Responding to the development of communist regimes throughout the world and perceived communist “infiltration” in the United States, conservative Protestants, on many occasions, expressed their understanding of the threats that American society faced. The success that evangelist Billy Graham, religious editor Carl Henry, and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover had in presenting their anti-communist message to countless Americans suggests that conservative Protestantism played a meaningful role in the shaping of American cold-war culture. One way to understand this process better is to probe how conservative Protestants drew motivation and legitimation from dominant American expectations that were religious, anti-communist, and masculine. Of course, conservative Protestants were not alone in reinforcing these ideals, since many liberal Protestants, Catholics, and Jews likewise represented dominant American expectations. What sets conservative Protestants apart was the profusion of voices, in all regions of the nation, that upheld a more consistent and rigorous anti-communist message.

American culture of the early Cold War period is striking for the uncritical acceptance of anti-communism. Communists usually found it impossible to hold public addresses, as was the case in Trenton, New Jersey, in 1947, when leaders attempted to speak at a public hall only to be attacked by an anti-communist mob determined to protect “The American Way” from the influence of “Commies,” “rats,” “bastards” and “Stalin-
The Los Angeles Times warned, in 1949, of the demise of capitalism and the creation of a communist America—“the United Soviet States of the American Republic (USSAR).” In a 1952 letter to the Washington Herald-Times, Robert Palmer urged mothers and fathers to drill the letters “D.B.A.C. (don’t be a communist), in every child’s mind,” and for news commentators to do likewise every time they broadcast. Television shows and Hollywood movies, such as “The Red Menace,” “The Red Nightmare,” “I Was a Communist for the FBI,” and numerous others, alerted Americans of the communist threat. Many such films castigated labor unions and communist infiltrators (who allegedly had no real interest in the plight of the downtrodden), lionized law enforcement officials, and promoted the patriotic duty of informing on friends suspected of communist sympathies. One national survey in the early 1950s indicated that 91% of Americans held that high school teachers who were admitted communists should be fired and 77% approved having their American citizenship taken away. Many agreed with L. Nelson Bell, Billy Graham’s father-in-law, that the ultimate goal of communism “is complete domination of the world” and that “America is in the gravest danger in her history.”

Countless historians have established the persistence of religion in American culture. During the early cold-war period, numerous surveys indicated that at least 95% of Americans “believed in God.” Good and patriotic Americans attended church. Besides, as the Los Angeles Times stated: “A Churchgoer Makes A Better Neighbor.” Popular magazines proclaimed that religion “is booming in America” and thus it is no surprise that a 1958 Gallop poll revealed that 80% of the American electorate would “refuse to vote for an atheist for President under any circumstance.” Many concurred with Senator Joseph McCarthy when he stated that “the fate of the world rests with the clash between the atheism of Moscow and the Christian spirit throughout other parts of the world.”

Anti-communism in America took solid root during the Red Scare period immediately after 1917, with conservative Protestants among the key leaders who responded to the reds. Anti-communist rhetoric thrived decades later in conservative religious magazines such as the bi-weekly Christianity Today financially supported by ardent conservative J. Howard Pew, the president of Sun Oil Company. With almost 200,000 copies distributed throughout the United States to clergy and lay people by the late-1950s, the Washington-based Christianity Today sought to influence national policy and it offered hundreds of commentaries, reports, and articles on commu-
nism. In the early decades of the century, many conservative Protestants had been relatively poor rural people, but more evangelicals rose to the middle-class after World War Two (in step with economic expansion), becoming more visible as a political force. The problem, often repeated by conservative Protestants, was that atheistic communists recognized no fixed principles of morality; a communist’s word, integrity, or intentions could not be trusted, even those stated in international treaties. In conservative Protestant circles, communism was nothing less than a sinister force seeking to subvert Christianity and American freedom and individualism.  

American expectations and traditions were not only religious and anti-communist, but also masculine. Defenders of America had to be aggressive. The had to uphold manliness because there was the belief that a lack of virility or homosexuality might lead to political subversion. Critical of their own movement, some communist activists despised of the “failure of masculinity in writers who would not deal with the hard realities of the class struggle.” Of course, there was also the issue of gender equality that communists promised. Women would be freed from “slavery” and placed in the workplace and their babies in nurseries, a threatening idea to many Americans. As Christian statesman John Foster Dulles pointed out in 1950, the constitution of the Soviet Union provided women equal rights with men in all spheres of society (including economic and political life) assured by a wide network of nurseries. One Iowa housewife, who suspected another woman of being a communist, stated: “I just don’t trust her . . . She has more money to spend and places to go than seems right.” In Modern Woman: The Lost Sex (1947), Freudian analyst Marynia Farnham and sociologist Ferdinand Lundberg claimed that communist agents used feminism to disrupt the West and terminate its vigor.

As the cold war germinated in post-World War Two America, Billy Graham, brimming with piety, anti-communism, and masculinity, began to make his mark. In The Culture of the Cold War, Stephen J. Whitfield noted Graham’s influence, stating “he probably remained the most consistently and deeply admired American of his time.” According to William McLoughlin, Graham’s “popularity was part of the grass-roots reaction to the whole traumatic postwar experience,” the desire for reaffirmation of ideals and values that had given “meaning and order to American life in the past.” In 1957, one commentator claimed that his “authoritarianism” and “decisiveness” appealed to many revival listeners. Beginning in 1947, Graham’s revival campaigns held in major cities and covered by print and
frequently by radio and television had a far-reaching impact. While his focus was a gospel message, Graham often highlighted the threat of communism to hammer away at the necessity for repentance of sins and thus revival.\textsuperscript{21} The use of fear and anxiety were not necessarily melodramatic ploys, for Graham believed that the three major crises that America faced were the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and the communist menace.\textsuperscript{22}

At the 1949 Los Angeles campaign, where he first received national exposure, he declared that “communism is not only an economic interpretation of life—communism is a religion that is inspired, directed and motivated by the Devil himself who has declared war against Almighty God.”\textsuperscript{23} To a Washington audience, he declared that this anti-God and anti-Christ “fanatical religion” sought to undermine “this great America of ours.”\textsuperscript{24} In North Carolina, he explained that in times of darkness communist promises of hope enticed followers, believing the communist pledge to rebuild the world. Graham lamented that when communism demanded conversion many would choose this “counterfeit of Christianity.”\textsuperscript{25} Responding soon after the Cuban Missile Crisis, he warned that “in spite of a few recent reverses, the communists have been winning during the last 15 years.”\textsuperscript{26}

There were other signs of a cold-warrior attitude such as his earlier statement, in \textit{I Saw Your Sons at War: The Korean Diary}, that the division of Korea at the 38th parallel was a “scandalous” decision by “men who sold us down the river.” Graham supported an American “offensive war” and held that the Truman administration was “cowardly” for not allowing MacArthur to win the Korean War, even if it meant bombing China.\textsuperscript{27} In 1958, responding to the Eisenhower administration for lessening its commitment to troops in Lebanon, to fight communism, Graham stated: “We hesitate, we vacillate, and weakly back down when the going gets tough.”\textsuperscript{28} Described by a Boston Daily Globe journalist as a “tall, athletic evangelist,” Graham upheld a fighting spirit and the campaigns themselves frequently exhibited signs of an aggressive masculinity.\textsuperscript{29} He preached that only God could hold communism back, but if called he would “shoulder a gun.”\textsuperscript{30} He also pointed out the manliness of Christ, who “was every inch a ‘He-man.’”\textsuperscript{31} In fact, “Christ was probably the strongest man physically that ever lived. He could have been a star athlete on any team. He was a real man with His strong shoulders [and] squarish jaw.”\textsuperscript{31} It is notable that revival converts who received the most press attention tended to be manly individuals such as “a hard-boiled police sergeant,” tattooed brawler Eddie Dickens, “real genuine cowboy” Sam Means of Texas, New York Giants bad boy Kirby Higbe, war
hero and former Olympic track star Louis Zamperini, or Californian racehorse owner and cowboy legend Stuart Hamblin who was described as a “man’s man.” By way of revivals and television, Graham and his blend of piety, anti-communism, and masculinity, reinforced a conservative Protestant understanding of American cold-war culture.

Another conservative Protestant who voiced religious, anti-communist, and masculine ideals to a wide audience was Christianity Today editor and theologian Carl Henry, former professor at Fuller Theological Seminary – “strictly a men’s school” that discouraged women from attending classes. Under his editorship, Christianity Today rose to prominence in conservative Protestant circles, and, consequently, television camera crews periodically descended upon the Washington office seeking commentary on various issues.

The exclusively masculine Christianity Today sought to offer a more balanced approach than fundamentalist thinking, but it still championed free-market capitalism and certainly did little to temper its attacks on atheistic communism. Like many other contributors to the magazine, Henry, himself, wrote of the dangers of communism to the Christian faith and the importance of eradicating sin by the redemptive power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. America had to maintain its biblical heritage and be on guard against subtle socialist proclivities, internal threats, and external foes. He feared the signs of “cancerous collectivism” or “secret totalitarianism” in the United States such as soaring costs of government, the rise of punitive taxation, greater federal support for education, and plans for socialized medicine. In 1960, Henry defended the House Un-American Activities Committee and implored Americans to be vigilant of the monstrous evil of communism at home, particularly during the post-McCarthy era when communist agitators taking orders from Moscow were likely to have greater freedom to inflict the nation with subversive influences.

Like Graham, Henry’s response to external communist threats was aggressively masculine, in keeping with the militancy against communism promoted by conservative Evangelicals and Fundamentalists. Adopting Christian sentimentality or “a sentimental theory of the love of God” meant being soft on communism. Henry was critical of American foreign policy that allowed a little man who “plays the rumba on his tuba down in Cuba” to initiate a serious threat to American national security. Here Castro the warrior and revolutionary is downgraded to “a little man,” which corresponded with the persisting stereotype, in the early twentieth-century
popular press, that Americans were superior and masculine and Latinos “childlike people of color.” As Henry saw it, Americans, of course, would have to take action in Cuba; they could not permit Castro to leak communism, bringing in foreign powers, ninety miles off shore, that “would destroy us.”

Henry asserted that American military support for the Bay of Pigs episode was weak and an embarrassment and in the following year, days before the unfolding of the Cuban Missile Crisis, he decried American pacifism in religious and diplomatic circles and the so-called “better Red than dead” philosophy. There was even the suggestion that pacifist pickers at Pennsylvania Avenue aided Khrushchev. Concerned that communist sympathizers manipulated public opinion, Henry contested peace “propaganda” such as “unilateral American suspension of nuclear tests, demilitarization of Germany, and withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam.” Disputing the pacifist axiom “that war is always evil,” he supported the concept of a “just war” and warned of a surprise attack that could result in American surrender to communism. As he stated elsewhere, “We must arm, certainly. We cannot allow ourselves to be engulfed by the dictatorship of the Soviet Union.”

J. Edgar Hoover was another cold warrior who voiced an uncompromising position on communism. Viewed as a “folk hero” to millions of Americans, Hoover relished his role as a powerful guard and defender of America and the traditional Christian values that most Americans upheld against the internal threats of communists. According to one biographer, Hoover had, throughout his decades of FBI service, “a turn-of-the-century vision of America as a small community of like-minded neighbors, proud of their achievements, resentful of criticism, fiercely opposed to change.” Like other religious conservatives, he championed a romanticized America of the past with its old truths and pieties. Hoover initially attended a Lutheran church, but at age fifteen he became a Presbyterian, remaining a member for the rest of his life.

While his religious life (at odds with some of his law enforcement ethics and methods) has received minimal treatment by historians, his connection to conservative Protestantism became more public in the late-1950s and early-1960s when he published a number of “revival oriented articles” in Christianity Today that explained how communists operated against the American religious heritage. For example, in 1960 the magazine invited Hoover to present a three-part series entitled “The
Communist Menace: Red Goals and Christian Ideals,” “Communist Propaganda and the Christian Pulpit,” and “Soviet Rule or Christian Renewal?” He painted a dark picture of Marx as an “intolerant atheist” mixing the ideological acids of an evil philosophy, V.I. Lenin as a “beady-eyed Russian” seizing power with Bolshevik henchmen, and Joseph Stalin as crafty and cunning. Hoover used nuclear war rhetoric to warn of the communist foe: “The communists are today spraying the world with ideological and propaganda missiles designed to create a deadly radioactive cloud of Marxism-Leninism,” with the “deadliest” missiles targeting the “Christian pulpit” to be “liquidated, pitilessly, mercilessly, finally.” In rejecting God, he argued, communism became “a fanatical, Satanic, brutal phenomenon.”

Hoover alerted Christians of a false communist claim for tolerance of religion, a communist plan to agree with Christians on common issues, and the goal to exploit the church for communist ends. His warnings were consistent with conservative Protestant fears that liberal Protestants were vulnerable to socialist influences and thus communist exploitation. Communism is a deceitful and bitter enemy of religion, but the nation would remain strong as long as Americans looked to the Bible for “inspiration, zeal, and guidance for life.”

Concerning one of Hoover’s article, Marion Walger of Baltimore wrote to Christianity Today desiring that Hoover’s words “could be put into the hands of every man and woman, and every boy and girl – in America at least.”

In his book Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight It (1958) and other publications, Hoover utilized strong language to explain how Americans could effectively respond to the red menace. His jeering of communists represented an aggressiveness, bravery, and loyalty that were manly qualities. Although Hoover’s forceful presentation might in part be explained as his way to promote his manliness and counteract any rumours of his homosexuality, it was also vital for him to take the role of the unyielding defender of American and Christian ideals, a responsibility he took serious since joining the Department of Justice.

In assessing the impact of the religious, anti-communist, and masculine ideals of Graham, Henry, and Hoover, one might acknowledge the function of traditions that legitimize and even prescribe particular group or societal behavior. One of a number of reasons why early cold-war Americans upheld intense anti-communism was because of its intimate connection with fundamental values and traits of American society,
including religiosity and masculinity. Although many Americans were outside conservative Protestant circles, most Americans upheld the importance of Christian values. As for gender, the dominant ideal of domesticity held that the wife stayed home to insure the rearing of patriotic children. Excessive anti-communist activity by ordinary Americans was legitimate. Did not conservative religious leaders advocate an aggressive and virile response? Reinforcement worked both ways. Conservative Protestant leaders could promote unyielding anti-communist attitudes, that occasionally bordered on hysteria, without much challenge from Americans who not only feared communism for its threat to capitalism but also it promotion of atheism and perhaps even gender equality.

Additional ways to explore the impact that conservative Protestants likely had in shaping early cold-war culture in America can be found in social psychological research on group and societal behavior. For example, studies demonstrate that people are more susceptible to persuasion if the speaker is believed to be an expert, has style, self-confidence, and high status, and offers a message that arouses strong emotions. Graham the athletic, globe-trotting evangelist, Henry the learned and respected evangelical journalist, and Hoover the FBI national hero offered credible, emotional, and persuasive messages concerning the threat of communism. Their messages also benefited by the tendency of individuals to divide the social world into “us” and “them” or “in-group” and “out-group” categories, with the “in-group” viewed favorably so as to protect and bolster social identity and the “out-group” perceived disapprovingly to the point that all characteristics of the group are viewed in a negative manner. Applying this model of social categorization to communism in America, one can understand how those who were supportive or sympathetic to socialist causes appeared to possess only undesirable traits, particularly in the eyes of conservative Protestants such as Graham, Henry, and Hoover who, because of their strong identification with the in-group, were especially threatened by communist activity.

The warnings of Graham, Henry, and Hoover also reinforced negative stenotypes of left-wing Americans that would continue to persist as a result of the construction of social walls between true Americans and those who allegedly carried out un-American activities. Thus, the many Americans who experienced the anxieties of cold-war culture also fell under conformist and psychological influences that commanded a vigilant and united response to communism. It was no surprise that most Americans who sought acceptance
and understood and endorsed the goals of the patriotic in-group desired to work within the group in order that anti-communist ideals dominated. Believing that the danger of communism was real, they were unlikely to show much tolerance for those espousing communist views. Not until traditional ideals came under attack by the counterculture of the 1960s, moral relativism, and the disturbing images of the Vietnam War – all signs of the crumbling of the anti-communist consensus – was there a sustained challenge to America’s perception of communism, religion, and gender.

As Americans faced the rise of communist regimes throughout the world and the threat of “infiltration” in the United States, conservative Protestants reacted with vigilance. For conservative Protestants, the time was right to play a greater role in American life and policy. In the past generation, conservative Protestants in general were on the defensive with the rise of the New Deal and overall greater support for governmental intervention in society. With the arrival of the cold war, conservative Protestant leaders gained the best opportunity in decades to play a prominent role in society since they appeared to be one with American culture, on the issue of responding to communist forces. The whole traumatic postwar experience demanded reaffirmation of time-tested ideals and values. Billy Graham, Carl Henry, and J. Edgar Hoover, who offered strong, virile, and dynamic leadership, responded to the “reds” effectively because their message embodied American expectations that were religious, anti-communist, and masculine.

Endnotes

1. I would like to thank the CSCH for providing a forum that allowed the presentation of my ideas on religion and American culture. Also, I thank those in attendance who offered helpful suggestions and questions.

2. Culture can be defined as a collection of beliefs, values, and ideals expressed in popular forms and embodied in political and other institutions (see George Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925 [New York: Oxford University Press, 1980], vii).


7. Samuel A. Stouffer, *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties: A Cross-section of the Nation Speaks Its Mind* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1955), 40, 43. The national cross-section survey “sought to be representative of the American population twenty-one years of age and over, living in private households. Excluded were persons in hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, hotels, and military establishments” (237).


9. Such was the title for the list of church services (*Los Angeles Times*, 12 November 1949).


35. For example, see “The Fragility of Freedom in the West,” *Christianity Today*, 15 October 1956; and “Christianity Versus Communism,” *Christianity Today*, 11 May 1962.


38. For example, see “Christian Default in the West,” *Christianity Today*, 27 August 1965; and “Christianity and Communism,” *Christianity Today*, 24 April 1961.


45. Although Hoover may have aligned himself with conservative Protestants for political (keeping support for the FBI strong) rather than religious reasons, he nonetheless made the connection with conservative Protestantism.


51. For example, see Natalie Zemon Davis, particularly the chapter “The Rites of Violence” (of the late-sixteenth century), in Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 152-187.


