McCarthyism, 1950-1954
By John Herbers

Synopsis
In the early years of the "cold war" between the United States and the Soviet Union, Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, Republican of Wisconsin, rose to prominence by making charges, most of them unsubstantiated, that the United States government was severely infiltrated by Soviet spies. The American press was widely accused of allowing the senator to manipulate its coverage of the story, though fellow senators eventually repudiated him. While coverage of McCarthy's accusations examines a range of issues, this case focuses on two:

The first is verification and the difference between reporting the facts and reporting the truth about the facts.

The second is the issue of speed and pressure to get the story.

During the McCarthy era, adherence to strict factualness combined with pressure from the wire services kept reporters from questioning McCarthy or digging for the truth about what he said. Today, the competitiveness of the 24-7 news cycle and the increased number of outlets offering news can deter journalists from feeling they have the time to verify or provide such context.

Introduction
Following the Allied victory of 1945 that ended World War II, the world was so polarized between the western democracies and the communist blocs of Russia and Asia, both seeking global domination, that deep divisions evolved in the United States on how best to deal internally with the threat from the nation's war-time ally, the Soviet Union. There was a consensus that persons loyal to the communists should not be allowed to work in sensitive positions within the federal government. But a strong movement developed among political leaders and opinion makers that the government and others were too lax in demanding loyalty to the United States.

The dispute had its roots, in part, in the Great Depression of the 1930s, when unemployment reached 25 percent. People were starving, and the economy seemed to have collapsed. Many
intellectuals and others, although a small minority, turned to the American Communist Party in search for a system that would be more just and equitable than the American one. During the War, when conditions improved and the United States fought with the Soviets against the Fascist countries, those who had shown sympathy for communism were integrated into the military and the American work force. Many or most of them severed any ties they may have had with communist ideology.

But so great was the fear of communism sweeping the world that both political parties sought ways to block communist influence, especially in government. President Harry S. Truman, a Democrat, established a security program in the executive branch in which people had to sign a loyalty oath, despite the opposition of civil libertarians who charged that loyal Americans could be fired simply by being suspected of having sympathy for "subversive" groups. But this was not enough to keep conservative Republicans from charging the Democrats with being "soft on communism."

This charge contributed to the GOP victory in the Congressional elections of 1946. Future President Richard M. Nixon, for one, was first elected to the House after a campaign in which he accused his opponent, a Democratic incumbent, of holding communist sympathies. In Washington, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) held hearings in which it searched for communists and their sympathizers, not only in government, but throughout the American society. One of its major targets was the entertainment industry in which producers, actors and directors were blacklisted, their careers ruined or damaged if they refused to cooperate with the committee. Lillian Hellman, for one, complained that she lost her cherished farm because she experienced a drastic reduction of income once the committee labeled her as a suspect. Others in Hollywood were incapable of working. Several writers worked under false names.

As Thomas C. Reeves wrote in The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy, politicians were not alone in charging the Soviet Union with infiltrating American society. The United States Chamber of Commerce distributed publications associating postwar labor demands with Kremlin conspiracies. The Hearst and Scripps-Howard newspapers gave large headlines to spy accusations. Roman Catholic leaders supported FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover in his charges that American communists had made deep inroads "in practically every phase of our national life, infiltrating newspapers, magazines, books, radio, movies, unions, churches, schools, colleges and fraternal orders." The conflict was further inflamed by the emergence of the Soviet Union as a nuclear power. Then in 1949, Alger Hiss, a former high-level official in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations suspected
of passing American secrets to the Soviets during the war, was convicted of perjury when he denied knowing communists in the 1930s. An array of politicians and columnists charged that despite the Truman loyalty program, the government was protecting many subversives.

After the 1948 election of Harry Truman, Republicans had been looking for an issue that would help them win back the White House after almost two decades of Democratic rule. The communist issue seemed tailor-made for that purpose. After all, the alleged infiltrations had occurred on the Democrats' watch. It was at this juncture that the National Republican Party assigned the junior senator from Wisconsin, Joseph R. McCarthy, to a routine speaking tour in 1950. Because he was not well known and had little authority in Congress, McCarthy was directed to small, obscure cities. His subject, he decided after careful consideration, would be communists in government. His first stop, on Feb. 9, was Wheeling, West Virginia, where he addressed the Women's Republican Club. Before a small audience, his remarks followed the standard Republican line on subversion, except that he added the following shocker:

"While I cannot take the time to name all the men in the State Department who have been named as active members of the Communist Party and members of a spy ring, I have here in my hand a list of 205 names that were known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping policy in the State Department.""4

The role of newspapers
McCarthy's Wheeling speech was covered only by the Wheeling Intelligencer and the Chicago Tribune, the latter a McCarthy supporter. The Associated Press bureau in Charleston, West Virginia, obtained the story from the managing editor of the Wheeling paper, an AP stringer. At 2 a.m. on Feb. 10 the bureau routinely filed on its wires a 110-word story containing the charge of 205 communists in the State Department.

A relatively few newspapers printed, or even noticed, the AP story. But when McCarthy arrived in Denver the next day in route to Salt Lake City several reporters were at the airport demanding that he supply the names of those accused. He said he had left the list in a suit on the plane, but if the Secretary of State would call him in Salt Lake City he would be glad to read him the list. The reporters filed just what he said.

Secretary of State Dean Acheson said he had no idea what McCarthy was talking about and denied that any known communists or sympathizers were in his department. Yet McCarthy, in his speeches, kept making the charge, changing the numbers, dodging and bluffing as he went and promising to reveal his list at some point.
The newspapers by that time were prominently displaying his charges, which gave credence to long-standing charges by a number of prominent Republican leaders that the Democrats were soft on communism. In just a matter of days, McCarthy was no longer unknown and had gained a large national following of supporters who flooded his office with friendly letters, telegrams and telephone calls, just what the senator wanted.  

McCarthy never produced any such list of names. Later that year, when his charges were under investigation by a Senate committee, he went to one of his supporters, the newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst Jr., for help. "Joe never had any names," Hearst later recalled. "He came to us. 'What am I gonna do? You gotta help me.' So we gave him a few good reporters to help him find names."

It is helpful at this point to understand how Americans got their news in 1950 and the framework in which reporters and editors had to operate. Television was then in its infancy and was largely an entertainment medium, as was radio. Daily newspapers were by far the major source of information about national and foreign affairs. Weekly magazines were becoming more important, both in providing analysis and in shaping public opinion. But their impact was overshadowed by the daily barrage of news and opinion from the newspapers. For example, Time magazine was dubious from the beginning about McCarthy's charges, but its coverage seemed to have little impact as McCarthy's popularity soared. The dailies proliferated in cities across the country and their news from outside their circulation areas came largely from the three wire services—The Associated Press (AP), United Press (UP) and International News Service (INS). (UP later acquired INS and became United Press International,UPI). 

The enforced standard for the wire services, as well as for most reporters writing directly for newspapers, was strict objectivity. News stories were to contain no opinion from the writer. That was the sole province of the editorial page and columnists. Reporters could not write about private transgressions of public officials or what was said in private meetings without the permission of those involved. The news analysis written by reporters to help readers understand the meaning of a news event that is so prominent today in the news columns had barely been developed.

The demand for strict objectivity was, in part, a reaction to undisciplined journalism that had been prominent during much of American history in which readers could not tell fact from opinion. The wire services had practical reasons for adhering to strict factualness. The newspapers themselves owned AP through an association, and on issues such as subversion in government were sharply divided editorially. The rival UP was owned by the Scripps-Howard chain and INS by the Hearst newspapers. But both sold their services to papers
across-the-board and did not want to appear biased in any manner.

All three wire services sought to produce stories that would be selected for use by the papers. They put high priority on being first to report a news event, even if by minutes. When McCarthy became hot copy after his Wheeling speech, they raced to get his performances on the wire, usually without any idea as to whether his charges were true. Editors put their stories in the papers in the same manner. UPI was particularly pressed to beat the AP because it sold its service at a flat rate. The AP billed its member papers in proportion to the size of their circulation and was much more affluent and secure. Enormous economic pressure was felt by UPI, which was basically a secondary service for the big papers and had a lot of small paper clients because it was cheaper than AP. Also, because of the large number of afternoon papers, which re-plated their front pages during the day, time pressure was on the wires all day long.

'Just a political speech'
In the early 1950s some reporters covering McCarthy had evidence that he could not back up his claims, evidence that never got into their stories. McCarthy was gregarious and a heavy drinker who talked freely to reporters. For example, he told two newsmen who were pressing him in his office for names, 'Look, you guys, that was just a political speech to a bunch of Republicans. Don't take it seriously.' Neither reported what he said. In another incident reporters overheard McCarthy pressuring his office by telephone to give him names of suspected subversives at a time when he was publicly claiming to have all the names. But this, too, was never disclosed to readers. Edwin R. Bayley, himself a reporter for the Milwaukee Journal, wrote in a 1981 book, Joe McCarthy and the Press, that such incidents, if reported at the time, could have had an important effect. "But reporters covered politics then as if it were a stage play; only what happened in public counted."

Without the truth becoming known about him, McCarthy continued making charges that were headlined in papers across the country. His staff dug up the names of some suspects in the government, but none proved to be a communist sympathizer or in a position to influence American policy. Back in Washington, McCarthy promised to expose the "top Soviet agent in the State Department." Called into a closed committee hearing by dubious Democratic senators, he said the top agent was Owen Lattimore, a scholarly expert on Asia who had advised the State Department but had never been an employee of the government. McCarthy could offer no proof of his charge, which Lattimore adamantly denied. He had been publicly lambasted as a traitor by McCarthy's conservative allies because he believed, realistically as it turned out, that the Nationalist government of China, America's ally in the war, could not be restored. He felt the United States would do better to work with the emerging communist government to encourage it to remain independent of communist
Russia, a strategy that 20 years later Richard Nixon, a friend and supporter of McCarthy, followed when he became president.\textsuperscript{11}

With McCarthy unable to support his charges, it seemed to many that his star would soon fade. But just the opposite happened. The polls showed his popularity to be rising. Many Americans believed that somehow what he said had a ring of truth. In addition he had the editorial support of many important newspapers and columnists and commentators, including Fulton Lewis Jr. of the Mutual radio network and Walter Winchell of the NBC Blue Network, and such spiritual leaders as the politically powerful Roman Catholic Francis Cardinal Spellman of New York.\textsuperscript{12}

**Leader of a crusade**

The truth or falsity of McCarthy's charges no longer seemed to be the chief issue. Most of his Republican colleagues in the Senate disregarded his tactics and cheered him on as a leader of a crusade that could win them the next election. The issue of subversives in government had been totally politicized, and McCarthy went on to win reelection in his home state in 1952. While editors and reporters across the country bitterly debated what to do about McCarthy, their system of gathering and disseminating news remained unchanged for a time.\textsuperscript{13}

William Theis, then Senate correspondent for INS, told Edwin Bayley in an interview in 1976, "All three wire services were so goddam objective that McCarthy got away with everything, bamboozling the editors and the public."

"We let Joe get away with murder," Theis continued, "reporting it as he said it, not doing the kind of critical analysis we'd do today. The public in those days was accustomed to believe damn near anything. It was just a big lark to Joe. He was like a kid in a candy store, trying to grab everything he could.... As a reporter you did what you could, but things never solidified. He'd talk you blue in the face.... The main trouble was in the climate of the country. People were ready to believe anything about communism.... Editors and editorial writers refused to believe that McCarthy would make such charges without having the evidence to back them up.... It was the most difficult story we ever covered. I'd go home literally sick, seeing what the guy was getting away with."\textsuperscript{14}

Reporters for the other wire services were equally as embittered. One of them was George Reedy, who left UP in disgust with having to cover McCarthy and went to work for Senator Lyndon B. Johnson and later became his presidential press secretary. "We had to take whatever McCarthy said at face value," Reedy told Bayley. "Joe couldn't find a communist in Red Square—he didn't know Karl Marx from Groucho—but he was a United States senator."\textsuperscript{15}
But he knew the news business
McCarthy may have been ignorant about communism, but he was
clever about the news business. He knew all the deadlines of the
major newspapers, enabling him to make a charge just before
deadline and get it in print before the papers could check it out. He
especially knew how to manipulate the wire services. He knew they
operated on two cycles, one for morning paper and one for the
afternoon papers. If a story broke in late afternoon it would make the
morning papers. But the afternoon papers would want a fresh angle
and McCarthy would always supply it to them, offering a lead serving
his purposes. Often, the story with the new angle would not appear on
the wires until the middle of the night when reporters could not check
it out. The early editions of the afternoon papers would then go to
press with McCarthy's charge as the lead.

It is hard to find anyone who even tried to buck the system. One who
did was Allen Alexander, then an AP editor in Charlotte, North
Carolina, responsible for relaying national stories to newspapers in
the Carolinas. Alexander, later retired in Cabin John, Maryland,
recalled how it was on the morning cycle:

"It was quite apparent that many of Senator McCarthy's headline
catching statements were deliberately timed so that they would be
bulletined out of Washington around 10 a.m. This assured him of
reaching the first editions of the Eastern Time zone press, including
25 to 30 afternoon dailies in the Carolinas.

"The 10 a.m. bell ringer usually would be followed by a new lead at
noon, which would come closer to giving more balance to the original
pronouncement. That is, instead of the original unvarnished 'Senator
Joe McCarthy declared today that John Doe is a lousy, no-good
communist' it would state 'John Doe denied today that he is or ever
was a lousy, no-good communist.' By 2 p.m., in time for final
afternoon editions, the semblance of a balanced, fair story on the
senator's charges might be available. All too often, however, this did
not take place during the same news cycle."

Alexander said if the first story were "blatantly irresponsible" he would
on occasion try to delay filing it, knowing that a fairer lead was
expected. But some papers complained that the UP and INS were
beating the AP and Alexander's boss would come in and say, "The
competition wires got all the play on McCarthy Wednesday. How
Come? What time did our Washington trunk story come in? What
time did you relay it?" Alexander could not struggle against this,
because copies of every story carried the date and time it moved.16

It would be difficult to exaggerate how competitive both the wire
services and the newspapers were in those days. In 1950, there were
322 morning dailies with combined circulation of 21 million and 1,450
evening papers with combined circulation of more than 32 million.
The larger cities had several competing papers, each publishing as many as eight or nine editions a day. All of the papers were struggling to retain readers and advertising against the rising tide of television, which was beginning to come into its own as a conveyor of news. Time magazine ran a cover showing McCarthy against a backdrop of newspaper headlines screaming, "Threatens, Charges, Defies, Accuses, Warns, Hunts, Demands, Brands" and a caption reading:

SENATOR McCARTHY
Opportunity keeps knocking.

The challenge of fairness
The question raised in some newsrooms at the time was whether McCarthy was an honorable senator concerned with the nation's security, whether he was a shameless fraud, or something in between. The problem for many conscientious journalists was how to report about this man in a fair way without letting him manipulate the coverage, as he clearly was doing. The following are some of the approaches that were tried or discussed:

- Send one or more reporter to Wisconsin to do a profile of McCarthy in his early years in politics, to give readers a better opportunity to judge his character. Few people knew that McCarthy lied in his first successful run for office, telling voters that the incumbent judge he was trying to unseat was 76 years old and ripe for retirement. The judge was actually 65 and McCarthy knew it. He grossly exaggerated his war record, but these incidents were little known outside Wisconsin.
- Because of the rule against opinion or analysis in the news columns, assign a reporter to write background and details of previous developments in the case to run along side each breaking story of a McCarthy accusation, or to bracket the same material into the running story. The Washington Post had success with this, assigning Murray Marder to the task. On some days Marder's stories ran for two columns. This approach, though rare, was important because the breaking story almost always covered only the events of the day in almost every newspaper.
- Adopt a rule never to run a McCarthy accusation until the paper could contact the accused and put the events into focus, and to ask the wire services to do the same. Reputations were ruined as the truth seldom caught up with the lie. This proposed rule, however, would have been difficult to enforce because of the intense competition among wire services and newspapers. It would be interesting in this respect to compare McCarthy era excesses in a highly competitive field to the excesses common today when there are so many competing outlets for news that an unfounded report in some undisciplined column or
publication finds its way into the public arena and has to be dealt with by the responsible press.

- Come clean with readers and report what goes on behind the scenes as a way to understand events in the public forum. For example, shortly after McCarthy's Wheeling speech he and two reporters and an editorial writer for the Milwaukee Journal met for lunch and got into a shouting match about McCarthy's refusal to provide any names of the alleged spy ring in the State Department. The journalists left convinced that McCarthy had no names. That meeting started the paper on its long crusade against McCarthy, but only on the editorial page.

The point is that a lot of stories were circulating around the country that together would have cast grave public doubt about the senator and his charges. There is often a surface story and a background story. The background story with hard work can often be written well within the boundaries of strict factuality.

**The Role of Broadcasters**

When McCarthy won reelection to another six-year term in 1952 and the Republican party won control of the Senate, he was assured of a long run of bashing alleged communists. He became chairman of the Senate Committee on Government Operations, a post from which he conducted extensive hearings into alleged communist influences in the Voice of America, the State Department's radio outlet in countries around the world, and later into the U. S. Army. His power was further increased by reports that he was responsible for the election of at least eight other Republicans in the Senate who ran on the subversive issue.\[19\]

At the same time there was a rapid increase in the number of Americans who got their news from television. In 1950 alone, the number of television sets in American homes increased from little more than three million to ten million, receiving broadcasts from 106 stations in 65 cities. It did not take McCarthy long to learn how to manipulate both newspapers and broadcasting at the same time.\[20\]

In the 1950s a Fairness Rule was adopted by the Federal Communications Commission, which required broadcasters to give persons airtime to reply to charges made against them on broadcast stations. (The Fairness Rule was repealed in 1987, because the FCC felt it put too much of a burden on broadcasters, but an "equal time" law pertaining only to candidates for public office remains in effect.) McCarthy was quick to demand time to respond to anyone making accusations against him, however vague, and the networks, then novices at political jousting, were usually quick to give it to him. Further, he kept the broadcast media—which, unlike newspapers, were federally regulated—on the defensive by charging there were vast numbers of communists and their sympathizers in broadcasting.
The senator repeatedly charged that all journalists who disagreed with him were espousing the communist line and took their orders from the *Daily Worker*, an organ of the American Communist Party. This charge was ludicrous on its face. Both the party and its newspaper were weak and did not even pretend to order straight journalists around. But Republican leaders, although fully aware of McCarthy’s methods, made no effort to rein him in as long as he was not damaging them.

McCarthy used his Senate hearings to advance his own views while shutting out opposing views. “After rehearsing a witness—friendly or hostile—in closed session, he arranged for the testimony he wanted the public to see and hear to testify during the two hours a day that the hearings were covered by television,” Edwin Bayley wrote.

For example, one witness, Reed Harris, acting director of the Federal Information Administration, who had written a book 20 years earlier advocating the right of professors to teach atheism and communism, was accused by McCarthy of never having been cleared for loyalty and security. Harris tried to protest that indeed he had been cleared six times, but McCarthy cut him off. He was promised time for rebuttal while the hearing was being broadcast by ABC, which was carrying the hearing two hours a day. McCarthy used most of the two hours that day for witnesses hostile to Harris and said he understood ABC would extend its broadcast for the Harris testimony. ABC said there was no such understanding, and Harris had only begun to testify when ABC switched to a commercially sponsored giveaway show. What viewers were left with was an overwhelmingly hostile portrait of a public servant who had broken no law and had never shown disloyalty during his federal service. A short time later Harris, thoroughly humiliated, resigned. McCarthy, expressing satisfaction, said he hoped some of his associates would follow him out of the government.\(^\text{21}\)

The broadcast media were even slower than the print press to try to come to terms with McCarthy, in part because all stations were federally regulated and broadcasters did not want to be drawn into political fights. One of the few exceptions was Martin Agronsky, a commentator for ABC, who had been critical of the methods used by the House Un-American Activities Committee as well as those of McCarthy. Agronsky had a daily radio program sponsored by businesses and other institutions in each city where it was carried. After Agronsky discovered that he was losing sponsors around the country, he learned that McCarthy and his staff were putting pressure on his sponsors to end their support. The program began losing money, and a number of local station owners demanded that ABC fire him. Robert Kitner, the network’s president, refused and encouraged Agronsky to continue his criticism.\(^\text{22}\)

A 1954 broadcast by Edward R. Murrow attacking McCarthy’s
methods has been widely heralded as one of the chief factors in causing the senator's censure by the Senate later in the year. But as Edwin Bayley pointed out in Joe McCarthy and the Press, Murrow's commentary was not nearly as strong as a number of newspaper editorials that had appeared much earlier and came only as McCarthy had become vulnerable.  

As McCarthy's power grew, so did his ambition. His Republican colleagues never dreamed that he would challenge the popular Eisenhower administration in the way he had President Truman and the Democrats. But he soon let it be known that, while he thought Eisenhower had done more than Truman to rid the government of communists, the new president had not done enough. He took on the U. S. Army as another source of suspected disloyalty and publicly browbeat Secretary of the Army Robert Stevens and Army officers. By this time, he talked as if he, not the President, were the real leader of the Republican Party. Eisenhower, who had been reluctant to openly criticize McCarthy, finally did so by publicly praising Stevens and those Army officers under attack.

It was the extensively telecast Army hearings of 1954 that had the most negative effect on the senator. The Army, chafing under McCarthy's abuse, charged that McCarthy and his chief counsel, Roy M. Cohn, had pressured the Army to give preferential treatment to G. David Schine, a committee staff member who had been drafted and stationed at Fort Dix despite Cohn's efforts to have him remain on McCarthy's committee. A bipartisan subcommittee opened televised hearings on the Schine dispute. McCarthy, rather than becoming more judicious, stepped up his abusive behavior and tactics. As the hearings ground on to larger and larger TV audiences, McCarthy's public support began to slip away. James Reston noted in the New York Times that the hearings had "demonstrated with appalling clarity what kind of man he is."

The most remembered scene came on June 9, 1954, when McCarthy accused Joseph Welch, a Boston lawyer who was the Army's counsel for the hearings, of having a suspected communist sympathizer in his law firm. Welch, a flamboyant speaker, explained that the young lawyer, Frederick Fisher, indeed had belonged to the Lawyer's Guild, once affiliated with the American Communist Party, but had since become active in Massachusetts Republican politics; that Fischer had been recommended by another member of the law firm, but he, Welch, knowing the sensitivity of the hearings, had not taken him on and had sent him back to Boston.

But McCarthy kept at his accusations until Welch interrupted, and with millions of Americans watching on television, said: "Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator. You have done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir? At long last, have you no sense of decency?" The hearing room burst into loud applause.
Did it require prolonged television coverage to demonstrate what was so now so apparent to many? Could not editors and reporters have found a way under existing practices to define the real McCarthy, especially in view of the fact that it had long been believed in journalism circles that McCarthy cared little about the communism issue, that he was only interested in increasing his own political power?

Later in the year, after the Democrats regained control of Congress in the 1954 elections, the Senate voted 67 to 22 to "condemn" McCarthy for violating due process and rules of the Senate. Thereafter his colleagues simply turned their backs on him, walking off the floor when he rose to speak or declining to acknowledge his presence in a crowded elevator. Reporters quit hanging on to his every word and he did not make page one news again until he died, on May 2, 1957, of cirrhosis of the liver brought on by heavy drinking.  

**Debate over McCarthyism's impact**

Scholars have long been assessing the impact of "McCarthyism," of which McCarthy was the chief, but by far not the only practitioner. And even before McCarthy was censured, the term McCarthyism entered the dictionaries and has been in constant use for half a century, defined as the use of indiscriminate, often unfounded, accusations, sensationalism, inquisitorial investigative methods as in the suppression of political opponents. Yet the controversy continues, even in scholarly tomes, not only about McCarthy himself, but about the extent of communist infiltration in American Society and what impact it may have made in the nation's politics and culture.

Probably no institution felt the impact of the McCarthy phenomenon more than the news media. Murray Marder of the *Washington Post*, who covered McCarthy extensively, remembers well one aspect of the period when McCarthy was flourishing. He recalls that, from his position at the center of the controversies, the period was one of "national turmoil, at least as serious as the reaction to the Vietnam war. Careers and families were destroyed, people committed suicide. Fear was in the atmosphere: you always had to know who you were talking to. It threw into jeopardy all the great American attributes—freedom of speech, thought and association. Anybody who had been in public life was vulnerable, and you had to think back all your associations. It was the closest we ever came to a real totalitarian atmosphere."  

More than in any other period, the press was a major contributor to shaping the character of the times. Yet that era also exposed flaws in how journalism was then practiced, and it led to major changes in the way news is gathered and presented. It would be interesting to consider what changes in the practice of journalism during the 20th
century can be attributed in whole or in part to the McCarthy period. What do you think?

**Discussion Questions**

1. Who are some contemporary McCarthy-like figures able to control and dominate the news?
2. How should you as a journalist respond if a Senator made an accusation like McCarthy’s and then said he would turn the names over to the authorities at the proper time?
3. How did journalists reporting the McCarthy accusations justify their coverage? How did it serve the public interest, if at all?
4. Are there new rules of evidence that journalists use today, which did not exist during the McCarthy story? If so, what are they?
5. The McCarthy era had elements of national hysteria over the communist menace. What should the news media do to tamp down such panic? The TV networks were very careful about reporting developments in such times of post-McCarthy crises such as the assassination of President Kennedy and the attempted assassinations of Presidents Ford and Reagan. One tragic consequence of such hysteria, shown as far back as the Salem witch trials, is the destruction of lives and careers.

**The Author**

John Herbers is a former national correspondent for the New York Times.

**End Notes**


4 Bayley, pp 17, 18.

5 Ibid, pp 18-38.

7 Bayley, p 66.

8 This summary of practices by the wire services and newspapers comes largely from the recollections of the author of this chapter, who was a reporter for Southern newspapers United Press from 1949 to 1963.

9 Bayley, p 36.


13 Bayley, Chapter 2, "The Floundering Press."

14 Ibid, pp 67, 68.

15 Ibid, p 68.

16 Ibid, pp 70, 71. Alexander, in a telephone interview with the author of this chapter, in December 1999, provided additional information about the wire services.


19 Bayley, p 182

20 Ibid, p 176

21 Ibid, pp 182-194; Reeves p 483.

22 Bayley, p 194-195.

23 Ibid, p 193.

24 Ibid p 188.

25 Reeves, Chapter 22, pp 495-637.

26 Ibid, 662, 671, 672.


29 Interviews with Bayley, pp 148-151, and with the author of this chapter.