came with the successful Allied invasion of Normandy in 1944 which turned the tide of the war. After World War II ended, Eisenhower served as Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army from 1945 to 1948.

Members of both the Democratic and Republican Parties tried to convince Eisenhower to run for president in 1948 on their ticket. That both parties considered him was due to his celebrity as well as the fact that he was politically ambiguous—he had probably never voted in his life.<sup>14</sup> Despite being courted by both parties to run for national office, Eisenhower resisted being pushed to the forefront of politics and accepted a figurehead post as the president of Columbia University in 1948. He simultaneously worked with the fledgling North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Europe and retired from active military service.

The Democrats approached Ike in part because they had no clear candidate to run in 1952. Truman bowed out of the race after losing the New Hampshire primary to Tennessee senator Estes Kefauver and therefore declined to seek re-election. Early in the election season, Kefauver looked as though he might be the Democratic Party's front runner but was disliked by the big city political bosses who were adversely affected by his televised senate investigations into organized crime. Kefauver would reemerge in 1956 as Stevenson's vice presidential running mate. Georgia Senator and leading conservative Richard Russell was a favorite for the Democratic nomination in the South, but the

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<sup>14</sup> William B. Pickett. *Eisenhower Decides to Run*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 27-35.

Democratic Party was unwilling to risk running a Southerner, as none had been successfully elected president since before the Civil War.<sup>15</sup> To appease the South and balance the ticket, Alabama senator and known segregationist John Sparkman was made the Democratic vice presidential candidate. Hoping to avoid a similar schism that had divided the Democratic Party prior to the 1948 election, Democrats avoided the issue of Civil Rights throughout the campaign.<sup>16</sup>

After rejecting the Democratic Party's presidential nomination several times, Stevenson finally bowed to the will of those who sought him for office and accepted his party's drafting efforts at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago during the summer of 1952. Likening himself to a doomed Christ, Stevenson hesitantly accepted his party's bid for the presidency, dramatically professing: "I have asked the Merciful Father to let this cup pass from me. But from such dread responsibility one does not shrink in fear, in self-interest, or in false humility. So, 'If this cup may not pass from me, except I drink it, Thy will be done.'"<sup>17</sup> In response to this, the *New York Daily News* chided Stevenson for pompously comparing himself to the son of God, asserting that "it is logical to assume that he at least has delusions of grandeur, and may be a religious fanatic who could prove dangerous in high public office."<sup>18</sup> Stevenson was not, however, a religious fanatic; he had quoted the Bible perhaps in attempt to use Christianity as common ground to appeal to

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<sup>15</sup> Woodrow Wilson was a southerner by birth but made his political career in New Jersey prior to seeking the office of the presidency.

<sup>16</sup> The Democratic Party split over the issue of Civil Rights in the South prior to the presidential election of 1948. Incumbent Harry Truman ran as the Democratic candidate for president whereas Strom Thurmond of South Carolina ran as the "Dixiecrat" candidate representing southern interests. They were both opposed by Republican Thomas Dewey of New York. This schism in the Democratic Party actually helped Truman to win the election as the conservative vote was split between the Dixiecrats and the GOP.

<sup>17</sup> Adlai Stevenson. *Major Campaign Speeches of Adlai E. Stevenson*. (New York: Random House, 1953), 7.

<sup>18</sup> K. A. Cuordileone. *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 259.

his multi-factional party while borrowing the famous words to describe his hesitancy.

Whatever his objective, the response to his acceptance speech was not what Stevenson had intended. Even a Stevenson supporter confessed that he had been “driven ‘literally to drink’ upon hearing the speech.”<sup>19</sup>

On the opposite side of the political divide, the Republican Party was initially unable to agree as to who would represent them on the national stage. Though he was actively pursued by some, Eisenhower did not obtain the GOP’s nomination without a struggle. Longtime senator Robert Taft, son of twenty-seventh president William Howard Taft and known in party circles as “Mr. Republican,” appeared to be the party favorite in the Midwest. Unwavering and ultra-conservative, Taft alienated party moderates and was unpopular with Republicans in the Northeast. Though Taft was the favorite of many conservatives, it seemed widely acknowledged that he was too polarizing a figure and would have difficulty winning a national election. New York Governor and two time presidential loser Thomas Dewey spearheaded the movement to draft Eisenhower and succeeded in obtaining his nomination at the Republican National Convention in July of 1952. Thus, though neither Eisenhower nor Stevenson had presidential ambitions, both would acquiesce to the appeals of their respective parties and agreed to seek the nation’s highest office in 1952.

By the time Truman’s first elected term had come to an end, the Democratic Party was hard at work struggling to define itself against the extreme left. Domestic headlines in 1949 and 1950 were dominated by the Alger Hiss trial which seemed to verify what red-baiting conservatives had been saying about the previous Democratic administrations—

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<sup>19</sup> K. A. Cuordileone. *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 91.

communists had infiltrated the United States government, and apparently at the highest levels. During a HUAC investigation, former Communist Party member turned government informant Whittaker Chambers exposed former State Department employee Alger Hiss as a communist. It was never conclusively proved if Hiss was a current or former member of the Communist Party, but in the course of the trial he was charged and found guilty of perjury. With the indictment of Alger Hiss and the immense media coverage that followed, the image of the Ivy League liberal became tainted by suggestions of subversive political leanings. The Hiss case and its legacy served as a major political setback both for American liberals as well as intellectuals.

Dominating headlines a year later in 1951 was the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. A married couple accused of espionage, Julius was accused of passing the secrets of the atom bomb to the Soviets while his wife was subsequently accused of aiding him. Both maintained their innocence throughout the trial but were found guilty and sentenced to death at their trial's end. Some felt the death penalty especially harsh as the couple had two young sons that were orphaned after the death sentence had been carried out. However justified the verdict, the outcome of the Rosenberg trial sent a clear message to the American public: communists and those who sided with them were enemies of the United States.

The American government faced similar challenges on the international scene. Relying on China as a pivotal ally in Asia during the Second World War, the Truman administration witnessed Mao Zedong's victory over Chinese Nationalists in 1949. Alarmed at losing China to the Soviet Union's sphere of influence, Americans reacted forcefully to the 1950 invasion of South Korea by communist forces from the North.

Invoking the pledge of the Truman Doctrine, the United States entered into a war of containment that would prove unpopular with the American people. By election season of 1952, the situation in Korea had been reduced to a frustrating stalemate which the public subsequently blamed on the Truman administration. Perhaps most frightening to the security of the United States was the Soviet's successful detonation of their own atomic bomb in 1949, only four years after the United States first developed the technology and far sooner than American scientists had predicted.

The generation of Americans who came to adulthood prior to the beginning of the Cold War had experienced the trauma and dislocation of both a crippling economic depression and a major world war—these people looked to the postwar years to provide a sense of stability and control unknown to them in their lifetime. However, the landscape of American life only continued to change: more women than ever before joined men in the workplace and urban centers witnessed a mass migration of families to the suburbs. The escalation of the Civil Rights movement further threatened the status quo that many desired to maintain. Unable to control such changes, the American public was anxious and apprehensive about the future.

These combined international and domestic tensions resulted in a perceived need for rigid self-identification and clearly demarcated boundaries in politics as well as the social sphere and especially so for American liberals. Consequently, a characterizing feature of Cold War culture was an irrational fear of the Other. In practical terms, the socialist infiltrator was the personification of legitimate political anxieties. The key to avoid falling prey to political subversives was constant vigilance against the Other in any of its various forms.

America's seemingly irrational fears of communist infiltration can retrospectively appear foolish and unfounded, but at the root of these anxieties lay legitimated sources for concern. The American way of life and communist values were diametrically opposed; there was no room for both to exist simultaneously. At the most basic level, the totalitarian nature of Soviet communism meant that individual liberties were sacrificed in lieu of a powerful and cohesive central government that would work towards creating a classless society. Thus, in valuing the personal liberties guaranteed by democracy and the possibility for self-advancement under capitalist economics, the United States feared that communism would spell the end for what the American dream had come to represent. This conflict between personal freedoms and the pursuit of an ideal utopian society is what fueled the battle between democracy and communism that served as the ideological basis of the Cold War.

Interestingly, this conflict of values underscores a particular irony of both the right and the left in perpetuating the Second Red Scare of the 1950s. Conservative Cold Warriors, like congressmen Richard Nixon (later Eisenhower's Vice Presidential running mate) and Joe McCarthy, crusaded to protect American civil liberties, threatened by the nature of a communist government, by infringing upon Americans' rights to free speech and privacy. Conversely, American communists freely chose political beliefs that entailed curtailing their own individual rights and subsequently protested when the HUAC and the FBI overstepped their constitutional boundaries in the name of national security with the creation of blacklists and the implementation of jail time for admitted communists.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Stephen J. Whitfield. *The Culture of the Cold War*. (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 34-40.

One of the landmark political works of the early postwar era, Arthur Schlesinger's *The Vital Center* is useful as a primary source of analysis of the Cold War's ideological conflict. Schlesinger explains that the lure of totalitarianism stems from an individual's fear of making his own choices—he is essentially afraid of being alone and possibly impotent in the face of a constantly changing world. This innate fear, argues Schlesinger, enables societies to endorse totalitarian regimes as an escape from the anxiety of limitless personal freedom. The system of democracy, however, operates according to this limitless freedom even though the isolation and insecurity of personal choice is ever present. Thus, according to Schlesinger, a society's freedom necessitates its anxiety.<sup>21</sup>

The difficulty in fighting communism was that this particular enemy was a political philosophy—not necessarily a tangible nor immediately recognizable opponent. The “amorphous, ideological” nature of the Red Menace meant that articulating its dangers was difficult.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the complexity of the problem was overridden by those who had more simple solutions to offer. This is one explanation of how Senator Joe McCarthy attained political prominence in the early 1950s when he claimed to have lists of known communists occupying government positions. Though his political career ended in disgrace, McCarthy's blustering accusations found an audience because he offered the anxious American public a simple solution: purge the government of undesirable elements. This was also vice presidential candidate Richard Nixon's solution. In a television advertisement for the election in 1952, Nixon, dubbed here as the “fighting American,” promised the American viewing public “that the best thing that can be done for [the good and honest individuals in

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<sup>21</sup> Arthur Schlesinger. *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949).

<sup>22</sup> K. A. Cuordileone. *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 8.

government] is to kick out the crooks and the others that have besmirched their reputation in Washington D.C. and that's what we're going to do.”<sup>23</sup> The McCarthy phenomenon, as illustrated here, underscores the trend in Cold War politics of oversimplifying that which does not fit into the rigid construction of acceptable politics and personal behavior and warping it into something to be feared and mistrusted.

Historian K.A. Cuordileone alleges that Adlai Stevenson was the 1950s’ “ultimate political casualty” and Richard Hofstadter similarly describes him as having all “the dimensions and appeal of a major tragic hero.”<sup>24</sup> In the interim of Roosevelt’s democratic legacy and Kennedy’s emergence as the liberal’s executive Cold Warrior, Stevenson was ill-suited to gain a national backing at a time when the liberal identity was being reevaluated. Schlesinger’s *The Vital Center* similarly describes this realignment of American politics and advocates the moderate liberal as the champion against the totalitarian regimes that would threaten the future. Unfortunately for American liberals, Democratic candidate Stevenson would be come to be characterized by the opposition as the same impotent, effeminate “doughface” Schlesinger cautioned against.<sup>25</sup> As Schlesinger was ultimately unable to disentangle himself from the gender-role paranoia that pervaded his politics, *The Vital Center* is evidence that both conservatives as well as liberals criticized other men for not being manly enough.

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<sup>23</sup> Campaign commercials accessed online 01 Nov 2007 at:  
<[http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav\\_action=election&nav\\_subaction=D&campaign\\_id=165](http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav_action=election&nav_subaction=D&campaign_id=165)>

<sup>24</sup> K. A. Cuordileone. *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*. (New York: Routededge, 2005), 88.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-6.



Crises of masculinity have occurred in recent times as a product of modernity and industrialization. As the rise of big industry decreases the amount of needed manual labor, the traditional workforce is replaced by machines. Consequently, as the separate spheres of male and female influence begin to dissolve with the introduction of women in the workplace, men find that their traditional roles no longer exist. To reaffirm the male's worth and sense of place, the masculine role is re-defined.<sup>26</sup> This is evident in the gender paranoia and homophobia that exists in the rhetoric of early postwar politics.

Mention of the State Department in the early 1950s was an invitation for homosexual innuendo and nervous sniggering. In 1950, ninety-one "peculiar" were purged from the State Department amidst a flurry of sex-scandal allegations.<sup>27</sup> Prior to these firings, the diplomats of the Roosevelt and Truman administrations had been admonished for not being tough enough with regards to foreign policy. In his defense of the State Department after the firings made headlines, Secretary of State Dean Acheson attempted to allay the situation by extolling the manly pursuits of those still on the payroll. Acheson professed that the men of the State Department were as "able, powerful, and vigorous" as the men who had come before them.<sup>28</sup> These backpedaling attempts to reaffirm the State Department's muscle were largely transparent, as the conservative opposition noted the administration's sensitivity. It was significant that this particular branch of government became associated with a deviant homosexual underground as these

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<sup>26</sup> K. A. Cuordileone. *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 1-21.

<sup>27</sup> David Johnson. *The Lavender Scare*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 69.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

“lace-panty diplomats” had the kind of foreign connections that made average Americans nervous.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, in addition to being accused of having communist leanings, political hopefuls had to prove that they were not the “lavender lads” McCarthy promised to out.<sup>30</sup> What were considered subversive sexual tendencies were subsequently linked to subversive politics. The perceived threat of homosexuality to masculinity was thus tied to the perceived threat of communism to the American state. In this way, male characteristics that failed to support traditional paradigms of masculinity, whether actually homosexual or not, became a part of the irrationally feared Other.

In the black and white world of America in 1952, a politician’s stance on communism could be described in one of two ways: hard or soft. The sexual implications of this dichotomy are obvious. Those who were hard on communism were determined to be tougher and more virile than their Red counterparts—McCarthy bragged that if he was given a club in the presence of a Stevenson advisor, he would “make a good American of him.”<sup>31</sup> Though McCarthy was known to be the more conservative of the two, even Eisenhower blamed America’s problems on an inherent softness. Quoted in the *Chicago Tribune*, Eisenhower stated that “if we had been less trusting, if we had been less soft and weak, there probably would have been no war in Korea.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> K. A. Cuordileone. *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 89.

<sup>30</sup> David Johnson. *The Lavender Scare*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Stephen J. Whitfield. *The Culture of the Cold War*. (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 108.

<sup>32</sup> “Eisenhower and Stevenson Views on Korea War Issue” *Chicago Tribune*, October 1952, 4.

For these reasons, several aspects of Stevenson's character gave the opposition ammunition to negatively portray him as less manly than his Republican counterparts. For one, Stevenson had never served in the military. In the years after World War II, no president without a record of military service would be elected until Bill Clinton in 1992. Add to Stevenson's civilian standing his divorced marital status, balding head (though Ike too was bald), and intellectual demeanor; the opposition ran with the idea that Stevenson at least seemed to be a little "fruity." The New York *Daily News* described Stevenson as "Adelaide" and mocked his "teacup words, reminiscent of a genteel spinster who can never forget that she got an A in elocution at Miss Smith's Finishing School."<sup>33</sup>

Richard Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* opens with a discussion of the presidential election campaign of 1952. Stevenson, Hofstadter notes, was "a politician of uncommon style, whose appeal to intellectuals overshadowed anything in recent history," whereas his popular opponent Eisenhower was "conventional in mind [and] relatively inarticulate." Hofstadter chose to include the campaign of 1952 in the book's introduction to illustrate the representative contrast between the intellectual Stevenson and the "philistine" Eisenhower. Though *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* studies the topic of intellectualism from America's inception, Hofstadter reveals that it was the political and social climate the 1950s that inspired him to explore the history of the America's disdain for the intellectual. McCarthyism, Hofstadter laments, was responsible for associating higher learning with the possibility of being exposed to and later advocating dangerous ideas.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Richard Hofstadter. *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 227.

<sup>34</sup> Richard Hofstadter. *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 3-4.

Intellectualism also suffered a blow from America's newfound prosperity that had begun to emerge in the early 1950s. The affluence and economic boom of the United States' economy after the second World War created a culture of consumerism that emphasized acquisition; individuals were encouraged to spend, not save. The emphasis on making money and becoming successful in the business world created the understanding that the process used to get ahead was unimportant; material success in the end was most significant. In this way, intellectual pursuits were pushed to the periphery. The resulting increased popularity of the political everyman meant that intellectuals gradually became an additional manifestation of the Other.

The legacy of the Hiss case seemed to indicate that this was true. Unfortunately for Adlai Stevenson, he, like Alger Hiss, had attended Harvard Law School and was also known for his sophisticated eloquence and intellectual demeanor. In the 1952 campaign, it was Eisenhower's vice-presidential running-mate Richard Nixon who worked to expose Adlai Stevenson, among other things, as a communist sympathizer. Both Stevenson and Nixon had been very publicly involved in the widely publicized trial of Hiss two years prior. Alger Hiss' perjury conviction came to symbolize the impotency of the liberal administration in preventing the Red menace from infiltrating the federal government. The legacy of the Alger Hiss trial lay not in facts or outcomes but in the court of public opinion. Public opinion subsequently convicted Hiss, and those associated with him would spend the rest of their political careers trying to distance themselves from his image.

As Hiss' chief character witness, Stevenson acknowledged Hiss' good reputation and record of service. Stevenson and Hiss knew each other from their respective work for the U.S. State Department as well as their brief work at the United Nations in the late

1940s. When public opinion turned squarely against Hiss, it was Stevenson who found himself advocating his own good character. On the opposite side of the case, then Congressman Richard Nixon found celebrity as one of the HUAC members to provide evidence against Hiss. Nixon would use Stevenson's connection to Hiss throughout the campaign of 1952 to suggest that he too might have suspicious political alliances. On the campaign trail, Nixon, displaying his affinity for alliteration, denounced Stevenson as having "a PhD from Dean Acheson's cowardly college of Communism containment."<sup>35</sup> Campaigning for his fellow Republicans, McCarthy several times referred to Stevenson as "Alger" before correcting himself.<sup>36</sup> More than an accidental slip of the tongue, both McCarthy and Nixon continued to use such sophomoric political tactics as these to smear Stevenson as both an out-of-touch intellectual as well as a potential subversive, allowing an uninvolved Eisenhower to seemingly take the high road.

Additionally, many of the most vocal leaders of the Second Red Scare, like Nixon and McCarthy, were not a part of the east coast Ivy League establishment to which Stevenson, Dean Acheson, and Alger Hiss belonged. Numerous elections passed have seen the same embittered battle between the learned gentleman and the street-smart man of the people—Andrew Jackson's Democratic Victory in 1828 marked the end of America's initial elitist trend begun by the nation's founders. This debate as to who should rule—the most intelligent or the most relatable—has always been a disputed cornerstone of American politics.

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<sup>35</sup> "Khaki in the White House Better'n Pink" *New York Daily News*, October 10, 1952, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen J. Whitfield. *The Culture of the Cold War*. (Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 78.

On the campaign trail prior to the election of 1952, Nixon also derogatorily referred to Stevenson as an “egghead.” In his *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, Hofstadter includes a quote from a “popular novelist of right-wing political persuasion” who defines the term egghead as “a person of spurious intellectual pretensions, over-emotional and feminine in reactions to any problem.”<sup>37</sup> Here, the connection is directly made between intellectual values and feminine traits. Thus, the anti-intellectual current of American politics in the 1950s favored those who could express the complicated nature of the post-war mood with simple words and familiar sentiments. To some degree, this helps to explain the overwhelming popularity of Eisenhower and, conversely, the sense of alienation between the average citizen and Adlai Stevenson.

However, not everyone thought his superior intellect a liability. An editorial from *The Nation* in April of 1952 describes Stevenson, though “a political amateur,” as the image of “a kindly professor of English who has aroused amazement, apprehension, and grudging admiration among the professionals.”<sup>38</sup> In the introduction to his *Campaign Speeches*, Stevenson describes the intellectual aspect of his campaign with pride. Drafted to run in a race he never sought, he explains that one of the few aspects of his campaign and platform he had control of was the tone he put forth. Addressing the notion that his smarts hurt him with voters, Stevenson attested that the collective intellect of himself and his constituents was actually the high point of his campaign:

Did I talk over the people’s heads? No—and that’s about the only aspect of the campaign I am sure of! [...] There were many like the woman who flattered me with her thanks for “a shot in the intellect” and the one who

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<sup>37</sup> Richard Hofstadter. *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 9.

<sup>38</sup> Whitney, Alan. “Stevenson of Illinois” *The Nation*, April 12, 1952, sec. I, 341.

wrote, "I am easily swayed by emotion until I think, which I occasionally do."<sup>39</sup>

Stevenson's intellectual standards did however hurt him with television viewers. Televised campaign speeches and shorter advertisement spots for the election of 1952 were largely experimental, as both parties were new to the medium. Because Eisenhower was known to be a somewhat poor public speaker, his campaign chose to produce several short commercial spots that ran less than a minute long. In these commercials, Eisenhower was filmed behind a podium answering a question from a concerned citizen. The following is the transcript in its entirety from one of these "Eisenhower Answers America" campaign spots:

Woman: You know what things cost today. High prices are just driving me crazy.

Eisenhower: Yes, my Mamie gets after me about the high cost of living. It's another reason why I say it's time for a change, time to get back to an honest dollar and an honest dollar's worth.

These short commercials, played intermittently between popular television shows during prime time, were seen by more viewers and cost less than the half-hour long segments made by Stevenson's campaign. Refusing to be shown in the shorter commercials, Stevenson appeared in eighteen different thirty-minute segments in which he spoke about issues facing the country. This strategy of longer campaign ads was meant to highlight Stevenson's skills as a public speaker but failed to capture the same audience as Eisenhower, as Stevenson's televised speeches were only shown at 10:30 at night twice a week.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Adlai Stevenson. *Major Campaign Speeches of Adlai E. Stevenson*. (New York: Random House, 1953), xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>40</sup> Campaign commercials accessed online 01 Nov 2007 at:  
<[http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav\\_action=election&nav\\_subaction=D&campaign\\_id=165](http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav_action=election&nav_subaction=D&campaign_id=165)>

In addition to these advertisements (both Eisenhower's shorter spots and Stevenson's thirty minute blocks) that featured the candidates in a question and answer format, both parties relied on short animated commercials to use as ammunition against the opposition. These were beneficial to Eisenhower, as they did not show him or require him to speak. On the other hand, Stevenson, who could have benefited from this use of televised campaigning, refused to lend his image and voice to appear in any type of shorter commercial. Disdainful of the new political medium, Stevenson protested that "the American people will be shocked by such contempt for their intelligence. This isn't Ivory Soap versus Palmolive." <sup>41</sup>

Gendered images are evident in several of these commercials as well. Whereas the conservative opposition played a major role in smearing Stevenson's masculinity in other areas of the race, here, it is Stevenson's own campaign that uses innuendo and suggestion to assail Eisenhower and the GOP. Playing off the idea of a lover's quarrel, a commercial for the Stevenson campaign features two hearts, side by side, pierced by an arrow. One heart is labeled "Ike" and the other "Bob." Somber music plays as voiceovers play the roles of both Eisenhower and Taft, whimpering after an apparent fight. After agreeing to never fight or separate again, an announcer asks the audience: "Will Ike and Bob really live happily ever after? Is the White House big enough for both of them?" <sup>42</sup> Here, the implication is that once elected, Eisenhower would be the pawn of the Republican Party and fall under control of the conservative wing under Senator Taft. A rare indictment of Ike, this commercial

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<sup>41</sup> Campaign commercials accessed online 01 Nov 2007 at:  
<[http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav\\_action=election&nav\\_subaction=D&campaign\\_id=165](http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav_action=election&nav_subaction=D&campaign_id=165)>

<sup>42</sup> Campaign commercials accessed online 01 Nov 2007 at:  
<[http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav\\_action=election&nav\\_subaction=D&campaign\\_id=165](http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav_action=election&nav_subaction=D&campaign_id=165)>



suggests a certain impotence in the General's ability to effectively rule outside of the whims of his party. This is additional evidence that liberals as well as conservatives used suggestions of a weakened masculinity to politically malign the opposition.

As Truman's popularity seemed to plummet daily, much of the Democratic campaign in 1952 attempted to remind voters of FDR's recent legacy and the trials that had befallen the United States prior to his first election in 1932. One of the Stevenson campaign's animated spots features shots of a rundown farmhouse as a voice sings "Farmer Mac doesn't want to go back to the days when there wasn't a moo or quack, to the days of 1931 when he didn't have bread when the day was done."<sup>43</sup> The conservative opposition resented the Democrats' attempts to ride the coattails of FDR as they protested that 1952 was not 1931, as these campaign ads seemed to suggest. An editorial cartoon from the *Chicago Tribune* in October of 1952 depicts a pinched looking Stevenson taken aback as an exasperated farmer tells him to "stop talking about a former nominee for president once promising 'a chicken in every pot.'" <sup>44</sup>

Additional campaign television spots that seem to highlight the disadvantages of the Stevenson campaign are not the product of the opposition but of the Stevenson campaign itself. One spot for Stevenson features a woman declaring him to be "a new kind of man in American politics" and boasts that "in the South he has made a strong statement for civil liberties and full equality."<sup>45</sup> This perception of Stevenson being a "new kind of man" was also picked up by the opposition and was precisely what was used to make fun of him.

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<sup>43</sup> Campaign commercials accessed online 01 Nov 2007 at:  
<[http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav\\_action=election&nav\\_subaction=D&campaign\\_id=165](http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav_action=election&nav_subaction=D&campaign_id=165)>

<sup>44</sup> "The Horsemeat Man Comes Around" *Chicago Tribune*, October 1952.

<sup>45</sup> Campaign commercials accessed online 01 Nov 2007 at:  
<[http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav\\_action=election&nav\\_subaction=D&campaign\\_id=165](http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav_action=election&nav_subaction=D&campaign_id=165)>

Additionally, the Democratic Party in 1952 was wary to condemn practices in the South, as the allegiance of the southern states was based on a candidate's implied promise to maintain the status quo. This was not accomplished by making "strong statements for civil liberties."

Another Stevenson commercial features a woman admitting that she "didn't know much about him before he came" and attempting in song to rhyme "Stevenson" with "civilians' son." It was however General Eisenhower's military experience and promise to go to Korea that again prompted much of his support. Once more, the Stevenson spots seem to convey counter-productive messages and in the end paled in comparison to the mass appeal of the GOP's catchy "I Like Ike" slogan. Thus, due to the more effective use of television advertising by Eisenhower's campaign and the seemingly confused content of Stevenson's spot advertisements, Eisenhower emerged as the victor of this particular medium.

On the eve of November 4, 1952, Eisenhower would emerge the overall victor of the campaign as well. With 55.1% of the popular vote to Stevenson's 44.4%, Eisenhower won the electoral votes of all but nine of the forty-eight states including Illinois, the state that had only four years prior elected Stevenson governor with an unprecedented degree of support for a Democratic candidate. In a speech made a month after he lost the presidency, Stevenson admitted to members of the Gridiron Club in Washington that "the fact was that the General was so far ahead we never even saw him. I was happy to hear that I had even placed second."<sup>46</sup> Stevenson would run again in 1956 and would be defeated a second time by Eisenhower and Nixon. He devoted the rest of his political career to supporting the Democratic Party and serving in diplomatic posts as he worked alongside Eleanor

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<sup>46</sup> Jill Kneerlin, ed. *Adlai Stevenson's Public Years*. (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1966), 57.

Roosevelt, who ardently supported him for president, as a United States ambassador to the United Nations. Stevenson died in London in 1965 of a heart attack at the age of sixty-five. Though ten years older, Eisenhower would outlive Stevenson for four years, dying in 1969 of heart failure at the age of seventy-nine.

Though “I Like Ike” may be what most remember from the campaign of 1952, traces of Adlai Stevenson still exist in public memory and often pop up in unexpected places. In anticipation of the 2008 election, the November 5, 2007 edition of *Time* featured an editorial entitled “The Bald Truth,” an essay about the history of bald presidents and presidential candidates. Like *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, “The Bald Truth” similarly opens with a discussion of the campaign between Stevenson and Eisenhower, only now comparing their similar lack of hair rather than each’s intellectual acumen. Exploring the link between powerful leaders and full heads of hair, the author remarks that “whether or not they realize it, voters think of great leaders as people with haircuts, and really great leaders as people with haircuts named for them. George Clooney once wore a Caesar. It is unlikely that he will ever ask his stylist for a Stevenson”.<sup>47</sup>

Additionally, in Bloomington, Illinois, visitors to the Central Illinois Regional Airport can pose for pictures with a statue of a seated Stevenson, legs resting on an upright suitcase, exposing a small hole in the underside of his right shoe. This curious statue is modeled after the celebrated photo captured by journalist Bill Gallagher during the 1952 campaign. Gallagher captured a cross-legged Stevenson reading and reviewing notes, apparently unaware that the tattered soles of his shoes would become another source of antagonism from his opponents. Stevenson’s supporters defended the governor and his

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<sup>47</sup> Steve Rushin. “The Bald Truth,” *Time* 76 November 5, 2005, 56.

footwear, suggesting that his worn shoes only showed that he was more concerned with issues of greater importance than his appearance. Better a hole in his shoe, they quipped, than a hole in his head. This minor fashion gaffe and the famous photograph that immortalized it would earn Gallagher the Pulitzer Prize in 1953.

Be it his bald head, worn-out shoes, or funny name, Stephenson's legacy today may sometimes be reduced to an amusing side-note to the nervous and paranoid times in which he lived. Despite the criticism and suggestive innuendo, Stevenson was able to champion his image as an egghead and allowed himself to laugh at his own missteps and shortcomings—one of Stevenson's campaign spots mentioned the hole in his shoe and another admitted that "Adlai" was, in fact, a funny name.<sup>48</sup> Stevenson's media image and the opposition's campaigns against him provide a multitude of material that contributes to the discourse of the Cold War and the analysis of its many neuroses. The connection between communism and homosexuality, whether implied or actual for either or both, is one that is made numerous times in the politics, media, and rhetoric of the 1940s and 1950s.

As the most recent history if often the most obscure, this topic seems only now to be garnering the same attention paid to the subject of women and women's roles during the Cold War; the practice of gender studies often forgets its other half. Recent interest and scholarship in the area of men's studies and the history of sexuality in the United States has opened new dimensions in the study of the United States during the Red Scare. This study was undertaken in an attempt to contribute to the current dialogue surrounding gender, sexuality, and the politics of anti-communism.

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<sup>48</sup> Campaign commercials accessed online 01 Nov 2007 at:  
<[http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav\\_action=election&nav\\_subaction=D&campaign\\_id=16](http://livingroomcandidate.org/election/index.php?nav_action=election&nav_subaction=D&campaign_id=16)>

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