

Reporter in a Troubled World: Marquis W. Childs and the Rise and Fall of Postwar Liberalism

by

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of the career of syndicated newspaper columnist Marquis W. Childs between 1944 and 1968. During these years, Childs worked from the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* Washington bureau and his column was widely printed in American newspapers. The dissertation analyzes the content of his column and other writings to trace the evolution of his political thinking and his involvement with the most pressing issues and most prominent figures of his era. It examines his reporting and analysis of Cold War domestic and international politics and individual chapters focus on a set of topics that drew from Childs the most sustained attention and emotional engagement. These include the onset of the Cold War and the emergence of what has been called the Cold War consensus, the start of the Atomic Age and early debates about American atomic policy, the red scare and civil liberties, Cold War foreign policy and nuclear disarmament in the Eisenhower and Kennedy eras, the postwar African American freedom movement, and the political and cultural upheaval resulting from American involvement in the Vietnam War.

Childs was a moderate leftist influenced by Progressive Era and New Deal models of liberalism. The dissertation situates Childs' writing in the broader context of the evolution of liberalism as writers and thinkers sought to refashion core liberal principles to address the needs of a changing, and often deeply challenging, postwar world. It also examines changes in the practice and culture of opinion journalism and the relationship between newsmakers and those who earned their living writing about them in the postwar era.

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Introduction

The right word is a powerful agent, and those of us who traffic in words should know that if we have any strength, any influence, any force, it is in the word.¹

Like many political journalists, Marquis W. Childs was fascinated by power. He was interested in watching how it was obtained, employed and, ultimately, lost. From the early days of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal to the tumultuous era of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, Childs closely observed power politics at the highest levels from his vantage point at the Washington bureau of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Senators and members of Congress called him a friend. He wined and dined with ambassadors and cabinet secretaries. Diplomats, military leaders, and bureaucrats of all stripes shared information and served as useful sources as Childs traveled from Washington to Los Angeles, from London to Berlin, Moscow, and Peking. And yet, Childs also feared power, or more accurately, he feared its misapplication. He saw the world as a dangerous and troubled place too easily made subject to the whims of a Hitler, a Stalin, or a lesser demagogue. He sought to promote the right balance between centralization and planning on one hand, and individuality and markets on the other; this was the "middle way" for which he was best known.² It also informed his life-long identification as a New Deal liberal and motivated his dedication to measures or policies that channeled organized power toward progressive ends but still diffused it to make it responsive to the needs of the people.

¹ Marquis W. Childs, *Witness to Power* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975), 268.

² Childs first came to national attention with the publication of his 1936 book *Sweden: The Middle Way*, which showcased Sweden's state socialism as the model of good governance in an age of extremes. The book argues for democratic socialism and controlled capitalism as antidotes to Communism or unbridled capitalism. The book garnered a lot of attention at the time and President Franklin Roosevelt was impressed enough by Childs' analysis to send an American delegation to study Sweden's social and economic system.

Childs worked in an era when the major figures of American journalism exercised unprecedented power of their own. He felt the weight of this influence as a widely-read syndicated columnist and fretted about how to gauge his power and use it most judiciously. As he outlined in his 1974 memoir, he was only too aware of the temptation, prevalent among influential journalists, to exert power behind the scenes rather than merely chronicle it.³ For over four decades, Marquis Childs walked the line between reporter and participant as he circulated in the halls of power in Washington and the capitals of the world. Although it wasn't always apparent to readers of his column, he had close relationships with many newsmakers of the day and did, on occasion, work to get their ideas onto the public agenda in the attempt to frame and influence policy. He was, at times, willing to use his column to further the objectives of friends and friendly sources, although only when their beliefs and objectives meshed with his own. Such behavior was relatively common among the powerful pundits of his era, but he was troubled by the implications none the less.

This dissertation is an examination of the career of Marquis Childs as a reporter and political commentator between 1944 and 1968, the period of his greatest prestige and influence in public affairs. Childs was not the most important columnist of his era, nor the most widely read. He never achieved the same level of influence and distinction as Walter Lippmann or James Reston, and he was not as combative or controversial as Joseph Alsop or Drew Pearson. Still, contemporaries knew Childs to number among the major commentators and he spent many years as one of top columnists on the national scene. He was very much member of the nation's "press establishment," with access to policy makers at the highest levels, and therefore

³ Ibid., 268-269.

able to exert some influence over the content and character of public discussion about major issues.⁴ Political leaders paid attention to what he wrote and sometimes sought to influence his writing.⁵ Pierre Salinger, press secretary to President John F. Kennedy, listed him as one of the “ranking members of the fraternity” who was targeted for special treatment and consideration.⁶ Pollsters typically included Childs among the favorite columnists when they conducted public opinion surveys. Members of Congress placed his columns in the *Congressional Record* and sent him notes of congratulations or angry rebuttals. At its peak, Childs’ “Washington Calling” column was distributed by United Feature Syndicate to over 160 newspapers across every region of the country, as well as several foreign publications. His byline appeared in the nation’s popular magazines and journals of opinion on a regular basis. Letters to the columnist from politicians, subscribing editors, and readers, writing from the White House or Main Street America, indicate that people were paying attention. As will be discussed, Childs fell easily into the left/moderate wing of the mainstream of public opinion. He was in many ways a representative figure of the postwar consensus that dominated the thinking of his era. At other times, however, he either challenged convention by pressing unpopular topics and opinions or put forward a somewhat different point of view that fit uncomfortably into the consensus and, perhaps, pushed its margins by a degree.

Marquis Childs has to date been overlooked by historians of postwar journalism, despite the prominence he achieved during his career. Although historians understand that influential columnists played an important role in postwar American politics and the creation and

⁴ See Karl E. Meyer, “The Washington Press Establishment,” *Esquire* (April 1964), 73-74.

⁵ For example, see Sen. Joseph Clark Jr., “Columnists Influence Opinions, Voting Records of Congressmen,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 February 1959, B5.

⁶ Pierre Salinger, *With Kennedy* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1966), 120.

evolution of the postwar consensus, no biography or detailed analysis of his work and career has been written. Scholars typically mention him only in passing or as one of several journalists in a list of notable or representative figures. Historians frequently quote from Childs' books and columns as examples of contemporary opinion, but he himself is rarely the subject of analysis.⁷ This dissertation argues that Childs merits more academic consideration because of his significance as a political journalist at a transformative time in American history. His chronicle of the issues, events, and personalities he covered was insightful and comprehensive. He broke important stories and took part in political coverage for one of the nation's premiere regional newspapers. At the same time, his analysis and opinion informed and affected contemporary debates, especially among those on the liberal side of the political spectrum. Peers and colleagues turned to his column as a reliable source of judicious reporting and a model of informed liberal commentary.⁸ This study seeks to enrich the understanding of postwar journalism by refocusing scholarly attention on one of the craft's notable practitioners who occupied a high position in the "commenting game," as he frequently called it.

The dissertation, however, is not a formal biography. Childs wrote millions of words about other people, but had little to say in print about his own life. Ever the journalist, Childs was much more comfortable writing about others than about himself. His published writing, the letters and files stored among his papers, and the recollections of family and colleagues all

⁷ Biographical dictionaries, including Dan Nimmo's eight page "bio-critical" study, remain the only substantive published sources of general information about Childs. See Dan Nimmo and Chevelle Newsome, *Political Commentators in the United States in the 20th Century: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 40-47. See also Sam G. Riley, *Biographical Dictionary of American Newspaper Columnists* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1995), 57-58.

⁸ Childs ranked second to Walter Lippmann in an early 1960s poll of Washington correspondents who were asked which columnist was most fair and reliable. William L. Rivers, "The Correspondents After 25 Years," *Columbia Journalism Review* (Spring 1962), 8.

offer glimpses of Childs' personal life and inner thoughts, but the task of detailing his day to day life remains outside of the scope of this study. Instead, the dissertation is an analysis of a working journalist's career and his relationship to the people and events of his time, with his own words and ideas at the center. It follows the key themes and shifts in his thought on political and social issues as expressed in his writing. Although a lifelong New Deal and anti-Communist liberal, Childs was not entirely ideologically bound. He saw himself as moderate and pragmatic, a realist who valued compromise in a complicated and ever-changing world. This dissertation examines Childs as a participant-observer in that world, playing what he called "a game" comprised of events, relationships, and rules of journalistic practice that evolved over decades. That he saw the stakes of the game as incredibly high is clear from both his published writings and the contents of the papers he left behind. The world was, according to Childs, fraught with peril, especially for those who embraced liberal values. It was a deeply troubled place where the gravity of events was substantial and, after the onset of the atomic age, the possibility that everyone might lose was only too real.⁹ This dissertation examines Childs as he worked to uncover truths about that world and to interpret them for the broad audience so they could understand, and hopefully better control, the events around them.

The dissertation, however, serves another broader function. Studying the career of Marquis Childs offers valuable insight into the role of opinion journalism in postwar political culture. It fills a significant gap in the historical literature by offering a careful analysis of Childs' career and writing on a broad array of subjects. The newest and most comprehensive

⁹ Marquis W. Childs, "The Interpretive Reporter's Role in a Troubled World," *Journalism Quarterly* 27 (Spring 1950): 134-40.

study of Washington journalism is *Reporting From Washington*, by Donald A. Ritchie.¹⁰ Ritchie includes a thoughtful chapter on the general history of news columnists, but Childs merits very little space in this account. Although the span of Childs's career overlaps with that has been called a "golden age" of the political columnist, the significance of these journalists remains relatively understudied and the influence of these legendary figures is more assumed than demonstrated in most cases.¹¹ Most of the scholarship in this area takes an individual biographical approach and to date the emphasis has tended to focus on those at the very top of the game like Walter Lippmann, James Reston, and Joseph Alsop. The earliest comprehensive study of the Washington correspondents and columnists, completed in 1937, employed survey research to provide a largely sociologic or demographic account of the journalists' backgrounds and attitudes about various topics.¹² Charles Fisher's *The Columnists* offers biographical material and anecdotes, but little analysis.¹³ Updating these classics in the 1960s, William Rivers sought to analyze the influence of several of the most famous columnists of the day, including Lippmann, Reston, and Drew Pearson.¹⁴ The title of the book, *The Opinionmakers*, reveals how powerful Rivers believed the elites of the profession to be, even though little hard evidence of this influence on the general public is offered. The real value of Rivers' work is that it documents the influence of "elite" columnists and Washington reporters on lesser members of the Fourth Estate, many of whom are shown to have taken cues from Lippmann

¹⁰ Donald A. Ritchie, *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹¹ See, for example, Ben Bagdikian, "A Golden Age of Oracles," *Columbia Journalism Review* (Winter 1966), 11-16.

¹² Leo C. Rosten, *The Washington Correspondents* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937).

¹³ Charles Fisher, *The Columnists* (New York: Howell, Soskin, 1944). See also F. B. Marbut, *News from the Capital: The Story of Washington Reporting* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1971).

¹⁴ William L. Rivers, *The Opinionmakers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

and the others in the upper ranks of the trade.¹⁵ A similar argument emerges from Stephen Hess' *The Washington Reporters*.¹⁶ Adding a study of Marquis Childs to this body of scholarship significantly broadens our knowledge of postwar opinion journalism.

The major focus of this study is the reporting and analysis that Childs produced, primarily in the column he wrote starting in 1944. Every installment of the column was read carefully to identify important themes, concepts, and original news reporting, and to consider what Childs expressed in the context of the broader range of ideas in which his writing circulated. Childs wrote on an almost impossibly wide range of topics, from agricultural price subsidies to the race to the moon. However, a number of key subjects dominated his reporting and, thus, serve as the focal points of analysis in this project. These include the Cold War and America's role in the world, the nation's military policies, control of atomic weapons, the red scare and civil liberties, and civil rights and equal opportunity for all citizens. At the simplest level, his major concern to ensure that wisdom and judiciousness informed public policy, be it in international relations, defense spending, education policy, civil rights programs, or any other topic of the day. Central to his worldview was the liberal's faith that progress was possible only through bold ideas applied to the nation's collective problems by public-spirited leaders dedicated not to faction or personal agendas, but to the common goal of improving the nation through policy.

Although Childs considered himself a realist who adopted his thinking in accordance with changing situations, certain core ideas animated his world view. Many of these attitudes

¹⁵ Ibid., 53-56.

¹⁶ Stephen Hess, *The Washington Reporters* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1981). See also Barney Collier, *Hope and Fear in Washington: The Story of the Washington Press Corps* (New York: Dial Press, 1975).

were formed during his early years in the Midwest, where he absorbed the spirit of populism and progressivism that characterized much of the region's political culture in the early decades of the Twentieth Century. He was drawn to the model of reformist government at the heart of the La Follette movement in Wisconsin and at the start of his career he wrote admiringly of progressives like Nebraska's George W. Norris.¹⁷ In foreign policy, Childs shared the idealism and internationalist outlook that thrust the United States onto the world stage during the interwar years. He believed in the Wilsonian idea that the United States had a special role to play in bringing democracy and prosperity to the world through international accords and global trade.¹⁸ He also understood that the nation's power brought with it great responsibility. In fact, he often felt that the burden was almost too great for anyone to bear. It was the rare leader or statesman who didn't let him down and his work was often informed by a deep pessimism, at times verging on the despondent and alarmist, about the state of affairs.

One important element of this dissertation is the attempt, where possible, to trace and analyze Childs' influence as a commentator on public discourse by examining his relationships with newsmakers and locating instances when the effects of his writing on leaders or the public at large can be documented. Occasional glimpses of his interactions with the first hand

¹⁷ For example, see Marquis Childs, *I Write From Washington* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1942), 35-41. On La Follette and Progressivism, see David P. Thelen, *Robert M. La Follette and the Insurgent Spirit* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976) and Nancy C. Unger, *Fighting Bob La Follette: The Righteous Reformer* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000). Childs was friends with members of the La Follette family starting while he was a student at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. On Norris as an architect of New Deal legislation and reform, see Richard Lowitt, *George W. Norris: The Triumph of a Progressive* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978). Lowitt discusses Norris' friendship with reporters on pages 334-336. An older, but still insightful study of links between Progressive Era thinkers and 1930s liberalism is Otis L. Graham Jr., *An Encore for Reform: The Old Progressives and the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

¹⁸ In addition to work cited later in this study, on the influence of Wilson see Alan Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Wilsonianism: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American Foreign Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); and essays collected in John Milton Cooper Jr., ed. *Reconsidering Woodrow Wilson: Progressivism, Internationalism, War, and Peace* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

participants appear among his papers, in his memoir, or in the recollections of others. These can shed some light on Childs' newsgathering practices and use of sources. Reactions from policymakers to published columns, as well as Childs' own responses to their praise or criticism, provide some evidence of the influence of his writing on policy debates and decision making. The earlier studies mentioned above take columnists' influence for granted, perhaps by virtue of the size of their readership. As Edwin Yoder Jr. has pointed out, the task of accurately gauging the influence of a prominent columnist is challenging at best.¹⁹

Comprehensive evidence of readership or the response of readers to Childs' columns and other writing is simply not available, though the evidence that is available is suggestive. To some degree, then, this will be a study of perceived influence. Correctly or not, pundits like Childs were considered the most powerful members of the media establishment in the years before they were eclipsed by the "talking heads" and other stars of the television age. Much of their power and influence in public affairs arose from the widespread belief that their words shaped attitudes and opinions. Childs himself saw his columnist rivals in this light. He once wrote that James Reston held power equivalent to three senators and that Joseph Alsop was as influential as a Deputy Secretary of Defense.²⁰ Stewart Alsop shared this belief, pointing out that "Presidents may come and Presidents may go, but a James Reston or a Marquis Childs goes on forever."²¹ Powerful people sought Childs out and tried to give him information, to influence his writing and, on occasion, to win his favor. This dissertation examines the

¹⁹ Edwin M. Yoder Jr. *Joe Alsop's Cold War: A Study of Journalistic Influence and Intrigue* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 3-5.

²⁰ Childs, *Witness to Power*, 1-2.

²¹ Stewart Alsop, *The Center: People and Power in Political Washington* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 171.

question of Childs' influence, real or perceived, among policy makers, the public, and other journalists.

In some instances, the dissertation compares Childs with other significant journalists working in the postwar years to frame his work in the context of his contemporaries. Most of the best scholarship on newspaper columnists to date has taken the form of biographies or analyses of individual writers; the use of an individual's career as a lens through which to study the time period can be fruitful. Walter Lippmann's reputation as the dean of political columnists, widely held during his lifetime and after, is the subject of many books, the best of which is Ronald Steel's *Walter Lippmann and the American Century*.²² The most thorough study of Joseph and Stewart Alsop is Robert Merry's *Taking on the World*, which is in some ways a model study of the influence of journalism on public life.²³ Other important publications include Peter Kurth's book on Dorothy Thompson, *American Cassandra*, and John Stacks' biography of *New York Times* reporter and columnist James Reston.²⁴ These works are strongest when they situate their subjects in rich historical context and examine the columnists as actors that both influence, and are influenced by, the trends and events of the time.

²² Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Atlantic-Little, Brown, 1980). See also John Luskin, *Lippmann, Liberty, and the Press* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1972) and Barry D. Riccio, *Walter Lippmann- Odyssey of a Liberal* (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 1994). Lippmann's status among his peers is thoroughly documented in Marquis W. Childs and James Reston, eds, *Walter Lippmann and His Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1959).

²³ Robert W. Merry, *Taking on the World: Joseph and Stewart Alsop- Guardians of the American Century* (New York: Viking, 1996). See also Yoder, *Joe Alsop's Cold War*, and Leann G. Almquist, *Joseph Alsop and American Foreign Policy* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993). The controversial Drew Pearson is profiled in Oliver R. Pilat, *Drew Pearson: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1973).

²⁴ Peter Kurth, *American Cassandra: The Life of Dorothy Thompson* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990); John F. Stacks, *Scotty: James B. Reston and the Rise and Fall of American Journalism* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2003). Valuable first-hand accounts of political reporting on the national scene are Ben Bradlee, *A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991); Joseph C. Harsch, *At The Hinge of History: A Reporter's Story* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993); and Jules Witcover, *The Making of an Ink-Stained Wretch: Half a Century Pounding the Political Beat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

Columnists' memoirs have also informed this dissertation. In addition to Childs' *Witness to Power*, useful and insightful books include James Reston's *Deadline* and Joe Alsop's *I've Seen the Best of It*.²⁵ A full comparison of Childs' writing and that of Lippmann, Reston, Joe Alsop and the others on the wide range of issues considered here is beyond the scope of this study. However, in some relevant instances, this dissertation does compare or contrast what Childs wrote in his column to writing by other influential journalists. He knew and respected these men and, especially in the case of Lippmann, they influenced his work in various ways.

Due to the length of Mark Childs' career in Washington, an analysis of his work can shed light on broader trends in postwar journalism generally. For example, media scholars such as Michael Schudson and James Boylan posited that postwar journalists developed a greater sense of independence from those they covered, shifting from an era of generally stenographic reporting, and formed an "adversarial culture," especially during the 1960s decade.²⁶ This is often explained as a generational shift, but individual journalists like Childs also adapted their opinions, reconsidered old judgments, or gained new perspectives as their careers went on and as the world changed around them.²⁷ Other scholars have identified a dramatic increase of interpretive reporting that sought to make up for perceived limitations in traditional objective reporting styles in the wake of McCarthyism and the challenges of

²⁵ James Reston, *Deadline: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1991); Joseph W. Alsop with Adam Platt, *I've Seen the Best of It: Memoirs* (New York: Norton, 1992).

²⁶ Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 178-183; James Boylan, "Declarations of Independence," *Columbia Journalism Review* (November/December 1986), 32-45.

²⁷ On the generation gap explanation, see James Boylan, "Newspeople," *Wilson Quarterly* (Special Issue 1982): 77-79. On these trends generally, see James L. Aucoin, "The Re-emergence of American Investigative Journalism 1960-1975," *Journalism History* 21:1 (Spring 1995): 5-9.

reporting the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War.²⁸ This scholarship, however, has not looked carefully at the relationship between these trends and columnists and opinion journalism. Although he frequently sought the comfort of the left edge of the political middle and was a figure of consensus, generally speaking, Childs cannot accurately be described as a stenographer of power. Childs began describing himself as an interpretive reporter as early as 1950. To what degree did his style of journalism anticipate and influence what came later? How did his approach to his craft change during the long years of his career? Questions such as these inform part of the inquiry behind this project.

Finally, the dissertation positions Childs as a voice of postwar liberalism and it examines his work against the debate among Democrats and progressives over the liberal response to and position on various domestic and international issues through the postwar years. Childs' career as a commentator on public affairs overlaps neatly with the "rise and fall" of what historians have called New Deal liberalism, postwar liberalism, or anti-Communist liberalism.²⁹ Regardless of terminology, it is clear that Childs saw himself as firmly within this political tradition and his column was seen by readers and fellow journalists alike as a reliable element of this branch of political writing and thought. He began his career as a Washington correspondent shortly after the launch of President Roosevelt's New Deal.³⁰ Though at times

²⁸ On McCarthy and the crisis of objectivity, see David R. Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers, 1945-1965* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), 42-46, and Edwin R. Bayley, *Joe McCarthy and the Press* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 214-220. Daniel Hallin makes this point about Vietnam War reporting in *The "Uncensored" War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 66-67.

²⁹ Two articles that discuss the changing nature of liberalism and the various strands of thought that the term encompasses are Gary Gerstle, "The Protean Character of American Liberalism," *American Historical Review* 99:4 (October 1994): 1043-1073, and Kent M. Beck, "What Was Liberalism in the 1950s?" *Political Science Quarterly* 102: 2 (Summer 1987): 233-258.

³⁰ On Roosevelt and the New Deal as the foundation of postwar liberalism, see Alonzo Hamby, *Liberalism and Its Challengers, F.D.R. to Reagan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985; essays in Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989);

critical, his overall position was one of great sympathy with those in the White House, Congress, and other offices who attempted to further the objectives of the liberal state. In the postwar years, Childs' thought and writing mirrors in many ways the vision of vigorous anti-Communist liberalism articulated by Arthur Schlesinger Jr. in *The Vital Center*.³¹ Through his writing, his friendship with fellow liberals like Adlai Stevenson, and his involvement with groups like the Americans for Democratic Action, Childs took part in the debate over the shape and character of liberalism in the early Cold War years. As liberalism evolved in the 1950s and 1960s, Childs' writing continued to be one element of the conversation about its meaning and direction.

Mark Childs attained his greatest level of fame and perceived influence at the same time that the liberal consensus began to unravel. Despite the promise of a redefined liberalism of the 1960s, partially embodied by the promise of John F. Kennedy, but more fully in the civil rights movement and President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society initiatives, this left political tradition came apart by the end of the 1960s, the victim of forces pressing from both the New Left and an emerging conservative backlash.³² In Childs' case, as with so many others, the Vietnam War proved to be a point of departure from his longtime faith in the liberal mission. As the final two chapters of this study make clear, he was much less certain of his bearings in the

essays in Sidney M. Miklis and Jerome M. Mileur, eds., *The New Deal and the Triumph of Liberalism*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002); and Alan Brinkley, *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

³¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1949). See also Alonzo Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 277-282.

³² See Irwin Unger, *The Best of Intentions: The Triumph and Failure of the Great Society Under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon* (New York: Doubleday, 1996). A brief survey is Bruce J. Schulman, *Lyndon Johnson and American Liberalism* (Boston: Bedford, 1995). The essays in Sidney M. Miklis and Jerome M. Mileur, eds., *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005) cover all aspects of this topic. Allan J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984) remains a thorough account of the waning of the New Deal order.

disputatious days of the late 1960s. He had always written with one eye on the challenge from the right and the Communist far left; by the late 1960s, he was also disconcerted by the more moderate New Left, as well as the more unruly elements of the black power movement. Very little has been published on the relationship between political columnists, or newspaper journalism more broadly, and postwar liberalism, even though journalists numbered among the noteworthy articulators of liberal ideas and models.³³ One goal of this dissertation, then, is to address this lack of scholarship by using Childs to examine the influence of postwar liberalism on journalists, and vice versa. Did Childs help shape, or merely reflect, these evolving political attitudes? How did his own liberalism change over time in response to world events and cultural change? Did his reputation as a New Deal liberal diminish his capacity to speak to and influence those on the left and the right during the late 1960s? Addressing these issues comprises a significant analytical element to this project and, hopefully, can stimulate additional research on this neglected topic.

Biographical Sketch

Although biographical material is presented in the body of this dissertation as it becomes relevant to the analysis, a brief overview of Childs' life is useful in this introduction to the project. Marquis William Childs was born on 17 March 1901, in Clinton, Iowa, where his father was a lawyer and local Republican politician.³⁴ His unique first name (pronounced

³³ One minor exception is Mark K. Doudna, *Concerned About the Planet: The Reporter Magazine and American Liberalism, 1949-1968* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997).

³⁴ Biographical material is compiled from Childs' memoir *Witness to Power*, a series of interviews conducted by the Columbia University Oral History Program in the late 1950s, letters and promotional materials in the Marquis W. Childs Papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society (hereafter Childs Papers), an unpublished autobiographical manuscript, and correspondence by the author with Prentiss Childs, Mark Childs' son. Childs' date of birth is routinely misstated as 1903. As a young man he began to tell people that he was born that year in the effort to make himself appear two years younger than he really was. Although there is no direct evidence, available material suggests he did this in an effort to hide the fact that he dropped out of the University of Iowa and

MARK-us) was his mother's family name, but he preferred to be called Mark by friends. Childs finished high school in Clinton and enrolled at the University of Iowa, majoring in pre-medical studies because of his father's strong urging that he pursue medicine and earn a respectable living. He dropped out after a year and spent some time working in a Chicago department store. Thanks to a relative who supplied the necessary funds, Childs was able to study journalism at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and he earned his B.A. in 1923. While in Madison, Childs worked as a reporter for the United Press wire service and, after graduating, he spent a little over a year covering the Midwest from the Chicago office of the UP. Like many journalists, Childs had a lifelong ambition to be a novelist. In 1925, he accepted a teaching fellowship at the University of Iowa, where he taught composition and completed an M.A. in English in 1926. He published at least a dozen short stories for magazines in the early years of his career. The urge to write fiction stayed with Childs his entire life; he wrote three novels during his career and his son recalled that even late in life Childs regretted not pursuing fiction more vigorously. Childs met his wife, the former Lue Prentiss, while living in Iowa City. With a new wife and in need of a career, Childs put fiction aside and returned to the United Press, working briefly from the New York office and later as head of the bureau in St. Louis. Chafing at the limitations of wire service duty, Childs sought a job on the *Post-Dispatch*, which had a reputation as one of the best papers in the Midwest. Legendary managing editor O. K. Bovard hired Childs for the Sunday Features section and he

graduated two years late from the University of Wisconsin. Another less plausible explanation is that he lied about his age to avoid military service during the First World War. A young man born in 1901 would have been nearing draft age by the end of the war; a man born in 1903 would still have been too young.

was associated with the *Post-Dispatch* for the rest of his career, eventually writing 6380 articles for the paper.³⁵

Childs joined the Washington bureau in 1934 and quickly made the connections necessary to stand out as a successful political correspondent. As he described it, he became fascinated by the ability to make contacts, and eventually make social acquaintance or even be friends with men whom he had first known only in the headlines. He first came to widespread attention with the 1936 publication of his bestselling book *Sweden, The Middle Way* and his *Harper's* magazine article "They Hate Roosevelt," which was subsequently reprinted and distributed by the Roosevelt re-election campaign as a pamphlet. Another magazine article got Childs involved in the politics of the Supreme Court; he inadvertently revealed derogatory comments made by Justice Harlan Stone about Roosevelt appointee Hugo Black and caused a brief stir among the normally tight-lipped court and its observers. He also published a controversial series of stories about American interests and corruption in the Mexican oil industry that ultimately resulted in his filing a defamation suit against a United States Senator. Despite these incidents, the personable and talented Childs became a highly regarded and well-connected political correspondent. He reported from Spain during that country's civil war and traveled to Europe several times during World War II. He was the president of the Overseas Press Club for two years in the middle of the war.

In February 1944, United Feature Syndicate offered Childs a job as a columnist as a replacement for the extremely popular Raymond Clapper, who had been killed in an airplane accident in the Pacific. After some deliberation and wrangling over his *Post-Dispatch* contract,

³⁵ Paul Linsalata, "Marquis Childs' Column Reflects Issues Still Vital," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 2 July 1990, B1.

Childs accepted and launched the “Washington Calling” column, writing initially as many as six days a week. Childs continued to work from the *Post-Dispatch* offices and contributed some original material to the paper as part of his severance agreement, but between 1944 and 1954 he was earning his living primarily through syndication fees, speaking engagements, and freelance writing. In 1954, Childs returned full time to the *Post-Dispatch*, where he resumed his duties as a national affairs correspondent while continuing to write the column three or four days a week. He served as the chief Washington correspondent from 1962 to 1968, at which time he became a contributing editor. Childs retired from full time work in 1974, but kept writing the column, albeit less frequently, until 1981.

Along the way, Childs wrote or co-authored thirteen non-fiction books and three novels, as well as dozens of magazine articles. He appeared frequently on radio and television programs, including 168 installments of *Meet the Press*.³⁶ He moderated the syndicated weekly television news show *Washington Spotlight* in 1951 and 1952. The W. Colston Leigh agency of New York represented Childs in his lucrative career as a speaker and he gave dozens of talks to civic groups and on college campuses, often, but not always in cities where a local paper carried his column. He served as a guest instructor in journalism at Columbia University and the Universities of Oregon and Texas. The first Pulitzer Prize for commentary, awarded in 1970, was the most prestigious of his many awards and honors. Childs died of heart failure in San Francisco on 30 June 1990.

³⁶ Rick Ball and NBC News, *Meet the Press: Fifty Years of History in the Making* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998), 118.

Sources

Two major types of primary sources provide the basis for this study. The first is the voluminous published writing that Childs produced during his long career. The syndicated “Washington Calling” column appeared in newspapers between three and six times each week for over three decades. The subscriber list for the column varied over time, but it was always somewhere between 140 and 165 newspapers, which made it one of the more widely circulated political columns in the country.³⁷ The column is also useful in that the format freed Childs from the dictates of objective reporting and allowed him to inject his own informed analysis and interpretation. Unlike some columnists, Childs refrained from writing personal opinion and he rarely made direct statements that clearly revealed his political philosophy. He considered himself first and foremost a reporter and he attempted to incorporate original reporting, rather than pure opinion, into each column. Letters reveal his pride at breaking stories and his chagrin at editors who chose not to print particularly newsworthy columns. Not content to produce “thumb sucker” pieces, Childs cultivated a large network of powerful sources and traveled frequently in the US and abroad frequently to observe events first hand.

The column offers the best opportunity for historical analysis because those pieces circulated most widely among the largest number of readers. The column appeared regularly in the *Washington Post* from the very beginning in 1944 and much evidence suggests that it was

³⁷ It is difficult to compile an accurate list of Childs’ subscribing newspapers over the years. Three partial lists appear to be available among the available archived materials, two in Childs’ papers and one in the Joseph Pulitzer II Papers at the Library of Congress. Correspondence with United Feature Syndicate in the Childs Papers includes many letters about individual newspapers that had dropped or subscribed to the column and Childs corresponded with some of the editors of these papers on a fairly regular basis. Incidental comments in some of these letters suggest that the total number of subscribers was generally between 145 and 155. In addition to the *Washington Post*, urban papers included the *New York Post*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *Cleveland Press*, and *Detroit News*. Other smaller cities in which he appeared included Seattle, Denver, Atlanta, Des Moines, Miami, San Diego, and Cincinnati. Some of the noteworthy others were in state capitals and university towns, like Madison, Wisconsin, and Lincoln, Nebraska.

read in the White House, Congress, and other halls of power. For that reason, this study will make use of the version of the column that appeared in the *Post*. Research has demonstrated that the “Washington Calling” column was not always printed in the exact same format on the same day in each subscribing paper. Nor did editors opt to print the Childs column on every occasion. The completeness of the *Post*’s collection and the fact that its version of the Childs column was most widely read among the power brokers in the nation’s capital make it the most suitable subject for this project. Letters from political leaders in response to the column generally refer to the contents of the *Post*’s version. Similarly, this version was most likely to be inserted into the *Congressional Record*.³⁸

The dissertation also draws on Childs’ other significant writing on public affairs. He wrote additional material for the *Post-Dispatch* that was not included in the column, including a series of articles on individual liberties republished as a pamphlet in 1961. Another important source of information is the collection of articles that Childs wrote for the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Harper’s*, *The Nation*, *The Reporter*, and other popular magazines and opinion journals. Many of these articles deal with political issues and the length and relative lack of deadline pressure allowed Childs to do more comprehensive research and devote more attention to his subject than allowed by the limitations of a newspaper column that appeared as often as six days a week. The same can be said of the several nonfiction books that Childs wrote or edited during these years. Although none of the books was a major best seller, each received favorable reviews and attracted some attention. Two of the books are partly written as memoirs

³⁸ Childs felt that the *Washington Post* was his most important syndicated paper and he was friends with *Post* owner and publisher Eugene Meyer. Marquis Childs, unpublished autobiographical manuscript, in author’s possession thanks to Prentiss and Catherine Childs, section 11, page 3. His feelings about the paper and the Meyer and Graham families are outlined in Childs to Chalmers Roberts, 11 June 1974, Childs Papers, 1995 addition, box 3, folder 19.

and one is offered as a “diary” that recounts Childs’ activities covering major stories in Europe in 1954. None of these books reveal as much about the author as the historian might like, but each offers details and observations available in no other place.

Alongside Childs own writing, manuscript sources are at the heart of this study. The Marquis W. Childs Papers at the Wisconsin Historical Society are indispensable. Comprised of roughly forty boxes, donated over the course of several decades, the Childs Papers contain much of the journalist’s collection of research and background files, office memos, press releases, copies of his speeches and lectures, transcripts of television and radio appearances, photographs, and personal and professional letters. Letters from readers and subscribing editors provide a small window into the reception of Childs’ work. Also included are numerous notes and letters from the newsmakers who were the subject of Childs’ columns. Both friend and foe felt free to respond to what he wrote through this personal correspondence. The collection also includes drafts of unpublished or incomplete works, including an unfinished novel about Washington journalism, a book manuscript about John Foster Dulles, and a 1974 Ford Foundation study on public attitudes about the mass media that was never released. Copies of expense reports and itineraries allow the researcher to trace Childs’ extensive travel in some instances. Correspondence with editors and the United Feature Syndicate demonstrate Childs’ concern with the business arrangements of his professional life. Several boxes contain memos and related files that passed between the *Post-Dispatch* Washington bureau and the newspaper’s office in St. Louis or publisher Joseph Pulitzer’s summer home in Maine. The importance of this collection for any scholar examining Childs cannot be overstated.

A second, smaller collection of Marquis Childs Papers is housed at the University of Iowa Library Special Collections. These files are mostly related to his activities as a book author. Included are research notes, drafts and revisions of book manuscripts, letters to and from editors and publishers, reviews, and other similar documents, including an original manuscript of Childs' 1975 memoir *Witness to Power* that contains material deleted from the published version. The files show that Childs was highly particular about the way his work was edited and was, at times, a somewhat stubborn author. He was also attentive to reviews of his work and, even more so, to sales figures reported from the publisher. This collection also houses transcripts of a number of interesting speeches from the 1960s that reveal a great deal about how Childs thought about and reacted to the challenges of that difficult decade.

Primary sources related to Childs can be found among the papers of his contemporaries in the field of journalism. The James Reston Papers, housed at the University of Illinois, trace the activities of one of Childs' good friends and professional rivals. The Papers of James Wechsler, William Evjue, Robert Fleming, Douglass Cater, Edwin Bayley, William Benton, John Oakes, Robert Lasch, Joseph Harsch, Clark Mollenhoff and others at the Wisconsin Historical Society offer a variety of useful documents that provide information about Childs or about the nature of journalism in the postwar years. Many of the files in the Evjue, Benton, Bayley, and Wechsler collections, for example, deal with press coverage of Senator Joseph McCarthy. The Library of Congress holds collections important to this project. The Papers of Joseph Pulitzer II, who was owner and publisher of the *Post-Dispatch* during the first half of Childs' career, contain much pertinent information. The Papers of Richard Dudman, who worked with Childs in the Washington bureau for over twenty years, are similarly useful.

Dudman often traveled to places where Childs could not go when he was tied down in Washington and his reporting was clearly an influence on Childs' understanding of world and national events. The Joseph and Stewart Alsop Papers and Richard Strout Papers shed light on the career of several of Childs' famous contemporaries who wrote for important national publications that Childs read and greatly respected. The Lawrence Spivak Papers contain transcripts of the many episodes of *Meet the Press* that featured Childs as a panelist. Several research collections at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library provided a small array of useful materials related to Childs, especially the transcript of an interview he recorded in 1978 that discusses his work during the Kennedy years. Finally, two sets of interviews with Childs in the Columbia University Oral History Collection are highly informative.

Chapter topic outlines

Chapter one examines Childs' writing from the late period of World War II through the end of the 1940s to study his reaction to the onset of the Cold War. Childs initially believed the end of the war could usher in an era of peaceful co-existence furthered by the spread of American-style democratic values and economic development, as well as the establishment of the new United Nations Organization. Although wary of the Soviets, he did not expect or desire conflict with them in Europe or elsewhere. World events gradually forced him to reconsider his beliefs about the proper nature of America's place in the world. The chapter discusses his columns about the hardening conflict between the United States and the Soviets in occupied Germany and Eastern Europe as his own foreign policy thinking evolved from urging peaceful co-existence to adopting a Cold War mindset. Although he disagreed in some ways, he was an advocate of the Truman Doctrine and the idea of containment of Soviet influence.

He was also a proponent of diplomatic solutions and to that end he urged support for a vigorous United Nations, the Marshall Plan to reconstruct war torn Europe, and the formation of a common European defense and economy. The chapter details the way he used his writing to explain and advocate for these ideas.

A second aspect of this chapter is an analysis of the emergence of Cold War liberalism and Childs' relationship to its development as a progressive, but strongly anti-Communist movement. Childs was involved to some degree in the formal development of this body of political thought through his involvement with the Americans for Democratic Action, but even more through his own writing. Cold War liberalism developed as a response to the challenges that Childs was writing about in his column. Although he was not one of the high-profile leaders or publicists for the movement, his writing did play a role in framing and defining the contours of what was always a malleable ideology.

The case could be made that the single most pressing issue faced by Childs during his entire career was nuclear weapons and the arms race. From Hiroshima to the final days of his column, he dedicated thousands upon thousands of words to the effort to control and limit the unprecedented dangers of the Atomic Age. Chapter two of this dissertation, which overlaps in time with the first chapter, examines Childs' writing about the atomic bomb, control of the atom, and the effect of atomic weapons in America's national security and foreign policy through the end of the 1940s. He was immediately fascinated and horrified by the potential devastation threatened by a future atomic war and he did everything he could through his column to lessen the risks. He was strident in the belief that the atomic program be managed by a civilian, rather than military, agency to ensure careful oversight. He was also firmly in

favor of proposals to put atomic technology and weapons into the hands of an international organization to mitigate the threat of atomic war. He wrote dozens of columns examining various proposals and concerns about such an organization.

The chapter also looks at Childs' relationship with key players in the story of atomic energy like Senator Brien McMahon, chair of the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, and David Lilienthal, the first head of the civilian Atomic Energy Commission. Both of these men were his friends and Childs was an ardent supporter of their efforts to implement policies he advocated in the column. Another element of the chapter is a brief study of Childs' response to the problem of espionage and atomic security, especially as it related to civil liberties and the right of free inquiry for American scientists. He was deeply concerned that the closed mindset of many influential leaders valued excessive security over the protection of individual freedom. Taken in conjunction with chapter one, the first part of this dissertation traces Childs' thinking and influence as a writer and as a liberal as the nation made the perilous transition from World War II into the Cold War.

Chapter three is a more sustained analysis of Childs' involvement with, and reaction to, the red scare and McCarthyism in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Childs was among the small, but influential group of prominent commentators who wrote critically of this form of virulent anti-Communism starting long before Edward R. Murrow's famous 1954 *See it Now* program and the Army-McCarthy hearings supposedly broke the back of McCarthyism. He did so at a time when he was not affiliated with a major newspaper and was fully dependent on public goodwill for his livelihood. He did not suffer the abuses of McCarthyism in the same way as

some other liberals, but he was on a number of occasions the victim of smear attacks that challenged his reputation as a journalist and commentator.

The chapter draws from more than 120 columns that discuss elements of the political culture of the red scare era. Some of them were designed as public defenses of individuals who found themselves the targets of hostile inquiry. Others were direct attacks on the politicians and agencies at the center of the red scare. Still others were reasoned analyses of the central place of freedom of speech and conscience in the long tradition of American beliefs. He believed that the red scare did significant damage to America's reputation overseas and to the nation's efforts to use diplomacy and negotiation in the world arena. Published in many widely-read newspapers, Childs' column was part of the anti-Communist liberal argument that ultimately turned opinion away from the McCarthyite mode. The chapter provides an outline and analysis of that effort.

Chapter four discusses and analyzes Childs writing about foreign policy and arms control in the late Eisenhower and Kennedy years. It looks in particular at the way he wrote about the perceived weakness and drift of the late 1950s that he thought was making America vulnerable in the global Cold War. It examines his relationship with Eisenhower and his assessment of the shortcomings and failures of the popular president, especially in the wake of the Soviet *Sputnik* launch and the period of the so-called missile gap. Childs was particularly critical of Eisenhower's leadership and he has subsequently been criticized by more recent scholars who argue that observers like him misunderstood the former general's shrewd and deceptively active leadership style. The chapter examines what Childs wrote about Eisenhower and how his impressions were formed.

The second part of the chapter traces the columnist's writing about John F. Kennedy's candidacy in 1960 and leadership in the White House. Childs was more overt in his support for Kennedy than he was for any president in the postwar era. The chapter analyzes Childs' relationship with Kennedy and his hope that Kennedy would reinvigorate the nation and move policy in a more liberal and dynamic direction. Through his writing, he portrayed Kennedy as a decisive and resolute leader and did a lot to help erect the mythology that surrounded Kennedy in the years after his death. The chapter also examines Childs' writing on and advocacy for the nuclear test ban treaty, a subject of many columns in the late 1950s and 1960s.

The fifth chapter traces Childs' writing on the postwar African-American civil rights movement. Childs was not at the forefront of the civil rights movement in any way, but his column was a longtime advocate of fair treatment for minorities. One of his primary concerns in the 1950s was that the nation's racial problems presented an embarrassing image to the rest of the world and many of his columns from that period address civil rights as a propaganda issue rather than a legal or moral one. Like most journalists, he was slow to come to the cause. Because he was overseas so frequently, he did not pay as much attention to race in America as many other journalists did. In the 1960s, he began to take more seriously the racial problem.

His more direct engagement with the issue, examined in the second part of the chapter, began in 1963. He started to write more frequently and with more urgency about race relations. Because of his orientation as a political journalist, his writing tended to focus on policy solutions and the Congressional struggle to enact meaningful civil rights legislation. He did, on occasion, travel into the South or elsewhere to meet with civil rights activists and local officials to provide a first-hand perspective to his column. He became particularly interested in the race

problem in urban cities after 1965, when his civil rights columns tended to focus on the education, poverty, jobs training, and urban renewal plans that were part of the liberal response of the mid-1960s. The violence and unrest of the late 1960s unsettled him and, by the end of the period under study in this dissertation, he had become somewhat disillusioned both with the problem and with the solutions that had been offered.

The sixth and final chapter covers Childs writing about the war in Vietnam, starting with columns from the mid-1950s, but mostly focusing on the Lyndon Johnson years. It discusses Childs in the context of the breakdown of the postwar consensus wrought by the war and looks at the challenges he face in his relationship with Lyndon Johnson. Childs was by no means the first commentator to criticize the war and he accepted the rationale for America's involvement there, to varying degrees, until around 1965. After that point, he became much more critical and, although not advocating a full withdrawal of military and economic aid, he asked hard questions about American policy. He also began to assess the role of a critic in the modern American political system. The problem of the Vietnam War offered no easy solutions for liberals like Childs who had always supported America's mission to bring democracy to the world. By the mid-1960s, that mission was no longer viable to an experienced and careful observer of global affairs. He soured on the war well before the Tet Offensive revealed the limitations of American policy there.

This and the previous chapter on civil rights bring Childs to the end of the most active and influential part of his career and, in both cases, find him increasingly frustrated, perplexed, and out of step with events. Core liberal ideas seemed ill suited to provide answers to the race and poverty crisis in the cities, just as much as they failed to account for what he saw

happening in Vietnam. Developments like the rise of the hippies and black power fell well outside of his frame of reference, just as popular support for the reemergence of Richard Nixon baffled him. The world remained a troubled place.

Conclusion

This dissertation reexamines the career of Marquis Childs, one of the most significant Washington columnists of the postwar era. Childs understood that he lived in a troubled world and this dissertation shows how he responded to and made sense of it through his writing. It brings together biographical information and a full analysis of his writing for the first time. Covering a span of nearly twenty five years, it also offers new insight into the role of opinion journalism in American political culture through a vital period of history. It adds to the scholarly literature on press coverage of important events of the Cold War era, the civil rights movement, and other major topics. It seeks to reassess the influence of opinion journalism on the course of postwar liberalism and progressivism. The dissertation also adds to the analysis of broad trends in postwar journalism history by looking at changes in the practice of column writing and the relationship of an important columnist to the men and women who he wrote about. Childs wasn't always correct in his understanding and assessment of the causes and implications of events taking place around him. In fact, he once admitted to a member of Congress that because of the frenzied nature of the job and the wide range of subjects he covered in the column, much of his writing was "necessarily off the top of my mind."³⁹ Still, studying his ideas and writing on the people, events, and issues of his time offers much for our understanding of postwar politics and journalism.

³⁹ Childs to Rep. Brooks Hays (D-Ala.), 28 April 1953, Childs Papers, box 2, folder 6.

Chapter 1

What we need above all is a positive and constructive foreign policy- a policy prepared to utilize America's great economic supremacy to strengthen the forces of the democratic middle, and to bring order and stability to a world in perilous disequilibrium.¹

The phrase "cold war" is essentially deceptive. Because it has been used so often the American people have been deceived into believing that our government is actually waging a cold war against the Soviet Union. In terms of our resources, our energies, and our interests we are not in fact waging such a war. We are merely making gestures in that direction.²

In early 1947, a group of prominent liberals met in the nation's capital to draft a set of common principles and objectives they hoped would become rallying points for progressives across the nation. Created specifically as an organization for the non-Communist left, the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) intended to make a public stand in favor of continued New Deal-style social programs, improved race relations, and a rational foreign policy in the Cold War that had consumed Americans since the end of World War II. Attentive readers of the Marquis Childs column, which had been running for nearly three years in roughly 155 newspapers, would have noticed that the reporter took special interest in this meeting. The event, he predicted, would have a wide and lasting impact beyond the daily headlines. It aimed to create an affirmative, dynamic vision for America's future. And, as he explained, "for the first time for such a gathering a deliberate and careful effort has been made to exclude Communists." The group would not be subject to the red-baiting that plagued other liberal and progressive groups sometimes affiliated with, or infiltrated by, Communists. The rest of the column listed well-known liberal thinkers, activists, and politicians, such as Reinhold Niebuhr,

¹ Marquis Childs speech titled "Which Way for America?" given at the University of Minnesota School of Journalism, 23 May 1947. Copy in author's possession.

² Marquis Childs, remarks given at University of Virginia Town Hall Meeting, 11 April 1950, Childs Papers, box 5, folder 3.

Eleanor Roosevelt, Rep. Helen Gahagan Douglas of California, and Mayor Hubert Humphrey of Minneapolis, who planned to take prominent roles in the group.³ What was not evident from the column was the fact that Childs himself planned to take part. Disturbed by the deepening Cold War, fearful of “drift” plaguing American policy, and acutely aware of the challenge of crafting a liberal, non-Communist foreign policy, Childs wanted to ensure that the new group articulated an internationalist and dynamic agenda for the United States in world affairs. Ultimately, Childs sat as chairman of the group’s foreign policy sub-committee and oversaw the writing of a document that embodied most of his own cherished beliefs about the role of the nation in the troubled postwar years and, even though he refused to take a public role in the later administration of the ADA, he used his column to promote these ideals on a regular basis.

This is a prime example of what Childs later called an attempt to be a “player in the game” of public life. As a reporter, he understood that his job was to inform readers about key issues and events factually and fairly, without taking sides or pressing for desired outcomes. As a citizen and progressive, however, he felt the urge to help shape those events to ensure that the nation was on the right path. As he described it, influential journalists were “players without numbers on our jerseys, arrogating to ourselves a power never contemplated by the men who framed the First Amendment.”⁴ Childs often used his column to bring certain issues to prominence over others and to write about them in a way calculated to influence opinion. His direct involvement with the ADA, however, was a rarity in his career; most often his attempts to influence public opinion or policy decisions were indirect and took the form of the written word. Because he saw himself primarily as a reporter, he rarely made direct statements

³ Marquis Childs, “Conference of Progressives,” *Washington Post*, 30 December 1946, 7.

⁴ Marquis Childs, *Witness to Power* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 4.

about his own opinion or argued directly for a specific point of view or policy. His preferred tactic was to use his column to support and draw attention to a politician or other leader who asserted the position Childs wanted to see win out. He gave these points of view generous play and sometimes provided long quotes from speeches, testimony, or writings. On the other hand, he could be a harsh critic of leaders who backed positions with which he disagreed. He rarely engaged in public feuds or name-calling, but he did not back away from making pointed comments and naming names, even if the subject of his criticism was a senator, a general, or the President of the United States. Childs recognized the tension between the two goals, information and influence, and sought to use whatever power he had wisely. And he did believe that a journalist in his position had power to use. As discussed in the introduction, he thought Reston, the Alsops, Lippmann, and a select group of others could move the needle of public opinion. Although he didn't say it outright, implicit in the discussion in his memoir is the belief that he could as well.⁵

Studies of the role of the press during the early Cold War years generally argue that the majority of the American press fell into a broad anti-Communist consensus that accepted the premises that the Soviet Union was a dangerous threat to American global interests and that, because of this fact, the United States should act decisively to counter this threat through policies like containing Soviet expansion and influence, rebuilding a potent military force capable of exercising power around the globe, and creating a defensive alliance of rearmed European allies to counterbalance Communist forces.⁶ As the following discussion will show,

⁵ Childs, *Witness to Power*, 1-2.

⁶ This point is made by any number of scholars. A quantitative basis for the argument is found in John Zaller and Dennis Chiu, "Government's Little Helper: U.S. Press Coverage of Foreign Policy Crises," *Political Communication* 13: 4 (1996): 385-405. For a thoughtful analysis of this process in broadcasting, see Nancy E.

Childs fit easily into this pattern. However, it is also worth examining the process through which a journalist like Childs came to be part of the consensus, and to consider the array of sometimes disparate points of view that are often lumped together as examples of consensus orthodoxy. Studying the major columnists offers a better view of the range of postwar opinion in the press. Walter Lippmann, who defined the Cold War by first popularizing the term and then wielding his influence as the most respected analyst in the commentary game, makes a good comparison for Childs' work.⁷ Lippmann urged Americans to take a leadership role in world affairs, but also to be pragmatic about the limits of American influence and interests. Initially a proponent of a broad global commitment, Lippmann later emerged as a critic of containment theory and a voice for realism and moderation. As will be discussed in more detail below, Lippmann was in some respects a significant influence on Childs, but in other ways Childs disagreed with the elder statesman. Though both would be considered members of a consensus, they were different in key ways.⁸

Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Daniel Hallin explained how consensus journalism affected early coverage of the war in Vietnam in *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). A countervailing argument seeks to demonstrate that the whole notion of consensus and, for that matter, a coherent and unified foreign policy is misconceived. See, for example, Eugene R. Wittkopf and James M. McCormick, "The Cold War Consensus: Did it Exist?" *Polity* 23:4 (Summer 1990): 627-653; and Scott Lucas and Kaeten Mistry, "Illusions of Coherence: George F. Kennan, U.S. Strategy and Political Warfare in the Early Cold War, 1946-1950," *Diplomatic History* 33:1 (January 2009): 39-66. No thorough and conclusive study of journalistic consensus in the early Cold War yet exists, but the idea remains useful for analysis of Childs and liberal opinion writing of the era.

⁷ Lippmann's writing on the early Cold War is examined by Ronald Steel in *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1980), 418-461, and Patrick Porter, "Beyond the American Century: Walter Lippmann and American Grand Strategy, 1943-1950," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22 (2011): 557-577. An older account of Lippmann as an opponent of postwar American foreign policy is Barton J. Bernstein, "Walter Lippmann and the Early Cold War," in Thomas G. Paterson, ed., *Cold War Critics: Alternatives to American Foreign Policy in the Truman Years* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 18-53.

⁸ Childs did not list Lippmann among the columnists he read in a 1942 memo to Joseph Pulitzer II. He indicated that he "read few columnists" because he didn't have time. Childs to Pulitzer, 27 October 1942, Childs Papers, box 22, folder 2. He and James Reston of the *New York Times* co-edited a book of essays about Lippmann and his influence in 1959. His biographical introduction made clear that he had become a fan in the intervening years.

This chapter is an analysis of Marquis Childs' thinking and writing on American foreign policy in the early Cold War years, particularly on matters related to European policy and the U.S.-Soviet rivalry.⁹ To some degree, it traces an evolution in his understanding of America's role in the postwar world and the nature of the Cold War threat. For example, he initially believed that the United States and the Soviet Union would be able to resolve postwar differences through negotiation, perhaps within the framework of the new United Nations, but his position later hardened in response to global events. He supported the Truman administration's tougher line starting in 1947, but then came to criticize the president and his advisors for failing to wage the Cold War with purpose and vigor. In other ways, his beliefs remained consistent throughout these years. Like many of his generation, he had been influenced by the Wilsonian idealism of the pre-war era and the principles embodied in the Atlantic Charter; he therefore advocated free markets, international agreements, self-determination for all nations, and a dynamic American foreign policy to promote these ideals.¹⁰ The major focus of the chapter is Childs' writing on four issues that defined the early Cold War era: the creation of the UN, the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the beginning of the American defense alliance with Western European nations through the Atlantic Pact. In each of these cases, Childs urged readers to take seriously America's mission in the postwar world

⁹ This chapter largely omits discussion of atomic weapons, a subject covered in detail in the following chapter.

¹⁰ On the Wilsonian internationalism and the Atlantic Charter as inspirations for postwar liberal thought, see Elizabeth Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World: America's Vision for Human Rights* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), especially ch. 2. A more critical assessment of the long-term effect of this strain of thought can be found in Tony Smith, *America's Mission: The United States and the Worldwide Struggle for Democracy in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). See also several essays in Michael J. Hogan, ed., *The Ambiguous Legacy: U.S. Foreign Relations in the "American Century"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

and he sought to use his influence to ensure that these organizations and policies reflected and perpetuated the liberal principles that motivated his worldview.

Childs and Internationalist Foreign Policy

Childs firmly believed that negotiation was the best course for resolving conflict, but he also recognized that America should, whenever possible, bargain from a position of strength. He was, therefore, a proponent of defense spending necessary to maintain a superior military force that could act as a deterrent against Soviet aggression and to force the enemy to the bargaining table. In a 1948 letter to Senator Robert Taft, Republican of Ohio, the columnist stated his belief that “if we take the essential measures to make America strong we shall be able to prevent war with the Soviet Union.”¹¹ He also understood that anti-Communist alliances among the free nations were necessary and he therefore supported the creation of mutual defense organizations and significant economic aid to assist and strengthen American allies. At the heart of his thought was a core belief that the American system was superior to that of its enemies and that American foreign policy should be an instrument for progress.¹² The United States could spread freedom and democracy around the world, bringing with it prosperity and the gradual end of colonialism through self-determination. Soviet Communism, on the other hand, thwarted individual freedom of conscience and the right of national self-determination. He accepted that the Soviets had legitimate, historic concerns about protecting their borders. Some kind of co-existence was necessary, but their expansionist impulses had to be contained

¹¹ Childs to Senator Robert A. Taft, 9 April 1948, Childs Papers, box 7, folder 4. As the most imminent figure of the isolationist wing of the Republican Party, Taft featured prominently in Childs’ column and the Ohioan was probably the most frequently criticized of any elected official or public figure.

¹² These values were part of the broad consensus that motivated American action during the Cold War and resulted from a deep-seated cultural nationalism that posited America as redeemer and exemplar to the world. See John Fousek, *To Lead the Free World: American Nationalism and the Cultural Roots of the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), especially ch. 3 on conceptions of America’s global responsibility.

and their influence minimized. As was his practice, he wrote frequently about these issues, offering informed assessments, praising political leaders who took positive action and leveling criticism against those who did not.¹³

Childs had a global outlook from an early age. He wrote in an unpublished autobiography that he was fascinated, as a child, with an aunt who travelled frequently and brought back photos, toy flags, and other souvenirs from all around the world.¹⁴ The roots of his more mature belief in liberal internationalism date back to the period before he took up the syndicated column. Working as a daily journalist for the *Post-Dispatch*, even in the Washington bureau, limited his opportunities to express personal ideas about foreign policy, but he clearly had an internationalist outlook early in his career. He travelled in Europe and Latin America frequently to report for the paper, certainly much more often than the typical American of his time. His extensive writings on Sweden in the late 1930s indicate that he felt Americans could learn from other nations and should engage with the ideas of the broader world. Several other writings from before and during World War II clearly show ideas that would come to dominate his work in the early Cold War. A 1938 *Harper's* article pointed out the weakness of the American diplomatic corps in Europe, arguing that it was a sign of the nation's failure to assert itself adequately in a time of mounting crisis. A nation active in global

¹³ Childs sometimes displayed a strong patriotism that was not always evident later in his syndicated column and other writings. The end of his 1942 book *I Write from Washington* is a stirring evocation of the nation's beauty and his feelings of pride and obligation to work for the common good. During the war he worked as an air raid warden and wrote for the Writers' War Board. See Marquis Childs, *I Write from Washington* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942), 317-319.

¹⁴ Marquis Childs, unpublished autobiographical manuscript, section 1. Copy in author's possession courtesy of Prentiss Childs.

affairs, he suggested, would assemble a more highly skilled foreign service that would advance its interests.¹⁵

Although Childs and magazine publisher Henry Luce were not close, some of his thinking about foreign relations overlapped with Luce's conception of the American Century, which Luce articulated in the 17 February 1941, issue of *Life*. This famous editorial echoed many of the precepts of liberal internationalism and cast America as the dominant force for good in the world.¹⁶ Similar ideas animate a small booklet Childs co-authored with William T. Stone for the Headline Books series in 1941, as American involvement in the world war was imminent. Here he and Stone laid out a dramatic vision of a "new and responsible" role in the world "that will not be the familiar, secure world we have known for the last hundred years," but one in which America would "take the lead in sustaining the democratic way of life." As the clouds of war loomed, Childs hoped readers would help him build "a new, vigorous America conscious of her world responsibility."¹⁷ Using language that would not have been out of place in Luce's editorial, the book was designed to prepare Americans for the coming war against Nazi Germany and it contained a lengthy disavowal of the isolationist tradition. "We were never isolated," it argued. "Our national strategy and our whole history have been influenced by our position on the continent of North America, but this does not mean that the ocean barriers have ever made us oblivious to what was happening in other parts of the

¹⁵ Marquis Childs, "It is Called Diplomacy," *Harper's Monthly* (March 1938), 417-422.

¹⁶ On the American Century editorial, see James L. Baughman, *Henry R. Luce and the Rise of the American News Media* (Boston: Twayne, 1987), 130-133, and Alan Brinkley, *The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 267-273. The relationship of Luce's ideas to postwar internationalism is also thoughtfully discussed in Tony Smith, "Making the World Safe for Democracy in the American Century," in Michael J. Hogan, ed., *The Ambiguous Legacy: U.S. Foreign Relations in the "American Century"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 30-51.

¹⁷ Marquis W. Childs and William T. Stone, *Toward a Dynamic America: The Challenge of a Changing World* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 1941), 7.

world.”¹⁸ The book concluded with a stirring call to arms that included a list of the principles from the Atlantic Charter and told readers that no matter the outcome of the war America would have to play an active leadership role in the world in the postwar era.

It is something of a commonplace to say that World War II put an end of isolationism in the United States. The nation’s expanded role in global affairs and the dawn of the atomic age convinced many that the nation must have the kind of dynamic involvement Childs envisioned in order to prevent the next war, one that might lead to total devastation. But this oversimplifies the politics of the postwar years. As the war dragged toward an end, many Americans, for various reasons, hoped to return to a normal, pre-war existence and to minimize further entanglements with Europe’s problems. Others objected to the cost of taking on global responsibilities at a time when America’s economic future remained uncertain. Liberal internationalists feared such a return to old patterns of thinking and sought to mobilize the public in favor of elements of their agenda, including a commitment to an international organization to resolve future conflicts.¹⁹ Lippmann was again an important journalistic influence in this regard. His wartime book *US Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic* warned that America’s future security and prosperity would depend on a “forward leaning military presence.”²⁰ Childs was no different. In fact, the first published “Washington Calling” column, which appeared in mid-February 1944, over a year before the war in Europe ended, discussed the need for continued defense spending in the postwar era. According to his sources among

¹⁸ Ibid., 10.

¹⁹ On the 1943 debate on a resolution asking President Franklin Roosevelt to commit to American participation in the creation and direction of an organization similar to the failed League of Nations, see Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1-3. See also Randall B. Woods and Howard Jones, *Dawning of the Cold War: The United States’ Quest for Order* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1994), 16-21.

²⁰ Porter, “Beyond the American Century,” 569.

military planners, “we will keep permanently a military establishment big enough to enable us to take our part in the job of maintaining order in the world.” The world would experience “a different kind of peace,” one that required America to field a million-man Army and a Navy “half again as large as that which existed before 1940.” The cost would be high, he warned, but it was a necessary burden if Americans hoped to prevent a third world war.²¹

Most of the Childs columns from 1944 dealt with the war and day-to-day issues, but his writing began to deal more urgently with postwar problems in early 1945 when he travelled to Europe to talk with military and political leaders and to see the war’s effects first hand. Two columns published before the trip reiterated his earlier outlook on the postwar situation. His New Years Day 1945 column, based on his reading of the new book *Winged Peace* by Canadian Air Marshal William Bishop, warned readers that newly developed technology meant that Americans could not be safe from attack in the future. New rockets and jet propelled bombers would soon be able to cross the Atlantic in hours and international agreements had to be set in place to control the dangerous new weapons. “If the old nationalism prevails,” Childs advised, “then the doom of the world is certain. Man’s thinking...never catches up with man’s inventiveness.”²² In a second column that month, he employed the tactic of heaping praise on a leader who took action he found laudable. Senator Arthur Vandenberg, Republican of Michigan, gave a speech in early 1945 in which he signaled a change of heart and renounced his prior isolationist position. Childs quoted heavily from the speech and contrasted Vandenberg with Senator Burton Wheeler of Montana, who had been a pre-war member of America First and remained a loud voice against the various plans for postwar cooperation

²¹ Marquis Childs, “Our Postwar Defense Job,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 14 February 1944, 3B.

²² Marquis Childs, “World of Tomorrow,” *Washington Post*, 1 January 1945, 4.

circulating in Washington. Childs called the Montanan “bitter Burt,” but said that Vandenberg had done “a major public service.” The speech was the “first hopeful portent in a time of dreary waiting,” according to the column. “In both Moscow and London,” he added, “his assurances should go a long way toward ending doubts and fears of our future course.”²³

Childs spent two months on the continent, travelling first to London where he interviewed Winston Churchill and wrote about Anglo-American relations and the upcoming meeting of the Big Three.²⁴ He then crossed the English Channel on a Navy cargo ship to survey the war’s devastation and interview people in France, Belgium, Italy, Greece, Yugoslavia, and liberated areas of Germany. He spent several days at an Eighth Air Force bomber base in England and then went to front line areas in Italy and western Germany. These experiences provided him with a first-hand understanding of the massive devastation and enormous reconstruction job that lay ahead after the war. He also spoke with many Europeans, both in government and among the general public, to try to gauge their feelings about the United States and about the job ahead after the war. Columns filed from Europe were heavily descriptive and sought to impart a sense of the reality of the war, either from the front lines he visited or from the rubble-strewn cities. The most striking result of his trip was his fixation on the problem of caring for the hungry and desperate civilians and refugees. Awed by the damage and the sight of thousands of dislocated people, he wrote frequently about the need to

²³ Marquis Childs, “Senator Vandenberg’s Service,” *Washington Post*, 12 January 1945, 6. Vandenberg’s “conversion” to internationalism is discussed in Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World*, 161-162. The senator, a former newspaperman, became the very embodiment of bipartisan foreign policy in the early Cold War. For Childs, “bipartisan” essentially meant Republican cooperation with internationalist Democrats and a disavowal of isolationism. Childs mentioned Vandenberg favorably dozens of times and the senator was a good source until his death in 1951.

²⁴ Reporters were not granted access to the Yalta meeting and Childs did his best to gather information about what might happen there from contacts in London.

provide aid. He knew no peace agreement could gain the lasting support of suffering people and therefore a strenuous effort to distribute food and medical aid had to go hand in hand with the high-level diplomacy taking place at the Big Three meeting. "It is necessary to think in terms of councils and assemblies- the scheme of the new league to preserve peace and stability," he wrote. "But it is also essential to think of the physical and economic reconstruction of the war-desolate continent. Hunger has defeated too many hopes in the past."²⁵ Another column pointed out the irony that Americans seemed, on one hand, to be ready to support a new world organization, but at the same time he recalled hearing so many gripes from American citizens about having to send food aid to Europe while rationing was still a home front reality. "Why not look at it another way?" he wondered. Because hunger breeds dissatisfaction and warfare, "a little food spared now might save the young men of another generation."²⁶

Childs continued to write about conditions in Europe after returning home, but he also turned to the important diplomatic efforts then underway to shape the postwar world. He said little about the Yalta Conference, which took place under a veil of secrecy, or on the Conference on International Organization held in San Francisco to establish the United Nations, but both of these signal events formed a backdrop for his writing and interpretive reporting through the spring and summer of 1945 as World War II came to an end.²⁷ Initially

²⁵ Marquis Childs, "Realities of War," *Washington Post*, 19 February 1945, 7.

²⁶ Marquis Childs, "Our Inconsistency," *Washington Post*, 31 March 1945, 4. Nearly half of the columns written on the European trip deal at least in part relief for victims of the war.

²⁷ The San Francisco conference was open to the press. In fact, thousands of reporters from around the world, including a young John F. Kennedy, attended public sessions and press conferences. According to Arthur Krock of the *New York Times*, reporters significantly outnumbered the actual delegates and the US delegation struggled to manage its message and keep the press out of private sessions. See Stephen C. Schlesinger, *Act of Creation: The Founding of the United Nations* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2003), 144-155. There is no record of why Childs did not attend the conference, but budget considerations often limited his travel. Having just made an extensive

he wanted the San Francisco conference to be postponed until after war's end, believing that diplomats could take more time to establish a better organization once the pressing issues of the war were resolved. As he noted, it was better to delay the conference to mid-summer when "the problems to be confronted will be much clearer and there will not be the same desperate urgency."²⁸ It was important for everyone, including the press, to be patient. The work being done there, he wrote, "may well be the difference between the destruction of our civilization and its preservation."²⁹

Although he lauded the goals motivating the San Francisco conference, the issue of treatment of the smaller nations of the world and the way the United Nations would address the status of colonies was a sticking point.³⁰ He took seriously the idea of self-determination at the heart of Wilsonian internationalism and the Atlantic Charter. One major result of the war fought in the name of freedom, in his mind, must be a plan to set these nations on the road to independence. He supported the establishment of UN trusteeships as a concrete step toward self-governance. After the organizing committee failed to produce a strongly-worded policy setting up eventual independence as a goal, Childs saw it as a triumph of the "old order" and a betrayal of the Atlantic Charter and President Roosevelt's vision for the postwar world.³¹ He recalled that in his last one-on-one interview with the late president, Roosevelt had spoken at

trip to Europe, he was probably unable to persuade United Feature Syndicate to cover his costs. The Childs Papers contain many letters in which Childs and UFS haggle over his expenses.

²⁸ Marquis Childs, "Postpone Security Conference," *Washington Post*, 2 April 1945, 7; "Representation at S.F." *Washington Post*, 3 April 1947, 6.

²⁹ Marquis Childs, "San Francisco Portent," *Washington Post*, 19 April 1945, 8.

³⁰ On Truman's mixed attitude about self-determination, see John Allphin Moore Jr. and Jerry Pubantz, *To Create a New World? American Presidents and the United Nations* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 51-53.

³¹ See Borgwardt, *A New Deal for the World*, 184-191.

length about his ideas for ending colonialism through such a program.³² Childs was frustrated by these developments, writing that talk of the weak trusteeship system coming out of the conference “means little or nothing” and that it signaled to him that “apparently, the big powers that have fought this war against fascism mean to try to put back the old colonial order.”³³

Childs remained solidly behind the new organization, believing that over time the mechanisms for UN administration would be refined in such a way that it would be an instrument for peace and justice, although he still wrote in June 1945 that “the big powers are giving lip service to a very limited form of world organization while all the time preparing the instruments of imperial expansion and rivalry as in the past.” He worried that giving veto power to the “big powers” violated the spirit of the organization.³⁴ But, as he wrote, “the worst obstacles have been overcome” and the framework for a vital force for good was slowly coming into place. In any case, despite the problems, the effort was necessary and he sought to defuse the controversy generated by a number of senators, including Wheeler, who undermined public support for the UN by spreading stories about atrocities committed by British troops during the war. Americans, he thought, would see through this “holier than thou” posturing and stand behind the UN. “We must work within the new organization, standing for what we as Americans believe to be right and just,” he concluded. “We must stand up against the forces of distrust and disunity...that is our only choice in the never ending search for a better world.”³⁵ As the ratification vote approached, he noted that public opinion was “overwhelmingly” in favor and that many senators who might have once opposed it were caught up in the tide of

³² Discussion of the topic takes up several pages of Childs’ typed summary of the interview. See “Report of a Conversation with President Roosevelt on Friday, April 7, 1944,” Childs Papers, box 4, folder 9.

³³ Marquis Childs, “A Better World Betrayed,” *Washington Post*, 9 May 1945, 7.

³⁴ Marquis Childs, “Disillusionment on San Francisco,” *Washington Post*, 4 June 1945, 6.

³⁵ Marquis Childs, “Anticipating the Storm,” *Washington Post*, 11 June 1945, 6.

opinion.³⁶ After ratification, he described the act as “a flag that we have raised high for all the world to see.” He knew the new league would face challenges and support might waver, but, despite the problem with self-determination, he saw it as an instrument for progress with the United States playing a dominant role in bringing peace, freedom, and prosperity to the rest of the world.³⁷

Navigating Postwar Europe

As the debate over the UN played out, Childs turned his attention once again to Europe, where the Allied armies finally defeated Nazi Germany and discussions about the occupation and reconstruction of a shattered continent took on a new urgency. During the rest of the year, he wrote many columns about the issues and conflicts that presaged the Cold War. His concerns mirror those that vexed American leaders attempting to craft a set of policies to achieve American interests in the uncertain environment, and included the division and occupation of Germany, the status of Poland and other liberated areas, relief for European civilians, and the deteriorating relationship with the Soviets. These columns also show that he was ambiguous, and sometimes contradictory, in his thinking about the possibility for peaceful relations with the Soviets. No clear and fully articulated understanding of the postwar relationship among the Allies or a blueprint for settling the many complex problems was apparent from his columns. Like everyone else, he was reacting to an ever-changing world situation and trying to make sense of it.

³⁶ Marquis Childs, “Isolationists’ Tactics,” *Washington Post*, 28 June 1945, 10. In his classic study, Gabriel Almond described postwar Americans have having a “benevolent skepticism” about the UN in 1945. At least two in three supported it, but few felt it would prevent future warfare. See Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy*, 2 ed. (New York: Praeger, 1960), 100-101.

³⁷ Marquis Childs, “Dangers Facing the New League,” *Washington Post*, 27 July 1945, 8.

In mid-April, Childs received an inside look at the debate over German occupation plans from an unnamed administration source. The resulting column, published in the *Washington Post* on the day Roosevelt died, revealed a serious split between factions of military and civilian leaders over how to deal with postwar Germany. According to Childs' information, the State Department had worked out a plan by which Germany would be disarmed, but the nation's manufacturing infrastructure would be rebuilt and allowed to quickly begin fulfilling the need for food and civilian goods. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, however, pushed an alternative plan under which Germany was to be divided into four sections administered by the military and German industry would not be redeveloped as a matter of priority. Because it seemed impossible for American aid to provide adequate food and other consumer goods, Childs worried that such a plan would exacerbate hunger and suffering and make peaceful settlement more difficult. "How a Germany chopped up into four parts can possibly be administered is a question which has a great many responsible people puzzled," he told readers.³⁸ The Soviets had done the bulk of the fighting to defeat the Nazis and at the time the column was written the Red Army was moving rapidly westward toward Berlin. Childs did not know the details of any agreements among the Allied powers to divide territory and he assumed that the Soviets would be willing to negotiate a reasonable settlement that didn't establish firm spheres of influence.

Childs believed much the same thing about Poland, which the Red Army had already taken from the Nazis. He understood that the Soviets desired to protect their western border by establishing friendly governments and disarming Germany. He expected Stalin to negotiate

³⁸ Marquis Childs, "Our German Policy," *Washington Post*, 12 April 1945, 6.

shrewdly to maximize the Soviet position, but he did not think that Europe would be divided into East and West zones. His writing on the impasse over Poland makes this clear. The Soviets set up a government of pro-Soviet Poles at Lublin, but the Americans and British wanted to establish a broader government that included pro-Western figures and Polish exiles living in England. Stalin had apparently agreed to a joint government at Yalta, but failed to take action that satisfied the other powers. As Childs pointed out, some in the press, apparently seeking to incite anti-Soviet fears, amplified the disagreement into a crisis. He accused them, and here he was referring to certain right-wing radio commentators and what he often called the “Hearst/McCormick press,” of “deliberately trying to sabotage any international cooperation, apparently with the objective of making World War III inevitable.”³⁹ Childs, on the other hand, had a more pragmatic outlook and saw Soviet actions as part of a bargaining strategy. He argued that logic would compel them to back down. “There is no objective reason why the Soviet Union should take this unyielding stand,” he wrote. “The Russians have everything to gain by making a few concessions and nothing in their present position as a world power to lose...common sense must sooner or later prevail.” Such concessions would improve the Soviets’ standing in the world and open the way for American loans and continued cooperation.⁴⁰

On the other hand, Childs wrote harshly about Soviet involvement in nations like Romania during the same period. In this instance he complained about their attempts to influence the postwar government, their treatment of political prisoners, and their use of

³⁹ Childs often criticized the right-wing press, particular Robert McCormick’s *Chicago Tribune*, in his column when he believed their editorials and commentary were militaristic and dangerous. The *Tribune*, for its part, called Childs names in its editorials. His run-in with radio commentator Fulton Lewis Jr. is discussed later in chapter 3.

⁴⁰ Marquis Childs, “Polish Quibble,” *Washington Post*, 15 May 1945, 4.

civilians in labor camps, all of which had parallels in Poland that he did not mention. In this column, he accused the Soviets of intending to make the Balkans “a sphere of influence in the narrowest meaning.” The old model of spheres of influence, he believed, represented a failed past that made international cooperation impossible. He further described their treatment of Romanian workers as “slave labor” “This is a moral issue of the first order,” he wrote. “To approve or even tolerate the indiscriminate use of slave labor is to go against the very base of our civilization, against the very qualities that make us civilized.”⁴¹ He was also upset that the Soviets refused to allow western diplomats or reporters into the occupied regions.

Yet he admitted that the Soviets had reason to be suspicious, especially of British motives, and that they had not complained when Britain set up a pro-Western government in Greece without any consultation or consideration of Soviet interests.⁴² Perhaps as a way of explaining his own inconsistency on these issues, he wrote another column that told readers how hard it was for Americans to understand the “long history of horrors and hatreds” that motivated politics in central Europe. Soviet relations with their neighbors had to be understood in this historical context and it was important for Americans to be patient. “What we can do, in my opinion, is to stand firm for what we believe to be right,” he concluded. “We can work as mediator and friend, trying not to become involved in the quarrel as a partisan.”⁴³

American and Soviet relations further deteriorated in late 1945 as it became increasingly apparent in Washington that Stalin intended to exert close control over conquered territory to protect Soviet borders, extract resources and materials, and influence events in Western Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East. High-level meetings in Potsdam, London,

⁴¹ Marquis Childs, “Soviets’ Balkan Wall,” *Washington Post*, 19 May 1945, 4.

⁴² Marquis Childs, “Big Three Meeting,” *Washington Post*, 22 May 1945, 6.

⁴³ Marquis Childs, “Tangled Tapestry of Hate,” *Washington Post*, 28 May 1945, 6.

and Moscow failed to produce broad agreement and tensions increased over a wide range of issues. Furthermore, Congressional Republicans seeking an expanded role in foreign policy pressed the administration to take a harder line and American public opinion began to turn against the wartime ally.⁴⁴ Childs' own position at the time was that American policy-makers had already taken a firm stand with Stalin and that it remained to be seen how he would respond.⁴⁵ The history of American-Soviet relations, he reminded readers, gave Stalin and his advisers much to worry about. The United States sent troops to fight the Bolsheviks a quarter century earlier and the wartime alliance was a marriage of convenience rather than an expression of national friendship. Americans, he warned, should not look to intervene again. Instead, he urged readers to take seriously the "chance to become a working partner in a world organization" and support a foreign policy based on being "a friend to all peace-loving nations."⁴⁶

This idealism, however, was matched by a recognition that America should be prepared to use force if necessary. The fledgling United Nations had, as yet, little authority or power and America had a vastly larger military force than any of the western allies. Peace, he understood, might come through international agreement, but only if the United States stood ready to back up words with power. Here he worked behind the scenes with General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the Army, to counter the rush to disarm. Marshall had been a good source

⁴⁴ See Arnold A. Offner, *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 112-120. Congressional Republicans are discussed in Woods and Jones, *Dawning of the Cold War*, 83-86. According to this interpretation, Republican leaders and certain military figures pressed a more intransigent approach to the Soviets and pushed foreign policy rightward at the same time that Truman was increasingly resolved to, in his words, "stop babying" them.

⁴⁵ Marquis Childs, "Rumors and Russia," *Washington Post*, 24 October 1945, 6. Childs admitted that certain American actions regarding territory in the Pacific did not live up to the spirit of postwar agreements, but he argued that policy-makers intended to rectify the situation in the future.

⁴⁶ Marquis Childs, "America's Position," *Washington Post*, 5 December 1945, 6.

during the war, often meeting for off-the-record conversations, and in late 1945 Childs tried to return the favor. Marshall authored a study of postwar defense needs at the request of President Truman and his final report called for maintaining a large military force, including both men and armaments, into the foreseeable future. Marshall also pushed a plan to unify the armed forces, making the command and decision-making structure more efficient. The nation, it argued, must be able to defend its interests anywhere around the globe.⁴⁷ Childs agreed wholeheartedly with this assessment, but wrote that the tide of opinion in the nation and in the halls of Congress was heavily in favor of rapid disarmament and reconversion.⁴⁸ Frustrated that his report was being overshadowed, the general approached Childs and asked if he would use the column to generate more attention for his views. Childs agreed, partly out of friendship and partly because he shared Marshall's concerns, and wrote several times in late 1945 about folly of dismantling the vast war machine at a time when rapid military action might become necessary at any time.⁴⁹ Although war and militarism were contrary to the American character, he warned that the Soviets intended to maintain the draft and field a massive army.⁵⁰ As he had been writing since before the war, it was a new era that required new thinking. This was a good example of Childs trying to get involved behind the scenes, using what influence he had to promote the ideas he shared with a prominent policy-maker for mutual advantage. A

⁴⁷ See Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Statesman, 1945-1959* (New York: Viking, 1987), 158-160, on the Marshall postwar defense report. Marshall's plan for unification and a competing plan originating from the Navy are discussed in Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31-39. Childs backed the unification idea in "Quarrel Over Unification," *Washington Post*, 19 November 1945, 8.

⁴⁸ Marquis Childs, "Our Military Might," *Washington Post*, 13 October 1945, 6.

⁴⁹ See especially Marquis Childs, "Junking Our Power," *Washington Post*, 6 November 1945, 6. Childs recounted his maneuvering with General Marshall in *Witness to Power*, 54.

⁵⁰ Marquis Childs, "Russian and American Armed Forces," *Washington Post*, 14 January 1946, 9.

constant stream of columns that promoted a strong military and chastised proposals to cut the defense budget marked his writing well into the next decade.

Many historians have observed that 1946 was a crucial turning point in the Cold War when tensions reached the boiling point and Americans adopted unprecedented peacetime military budgets and an expanded global role. Alongside this emerged a harsher, more overtly anti-Communist rhetoric that sought to frame the conflict in ideological terms to mobilize opinion at home and abroad.⁵¹ In certain ways, this was also a pivotal year for Childs, although he remained hesitant to adopt a hard-line approach. His columns reflected a continued ambivalence about American-Soviet relations, both expressing suspicion about Soviet motives and actions as well as hopefulness that solutions would emerge to prevent conflict. He could also be quite critical of American policy, as he was in a March column about the hypocrisy of supporting self-determination while at the same time occupying bases on islands in the Pacific and backing Britain in her effort to reestablish authority in areas it controlled before the war.⁵² Additionally, he chided Congressional Republicans for, in his mind, working to undermine the UN. They had voted to ratify it, but since then did nothing to support its mission. As he described it, they were “fair-weather friends” paying lip service to American commitments. Voting for the charter was easy; living up to its promise took “fortitude and real determination.” It was not acceptable to use Soviet obstructionism as an excuse to withdraw from the world.⁵³ The new world body faced enough challenges and needed “creative, courageous thinking that goes beyond the mere do’s and don’ts of things as they are.” He

⁵¹ This transitional period is the subject of a massive amount of scholarship. For a thorough overview, see Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1992), ch. 3.

⁵² Marquis Childs, “Our Postwar Imperialism,” *Washington Post*, 4 March 1946, 7.

⁵³ Marquis Childs, “Lip Service to U.N.” *Washington Post*, 22 March 1946, 8.

extended his criticism beyond just Republicans, asserting that the State Department was “drifting” from crisis to crisis with no firm plan of action.⁵⁴

The metaphor of drifting, in fact, became one of Childs’ favorite ways to talk about perceived shortcomings in American policy and remained a central element of his commentary through the Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson years.⁵⁵ Certainly Soviet actions presented challenges to the administration; he was writing in his column about tensions over the Iranian oil fields, Communist activism in France, Soviet meddling in Yugoslavia, and other points of contention. The headlines, he wrote, “read at times like the accounts of a big-time fight. Round by round, we hear first that the American champion is on top, then the Russian.”⁵⁶ What he wanted, however, was leadership that would set a steady and firm course of action and find a way, either through the UN or directly, to achieve unified American objectives. This is part of the reason he championed bipartisan foreign policy and disparaged elements of the press and radio that “breathe continuous hatred and threats of war.”⁵⁷ Soviet propagandists characterized American democracy as “hopelessly entangled in its own contradictions” and asserted that “we cannot resolve our own internal conflicts short of breakdown.” Some of this, he admitted, was a fair point because so many disparate voices in the military, the press, and in government sought to direct and influence policy. “Only by presenting an unyielding front in the face of Russia’s demands will a peace eventually be

⁵⁴ Marquis Childs, “Positive Action,” *Washington Post*, 2 April 1946, 6.

⁵⁵ Childs may have picked up this concept from Walter Lippmann’s influential 1914 book *Drift and Mastery*, which bemoaned man’s ability to take positive action in a world of uncertainty and the failure of the elite to provide leadership and direction in the face of change. See David A. Hollinger, *In the American Province: Studies in the History and Historiography of Ideas* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 45-55, on Lippmann’s argument. The book influenced many thinkers in the 1920s when Childs was a young man developing his own world view. See William E. Leuchtenburg’s introduction to the 1985 reprint edition of *Drift and Mastery*, published by the University of Wisconsin Press.

⁵⁶ Marquis Childs, “Explosive Issues,” *Washington Post*, 14 August 1946, 6.

⁵⁷ Marquis Childs, “The Russian Mind,” *Washington Post*, 3 April 1946, 8.

achieved,” he concluded.⁵⁸ By no means did he advocate stifling legitimate dissent or attempting to curtail free and frank discussion of the issue. Instead he wanted decisive leadership and resolute action after all the options had been judiciously considered.

A highly-publicized and embarrassing manifestation of this confusion resulted from a speech given by Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace at Madison Square Garden in mid-September. At the time of the speech, Secretary of State James Byrnes was in Europe attempting to assert Truman’s harder line in negotiations with the Soviets, announcing, for example, that American military forces would remain in occupied Germany as a bulwark against Soviet expansion. Wallace’s talk, on the other hand, reflected a more accommodating, internationalist vision directly in conflict with Truman’s policy, critical of British imperialism, and supportive of human rights and collective action on the atom.⁵⁹ The discrepancy between the two positions, emanating from the top level of the administration, caused an immediate controversy, which was only magnified when Truman told reporters that he had approved the speech and believed it to be “wholly in line” with the stance articulated by Byrnes.⁶⁰ Truman ultimately forced Wallace to resign. For Childs, this was a perfect example of the kind of drift and mismanagement that plagued policy-making and he wrote three columns about it. He chose not to criticize Wallace’s ideas, which were, in fact, not very far from his own at the time; Childs’ distancing himself from, and eventual condemnation of, Wallace began in 1947. Instead he took the president to task for allowing such a mistake to undermine Byrnes’

⁵⁸ Marquis Childs, “Vandenberg’s Importance in Paris,” *Washington Post*, 30 May 1946, 3.

⁵⁹ See Mark L. Kleinman, *A World of Hope, A World of Fear: Henry A. Wallace, Reinhold Niebuhr, and American Liberalism* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000), 210-214. Wallace’s Cold War critique is also analyzed by Ronald Radosh and Leonard P. Liggio in an essay in Thomas G. Paterson, ed., *Cold War Critics: Alternatives to American Foreign Policy in the Truman Years* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 76-113.

⁶⁰ Offner, *Another Such Victory*, 175-176.

credibility and that of the administration itself. Childs recounted the inside history of the controversy, likely based on a conversation with Truman's press secretary Charlie Ross, who had been a member of the *Post-Dispatch* Washington bureau and remained a friend.⁶¹ Worst, even though Truman resolved the controversy by reasserting his hard line, the overall effect undermined American prestige at a time when successful negotiation required it most.

Childs' perception that American foreign policy suffered from this kind of drift likely explains his decision to get involved with the Americans for Democratic Action in early 1947. In mid-December 1946, a press release signed by Arthur Schlesinger Jr. circulated among liberal groups calling for an organizational meeting to create what has been called "an active, fighting organization" and "to provide spirited leadership for liberals."⁶² The foreign policy paragraph of the statement called for drafting a policy to "meet the problem of Soviet expansionism without risking the extremes of appeasement or of indiscriminate resistance." Such a policy, if sufficiently backed by the American people, would dispel Russian suspicions while also strengthening America's political and military position.⁶³ Childs decided to attend the meeting at the Willard Hotel in Washington, DC, as did a number of the nation's best known liberal activists, politicians, union leaders, and writers, and he dedicated a column to promoting the value of just such a group. Although the column took pains to reiterate the group's explicit non-Communist position, at the meeting he pointed out that material released to the public should highlight the positive. He did not want headlines to read "Anti-Communist

⁶¹ Marquis Childs, "Truman's Blunder," *Washington Post*, 17 September 1946, 6.

⁶² Mary Sperling McAuliffe, *Crisis on the Left: Cold War Politics and American Liberals, 1947-1954* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), 6.

⁶³ Draft press release dated 13 December 1946, Americans For Democratic Action Records (ADA Records), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wis., UDA Administration File, box 30.

Group Meets.”⁶⁴ Attendees agreed to form a continuation committee and meet at a later date to craft a specific set of policy documents. Childs became the chair of the group tasked with writing the foreign policy statement over the next two months.

The formation of the group generated a lot of attention and comment in the press and Childs used another column, published about a month after the first meeting, to clarify some of its positions, especially the role of labor unions and the exclusion of Communists.⁶⁵ He still did not mention, however, that he was involved with the ADA and, in fact, one of the notable organizers. Radio commentator Elmer Davis, chair of the first general meeting, decided not to continue serving in an official capacity, writing to James Loeb, “I think anybody formally engaged in news analysis should hold himself free from organizational commitments. Not that they would affect my treatment of the news, but they might affect the faith of some of my customers in objectivity.”⁶⁶ If Childs had similar concerns about his own professional reputation, he did not express them. However, he opted not to take a formal position with ADA after the foreign policy document was approved. Later, during the red scare, membership in groups like ADA became suspect in some quarters, despite the explicit anti-Communism of its mission and many of the prominent members. Over his career, Childs was seen by many observers as a liberal of the ADA type and no doubt some readers assumed he was a member. At one point he wrote to the editor of a subscribing paper, the *Minneapolis Star-Journal*, to explicitly deny membership. “The only active part I ever took in the organization was to preside at a panel meeting on foreign policy at its inception,” he explained. “I did this because

⁶⁴ Minutes of UDA meeting, 4 January 1947, ADA Records, series 2, box 71. An overview of the formation of ADA, including Childs’ participation in this meeting, is found in Steven M. Gillon, *Politics and Vision: The ADA and American Liberalism, 1947-1985* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 16-29.

⁶⁵ Marquis Childs, “Liberal Organization,” *Washington Post*, 7 February 1947, 6.

⁶⁶ Elmer Davis to James Loeb Jr., 4 January 1947, ADA Records, series 2, box 71.

I felt it was of the first important that this non-Communist organization get off to the proper start.”⁶⁷

Regardless, the document that Childs helped to draft is important for several reasons. In terms of understanding Childs, it is revealing because it expressed the fundamental foreign policy orientation that he had been working toward since the end of the war nearly two years earlier. Heavy hitters like Franklin Roosevelt Jr. and Schlesinger sat on the committee, but the document bears the unmistakable stamp of Childs’ thinking.⁶⁸ Close readers of the Childs column would have noted many parallels and certainly his writing over the next few years often overlapped with the goals and agenda laid out in the document. Additionally, during the months between the first meeting and the release of the final statement American foreign policy crystallized around the idea of containment of the Soviet Union, a policy articulated most clearly at the time with the announcement of the Truman Doctrine. Truman’s aggressive use of American arms and financial support for Greece split the ADA panel, as it did liberals everywhere, but the final document endorsed the new plan and therefore serves as a landmark document for Cold War liberalism and the effort of the non-Communist left in America to support an aggressive policy of containment through military and other financial aid to nations anywhere around the world that sat on the front line of the global struggle.⁶⁹ The statement, and the ADA more generally, both mobilized liberals and established a dividing line between those on the left who supported the Cold War agenda and those who did not.

The document’s preamble made clear that its authors were prepared to take on the responsibilities of global power. “The United States today is the strongest nation in a world

⁶⁷ Marquis Childs to Gideon Seymour, 15 June 1950, Childs Papers, box 8, folder 3.

⁶⁸ Gillon, *Politics and Vision*, 26.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

shattered by war,” Childs and the others wrote. “It cannot withdraw from foreign affairs; rather it is being compelled to assume an increasingly active role abroad.”⁷⁰ American power was most legitimately exercised through the UN, which offered “unprecedented possibilities of international cooperation for economic well-being” and “safeguards against the unilateral use of power for imperialist ends.” They also made a point of saying that “the essential issue is not between capitalism and socialism, but between those who believe in the inalienable rights of the individual and those who do not.” “In our dealings with foreign nations,” they continued, “we must not insist that capitalism as we know it is a prerequisite of democracy, nor equate democratic socialism with dictatorship.” Finally, the nation had to face up to the costs of its new obligations. “We must...wage peace with the same determination and the same conscious use of our economic power as we once waged war,” they concluded. “The last war cost one hundred billion dollars a year; we should not begrudge 5% of that for peace.”

Individual sub-sections of the document articulated a progressive stance on some of the major hot spots in the new Cold War in Europe. On relations with the Soviets, ADA sought a middle ground that would relieve tensions and break out of “the vicious circle of mistrust” plaguing the world situation. This could be done by recognizing their “legitimate aspirations” while also maintaining a “resolute determination to sacrifice no vital interest.” German and Japan should be de-militarized, but allowed to rebuild their political cultures and economies under democratic systems. Soviet security interests should be recognized in Eastern Europe, but the UN should work to enforce the principles of the Atlantic Charter in the region. The committee added a section on Latin America that called for fair and equal trade and efforts to

⁷⁰ This and subsequent quotations in the next two paragraphs are taken from ADA Foreign Policy Statement, 30 March 1947, ADA Records, series 2, box 71.

modernize the politics and culture of Latin American nations, especially with a goal of assuring the right of labor to organize, an end to the feudal landholding system, and freedom of self-determination. The section on Greece, the length of which betrays the disagreement among the group, asserted that the United States must take action to create viable democracy there by providing immediate aid, while also expressing concern about the anti-democratic nature of the Greek government that would receive the aid. It outlined a long list of reforms that should be made in return for American assistance. As a gesture to those who disagreed with the policy, it also included a statement of regret that unilateral military aid had been necessary and called for careful oversight to ensure that the liberties of Greece citizens would not be curtailed as a result if the conflict expanded.

Section B of the document moved away from individual regions and nations to offer general principles about some of the major issues of the day. It stated the group's desire to see international control of atomic weapons, with inspections conducted by the UN, and a general, multilateral disarmament of conventional armies and weapons. It also expressed support for any nation trying to "throw off the bonds of colonialism" and pledged a renewed effort to strengthen the UN trusteeship program. It pointedly criticized the United States for failing to "extend the spirit of the UN Charter" to occupied territories in the Pacific. It called for a program of significant relief aid for war-torn nations, loans from the new World Bank to rebuild national economies to provide jobs and material goods for their citizens, reduction of trade barriers, and efforts to eliminate hunger through planned agriculture. Finally, it expressed the goal of creating a "world government of limited powers adequate to prevent war" and the continued growth and development of UN programs that were working toward the

objectives outlined in the document. In all, the ADA foreign policy statement was a bold assertion of liberal principles that Childs and many others had been working toward for several years, if not decades.

Certainly there were many similar documents and arguments circulating in the political culture, emanating from liberals and others across the political spectrum. Academics, religious leaders, journalists, and many others used radio, books, popular magazines, and opinion journals to put forward a wide range of ideas about how to manage the crises of the day. However, because Childs was so closely involved with drafting the ADA statement and because it overlaps so fully with the ideas and themes of his writing before and after March 1947, it is a central document for understanding his attitudes about the Cold War. It is important, too, because it captures a moment when his thinking hardened and he became part of the emerging Cold War consensus. His support for the Truman Doctrine and a strong national defense sit easily alongside his anti-colonialism and his support for extensive relief aid and reconstruction loans of the type that were soon established under the Marshall Plan. His harder line, in fact, represents not so much a desire to see America as the dominant global power or a newly-found militarism as an acceptance that the only path to peace was through strong defense and containment of Soviet Communism. America's strength and the sacrifice and risk that wielding it entailed, ideally channeled eventually through the UN, was the instrument for achieving the objectives at the heart of the Atlantic Charter or other broader expressions of his long standing liberal internationalism. Where it might appear contradictory, or at least paradoxical, for Childs to turn to a more assertive foreign policy to reach a peaceful co-

existence, he didn't see it in those terms.⁷¹ Later, as the Cold War dragged on into the 1950s and became more of a chess match, he became less idealistic and more pragmatic, although the roots of this pragmatism can be seen in his initial assessment of Stalin as a shrewd bargainer who would negotiate based on rational self-interest, perceived influence, and risk rather than ideology.

Reporting from Greece: Front Line of the Truman Doctrine

Greece was a troublesome place to implement containment and Childs' analysis of the situation reflects both a broad encouragement of the general policy and a realistic understanding of the complexities of the situation on the ground.⁷² Scholars have widely interpreted the Truman Policy as a major turning point in the Cold War. With the British unable to maintain their position in Greece, Truman announced a program of economic and military aid to the weak and generally right-wing government that was fighting a guerilla war against Communists in the rural regions of the country. The Greeks, however, were plagued by a corrupt and inefficient government and a political culture that hardly fit the model of American-style democracy. More broadly, Truman expressed American determination to use its strength and influence in any region where a friendly or neutral government was fighting a Communist insurgency. The president put America's military and economic might behind anyone willing to join the battle against Communism. As the consensus model of journalism

⁷¹ Childs was by no means alone in this line of thought. Americans had a long tradition of turning to militarism to obtain what were promoted as liberal aims. On "liberal war," see John M. Owen, *Liberal Peace, Liberal War: American Politics and International Security* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

⁷² For example, see Elizabeth Edwards Spalding, *The First Cold Warrior: Harry Truman, Containment, and Liberal Internationalism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), ch. 3, and Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power*, 142-151.

suggests, many in the press supported Truman fully and reported on the crisis in a way calculated to maintain public backing for the plan.⁷³

Childs' initial response to Truman's message was more mixed. Much of what Truman said fit the pattern of Childs' call for bold international action. He accepted the premise that aid was necessary to prevent a Communist takeover in Greece, writing "word that comes back from able advisers is that if American help is not soon forthcoming, anarchy in Greece will be followed by a Communist dictatorship that will put an end to all hopes for democracy and thereby give Soviet Russia a springboard for the Middle East."⁷⁴ At the same time, however, he warned that American capacity for extending aid was not unlimited and demanded a careful accounting of the nation's obligations abroad. If the British had managed their own finances and obligations more carefully, he suggested, they would not have been forced to accept the "dire limits" on their ability to maintain global prominence. His next column wondered why the president had not acted to implement his plans through the agency of the UN. The world body had in place the tools to provide the kind of non-military assistance he believed were important in the effort. He understood that some military aid was necessary to arm and train the government army, but he wrote that focusing primarily on a military solution while ignoring the needed economic and social reconstruction of Greece could only "clamp a lid temporarily on the yeasty mess" that would eventually explode in our faces. If nothing else,

⁷³ On elite press coverage of the Greek crisis, see Daniel Chomsky, "Advance Agent of the Truman Doctrine: The United States, the *New York Times*, and the Greek Civil War," *Political Communication* 17 (October-December 2000): 415-432. As the article's title makes clear, Chomsky views the *Times* as little less than a publicity arm of the Truman administration in covering this story. A similar argument can be found in Shawn Parry-Giles, "Camouflaged Propaganda: The Truman and Eisenhower Administrations' Covert Manipulation of News," *Western Journal of Communication* 60: 2 (Spring 1986): 152-155.

⁷⁴ Marquis Childs, "Greece and the Larger Picture," *Washington Post*, 13 March 1947, 7.

Truman should have informed the UN of the plan and asked for technical guidance and assistance with the distribution and monitoring of aid.⁷⁵

Childs similarly took pains to outline the real nature of the challenge of rebuilding the Greek nation, defeating the insurgency, and establishing a real democracy there. The problem required more than sending a few ships full of dried milk, fruit juice, and warm clothes. “It is,” he asserted, “perhaps the most complicated political tangle of our time.” Significant political reforms were necessary to remove Nazi collaborators and far right military leaders who directed over half the nation’s budget to the armed forces. Rampant corruption undermined the civilian economy and destroyed the average citizen’s faith in the government.⁷⁶ Many of these problems resulted from long-term British mismanagement, especially in allowing a culture of political corruption and right-wing, non-democratic domination of government. Repairing infrastructure damage from the war alone would cost 1.4 billion dollars. Because the roads were so bad, it was cheaper to send a ton of cotton from India to Athens by ship than to transport it sixty miles from Greek farms. The Americans chosen to administer the aid program, and the public at large, “are going to need the wisdom of Solomon and the patience of Job” in order to make progress there.⁷⁷

Despite this gloomy outlook on the practical challenges of the program, Childs remained steadfastly behind the principle it embodied. “There is still a chance to bring about peaceable change in Greece,” he wrote. He then outlined a future course of events, akin to an early domino theory, if the US failed to act decisively. Without American aid, the current

⁷⁵ Marquis Childs, “United Nations Help for Greece,” *Washington Post*, 17 March 1947, 7; “Matter of Record,” *Washington Post*, 28 March 1947, 8.

⁷⁶ Marquis Childs, “Headache Ahead in Greece,” *Washington Post*, 19 March 1947, 9.

⁷⁷ Marquis Childs, “Thorns in the Path in Greece,” *Washington Post*, 10 April 1947, 7.

government would fall and be replaced with a military dictatorship. Then Communist aid and fighters would flood into the North from Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, leading to a full scale civil war like the one in Spain a decade before. Additional support would be “funneled in by Moscow.” By that time, no amount of Western aid could turn the tide and the result would be a “Communist dictatorship in smashed and ruined Greece.” The stakes were high and Childs put the full weight of his influence behind the American effort. “Those who really believe in democracy should work to try and make sure it comes before it is too late,” he urged. “There are those who say that we must wait for the wave of the future. But that is a counsel of despair.”⁷⁸ What was necessary was quick action from Congress to provide funds and generate wide-spread public support. “Failure,” he wrote, “would have the most far-reaching political significance.” He asked readers to see the United States through foreign eyes and realize the world looked to the United States to use its economic, technical, and industrial power to make the world a better place.⁷⁹

His writing was animated by an increasingly anti-Soviet tone and there is no question his understanding of the Greek situation was motivated both by a desire to aid the Greek people and to make a firm stand against Communism in the region. He had not yet adopted the term “containment,” which emerged as a widely used shorthand for the entire American Cold War strategy, but his rationale for defending Truman’s policy of assistance to any nation fighting internal or external threats from Communism was based on the premise.⁸⁰ In February 1947 he believed that American-Soviet relations could be moderated by “honest and straightforward

⁷⁸ Marquis Childs, “Wave of the Future?” *Washington Post*, 22 March 1947, 7.

⁷⁹ Marquis Childs, “A Captain for the Team,” *Washington Post*, 7 May 1947, 11.

⁸⁰ The term “containment” entered into broad use after the publication of George Kennan’s essay in the July 1947 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. Childs, however, didn’t use it until later in the decade.

agreements” that would alleviate suspicions and “clear the way” for a workable peace.⁸¹ No dramatic event sparked an immediate shift in his rhetoric, but after Truman’s announcement he began to blame the Soviets for taking steps to elevate the conflict and there was a subtle change in his writing. An early April column discussed a new book, *A Room on the Route* by Australian journalist Godfrey Blunden, that outlined the suffering of the average Russian citizen under the Soviet dictatorship.⁸² Another explained that the “masters of the Kremlin” were waging a war of opinion to isolate the United States and turn Western Europe against American interests. This was done in part through propaganda campaigns that characterized American programs as imperialism. The Soviets, he argued, believed American assistance in Greece would fail to halt the leftist insurgency and would end in embarrassing failure. They had been muted in response to the Truman Doctrine not because they were intimidated by a bold act, as some suggested, but because they held the advantage in the long term. “It now becomes our duty,” he concluded, “to see that the money spent in Greece is used to strengthen progress and democracy.”⁸³ Another column in May contended that Soviet leaders had revived Lenin’s April Thesis, which he described as a plan to avoid all pretense of cooperation and go underground to engage in infiltration and sabotage of the legitimate political system. The situation in France was rapidly becoming acute. “The real battleground of the moment is Western Europe,” and he worried that the newly aggressive Soviets held the edge there.⁸⁴ By August he flatly stated that the Soviets “mean to continue to try to destroy the government and

⁸¹ Marquis Childs, “Negotiating with Russia,” *Washington Post*, 6 February 1947, 11.

⁸² Marquis Childs, “Appraising Russia,” *Washington Post*, 7 April 1947, 6.

⁸³ Marquis Childs, “Soviet Strategy,” *Washington Post*, 25 April 1947, 8.

⁸⁴ Marquis Childs, “Lenin’s April Thesis,” *Washington Post*, 16 May 1947, 8.

bring Greece within the Iron Curtain.”⁸⁵ What he characterized as Soviet intransigence and use of the veto even undermined his enthusiasm for the United Nations. Perhaps it was time to force an end to the Security Council veto policy or, if they would not go along, expel the Soviets entirely.⁸⁶

Childs’ acceptance of the basic premises behind the containment policy marks a break with Lippmann, who at this time emerged as a major critic of the undefined and unrealistic containment policy articulated by the George Kennan article and evident in Truman’s speech on his aid policy. As Kennan’s containment thesis was entering into the thought of American policy makers, Lippmann published a series of newspaper columns, later collected as a small book, that refuted it on every point.⁸⁷ In particular, Lippmann argued that a policy of containment was impossible because it required constant counter-pressure along the whole of Russia’s vast border and was reliant on the co-operation, purchased with American foreign aid dollars, from nations that were not natural allies. Further, it was a negative and reactive policy, designed only to respond to Soviet actions. Lippmann urged Americans to be realistic about which areas were truly vital to the national interest and build a dynamic foreign policy that would defend and maximize them. Childs, however, didn’t make the same kind of cogent analysis of the potential drawbacks of containment. He often pointed out weaknesses in the application of the program in Greece and elsewhere, and sometimes worried about the costs, but the overall effect of his writing was to validate and argue for the idea of containing Soviet aggression.

⁸⁵ Marquis Childs, “Seeds of War,” *Washington Post*, 5 August 1947, 12.

⁸⁶ Marquis Childs, “Showdown with Russia,” *Washington Post*, 12 August 1947, 8.

⁸⁷ Walter Lippmann, *The Cold War: A Study in U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947).

Another aspect of Childs' writing at this time was a more dismissive, and even hostile, treatment of Henry Wallace, another major critic of containment. Since leaving government, Wallace had drifted toward a policy of peaceful co-existence with the Soviets and in April 1947 he undertook a speaking tour of England during which he offered a pointed critique of the Truman Doctrine. Wallace argued that Truman was whipping up a false crisis to scare Americans into supporting increased defense spending and a culture of intolerance for progressive ideas. He favored humanitarian aid and technical assistance, but pointed out that much of the aid to Greece took the form of military aid directed into the hands of anti-democratic rightists.⁸⁸ His position won support from both far left progressives and isolationist opponents of the Truman Doctrine, and his speeches in Europe drew large crowds and favorable comment among those critical of American intervention. Hoping to promote unity behind Truman's efforts, Childs described the Wallace tour as "a curious and somewhat dangerous experiment in international relations" and, engaging in a rare instance of red-baiting, he pointed out that "a tiny minority of American Communists and fellow travelers find Wallace an extremely useful front." "The Truman policy is an effort toward peace and stability," he continued. "To talk of it as though it were meant to be a gesture of force against Russia is a deep disservice."⁸⁹ Subsequent columns reinforced the idea that Wallace harmed American interests abroad through his speeches.

Childs sought to distance Wallace from the more acceptable ADA-style liberalism, arguing that Wallace was by no means the only one with the credentials to carry the banner of

⁸⁸ On Wallace, see Kleinman, *A World of Hope, a World a Fear*, 237-241

⁸⁹ Marquis Childs, "The Wallace Doctrine," *Washington Post*, 9 April 1947, 11.

Roosevelt and the New Deal into the postwar world.⁹⁰ The nation needed men and women of liberal thought “who believe that our economic power can be used to give new life and new opportunity to the forces of democracy” to show that American aid was “a constructive example to depressed people everywhere.” Wallace undermined this necessary task that already faced too many challenges. Childs also took up cause with liberal writers like Dwight Macdonald who dismissed Wallace as naive and overly idealistic.⁹¹ Wallace positioned himself as a voice for peace, but, to Childs, the choice was not “between Wallace’s brand of idealism and war. The alternative is a positive, far-seeing policy that will make use of America’s great economic and technological strength to build a stable world.”⁹² Wallace’s vision was an unacceptable “leftist isolation” that weakened America’s position and played into the hands of the Soviets.⁹³

In the fall of 1947, Childs went to Europe to see for himself what was taking place and he made Greece the centerpiece of his trip. The columnist often had to haggle with United Feature Syndicate over expenses, but in this case he was able to convince Larry Rutman, his supervisor, that the trip was necessary. He told Rutman that he needed to see the situation on the ground firsthand in order to continue writing perceptive columns. He traveled to Greece, Italy, Warsaw, Paris, and London to meet with American diplomats and military men to write about the progress of America’s involvement there.⁹⁴ As the trip neared, he wrote to one subscribing editor that his goal was “to appraise what Americans are doing in the way of occupation, relief, diplomacy, and so on, with discussion of European political and economic

⁹⁰ On the split between liberal factions over foreign policy, see McAuliffe, *Crisis on the Left*, 23-27.

⁹¹ Marquis Childs, “Wallace the International Martyr,” *Washington Post*, 16 April 1947, 9.

⁹² Marquis Childs, “War and Peace,” *Washington Post*, 12 June 1947, 13.

⁹³ Marquis Childs, “Leftist Isolationism,” *Washington Post*, 8 July 1947, 10.

⁹⁴ Childs to Laurence Rutman, 19 May 1947, Childs Papers, box 7, folder 3.

affairs a secondary consideration.”⁹⁵ Ten columns written over a two week stretch in Greece offered a grim assessment of the progress to date at “the razor’s edge where East meets West.”⁹⁶ He painted a positive image of Dwight Griswold, the former governor of Nebraska appointed to lead the aid mission, but he warned that able leadership would not be enough considering the lack of funds and the severity of the problems on the ground. Other columns detailed structural problems like a dysfunctional party system, a shattered infrastructure, and a corrupt army that limited Griswold’s ability to effect change. Congress, too, was to blame for cutting funds for the distribution of pro-American information to the Greek public, which Childs described as “deeply democratic” in nature.⁹⁷ After his two week visit, he summed up by offering three choices for the future: quit entirely, commit to a decade-long, gradual effort to rebuild and reform the entire Greek system, or fund another year for a temporary, stop-gap measure and hope for the best. Because he still believed that the Soviets were playing a waiting game, using propaganda as the primary weapon, it was clear that he believed the 10-year plan was the only real option, despite the massive cost and increased level of commitment. “If, after what we have done, these institutions should be allowed to die, it would be a tragedy in more ways than one,” he concluded. “They symbolize the vast reservoir of American good will in which the world has come to believe...and every possible effort, voluntary and public, must be made in order to save a great and tragic people from decimation and destruction and the slow death of dictatorship.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Childs to John F. James, 28 July 1947, Childs Papers, box 7, folder 3.

⁹⁶ Marquis Childs, “American Progress in Greece,” *Washington Post*, 17 September 1947, 13.

⁹⁷ Marquis Childs, “Reluctant Leadership,” *Washington Post*, 23 September 1947, 12.

⁹⁸ Marquis Childs, “Three Choices in Greece,” *Washington Post*, 2 October 1947, 11.

Promoting a Unified Europe

As the uneasy situation played out in the Near East, two more elements of American foreign policy began to take shape. American planners had long sought a means to provide significant reconstruction aid, integrate the markets and economies of Europe into a rational system, orient a rehabilitated Germany toward the West, and establish a mutual defense organization as a balance against the massive Soviet army. Although analysts had determined that the Soviets were unlikely to risk military conflict, these plans were still undertaken with great care to avoid any provocation that might lead to war.⁹⁹ Childs was an immediate supporter of the elements of these proposals, which eventually became the Marshall Plan and the Atlantic Pact. From late 1947 through the end of the decade, he used many columns to garner support, appropriations, popular backing, and skillful implementation of these complex efforts. Aspects of these plans align with his earlier writing about the postwar world and his idealism about using American power to remake the world along liberal lines. In other ways, his support indicates a shift in opinion, a reconciliation of his early hopefulness with a new, hardheaded acceptance of a world divided into spheres of influence with constant tension and the threat of war in the air. His writing in the column always had tended to be gloomy, alarmist, and occasionally hyperbolic, especially with regard to the threat of global war. Now, even though he approved of significant measures being taken in foreign policy, he continued to be pessimistic. He admitted this himself in another letter to John James. “It is very hard to be

⁹⁹ Kennan’s analysis of Soviet strategy and planning, which became the dominant thinking among American policymakers by 1947, was based on the conclusion that the Soviets did not want to fight a war with the United States and would only resort to conflict if pushed too far. The Americans, then, thought in terms of how aggressive they could be in integrating the European economies, opening markets, and establishing a mutual defense network without provoking the Soviets beyond their limits. See Michael J. Hogan, *The Marshall Plan: America, Britain, and the Reconstruction of Western Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 30-45.

cheerful or even seem to offer solutions,” he wrote.¹⁰⁰ The Cold War made the world a very troubled and dangerous place.

Childs’ initial response to the administration’s announcement of the European Recovery Program offset his pessimism to some degree, but he continued to worry that the ideas and programs would never be funded or implemented correctly.¹⁰¹ As discussed above, he had worked in the past with George Marshall, now Secretary of State, and when the secretary made a speech at Harvard outlining the aid plan Childs was on board immediately. He wrote that the day would be “triple-starred in the history books” and praised Marshall for explaining how exports and foreign trade were central both to America’s continued economic growth and its foreign policy goals in Europe. He had long been urging more direct action on relief. Unfortunately, he continued, the proposal was contentious and Congressional Republicans had already started making political statements against it.¹⁰² This provided him another opportunity to laud Senator Arthur Vandenberg’s bipartisan spirit and urge other Republicans like Robert A. Taft to put their weight behind the necessary program and move it through Congress quickly.¹⁰³ It was particularly important to speed recovery because the United Nations’ recovery program was set to end and the continent was still unable to provide basic needs for

¹⁰⁰ Childs to John F. James, 5 August 1947, Childs Papers, box 7, folder 3. The column published this same day argued that in the State Department “there has never been the same urgency to try to deflect the storm, if possible, and, failing that, to batten down what can be saved. It would be hard to say which crisis has top priority.” Childs, “Seeds of War,” 12.

¹⁰¹ This thinking is another example of Lippmann’s possible influence. Patrick Porter has identified the so-called “Lippmann Gap,” the premise evident in Lippmann’s writing on world affairs that because “efficient strategy and the internal order of a state were symbiotic,” even a perfectly designed foreign policy must be at least partly unsuccessful in a democracy because of domestic political fragmentation. See Patrick Porter, “Beyond the American Century: Walter Lippmann and the American Grand Strategy, 1943-1950,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22:4 (2011): 559. A similar outlook motivated Childs’ desire for bipartisanship and willingness to criticize those on the left or the right who deviated too far from the emerging consensus.

¹⁰² Marquis Childs, “Politics and World Responsibility,” *Washington Post*, 9 June 1947, 9.

¹⁰³ Marquis Childs, “Timing of European Reconstruction,” *Washington Post*, 16 June 1947, 9.

many citizens.¹⁰⁴ Although his trip was largely designed to assess the situation in Greece, Childs devoted a number of the European columns to demonstrating how Marshall Plan assistance would rebuild industry and win allies.¹⁰⁵ One aspect of his support for the plan was to promote American trade abroad, but his primary concern was to rebuild European industry to provide food, consumer goods, and jobs. He shared the common belief that hungry and unemployed people made easy targets for Communist propaganda and that peace and stability hinged on providing at least a minimum standard of living.

If anything, Childs' sense of looming danger and crisis intensified early in the new year; his attitude about the Soviets again became more belligerent and his writing took on a new urgency, and sometimes an element of overheated hyperbole. As he put it, Americans had already waited too long and there was no more room for indecision.¹⁰⁶ Congress began to debate the ERP in early 1948 and Childs paid close attention to the deliberations in his column, as usual lauding lawmakers who spoke in favor and chastising those opposed.¹⁰⁷ Vandenberg and Taft, as the dominant voices in the Senate debate, attracted the most attention, but he also followed statements by Marshall and others in the administration.¹⁰⁸ Childs' dedication to bipartisanship reached a high point during these debates to the degree that he toyed occasionally with the idea of forming a super committee of Republicans and Democrats to guide policy in a nonpartisan way outside of the electoral system. He assumed, as did nearly

¹⁰⁴ Marquis Childs, "After UNRRA," *Washington Post*, 1 July 1947, 12.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, Marquis Childs, "German Industry," *Washington Post*, 29 August 1947, 18; "Polish Iron Curtain," *Washington Post*, 11 September 1947, 12; "France and the Marshall Plan," *Washington Post*, 8 October 1947, 15.

¹⁰⁶ Marquis Childs, "Year of Decision," *Washington Post*, 6 January 1948, 8.

¹⁰⁷ Congressional debate over appropriations in this period is discussed in Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 19-25.

¹⁰⁸ For examples, see Marquis Childs, "Vandenberg's Cooperation," *Washington Post*, 10 January 1948, 9; "ERP: Details vs. Goal," *Washington Post*, 11 February 1948, 15; "Republican Sniping at ERP," *Washington Post*, 10 March 1948, 11.

everyone else, that Truman would be replaced in November by a Republican. In the meantime, the nation would drift aimlessly before making a sudden change in course. “Nine months is a long time,” he warned. “With peace or war on a knife-edge balance, it can mean an eternity.”¹⁰⁹ Several times he suggested half seriously that the American system of government be remade more like a parliamentary system where new elections could be called as needed rather than conducted on a fixed timetable.¹¹⁰ More often, however, he kept trying to educate the public on the need for, and the long-term benefits of, the ERP. Michael Wala has shown that State Department officials like Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs William Benton, working with an ad hoc group of liberal businessmen and labor leaders called the Committee for the Marshall Plan to Aid European Recovery, engaged in an expensive public relations campaign to win over the press and public.¹¹¹ Although Childs was friendly with both Benton and Marshall, there is no evidence to suggest that he was part of this information program. His writing, however, certainly worked along the same rationale and toward the same objectives.

This is not to say that Childs was uncritical of the administration at the time. Some of the lack of leadership resulted from Congressional haggling over scope and funding for important projects, but in other cases he put the charge directly on Truman or others at the highest level. One harsh column cataloged a litany of mistakes made by the Americans, especially in Greece and the Far East.¹¹² He wanted more clarity in public comments about the precise nature and extent and limits of American objectives. He still believed the Soviets

¹⁰⁹ Marquis Childs, “Frozen Attitudes on Foreign Relations,” *Washington Post*, 14 April 1948, 15.

¹¹⁰ Marquis Childs, “The Shooting War Comes Closer,” *Washington Post*, 4 March 1948, 11.

¹¹¹ Michael Wala, “Selling the Marshall Plan at Home: The Committee for the Marshall Plan to Aid European Recovery,” *Diplomatic History* 10 (Summer 1986): 247-265. Gabriel Almond’s study of public opinion in this period indicates that a broad consensus of business, labor, agricultural, women’s, and religious groups supported the ERP. See Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy*, ch. 8.

¹¹² Marquis Childs, “Pattern of Error,” *Washington Post*, 11 March 1948, 11.

wanted to avoid war, but he felt that confusion and conflicting statements coming from American diplomats and others could be exploited and turned into gaps where the Soviets could advance without fear. “An unequivocal statement” had to be made to show the world where the outer limit of American interests was situated. Any Soviet advance beyond that point would mean war, but at the same time clarity on the point would lessen the chance that the two sides would bungle into a war neither wanted.¹¹³ The problem was remedied in part by President Truman’s tough address to a joint session of Congress on March 17, Childs’ birthday. The president reaffirmed the nation’s commitment to aggressive containment of Soviet advances through continued aid and a larger armed forces created by a new draft and a program of universal military training.¹¹⁴ As Childs noted, the speech was a forceful assertion of America’s determination to halt the spread of Communism that represented the will of “the great majority of the American people.” It would send a clear message to “the tough-minded men who make up the Politburo in the Kremlin” that America would not allow Soviet domination of Western Europe “by direct military means or by Trojan Horse infiltration.” Childs balked at the immediate passage of universal military training, believing that passage of selective service legislation and the preparation for rapid implementation of a draft in an emergency would be adequate for the time being. He also urged funding for the expansion of the Air Force.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Childs, “The Shooting War Comes Closer,” 11.

¹¹⁴ Harry S. Truman, “Special Message to the Congress on the Threat to Freedom in Europe,” 17 March 1948. Available through Public Papers of the President, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php>. This speech marked the onset of what some scholars have called a “war scare” initiated by the administration. See Hogan, *Cross of Iron*, 146-148 on reaction to the speech.

¹¹⁵ Marquis Childs, “Truman Message,” *Washington Post*, 19 March 1948, 22.

The president's speech came in the midst of several crises that added to Childs' feeling of urgency and concern. He wrote about dangerous inroads made by Italian and French Communists that upset the pro-American orientation of those nations and threatened to undermine involvement in the ERP once implementation began.¹¹⁶ In late February, Czechoslovakian Communists took a majority of the governing body and then proceeded to violently seize control of the country and institute a dictatorship. Most significant was the Soviet blockade of Berlin, which began in late March when access roads and rail lines to the isolated city began to be closed. Over the ensuing weeks, the Soviets instituted a full blockade and tensions rose to dangerous levels. Although the western powers eventually operated a successful airlift to supply the population of their occupied zones in Berlin, the incident could easily have sparked a direct conflict.¹¹⁷ Childs had a variety of reactions to the situation. Initially he framed it as a dangerous crisis situated in a time of already escalating tension, a test of American resolve. He used a number of columns to raise the specter of Soviet threats to the West and paint a harsh picture of the malevolent intent of those in the Kremlin. However, he also urged calm. "This is a real threat to the American position," he stated. "But a parallel threat is the danger of war hysteria in the United States which would express itself not in a firm resolve to be strong, but in senseless jitters."¹¹⁸

At the same time, he was willing to raise questions about the conduct of the occupation. One problem was the rehabilitation of former Nazis and the powerful industrialists who funded

¹¹⁶ Marquis Childs, "Trouble for France," *Washington Post*, 20 January 1948, 10; "Italian Communists," *Washington Post*, 16 March 1948, 10.

¹¹⁷ The Berlin crisis has been the subject of many studies. A thorough new account can be found in Daniel F. Harrington, *Berlin on the Brink: The Blockade, the Airlift, and the Early Cold War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012).

¹¹⁸ Marquis Childs, "Behind the Jitters," *Washington Post*, 6 April 1948, 12.

and armed them before the war. Although he hoped for a revitalized Germany, he did not see how the allies could justify bringing these men back to positions of prominence. “To restore these men and call it free enterprise is a monstrous perversion of the truth,” he wrote.¹¹⁹ A later column asked why German leftists and socialists, who were natural foes of the Communists and friends of democracy, were not asked to join the effort to rebuild German political culture. They had been fighting Communist influence in Germany since the 1930s and could be useful allies.¹²⁰ On another occasion, he reminded readers of something the French had said during the crisis. Because the western powers were moving toward establishing a separate unified government in western Germany, perhaps the Soviets had a rationale for excluding them from Berlin, a city clearly inside the Soviet zone.¹²¹ He remained uncertain as well about the ultimate goal of the Soviet leaders. Was their willingness to negotiate over Berlin a “peace offensive” to be taken seriously or was it a ploy to lull the West into a false sense of security?¹²²

By late summer, Childs had sense that the high point of crisis had passed and he began to write seriously again about the power of negotiations to avoid the worst disasters. Western and Soviet diplomats opened discussions about resolving the Berlin impasse and Childs was able to point to a lesson he had drawn earlier: negotiation was always best, but it only worked if the United States could back it with force. By showing the Soviets that he would not back down, and by launching the innovative and bold Berlin airlift, Truman had blocked a Soviet incursion. By standing up to those who counseled war, he preserved the peace and won a moral

¹¹⁹ Marquis Childs, “U.S. Policy in Germany,” *Washington Post*, 1 May 1948, 9.

¹²⁰ Marquis Childs, “German Reactions in Berlin,” *Washington Post*, 21 July 1948, 13.

¹²¹ Marquis Childs, “Molotov’s Trump,” *Washington Post*, 14 May 1948, 22.

¹²² Marquis Childs, “Peace Policy,” *Washington Post*, 1 June 1948, 12.

victory for the West.¹²³ The United States, Britain, and France had also learned to set aside their differences and present a united front, which he saw as another valuable lesson to build on for the future. In the end, however, averting the crisis was a victory for everyone on all sides and a reminder that patience was the highest virtue. “The East-West contest might conceivably go on for years with recurring periods when it is acute,” he noted. “But the profound hope...is that a little more holding back and a little less arbitrariness may prevent a showdown.”¹²⁴

Truman’s Second Chance

Berlin wasn’t the only drama in the summer and fall of 1948. Childs spent a great deal of time covering the upcoming presidential election and speculating about the shift American foreign policy might take under a Republican administration. One manifestation of this was the appearance of a number of columns about John Foster Dulles, the corporate lawyer whom Childs expected would be appointed the next Secretary of State. Although he had no intention of switching party allegiance, Childs felt that Dulles could be a very good leader in the Cold War.¹²⁵ Dulles represented the internationalist wing of the Republican Party and had been a member of the American delegation to the UN. Like Vandenberg, he was a prime example of the bipartisan foreign policy that Childs so frequently praised. One column, published late in the campaign, defended Dulles from critics on both the left and the right. Those on the left were suspicious of his corporate ties and depicted him as a sinister figure from the world of global cartels and monopoly capitalism. Critics on the right looked to his leadership of Federal Council of Churches and saw a soft-headed liberal dedicated to pacifism and other gentle

¹²³ Marquis Childs, “Berlin Balance,” *Washington Post*, 27 July 1948, 10; “Lighter Skies,” *Washington Post*, 30 July 1948, 20; “The Coming Climax,” *Washington Post*, 15 September 1948, 8.

¹²⁴ Marquis Childs, “Patience and Caution,” *Washington Post*, 18 September 1948, 8.

¹²⁵ Childs, “Frozen Attitudes on Foreign Affairs,” 15.

pursuits. Childs recognized that both complaints were caricatures and he tried to offer support to the man who would be taking on one of the most challenging and important jobs in government.¹²⁶

Childs was much less charitable to Henry Wallace, who mounted a third-party campaign for the White House under the Progressive banner that irritated many liberals, especially those of the ADA variety. The Wallace campaign attracted some of its support from Communists and put forward an amplified version of the candidate's critique of Truman's foreign policy. Although Wallace managed to draw a small following from the left, including labor unionists and intellectuals, Childs and others in the ADA, non-Communist left felt the need to distance themselves from his vision.¹²⁷ Childs might have shared much of Wallace's worldview in 1945, but now he found it dangerous and he used the column to marginalize the former vice-president and his followers. One column tried to reclaim the name "Progressive" for the older La Follette movement that had fascinated Childs as a younger man in Iowa and Wisconsin. The year 1948 was nothing like 1924, he argued.¹²⁸ Another alleged that Wallace's criticism of the president and unwillingness to purge Communists from his party's ranks made war more likely. Far from being the apostle of peace described in campaign literature, Childs portrayed him as "probably contributing as much as any single individual toward making war with Russia inevitable." "To follow him," he added, "one must also be blind and deaf and dumb."¹²⁹ Yet another charged that some of Wallace's followers "subscribe to the doctrines of Marx and Lenin" and "in a last resort, they would use force and violence" to

¹²⁶ Marquis Childs, "Dulles' Opposition," *Washington Post*, 8 October 1948, 22.

¹²⁷ ADA's efforts to undermine Wallace's campaign are detailed in McAuliffe, *Crisis on the Left*, 39-48.

¹²⁸ Marquis Childs, "Champion of Frustration," *Washington Post*, 8 January 1948, 9.

¹²⁹ Marquis Childs, "Wallace's Contribution to War," *Washington Post*, 30 March 1948, 7.

change the American political system. In other contexts, Childs was strongly opposed to the use of the Communist smear campaign, but in this instance he felt the need to hint at it himself. He was, however, careful to point out that Wallace himself was not a Communist; he was either being duped or willingly closed his eyes to the menace so as to get additional supporters.¹³⁰ Such opposition, as well as internal problems, doomed the Wallace campaign. Childs scarcely mentioned him in the final two months of the campaign season and the party received less than three percent of the popular vote in November.

No one was more surprised than Childs when Harry Truman won re-election.¹³¹ He had been certain that Dewey and Dulles would take over foreign policy planning and the fact that Truman's team would now stay on board meant he was forced to re-evaluate America's place in the Cold War. His last column before the election had argued that even if "through some unprecedented political miracle" the president won, he would have to assemble a new team. Childs wrote that the White House and the State Department had serious differences of opinion and that, in any case, Marshall was ready to retire. Regardless of the outcome, he suggested that Secretary of Defense James Forrestal be asked to remain in office for an extended transition period to provide continuity and stability, at least for a while.¹³² After the election, Childs offered up a number of columns about the effect of Truman's victory on world affairs. One noted that the Soviets appeared to be making some overtures toward more peaceable

¹³⁰ Marquis Childs, "Wallace's Dilemma," *Washington Post*, 23 July 1948, 20; "Wallace's Stage Managers," *Washington Post*, 24 July 1948, 9. Later in life, Childs told an interviewer that Wallace's ambition and "erratic temperament" made him a "pushover" for the fellow-travelers and Communists. "The Reminiscences of Marquis William Childs," Columbia University Oral History Research Office, 1962, part 2, 35.

¹³¹ The 1948 election has received much scholarly attention. For a thoughtful overview and analysis of the election's implications for postwar liberalism, see Andrew E. Busch, *Truman's Triumphs: The 1948 Election and the Making of Postwar America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), especially ch. 6.

¹³² Marquis Childs, "Before January 20," *Washington Post*, 2 November 1948, 14.

relations, although he did not believe that they would slow their efforts to take advantage of American “mistakes” around the world. “Genuine peace overtures,” he wrote, “should not be rebuffed” and it was possibly “the moment for a broad advance toward at least a temporary peace.”¹³³ One of those American mistakes was the deteriorating situation in Greece. Aid to Greece had only accomplished the absolute minimum effect, barely allowing a feeble and largely anti-democratic, but non-Communist government to stand, which Childs blamed on Truman’s lack of vision. “Buying time is essential,” he wrote, “but it is also essential to know what to do with that dearly bought time.”¹³⁴ Ineffective leadership was wreaking havoc on military budgets and defense spending. Childs had backed the earlier effort to reorganize the armed forces partly because he assumed planning and decisions about priorities would be streamlined; instead the sometimes public and embarrassing rivalries among the services for weapons programs and pet projects wasted time and resources while American rearmament lagged dangerously.¹³⁵ When in early 1949 Dean Acheson became Secretary of State and Louis Johnson became Secretary of Defense, Childs hoped that the new blood would reinvigorate the Truman White House.¹³⁶

Although Childs wrote on many Cold War subjects in 1949, his primary interest rested on the proposal to form a self-defense alliance among the Western European powers, largely funded with American money, to counter-balance the huge Soviet army. Recognizing their vulnerability to a ground attack, the Europeans had pressed for a firm American commitment to

¹³³ Marquis Childs, “Change in Moscow’s Tactics,” *Washington Post*, 13 November 1948, 9.

¹³⁴ Marquis Childs, “China and Greece,” *Washington Post*, 18 November 1948, 13; “Disaster in Greece,” *Washington Post*, 18 January 1949, 10.

¹³⁵ Marquis Childs, “Division in the Pentagon,” *Washington Post*, 8 December 1948, 15; “Arms and Inflation,” *Washington Post*, 31 December 1948, 6.

¹³⁶ Marquis Childs, “Acheson Takes Over,” *Washington Post*, 19 January 1949, 13; “Big Job for Johnson,” *Washington Post*, 5 March 1949, 9.

mutual defense that was more comprehensive than relying on America's atomic monopoly.¹³⁷ Planning for the postwar alliance also provided a rationale for establishing a separate nation in West Germany, rebuilding and rearming it as a valuable ally. Childs saw the security agreement, promoted as the Atlantic Pact, as the logical extension of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan and quickly moved to support it through his column. It would be costly, but it would also provide a reasonable deterrent, strengthen the economies of the allies, and unify the western European nations into an orderly system. In fact, his first response was to argue that the pact was not primarily a military alliance; instead it was the "base for a new kind of world society" built on peaceful cooperation. Questions about American military aid remained unanswered, and in any case, he wrote, it would take at least five years to adequately rearm and modernize European militaries to "begin to restore something of the strength sapped by the war." Better, he argued, to promote the pact's peaceful aims in the propaganda war against the Soviets and then work to build a new international community that would "transcend the tragic limitations of the U.N."¹³⁸ This reasoning shows a noteworthy shift in Childs' thought since the ADA foreign policy statement two years earlier. On one hand, it reaffirmed the goal of working toward a peaceful world organization to promote peace and economic development. On the other hand, he was clearly losing faith in the UN as the proper instrument through which to achieve this goal.

Congressional support for the pact hinged on the issues of weapons exports and the increased presence of American military personnel and equipment in Europe. As with the case

¹³⁷ See Marc Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace: The Making of the European Settlement, 1945-1963* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 68-86, on the effort to accommodate the security needs and interests of the various nations that forged the pact and the debate over the role of West Germany.

¹³⁸ Marquis Childs, "Atlantic Pact's Peaceful Aim," *Washington Post*, 23 March 1949, 11.

of funding for aid under the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, Childs frequently wrote about the need for Congress to act quickly to appropriate sufficient funds to ensure the program's success. Fiscal conservatives worried about the cost, but Childs argued that national security priorities outweighed financial concerns.¹³⁹ If anything, rearmament had to be accelerated, even if this meant rationing certain strategic materials as had been done during the war.¹⁴⁰ As was his practice, he divided critics of the plan into camps based on the legitimacy of their position in his mind. He admitted that many real issues needed to be resolved, for example ensuring the stability of governments that received aid so American weapons did not fall into the hands of enemies. Similarly, the questions of which nations would qualify for aid and how to prioritize resources sparked real debate. Senators raising these legitimate issues were, in his column, making a constructive contribution to the eventual success of the program.¹⁴¹ Those who would undermine the whole enterprise, on the other hand, played a dangerous game with America's future and that of its allies. When Senator Taft announced his opposition, Childs predicted that the appropriation would fail and the entire pact would be doomed. The Soviets could then take over "a defenseless European continent" that was "alone and deserted" by America. Those in favor of the pact felt an "angry despair" and recognized that Congress was throwing away the best chance for peace in Europe.¹⁴² Other columns sought to more soberly weigh the pros and cons of the pact, point out the very real weakness of

¹³⁹ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 25-28.

¹⁴⁰ Marquis Childs, "Arms for Europe," *Washington Post*, 1 April 1949, 24.

¹⁴¹ Marquis Childs, "Illusions on the Pact," *Washington Post*, 14 April 1949, 13; "Weaknesses in the Pact," *Washington Post*, 28 July 1949, 13.

¹⁴² Marquis Childs, "Throwing Away the Chance," *Washington Post*, 14 July 1949, 11.

our European allies, and explain how the money would be more efficiently used to enhance American security.¹⁴³

The United States did invest in the Atlantic Pact that ultimately led to the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, providing some measure of mutual defense and deterrence. In the shorter term, Childs continued to argue in favor of expanded aid to Europe through the Marshall Plan and a revitalized military capable of defending American interests in Europe, as well as further efforts to negotiate with the Soviets from a position of strength. Although he might not have recognized it himself, Childs had, by 1949, reoriented his outlook on foreign affairs since the end of World War II and even since drafting the ADA policy statement. Many of the core principles remained, including support for the general idea of containment and the desire to work toward collective security organized around American leadership and free market principles. In other ways, however, his thinking had evolved. He now felt that the Soviets had abandoned any pretense of cooperation and therefore they could not be expected to negotiate in good faith. They would use subversion, espionage, and underground activity to undermine non-Communist governments in the West. Therefore, they were clearly an enemy. Further, his acceptance of the Atlantic Pact was implicitly an acceptance of separate spheres of influence, which he had been opposed to as a matter of principle in years past. If the United States was going to create a new world out of the ashes of the war, it could only do so within its own area of influence, which would have to be constantly defended from aggression.

¹⁴³ Marquis Childs, "Behind the Arms Aid Program," *Washington Post*, 31 August 1949, 9; "Britain's Defense Budget," *Washington Post*, 6 August 1949, 5; "Price of the Pact," *Washington Post*, 29 September 1949, 14.

As the Cold War deepened at the end of the decade, Childs' idealism was largely a thing of the past. He had adopted a more realistic foreign policy outlook in the face of what he understood to be a dangerous and hostile world situation. Other liberals who shared his general outlook wrestled with the same fundamental issues. His friend Arthur Schlesinger Jr. argued in favor of a new, muscular liberalism under the banner of the "vital center." This liberalism reflected the same general concern about the troubled world that so worried Childs, while at the same time arguing for many of the same solutions. It urged greater action, in the form of more defense spending, more wisely used foreign aid, and more standing up to the Soviets. As Childs said in the 1950 speech quoted at the beginning of this chapter, he really didn't feel that the country was waging a Cold War because it was not using all of the necessary resources. Instead measures were "tepid, timid, tentative half-measures."¹⁴⁴ More could, and had to be, done. Childs would remain an ardent Cold Warrior into the middle of the 1960s, although, as subsequent chapters of this study will show, his thinking about the role that America should play in the troubled world would continue to evolve.

¹⁴⁴ Marquis Childs, remarks given at University of Virginia Town Hall Meeting, 11 April 1950. Childs Papers, box 5, folder 3.

Chapter 2

“Here is the vital issue: Can we fit control of this overwhelming new power into the framework of our democratic institutions?”¹

“I have written thousands of words about the enormity of the weapons of mass annihilation as they have constantly accumulated on both sides of the divide, and it has always been with a sense of futility and even despair of being able to convey what they mean.”²

Despite all of his writing on emerging Cold War tensions, no problem plagued Marquis Childs as much as the danger of atomic weapons and the stresses of the Atomic Age formed a grim backdrop to his understanding of all postwar issues. From his first column after the August 1945 bombings of Japan through the high stakes drama of the Cold War arms race, he dedicated a considerable part of his writing to the subject. Although reassured to some degree by optimism that the atom could provide inexpensive power and advances in medical research, his main reaction was one of pessimism and, in fact, fear- fear of the potential destructiveness of atomic war and fear that the bomb was too dangerous for the normal give and take of Washington politics. As a close observer of the political system, he worried that partisan squabbles and civilian-military tensions would divert and distract the men responsible for crafting policies necessary to prevent global catastrophe. Childs sought to influence and direct the early debate over atomic policy in ways that reflect the emerging Cold War liberal position. In particular, he sought an international agreement to control the new weapon and demanded civilian oversight of atomic policy.

¹ Marquis Childs, “Atomic Security and Democracy,” *Washington Post*, 16 July 1947, 13.

² Marquis Childs, *Witness to Power* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975), 175.

Perhaps surprisingly, Childs rarely questioned the morality or the wisdom of the bomb's initial use. Once it was unleashed, he saw little to be gained from second guessing and he accepted the idea that the bomb ended the war, writing that it gave the Japanese an "excuse" to surrender short of the absolute destruction resulting from the invasion of their homeland.³ His desire after August 1945 was to employ what influence he had to make sure that forward-thinking policies and strict controls were enacted to reduce the chances it would be used again. To this end, he wrote frequently on the subject, explaining the contours of the debate and urging readers to take notice of the dangers. Childs was not always consistent in his argument through the early Cold War years, but he spoke out vigorously in the effort to explain the issues to his readers and, he hoped, influence those policymakers who read the column. Seeing himself as an "interpretive reporter," one whose role was "to give not merely the news but the meaning of the news as he sees it," he wanted to shape attitudes.⁴ Readers, he felt, could be led to the right opinion through clear reasoning and fact-based reporting and argument.

This chapter examines Marquis Childs' writing on the issue of atomic weapons in the late 1940s as he sought to help articulate and defend a postwar liberal foreign policy, as discussed in the previous chapter. It begins with an analysis of his initial reaction to the raids on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and follows his commentary on related topics through the first years of the postwar era to the point when the Soviet Union successfully detonated its own atomic weapon. Areas of primary focus include the proposals for international control of the bomb, the debate over civilian versus military control of atomic weapons and energy, the

³ Marquis Childs, "Future Use of Atomic Energy," *Washington Post*, 20 August 1945, 6; Marquis Childs, unpublished autobiographical manuscript in author's possession.

⁴ Marquis Childs, "The Interpretive Reporter's Role in a Troubled World," *Journalism Quarterly* 27 (June 1950): 134.

creation and management of the Atomic Energy Commission, atomic espionage, freedom of information and scientific inquiry, and emerging atomic arms race with the Soviets. These issues gripped the nation in the early postwar years and Childs' point of view during this time adds valuable insight into the political culture of this dangerous era and the evolution of the liberal point of view in the press of the era.

Childs' writing about the bomb and atomic politics exemplifies themes common in his columns on other postwar issues. Most of these positions and attitudes are in line with his position as a leading liberal commentator. Like most liberals, he valued civilian control of the armed forces and argued for government management of the atom through a civilian agency with limited military interference. As described in the previous chapter, he also advocated a strong defense and a dynamic role for the nation in world affairs. He believed that the nation was obligated to be a force for good in the world and use its vast power to protect freedom and democracy abroad. His strong internationalism led him to support plans for cooperative control of the bomb through the United Nations or some similar organization. Childs shared the liberals' dedication to civil liberties and the protections of scientific integrity and personal freedom in the face of increasing, and to his mind excessive, concern over espionage. Recognizing the atomic scientists as experts in this realm, Childs championed their right to be heard in policy debates and defended those who fell subject to public criticism, or even investigation, because of their dissenting views. As with most matters related to the Cold War, Childs remained firmly within the liberal consensus on atomic issues. Still, the idea of a consensus partially obscures the realities of the complex nature of the political and ideological debate over atomic policy in the same way that it limits our understanding of the early Cold

War more generally.⁵ Childs and others, both inside and outside of government, argued vigorously about the best way to confront the hazards of the postwar world, regardless of their core of shared objectives. In this respect, he used his column to support his ideological allies and criticize their opponents. In fact, as will be discussed more fully later in this chapter, Childs' occasionally found himself in direct conflict with powerful individuals who disagreed with his point of view on atomic matters and on at least one occasion he was forced to take to the radio waves to defend his professional reputation and integrity.

Surprisingly few scholars have written at length about the press at the dawn of the atomic age. Among the handful of works that examine the initial press response to the bombings are Paul Boyer's *By the Bomb's Early Light*, Allan Winkler's *Life Under a Cloud*, and Robert Lifton and Greg Mitchell's *Hiroshima in America*.⁶ Each offers useful documentation of the early shock and the diverse range of opinions found in the press, but none fully examines the extent of the debates that broke out in the aftermath of Hiroshima or offers much in the way of a thorough analysis of opinion journalism and the public.⁷ Others have been more concerned with public opinion about the bomb.⁸ Also studied has been the general lack of critical analysis in the press about the decision to use the bomb or the nation's atomic

⁵ The idea of postwar consensus has long been commonplace in history and political science. See for example Benjamin O. Fordham, *Building the Cold War Consensus: The Political Economy of U.S. National Security Policy, 1949-51* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998) and Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time: From World War II to Nixon, What Happened and Why* (New York: Doubleday, 1976). See also Eugene R. Wittkopf and James M. McCormick, "The Cold War Consensus: Did it Exist?" *Polity* 22: 4 (Summer 1990): 627-653.

⁶ Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age* (New York: Pantheon, 1985); Allan Winkler, *Life Under a Cloud: American Anxiety About the Atom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America* (New York: Grosset and Putnam, 1995), esp. ch. 1-6.

⁷ Chapter 2 of Winkler, *Life Under a Cloud*, is a solid study of coverage of this debate. See also Louis Liebovich, *The Press and the Origins of the Cold War* (Westport: Praeger, 1988), 83-92.

⁸ See in particular Michael J. Yavenditti, "American Reactions to the Use of the Atomic Bombs on Japan, 1945-1947," Ph.D. diss., University of California-Berkeley, 1970; Michael J. Yavenditti, "The American People and the Use of the Atomic Bombs on Japan: The 1940s," *Historian* 36 (Feb. 1974): 224-247.

policy over the years.⁹ James Reston, the Alsop brothers, and Walter Lippmann, Childs' chief rivals in "the commenting game," as he called it, have gotten various degrees of scholarly attention, but little has been done with other prominent print or radio commentators.¹⁰ In many ways, Childs fell into a rough agreement with the major columnists of the day on issues related to the bomb.¹¹ Lippmann, for example, wrote about international control in a way similar to Childs.¹² As with other aspects of the Cold War years in journalism history, our understanding of the role of the press and opinion columnists, who are routinely considered to have been influential in the postwar years, remains incomplete.

Although Childs wrote about many topics in the early postwar years, the attention he paid to the perils of the early Atomic Age indicates that it was a subject of grave concern to him. It is instructive to look at Childs as a window into the policy discussions as the nation grappled with early postwar atomic challenges. What in retrospect looks like a broad consensus in place to confront a new enemy was in fact a set of policies that emerged through contentious debate. As one of the more prominent voices in press commentary, Childs had some influence over public understanding and opinion, particularly in the articulation of a principled liberal position, and his writings on early atomic policy debates need to be taken into account for a full understanding of postwar media culture and the atom.

⁹ Uday Mohan and Sanho Tree, "Hiroshima, the American Media, and the Construction of Conventional Wisdom," *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 4: 2 (Summer 1995): 141-160. Additional studies that echo this position include several essays in Michael J. Hogan, ed. *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996) and Kai Bird and Lawrence Lifschultz, eds. *Hiroshima's Shadows: Writings on the Denial of History and the Smithsonian Controversy* (Stony Creek, CT: Pamphleteer's Press, 1998).

¹⁰ Robert W. Merry, *Taking on the World: Joseph and Stewart Alsop- Guardians of the American Century* (New York: Viking, 1996); Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1980), esp. ch. 34.

¹¹ Janet Besse and Harold D. Lasswell, "Our Columnists and the A-Bomb," *World Politics* 3:1 (October 1950): 7.

¹² Steel, *Walter Lippmann*, 424-425, 434-437.

Childs and the Beginning of the Atomic Age

The use of the atomic bomb against Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 came as a surprise to Childs, as it did to almost all Americans. Although Childs enjoyed frequent off the record sessions with military leaders like General George Marshall and Admiral Ernest King, which gave him access to frank discussion of wartime progress and planning, there is no evidence that he obtained information about the most secret weapon in the nation's arsenal.¹³ In fact, Marshall met with Childs and a few other newsmen in spring 1945 to lay out the basic outlines of plans for the invasion of Japan, with the warning that the military expected massive casualties. Childs left the meeting "sobered and solemn" and his columns from the final summer of the war reflect this grim outlook on the task ahead in the Pacific.¹⁴ This doesn't mean, however, that the columnist wasn't aware of rumors about a secret atomic program. His first column after the Hiroshima blast recounted veiled references that he had picked up in comments from sources as diverse as General Dwight Eisenhower and Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan. He also made clear that the Office of Censorship had raised suspicions among reporters by issuing regulations against any mention of atomic research in the news columns.¹⁵ Sharing office space with his old colleagues in the *Post-Dispatch* Washington bureau, he saw the Office of Censorship directives prohibiting reporting on such topics.

¹³ See, for example, confidential memos from Childs to Ben Reese, dated 20 December 1943 and 21 February 1944, in which he describes off the record discussions with King and Marshall. Childs Papers, box 22, folder 4. On censorship and the Manhattan Project, see Michael S. Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory: The Office of Censorship and the American Press and Radio in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), ch.7 in particular, and Patrick S. Washburn, "The Office of Censorship's Attempt to Control Press Coverage of the Atomic Bomb during World War II," *Journalism Monographs*, No. 120 (1990).

¹⁴ Marquis Childs, unpublished "Autobiographical Manuscript," in author's possession.

¹⁵ Marquis Childs, "Playing with Atomic Fire," *Washington Post*, 8 August 1945, 7. Copies of wartime these censorship regulations and advisories are in the Byron Price Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, box 3.

Rumors and suspicions, however, did not mean Childs anticipated the bomb's actual use and his first columns after August 6 betray a sense of great amazement and even shock. The "suddenness with which the basic understanding of the forces of nature was upset" stunned him. It was "a fact that most of us cannot even take in."¹⁶ "Like curious children," he wrote, "we have forced the lock on the forbidden door." A common theme in his initial response to the atomic bomb was the need for additional scientific research to fully grasp the elemental nature of the new development.

A crude hand, an ignorant, unknowing hand has grasped the stuff of which the universe is made. These scientists...are almost as ignorant of the root cause as are we ordinary mortals. You can read between the lines of the account of that testing on the lonely desert and see that they were not at all sure what was going to happen. Their conflicting reports on the effects of radiation after the bomb has exploded confirm their doubts.¹⁷

From August 1945 on, Childs was a stalwart supporter of scientific research free of political interference and he frequently used his column to articulate the scientists' perspectives on atomic issues.¹⁸ As will be discussed below, Childs' position on atomic issues often mirrored that of the emerging scientists' movement.

Two additional themes, both of which lie at the heart of early atomic age debates, are evident in Childs' initial columns. The first of these is that there really was no "secret" of the atomic bomb. Although a great deal of energy went into security efforts during and after the war and espionage was a significant concern, the basic knowledge about atomic energy necessary to create a weapon was available to any nation with a relatively advanced scientific program. In fact, the government released a vast amount of information about the fundamental

¹⁶ Marquis Childs, "Playing with Atomic Fire," *Washington Post*, 8 August 1945, 7.

¹⁷ Marquis Childs, "Leashing the Atom," *Washington Post*, 11 August 1945, 4.

¹⁸ See, for example, Marquis Childs, "Scientific Research," *Washington Post*, 16 August 1945, 8; "When Experts Speak," *Washington Post*, 20 October 1945, 6.

science of the atomic bomb in July 1945; all that was left was the dedication of time and resources to implement it. From the outset, Childs understood that the nation's rivals would be working on their own bombs and that eventually the American atomic monopoly would end. "The secret is ours today," he wrote, "but such secrets do not keep."¹⁹ Citing American physicists who had recently returned from a scientific exposition in Moscow, Childs warned that the Soviets would have their own bomb in two to five years because "they have the essential scientific background."²⁰ The issue of secrecy and proposals for sharing atomic technology remained central to early debates about atomic power. Those who believed in a "secret" of the bomb were much more likely to prioritize strict security procedures and oppose any technology exchange. However a core belief in the inevitability of the Soviet bomb served as a grim backdrop to discussion on all sides, including Childs' writing.

The second theme, which reveals Childs' pessimism and fear most clearly, was that there could be no real defense against an atomic attack and that any future atomic war would be devastating to winner and loser alike. The V-2 rockets and jet engines developed during the war changed warfare forever. History taught Childs that new weapons were always used in future wars, making an atomic attack, in his mind, inevitable. He took pains to discount optimistic chatter that every new development in weaponry results in some defensive measure that negates or minimizes it. In the case of the atomic bomb, he believed this was simply naïve, a "convenient platitude."²¹ The dawn of the atomic age, he wrote, "is the dividing line between the old world and the new."²² He felt the only chance for avoiding cataclysm was to devise a

¹⁹ Childs, "Playing With Atomic Fire," 7.

²⁰ Marquis Childs, "Atoms Vs. Humans," *Washington Post*, 5 September 1945, 6.

²¹ Marquis Childs, "Lessons of War," *Washington Post*, 15 August 1945, 8.

²² Childs, "Atoms Vs. Humans," 6.

reliable system to control the bomb and prevent its future use, something that would require extraordinary effort on the part of political leaders and rivals who had individual motivations and agendas in the political arena. To Childs, it was a matter of choice between enforced peace or disaster. “That pillar of smoke above Hiroshima is a sign of warning to all the world,” he implored. “Mankind must now make a choice. There can be no more evasion.”²³ It was a tragic fact, he felt, that the force of the atom had been first harnessed for war and destruction rather than peaceful uses. Due to the bomb’s great power, he also felt that no nation could be trusted with the bomb alone. The human race as a whole, working through enlightened government, had to step up to the task.²⁴

These ominous themes overshadowed other topics in his column in August and September 1945 and tempered his enthusiasm when writing about the end of the war, but he was not far outside of the mainstream of newspaper and radio commentary at the time. Scholars have pointed out that although opinion polls indicated widespread public support for the use of the atomic bomb, commentators tended to be more pessimistic, or even alarmist.²⁵ In the immediate aftermath of the bomb’s use, surveys suggested that nearly eight-five percent of Americans supported Truman’s decision, despite the pessimistic nature of much press commentary.²⁶ In any case, Childs found it difficult to celebrate the end of the war wholeheartedly and instead he tended to focus on the dangerous and uncertain future where the power of the atom would certainly become a matter of political controversy.

²³ Childs, “Playing With Atomic Fire,” 7.

²⁴ Childs, “Leashing the Atom,” 4.

²⁵ See Winkler, *Life Under a Cloud*, 29-30; Boyer, *By the Bomb’s Early Light*, esp. Chs. 1-2.

²⁶ Opinion polls from 1945 are widely discussed and commonly cited in the literature. See Michael Yavenditti, “The American People and the Use of Atomic Bombs on Japan: The 1940s,” *Historian* 36 (February 1974): 224-247. Initial public enthusiasm waned somewhat over the remainder of the decade, but remained high.

Childs and Civilian Control of the Atom

By fall 1945, after end of the war celebration had died down, the issue of how to proceed with atomic policy took center stage. October and November of that year marked a period of initial skirmish among interested parties in the White House, the Pentagon, Congress, and the press. Two central concerns dominated high-stakes discussions and news headlines in this period. First, would the atom be controlled by the military, which had developed it under the Manhattan Project, or would a civilian agency be created to oversee future development and foster research into peacetime uses for the new technology? Second, would the United States, and to a lesser degree the Canadians and British, maintain their atomic monopoly or would control over this new force be ceded to an international body that might prevent a dangerous arms race? Equally pressing were decisions about protecting the “secret” of the atomic bomb and how to accommodate the perspective of the emerging scientists’ movement and other non-governmental challenges to atomic policy. Congress began to debate a flurry of bills and proposals; at the same time Truman and his senior advisors, who disagreed over policy, met frequently to piece together a workable plan.²⁷ Childs responded to this heated moment in October and November with a series of seven columns that sought to clarify the issues for his readers and to articulate a clear argument in favor of civilian control, international agreement, and prudent security policy. The series introduced readers to the complexity of the debate, outlined key players, and reminded of the high stakes for the nation. Childs aggressively kept the atom front and center for his readers.

²⁷ Richard Hewlett and Oscar E. Anderson Jr., *The New World: A History of the United States Atomic Energy Commission: Vol. I* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1962), 417-429; Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 6-8; Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 234-238.

The question of civilian control of the postwar atomic program was on many minds in the fall of 1945. In his October 3 message to Congress, President Truman, who hoped for a mechanism of civilian control, had called for legislation on the matter and almost immediately a number of bills emerged to become the subjects of committee hearings in both houses. The most widely backed, co-sponsored by Representative Andrew Jackson May (D-KY) and Senator Edwin C. Johnson (D-CO), originated from the Pentagon and represented the interests of the armed forces. The May-Johnson Bill called for strong military oversight, focused on weapons production rather than research into possible civilian uses, and proposed highly restrictive security measures to maintain atomic secrets.²⁸ Proponents of military control argued that the weapons needed to be ready for use at a moment's notice and that excessive layers of command would jeopardize national security. They prioritized military uses of the atom over research into civilian applications. They also believed, wrongly it seems based on the prevalence of wartime espionage, that only the military could ensure adequate protection of sensitive materials. Childs, in a column that foreshadowed his argument on the topic over the coming winter, labeled the bill "fantastically bad" and wondered how such a proposal had even come to be debated.²⁹ Instead he used the column to publicly back a new special Senate subcommittee, under Brien McMahon (D-CT), then holding hearings on a rival proposal built around the principle of civilian control. As will be discussed below, Childs was a stalwart supporter of McMahon throughout the debate over atomic policies.

As this controversy settled over Capitol Hill, Childs again took up the issue of the "secret" of the atom. In several columns during this period he reminded readers that the basic

²⁸ Hewlett and Anderson, *New World Order*, 428-431; Byron S. Miller, "A Law is Passed- The Atomic Energy Act of 1946," *University of Chicago Law Review* 15:4 (Summer 1948): 801-805.

²⁹ Marquis Childs, "McMahon's New Job," *Washington Post*, 30 October 1945, 6.

science of the bomb was available to the nation's friends and foes alike, and that the atomic monopoly could last no more than three to five years. As he put it, "the method of blowing the world to pieces will not long be our exclusive possession."³⁰ He also wrote that it was wishful thinking to expect a sure-fire defense against an attack by an enemy with atomic bombs in the future. Taking President Truman to task for the tone of his recent message to Congress, Childs warned against "easy platitudes" and accepting the inevitability of future conflict with the Soviets.³¹ On both of these points he referred to recent testimony by J. Robert Oppenheimer, lead scientist and Director of the wartime Manhattan Project, in which the physicist had argued that the development of the bomb had ultimately weakened the nation's military position; our enemies would soon have a bomb and, because there was no adequate defense against attack, the nation faced a dire threat.³² Childs prized informed debate and the frank exchange of ideas; on the question of the atom he believed that the scientists' point of view was essential to the discussion.³³

Childs' writing in this period often aligned with the positions emanating from the scientists movement that was organizing to lobby public opinion on the atom. Veterans of the Manhattan Project and other concerned scientists around the nation formed local organizations to discuss the role of the atom, and science more generally, in public life, eventually coming together as a nationwide association under the banner Federation of American Scientists. According to its founding document, the group of liberal scientists formed "to meet the increasingly apparent responsibility of scientists in promoting the welfare of mankind and the

³⁰ Marquis Childs, "Handling the Atom," *Washington Post*, 6 October 1945, 8.

³¹ Marquis Childs, "The President's Message," *Washington Post*, 25 October 1945, 8.

³² Marquis Childs, "Congress Hears Atomic Facts," *Washington Post*, 19 October 1945, 6.

³³ Marquis Childs, "When Experts Speak," *Washington Post*, 20 October 1945, 6.

achievement of world peace.” Included was the effort to promote international control of the atom and to counter misinformation with scientific authority and facts to further intelligent debate.³⁴ The initial press release from the Federation articulated the same fundamental points about atomic energy that featured prominently in Childs’ writing in the first months after Hiroshima.³⁵ Although material from the FAS and affiliated groups does not appear in the archive of Childs’ papers, it is reasonable to speculate that he saw them at least occasionally. The FAS information clearinghouse, called the National Committee on Atomic Information, included ninety-one national columnists and radio commentators on its mailing list by May 1946; given Childs’ interest in the subject and sympathy for the group’s point of view, he was likely included.³⁶ Childs also visited the Washington FAS office, at 1749 L Street N.W., from time to time.³⁷ The group’s speakers, press releases, and publications like the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* informed the thinking of many liberals, although it was careful to avoid being seen as “left-wing” in their positions.³⁸

The issue that drew the most attention from Childs in this early period was the proposal for international control of atomic energy. Realistic observers like Childs understood that the Soviets and others would soon develop an atomic arsenal, leading to a potentially cataclysmic arms race. Why not avert the crisis, he wondered, by sharing the technology now and establishing a system to ensure it would only be used for peace?

³⁴ Constitution of the Federation of American Scientists, box 2, folder 9, Atomic Scientists Print and Near Print Materials, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois. See Jessica Wang, *American Science in an Age of Anxiety: Scientists, Anti-Communism, and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999) on the FAS.

³⁵ Press release from the Atomic Scientists of Chicago. No date, but September 1945, Atomic Scientists Print and Near Print Materials, box 2, folder 6.

³⁶ NCIA press release, 14 May 1946, Atomic Scientists Print and Near Print Materials, box 2, folder 6.

³⁷ Alice Kimball Smith, *A Peril and a Hope: The Scientists’ Movement in America, 1945-47* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965), 302.

³⁸ FAS internal memo, 25 July 1946, Atomic Scientists Print and Near Print Materials, box 2, folder 10.

If we were to move toward sharing this power with the rest of the world, I believe it would do more than anything else to wipe out the cloud of suspicion and hostility rapidly forming on the international horizon. We should have no illusions about that cloud. Above all, it is separating East and West, separating Russia and the United States into opposing camps.³⁹

Here again he supported a proposal gaining ground with the McMahon committee to work toward giving eventual control over atomic energy to the United Nations, as soon as the new body was well established and able to properly administer it. This was the lesson he drew from testimony of scientists and others before the various Congressional committees studying the issue as well as from his own sources in government. Childs revealed that most of the letters he was receiving at the time chastised him for wanting to give away the nation's most valuable secret, but he maintained his position and soon emerged as one of the most vocal proponents in the press of international control.⁴⁰

Childs wrote frequently on the long struggle to create a civilian agency to control atomic energy, which was ultimately resolved along lines that he championed in his column. Less successful was the effort to establish a workable system of international control of the atom, which represented a particularly bitter defeat for the columnist as well as the liberals and concerned scientists whose views he endorsed in his writing. This is a good example of the weakening of the New Deal liberal coalition in the wake of World War II that has been frequently noted by historians. No longer dominant in the face of Republican and conservative Democratic strength in Congress and the resurgence of American big business, liberals were forced to adapt to new conditions and compromise, accepting partial victories on many issues,

³⁹ Marquis Childs, "Handling the Atom," *Washington Post*, 6 October 1945, 8.

⁴⁰ Marquis Childs, "The Atomic Secret," *Washington Post*, 11 October 1945, 6.

including atomic energy.⁴¹ Childs' writing through the entire early Cold War period betrays a sense of frustration at the limits of liberal strength in the more conservative political culture. He also worried that the nation was too passive in its foreign policy, reacting to world events rather than acting forcibly for just aims.

If the Soviet Union did not exist we should have to invent it in order to have a foreign policy at all. That is the measure of the negativism of our policy. What we need above all is a positive and constructive foreign policy- a policy prepared to utilize America's great economic supremacy to strengthen the forces of the democratic middle, and to bring order and stability to a world in perilous disequilibrium.⁴²

At times strident and over-heated, his columns are sometimes filled with pessimism. He understood this himself, writing to John James, editor of the Johnstown (PA) *Democrat*, that this darkness "may grow out of situations in the world today. It is very ward to be cheerful or even to seem to offer solutions...as the horizon darkens I suppose my own views darken."⁴³ Regardless, Childs reiterated these concerns time and again in his column, urging readers to take interest in the debate and to support what he saw as sensible, liberal proposals.

The question of domestic control of atomic energy largely played out in Congress and in Senator McMahon's special joint committee in particular. Despite what seemed initially like widespread support, the May-Johnson bill stalled in committee and McMahon's allies gained momentum. Through the winter of 1945-46, the committee heard from seventy witnesses who produced 600,000 words of printed testimony.⁴⁴ The principle of civilian control received a

⁴¹ The literature on the challenges of postwar liberalism is vast. Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Knopf, 1995) is the classic interpretation. See also Jonathan Bell, *The Liberal State on Trial: The Cold War and American Politics in the Truman Years* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

⁴² Marquis Childs, "Which Way for America?" Speech at the University of Minnesota School of Journalism, Minneapolis, Minn., 23 May 1947. Transcript in author's possession.

⁴³ Childs to James, 5 August 1947, Childs Papers, box 7, folder 3.

⁴⁴ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 7.

boost in February 1946 when President Truman, after prodding from McMahon, reaffirmed his commitment to a civilian atomic energy commission, generating headlines across the nation. Over the objections of some of his senior advisors and military planners, the president opted for the civilian body with strong executive oversight that was likely to emerge from McMahon's committee and he ordered Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal and Secretary of War Robert Patterson to drop their support for the May-Johnson bill.⁴⁵ After a series of compromises, especially the addition of a military liaison committee that would consult closely with the new agency, the McMahon bill passed the Senate on 1 June 1946. President Truman signed it into law on August 1 after a conference committee ironed out differences with the House version.⁴⁶ The law represented at least a partial victory for liberals who valued civilian authority over the armed forces and trusted in government oversight of major public institutions and for the scientists who liked its provisions designed to promote research into peaceful applications of atomic energy.

Childs' writing during the period of this debate fully supported the effort for civilian control. Writing in late December 1945, he showered praise on Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan, a Republican who had done much to block quick passage of the May-Johnson bill through careful parliamentary maneuvering. Childs complimented him for having "shown more boldness and initiative than most of his colleagues."⁴⁷ Even so, Congress was not nearly bold enough for the columnist. Americans, he wrote, had been numbed by the suddenness of

⁴⁵ Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 367-369. Chapters 13 and 14 of Hewlett and Anderson, *The New World*, are an exhaustive account of the day-to-day legislative history of the bill and the extensive behind-the-scenes maneuvering that led to its final passage. See also National Committee on Atomic Information, "Comparative Analysis of Key Bills on Atomic Energy," Atomic Scientists Print and Near Print Materials, box 2, folder 6.

⁴⁶ Miller, "A Law is Passed," 814-816.

⁴⁷ Marquis Childs, "Record of Congress," *Washington Post*, 26 December 1945, 6.

change and overwhelmed by the momentous task at hand. Luckily, he thought, “responsible men” who understood the seriousness of the moment had begun to act decisively and 1946 would be a time of action on the atomic issue and other pressing concerns.⁴⁸ Later in the month he expressed satisfaction that the atomic bomb was in the headlines once again as a result of the announced tests at Bikini atoll in the coming summer. Even a scant six months after Hiroshima, he believed, Americans needed to be reminded “what the new force can actually do.”⁴⁹ Childs hoped observers from all nations would be invited to see the massive blasts, which would hopefully jumpstart serious discussion about controlling the bomb.

Four hard-hitting columns in early January laid out Childs’ argument against military control of the atom. The fact that control still rested with the military, five months after the war ended, was “a serious failure on the part of our civil government.” Military control, he wrote, “is contrary to the American tradition. It is more nearly in the pattern we have come to think of as fascist. We have learned that it is the failure of civil government in the face of great crisis or great necessity which opens the way to fascism.”⁵⁰ This column pointed out that even Secretary of War Patterson, according to an unnamed source familiar with Cabinet-level conversations, lacked access to secret information and that final authority in some cases rested with General Leslie Groves, the wartime director of the Manhattan Project who still ran the atomic program. Despite the relatively positive reputation enjoyed by the Army after the war, most readers would have been alarmed to learn about “this dangerous abdication of civil authority.”⁵¹ This culture of secrecy was particularly worrisome to Childs. The next column

⁴⁸ Marquis Childs, “Time For Decision,” *Washington Post*, 1 January 1946, 6.

⁴⁹ Marquis Childs, “Progress on Atomic Energy Control,” *Washington Post*, 28 January 1946, 9.

⁵⁰ Marquis Childs, “Atomic Materials,” *Washington Post*, 4 January 1946, 6.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

explained that Groves and other War Department figures had refused to provide information to the McMahon committee, even in closed sessions. Needless to say, the senators “resented the implication that they could not be trusted with information they considered essential to framing legislation.”⁵² Childs was not convinced that Secretary Patterson, rather than Groves, had final authority over atomic policy. “Back of all this,” he noted, “is the question of whether civil government has the capacity to take over or whether, as some have hinted, this is ‘too big’ for any but a few experts to control.”⁵³

Childs never employed the term, but his comments during this period reflect the liberal concern that the nation would develop into a kind of “garrison state” where a small band of military leaders made vital decisions outside of civilian oversight, using excessive secrecy and fear to maintain power and all aspects of civilian life took on quasi-military aspect.⁵⁴ The regimentation acceptable and expected during war might become a permanent part of American life. Groves was the convenient target for this concern. Several columns in early 1946 painted the general as overzealous, if not an actual threat to democracy. He was accused of using his position to remove a Manhattan Project scientist who was trying to unionize workers at an atomic facility from the staff.⁵⁵ He was also described as the secret force behind the May-Johnson bill, which would have granted primary authority over atomic energy to a single administrator, and accused of making arrangements to become the “real boss” of the program.⁵⁶

⁵² Marquis Childs, “Atomic Secrecy,” *Washington Post*, 5 January 1946, 6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ See Andrew D. Grossman, *Neither Dead Nor Red: Civilian Defense and American Political Development During the Early Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2001) on the idea of a “civil garrison.” The argument has been made by Grossman and others that the United States became a quasi-military state during the Cold War in any case, despite of civilian control of atomic energy.

⁵⁵ Marquis Childs, “Gen. Groves’ Power,” *Washington Post*, 8 January 1946, 6.

⁵⁶ Marquis Childs, “Atoms During Peace,” *Washington Post*, 9 January 1946, 6.

Groves' testimony on the McMahon bill opposed Truman's position with "good-natured impudence." Describing the general's "irresponsibility," Childs warned

He is not a scientist. He is not an expert in government. He is not an industrialist. He is not a philosopher or creative thinker. Yet 11 United States Senators, presumably representing the seniority and wisdom of the Senate, solemnly listened while he expounded on his views of what to do with atomic energy in peacetime.⁵⁷

Childs was careful to praise Groves for his wartime administration of the Manhattan Project, but the columns undoubtedly painted a negative image of his suitability for future control of the program. Supporters of the May-Johnson bill, regardless of the reason for their position, were associated with the potential dangers embodied in General Groves' continued administration of the program.

In the spring and summer of 1946, as Congress continued to hold hearings and passage became more likely, Childs wrote intermittently about civilian control. Although his attention focused mostly on the other major issue, international control through the United Nations, he did work to ensure that the McMahon bill would not get off track. In late June, when the House was debating its own version, Childs took Representative May to task for "funny business" in the voting and lent credence to rumors that the military was working behind the scenes to influence the House bill. Childs awarded May the "booby prize" and wrote that the legislator must be acting out of jealousy after the May-Johnson bill was pushed aside.⁵⁸ When the Atomic Energy Act was finally passed and ready for the Truman's signature, Childs lauded Congress, writing that the new law's "meaning for the future is incalculable." "Up until the last minute," he told readers, "there was a danger that heedless, ignorant men would wield their

⁵⁷ Marquis Childs, "Groves' Pattern," *Washington Post*, 2 March 1946, 6.

⁵⁸ Marquis Childs, "Snafu From Mr. May," *Washington Post*, 25 June 1946, 8.

hatchets on the infinitely complex machinery of atomic fission and send us all to kingdom come.” He again praised Senators McMahon and Vandenberg for their efforts and chastised Representative J. Parnell Thomas, whose “ranting caused acute nausea among his colleagues” during the final debates. Summing up, he wrote that Congress had acted to restore the traditional balance between military and civilian power. “That is reason enough,” he felt, “to put out the flags.”⁵⁹

The effect of Childs’ columns on this issue is difficult to assess. Scholars have argued that one reason for McMahon’s success was his ability to cultivate support among important opinion journalists, including Childs. His voice was certainly among the loudest in the choir of liberal commentators who backed the Senator through the debate.⁶⁰ In any case, the battle was far from over. In the coming years, Childs remained in the fight to have responsible, public-minded men appointed to the Atomic Energy Commission, to watch guard against military encroachment of civilian authority, and to maintain some sense of proportion and fairness as the loyalty issue and fear of atomic espionage devolved into the red scare. He also remained a champion of Senator McMahon, even nominating him for a *Collier’s* magazine distinguished Congressional award due to his management of the atomic question.⁶¹ At the end of 1946, however, he was satisfied that on the issue of civilian control, at least, the nation was on the right track.

⁵⁹ Marquis Childs, “Controlling the Atom,” *Washington Post*, 29 July 1946, 7.

⁶⁰ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 7; Hogan, *Cross of Iron*, 239-240; Peter Douglas Feaver, *Guarding the Guardians: Civilian Control of Nuclear Weapons in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 94-95. Feaver points to Childs’ January 1946 columns on General Groves as “very important” in bringing public opinion around to the position of civilian control.

⁶¹ Childs to James C. Derieux, *Collier’s* magazine, 2 December 1946, Childs Papers, box 1, folder 7.

The Question of International Control

If anything, the debate over international control was even more heated, revealing fundamental differences of opinion beyond the normal give and take of partisan politics. To some degree, participants on all sides felt the very survival of the nation was at stake and the implementation of their opponents' policy was a step down the road to national suicide. Concerns over espionage and the maintenance of atomic secrets played a more significant role here as well. Most of the action in this arena took place in State Department and White House meetings and international negotiating sessions, rather than in Congressional hearings and committee reports, making it somewhat harder to for the press cover. Easier to report on were the high-profile revelations of atomic espionage first coming to light early in 1946 and the very public scientists' movement that sought to reframe the discussion around global dangers and moral responsibility. Although these two factors affected the debate over civilian control, they played a larger role in the push to create a global body to oversee atomic energy and figured more prominently in press commentary, including the Childs column.

Planning for postwar atomic diplomacy began during the war and generated significant factions of opinion within the Truman administration and the War Department through the fall of 1945.⁶² As mentioned above, Childs was immediately drawn to the idea of effective international control as a means to avoiding an arms race. The new power was, to his mind, simply too difficult to manage and too dangerous to leave uncontrolled. At first, he felt the fledgling United Nations was too weak, but as the debate heated up in 1946 and 1947, his

⁶² Barton Bernstein, "The Quest for Security: American Foreign Policy and International Control of Atomic Energy, 1942-1946," *Journal of American History* 60:4 (March 1974): 1003-1044, remains an authoritative source on this internal debate among high-ranking policymakers.

confidence in the world body grew.⁶³ He also put his trust in a handful of public servants, particularly David Lilienthal and Bernard Baruch, whom he believed represented the best hope for a workable solution. As with the debate over domestic control, Childs had a tendency to use dramatic, sweeping language, writing, for example, “perhaps the race is inevitable. Perhaps the doom of this unhappy species is already sealed. But defeat cannot be accepted without struggle.”⁶⁴ He also continued to rely on the expert opinion of the scientists, giving their point of view ample play in his column.⁶⁵

Widespread public attention to the issue came in November and December 1945 through a series of announcements and international meetings. President Truman had decided to follow a plan of seeking some kind of international control while holding the essential processes and “know-how” for making a bomb in reserve. In mid-November, he announced that the United States, Britain, and Canada proposed the creation of a UN atomic agency, the judicious sharing of basic atomic science, and a gradual process of transferring control of the bomb, so long as adequate security and inspection measures were in place.⁶⁶ This proposal, to Childs, “had a reasonable sound. It is hard to see now anyone could quarrel with it.”⁶⁷ Elements of the proposal appeared to Childs to be positive steps toward the eventual abolition of atomic bombs and other weapons of mass destruction and, if nothing else, “break down the barriers of suspicion” that complicated postwar planning. The plan could only work, however, if the new commission had support from all the major players and already Childs worried over Soviet

⁶³ Childs, “Leashing the Atom,” 4.

⁶⁴ Marquis Childs, “Congress Hears Atomic Facts,” *Washington Post*, 19 October 1945, 6.

⁶⁵ One of many examples is Marquis Childs, “When Experts Speak,” *Washington Post*, 20 October 1945, 6.

⁶⁶ Melvin P. Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, The Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 93-95.

⁶⁷ Marquis Childs, “Freedom of Science,” *Washington Post*, 17 November 1945, 4.

silence on the matter, assuming that they rejected the idea that the United States would not “use the ‘secret’ for purposes of maneuver and manipulation.”⁶⁸

Ensuing high-level discussions between American and Soviet diplomats reaffirmed Childs’ suspicions. Secretary of State Byrnes met in December with Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov and, although Byrnes left Moscow feeling optimistic, Childs’ sources gave him the impression that little headway had been made. Both Truman and the Senate Atomic Energy Committee had limited Byrnes’ authority to make any promises about transferring atomic technology and the Soviets were opposed to the idea of a separate UN committee on the atom, preferring instead to place the issue under the jurisdiction of the Security Council, where they had veto power.⁶⁹ A new committee, headed by Undersecretary of State Dean Acheson, worked into spring 1946 to craft a formal proposal for operation of the UN atomic energy commission, which had been created in January, and the process for gradual transfer of authority over atomic energy. Childs was uncharacteristically optimistic about the nature of the new commission and Acheson’s blueprint, which became known as the Acheson-Lilienthal plan, but he bemoaned the fact that the leaked plan had generated a great deal of misunderstanding, along with grand-standing and red-baiting in Congress.⁷⁰ Opponents of the plan falsely accused Acheson and his supporters of planning to give away the nation’s greatest military asset or at least transfer secrets to an unsecured location where Soviet spies could easily obtain them.

⁶⁸ Marquis Childs, “Atomic Commission,” *Washington Post*, 21 November 1945, 6.

⁶⁹ Marquis Childs, “Reactions to Moscow Conference,” *Washington Post*, 28 December 1945, 6. See Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, 95-96; Campbell Craig and Sergey Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 118-121.

⁷⁰ Marquis Childs, “Progress on Atomic Energy Control,” *Washington Post*, 28 January 1946, 9; “Atomic Energy Question Muddled,” *Washington Post*, 28 March 1946, 3.

The issue of atomic espionage had a special saliency in early 1946. In February, authorities revealed the existence of a network of Soviet spies, based in Canada, who had allegedly infiltrated America's wartime atomic program. The resulting furor changed the tone of the debate over international control, making security the top priority and giving a potent weapon to opponents of any plan to share information. Although no one with influence advocated sharing the precise "know-how" to make an atomic weapon until strict controls were in place, it became common for opponents of international control to use this line of attack. Some have subsequently argued that the story was leaked, possibly by FBI Director Hoover, at a strategic moment to undermine the popularity of the international movement.⁷¹ In any case, Childs acknowledged the danger posed by an enemy "fifth column," but urged clear-headed restraint in its pursuit.⁷² The FBI, he assured readers, was capable of taking care of them.

Over the summer and fall of 1946, the basic American position on international control was represented by the Acheson-Lilienthal plan and then, after June, by the Baruch Plan. Childs portrayed the Acheson-Lilienthal plan as a "ray of hope in an atmosphere that seemed utterly dark and oppressive" while outlining its strong safeguards and lauding its potential for driving real progress in non-military applications. The initial plan was a reasonable start and Childs compared its opponents to lemmings, which "swim out to sea in great masses and die

⁷¹ For example, Craig and Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War*, 121-122. A still valid, older analysis of the effect of this first atomic spy scare is Gregg Herken, "A Most Deadly Illusion: The Atomic Secret and American Nuclear Weapons Policy, 1945-1950," *Pacific Historical Review* 49:1 (February 1980): 62-66.

⁷² Marquis Childs, "Fifth Column and the Atom Bomb," *Washington Post*, 18 February 1946, 7. Soviet espionage was much more significant than Childs understood in 1946. He did, however, correctly foresee that the issue of loyalty and security would fundamentally alter the debate. His response to the red-baiting of the McCarthy era is the subject of the following chapter.

for no conceivable reason.”⁷³ Truman appointed financier and diplomat Bernard Baruch to be the nation’s representative to the UN atomic energy commission, but the process was again put into confusion when word leaked out that Baruch was unwilling to present the Acheson-Lilienthal plan as written. Childs hoped the delay would lead to a better report that took into account “the knowledge and imagination of everyone who has any background at all in atomic energy” while warning that “personal controversy” had no place in such important work.⁷⁴ In June the revised plan became the official position.⁷⁵ This Baruch Plan provided for a system of inspections and added more stringent penalties for violations, as well as limiting the use of the veto, which was the Soviets’ one major interest at the time. Childs endorsed the new plan, especially the proposal for inspections and the elimination of the veto power. “It should be implemented as quickly as possible,” he wrote. “This is an offer that other nations cannot misunderstand unless they want to misunderstand it. Our desire is security and peace.”⁷⁶ Here was the path to peace through strength that Childs hinted at in his letter to Senator Taft, cited at the beginning of chapter one. Unfortunately, it was also a path that the Soviets would not accept. Baruch presented his plan on June 17 and Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet representative

⁷³ Marquis Childs, “Ray of Hope,” *Washington Post*, 29 March 1946, 6. See also Edward Teller, “The State Dep’t Report- A Ray of ‘Hope,’” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 1:8 (1 April 1946), 13.

⁷⁴ Marquis Childs, “Groping on Atomic Control,” *Washington Post*, 17 May 1946, 7. See also “A Dangerous Lull,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 1:11 (15 May 1946), 1.

⁷⁵ Background on Baruch and the internal debate with the administration in this period is available in many places. Most thorough is Hewlett and Anderson, *The New World*, ch. 15. See also Gregg Herken, *The Winning Weapon: The Atomic Bomb and the Cold War* (New York: Knopf, 1981); Larry G. Gerber, “The Baruch Plan and the Origins of the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 6:4 (Winter 1982): 69-95; and Offner, *Another Such Victory*, 144-152. Some have argued that the tougher language of the Baruch Plan was included intentionally by Truman, upon the advice of more hawkish advisors, to ensure that the Soviets would never agree to the terms. See Craig and Radchenko, *The Atomic Bomb and the Origins of the Cold War*, 123-125. True or not, Childs saw the changes as necessary and reasonable, rather than duplicitous. In fact, he didn’t seem to take the significant differences between the proposals into account in his writing.

⁷⁶ Marquis Childs, “Control of the Atom,” *Washington Post*, 18 June 1946, 6.

on the Security Council, countered less than a week later with an entirely different plan calling for, among other things, the prohibition of atomic weapons.⁷⁷

Initially, Childs held out hope that a workable solution would emerge from the subsequent UN negotiations. In August he urged readers to ignore the “sensation-makers” who thought the impasse meant war with the Soviets was on the horizon. Adopting a realist point of view, he reminded that the Soviets had their own interests and it was only natural for them to seek a policy that met their needs. Childs outlined the reasonable aspects of the plan for readers. Furthermore, Childs had long been friendly with Baruch and the columnist likely felt Baruch would make a good faith effort to negotiate. Childs and Baruch had met during the war to discuss mobilization and war financing and the two remained friendly for decades.⁷⁸

However, too much delay was problematic. Reacting to a *Foreign Affairs* essay by Dr. Harold Urey, a spokesman for the scientists’ organization, he warned that the US might be forced to fight an unwanted offensive atomic war unless international control was in place soon.

That is the awful logic to which our science has brought us. To be able to take such a course would mean that we should have to deliberately destroy millions of human lives...being an emotional and humanitarian people, we are hardly...equipped to take such a decision. Yet there are Americans- and some of them in important positions- who are thinking in those terms.⁷⁹

The columnist’s hopes dimmed as the negotiations dragged on through the fall months. He now cast the Soviets’ unwillingness to agree to the terms of the revised Baruch Plan as symbol of the weakness of totalitarian government. The Soviet state would never allow inspectors behind their borders because such an intrusion on their sovereignty would be “demoralizing”

⁷⁷ Offner, *Another Such Victory*, 148-150. Full text of both documents is available in “The American and Russian Proposals,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 2:1, 2 (1 July 1946), 3-10.

⁷⁸ For example, see memos from Childs to Ben Reese dated 28 January 1942 and 1 September 1942, Childs Papers, box 22, folder 1.

⁷⁹ Marquis Childs, “Frightening Logic,” *Washington Post*, 22 August 1946, 8.

and show weakness to the population. As inspection was the “heart of the American proposal,” it was hard for him to “see how the American and Russian viewpoints can ever be reconciled.” “It would seem,” he now admitted, “that the two parallel lines of policy can never meet except in war.” Still, he warned against a “get tough” policy and argued that the only course was the “patient but firm day to day exchange” currently taking place. To act rashly could only lead to disaster.⁸⁰

Negotiations made little progress as 1946 wound to a close. The Soviets appeared to agree in principle to a body for international control, but remained adamant about limiting inspections and maintaining veto power, while continuing to press for total atomic disarmament. Childs held out some final hope as the year ended, asking readers to be flexible and look carefully at Soviet proposals to see if they contained any areas for agreement.⁸¹ In the end, however, Baruch and the Americans tired of the delay. On the last day of 1946, the Security Council endorsed the Baruch Plan, with the abstention of the Soviet Union, and referred the matter to the UN atomic energy commission for additional negotiations.⁸²

Baruch labeled the Security Council vote a victory and resigned his post. Most other observers were not so sure. Positions had hardened on all fronts and there was little reason to think that a new team of diplomats working in a different forum would be more successful. As 1947 dawned, Childs had not given up all hope, but the situation seemed nearly impossible. Responsible national leaders were still talking about atomic “secrets” and the loyalty issue as if someone in government was proposing to give them away. No one more flexible than Baruch could be appointed as chief negotiator without cries of “appeasement” filling the press and halls

⁸⁰ Marquis Childs, “Small Hope for Atomic Agreement,” *Washington Post*, 11 November 1946, 5.

⁸¹ Marquis Childs, “Atomic Inspection,” *Washington Post*, 3 December 1946, 8.

⁸² Offner, *Another Such Victory*, 151; Leffler, *Preponderance of Power*, 114-116.

of Congress. Fear of espionage had given the nation a case of the “atomic jitters” and most of the discussion now seemed to focus on how long the atomic monopoly would last. Childs used his position as chair of the ADA committee on foreign policy, described in the previous chapter, to have that group put its weight behind a strong statement on international control, but, like his writing in the column, it did little good.⁸³

Summing up in a bitter assessment, Childs wrote “It is a delusion, and a perilous one, to think that delay can serve the United States. It is the delusion of the rich man who does not understand that his fortune is being drained away by the mere passage of time.”⁸⁴ On 5 March 1947, Gromyko made a major speech interpreted as a sign that the Soviets would make no concessions and that the Baruch Plan was as good as dead, leading to “pronounced discouragement” in the press.⁸⁵ By June, when the Soviets unveiled their latest proposal, Childs had decided that the issue was lost. The proposal was “more or less meaningless” and full of loopholes. As discussed in the previous chapter, the columnist’s attitudes about the Soviets were hardening in the summer of 1947 as he and other liberals adopted a tougher stance in the Cold War generally. He now figured that the Soviets were very near to completing their own bomb and were just using further UN discussion to stall. The opportunity to reach agreement before the onset of an atomic arms race was lost.⁸⁶

⁸³ Foreign Policy Statement of Americans for Democratic Action, 30 March 1947, ADA Papers, series 2, box 71.

⁸⁴ Marquis Childs, “Atomic Delusion,” *Washington Post*, 14 January 1947, 8.

⁸⁵ “Press and Radio Reaction to Gromyko’s March 5 Attack on the U.S. Proposals,” Department of State, Division of Public Studies, 17 March 1947, Records of the Atomic Energy Commission (RG 326), Records of the Office of the Chairman, Misc. Records, Box 4, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁸⁶ Marquis Childs, “Russia and the Atom,” *Washington Post*, 14 June 1947, 9.

The Trials and Tribulations of the Atomic Energy Commission

Early 1947 saw the nation's attention fall once more on the issue of domestic control and once again Childs took up the issue vigorously. The Atomic Energy Act of 1946 called for the transfer of the atom program from the military to the new Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) at midnight on 1 January 1947. The principle of civilian control had been enshrined in law, but many questions about the practical application of policies under the new agency remained to be worked out through the winter of 1946/47. Leadership of the AEC also remained a question mark. Childs often worried that it was difficult to find well-qualified public servants to fill important government positions. The salary of 15,000 dollars per year, he noted, was well below what a qualified candidate would easily earn in the private sector. Only a public-spirited person would seek the job, but anyone who had that level of idealism was "likely to have expressed himself on the progressive side of one issue or another." Those positions were bound to be fraught with controversy. The conservative press and FBI would comb through each nominee's background and in the enflamed political environment of the time innocent comments or associations of the past could easily be used to stir up opposition. "This kind of thinking," he noted, "tends to weed out anyone who has ever done any bold thinking. The perfect employee would be an efficient robot who has never been guilty of a thought or an idea."⁸⁷

Childs did take heart when President Truman nominated New Dealer David Lilienthal, former director of the Tennessee Valley Authority and expert in public administration, to head

⁸⁷ Marquis Childs, "Atomic Task," *Washington Post*, 27 December 1946, 6.

the new agency on 28 October 1946.⁸⁸ Lilienthal and Childs had known each other for many years and their political philosophies had much in common.⁸⁹ In fact, Lilienthal was exactly the kind of person Childs himself might have chosen for the position, as they both shared a similar idealism about public service and the role of government/industry partnership to drive economic progress. Childs was a long-time supporter of the TVA and other public works projects of the New Deal era and he believed that Lilienthal had the skill and expertise necessary to direct the atomic project. On the other hand, Lilienthal's tenure at the TVA had been marked by conflict arising largely from conservative opposition to the New Deal, allegations of leftist influence at the TVA, and internal disagreements over agency policy. These issues were bound to come up in the confirmation hearings. As Childs feared, politics would get in the way of clear-headed decision making on such a serious public issue.

In many ways, the confirmation hearings for Lilienthal and the others turned out even worse than Childs could have imagined, even though Truman's nominees were eventually confirmed. Elections in 1946 had given Republicans the majority in the Senate and Bourke Hickenlooper of Iowa chaired the committee. Hickenlooper, although not among the most extreme anti-Communists, shared the concerns of many conservatives about the intrusion of the government into free enterprise and the supposed softness of liberals in the global conflict with the Soviets. He was especially interested in increasing military involvement with the AEC, the continued development of the atomic bomb stockpile, as well as the loyalty issue and

⁸⁸ See Hewlett and Anderson, *The New World*, 620-624, on the politics behind Truman's decision.

⁸⁹ Lilienthal makes several references to informal conversations and lunches with Childs, as well as parties at the Childs home in Chevy Chase, Maryland, in his diary. David E. Lilienthal, *The Journals of David E. Lilienthal: Vol. II, The Atomic Years, 1945-1950* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964).

prevention of espionage.⁹⁰ The Iowan's skepticism about Lilienthal was outmatched by the outright hostility of Senator Kenneth McKellar, a seventy-seven year old Tennessee Democrat with a long history of skirmishes against the TVA. Although not a member of the committee, McKellar was granted permission to take part in the hearings by asking questions, subpoenaing witnesses, and entering documents into the record. The hearings, which took place from late January to early March 1947, quickly became a forum for airing political grievances and rehashing old allegations of leftist infiltration of the TVA, all at a time when Childs hoped the Senate would rise to the occasion and set politics aside.

Childs betrayed concern about McKellar's treatment of the Lilienthal nomination from the outset. In a column published on the first day of the confirmation hearings, he warned that the Senator would bring his New Deal-era grudges to bear on the nominee, as he was doing in a concurrent hearing in which the Public Works committee was considering Gordon Clapp's appointment as head of TVA. It was little more than a "grudge fight," he wrote, brought on by the fact that Lilienthal had refused to hire McKellar's political cronies for positions in the TVA during the 1930s. This bit of "petty vindictiveness" motivated McKellar's actions, but other conservatives were bound to bring up dated allegations of Communist intrigue and mismanagement at TVA.⁹¹ As the hearings dragged on week by week, McKellar's questioning and allegations held center court. At various points he accused Lilienthal of grave instances of fraud and mismanagement, even producing a statement from one of Lilienthal's secretaries at a job he held in Chicago before entering public life.⁹² He pressed Lilienthal on contracts and

⁹⁰ Wang, *American Science in an Age of Anxiety*, 161-162.

⁹¹ Marquis Childs, "Senator McKellar's Assault on TVA," *Washington Post*, 27 January 1947, 5.

⁹² Transcript available in *Confirmation of the Atomic Energy Commission and General Manager* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1947).

business arrangements from the TVA years. More significant was McKellar's use of the Communist issue. He called as a witness one of the detectives who had assisted with the HUAC investigation of TVA in the 1930s, reprinted wartime editorials alleging Communist infiltration of the agency in the committee record, and grilled a youthful ex-Communist who had worked briefly for TVA before the war. He went so far as to make the point that Lilienthal's parents had emigrated from an area of Eastern Europe that was now behind the Iron Curtain.

Childs took McKellar to task harshly, as did many in the press at the time.⁹³ No column in Childs' career was more strongly worded and direct as the one that ran on 8 February 1947. "It is just possible," he wrote, "that in the long history of the Senate there has never been any performance so dishonorable" as that of McKellar, an "unenviable record he will carry to his grave." It was a "black mark in the book of American political history" and a "monstrous reality" that could not be conveniently ignored. To Childs, the senator was engaged in un-American tactics and resorted to "the meanest form of character assassination." The state of Tennessee had a proud record in the Senate, he argued, but McKellar's actions would long be relegated to "a dark niche in the golden cathedral of American history."⁹⁴ These strong words, pointed even for Childs, indicate the depths of the columnist's concern over the future of the new atomic agency and the political career of his friend and fellow liberal Lilienthal.

⁹³ FAS press release, "Comments from the U.S. Press on the Confirmation of Lilienthal to the Atomic Energy Commission," Atomic Scientists Printed and Near-Printed Material, box 3, folder 2.

⁹⁴ Marquis Childs, "Dishonorable Performance," *Washington Post*, 8 February 1947, 7. Similar sentiment can be found in many Childs columns from the period. See "Grudge Fight," *Washington Post*, 17 February 1947, 6; "Lilienthal and Brandeis," *Washington Post*, 19 February 1947, 9; and "Executive-Legislative Stalemate," *Washington Post*, 5 March 1947, 9.

Childs was more generous to other, more moderate, critics of Lilienthal, making careful distinctions between what he saw as reasonable and unreasonable political motivation. At work, the columnist felt, was an effort to undo not just civilian oversight of the atom, but the expansion of the federal government under Roosevelt and Truman. Here again he hoped leaders on all sides would set aside partisan differences and deal practically with the atom. The new agency was responsible for important work and required able leadership rather than harmful delay. When Childs felt Republican leaders were raising legitimate policy issues in the confirmation process, he praised them for admirable service. When, on the other hand, he felt they used the hearings to undermine the principle of civilian control or score partisan points against the Truman administration, he criticized freely. Senator Robert Taft of Ohio came in for initial criticism for failing to exert strong leadership in holding the party to a centrist position and allowing Styles Bridges of New Hampshire and Wallace White of Maine to engage in red-baiting during the hearings.⁹⁵ Republicans like Wayne Morse of Oregon and Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan, whom Childs saw as responsible and moderate, garnered praise for their efforts to keep the hearings on track and defend Lilienthal's honor and integrity.⁹⁶ After Lilienthal was finally confirmed on March 10, Childs summed up his concern that petty politics drowned out substantive discussion of the nation's real concerns, again pointing to Vandenberg, Hickenlooper, and Morse as examples of "forward looking" leaders.⁹⁷ Although he did not mention Childs by name, Lilienthal was thankful for the support he got

⁹⁵ Marquis Childs, "Master-minding by Taft," *Washington Post*, 27 February 1947, 7.

⁹⁶ Marquis Childs, See "Grudge Fight," *Washington Post*, 17 February 1947, 6; "Lilienthal and Brandeis," *Washington Post*, 19 February 1947, 9.

⁹⁷ Marquis Childs, "Atomic Timetable," *Washington Post*, 5 April 1947, 5.

from allies in the press, saying on one occasion that he would not have been confirmed without their efforts on his behalf.⁹⁸

Lilienthal's successful confirmation settled the issue for a short time, but opponents of his management of the agency found much to criticize over the next two years, often related to the loyalty and espionage scare of the time. One flashpoint emerged when the House Committee on Un-American Activities raised questions about Dr. E. U. Condon, Director of the National Bureau of Standards and prominent member of the scientists' movement, making him a high-profile target for conservative criticism. Condon emerged as a leading proponent of the internationalist position and critic of excessive government secrecy in the postwar years. Through 1947 and 1948, he was the subject of investigation by the HUAC and became a polarizing figure, eventually being described as the nation's "weakest link" in atomic security, despite the inability of the committee to find any specific evidence of disloyalty.⁹⁹ Liberal supporters in Congress and the FAS argued Condon's case and pointed out how the right wing press exaggerated Condon's relationships with allegedly dangerous groups.¹⁰⁰ Childs joined this chorus in a pair of March 1948 columns, taking the opportunity to remind readers that the atomic secret, at issue in the allegations against Condon, had been a moot point since the end of the war and that the only fair charge against the scientist was that he was a "thorough-going maverick" who sometimes spoke his mind.¹⁰¹ Childs saw the attacks on Condon as part of a

⁹⁸ David Lilienthal, "Remarks Before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Washington DC, April 19, 1947," Records of the Atomic Energy Commission (RG 326), Records of the Office of the Chairman, Misc. Records, box 1, folder 2.

⁹⁹ Wang, *American Science in an Age of Anxiety*, 134-145.

¹⁰⁰ FAS Press Release on Dr. Condon, 4 March 1948, Atomic Scientists Printed and Near-Printed Material, box 3, folder 4; "Press Reaction to the Attacks on Dr. Condon: A Speech by Hon. Helen Gahagan Douglas, 14 April 1948," Atomic Scientists Printed and Near-Printed Material, box 1, folder 8.

¹⁰¹ Marquis Childs, "Smear Against Condon," *Washington Post*, 3 March 1948, 15.

larger pattern of attacks on the civilian-controlled AEC and the intellectual freedom and integrity of its advisors in the scientific community. The outcome, he felt, would be to “alienate and intimidate the very men on whom the future security of the country depends.”¹⁰²

Around the same time, Childs offered up a set of four columns on the current state of the atomic program after a year of management by the Lilienthal and the AEC. Designed in part to promote Lilienthal’s appointment to a second term and defend the embattled chairman from critics, the columns laid out a rosy picture of progress in weapons development, harmonious relations with the military, and new attention to civilian uses of the atom. Making use of numerous unnamed sources in Congress and at the AEC, Childs reported that the commission had taken great strides to increase the nation’s atomic arsenal, both in terms of the increased weapons stockpile and the power of each bomb. Issues of security and loyalty filling the headlines were just hot air, he reported. The AEC loyalty review board and the FBI had the issue under control. Even those who had opposed Lilienthal, he suggested, were now convinced that he was a capable and energetic leader, if not always flexible and open to suggestions. Just as important, the friction that many predicted would arise between the AEC and the Military Liaison Committee had not, in fact, generated any significant problems. Childs also argued that morale among the atomic scientists was high, although a poll taken at the same time by the Atomic Scientists of Chicago indicated otherwise.¹⁰³ Taken as a whole, these four columns were an uncharacteristically cheerful assessment of atomic politics and a

¹⁰² Marquis Childs, “Pattern of Persecution,” *Washington Post* 12 March 1948, 22.

¹⁰³ According to an ASC press release, three-fourths of members had either “decided to decline” or been made “more reluctant to accept” government employment due to the HUAC investigation of Dr. Condon. ASC press release, 22 April 1948, Atomic Scientists Printed and Near-Printed Material, box 2, folder 5.

ringing endorsement of the both Lilienthal's management and the principle of civilian control.¹⁰⁴

Lilienthal's tenure at AEC remained troubled, however. Matters finally came to a head early in 1949 when the Joint Committee opened an investigation into Lilienthal's leadership of the AEC. This time it was Hickenlooper who leveled the most serious charge, releasing a statement to the press accusing Lilienthal of "incredible mismanagement" of the agency.¹⁰⁵ The senator charged Lilienthal with taking a cavalier attitude toward security, for example neglecting to quickly track down a few ounces of missing uranium at an AEC facility. The more serious allegation was that Lilienthal had failed to prevent an alleged Communist from obtaining a fellowship, sponsored by the agency, to conduct research on unclassified aspects of atomic science. This erupted as a major controversy that spring, especially in the right-wing press and radio programs.¹⁰⁶ In a larger sense, the hearings reflected two years of increasing tension among the interested parties. For example, the Joint Committee and the AEC failed to reach a mutually satisfactory system for sharing sensitive information. Despite frequent secret testimony and classified reports, the committee was unable to get a firm answer to questions about the production rate of new atomic bombs and an accurate list of people who knew where

¹⁰⁴ Marquis Childs, "Cooperation on Atomic Energy," *Washington Post*, 18 February 1948, 13; "Understanding Atomic Energy," *Washington Post*, 19 February 1948, 11; "Atomic Scientists," *Washington Post*, 20 February 1948, 20; "Hopeful Beginning on the Atom," *Washington Post*, 21 February 1948, 11.

¹⁰⁵ Statement from the Office of Senator B.B. Hickenlooper, May 22, 1949. Atomic Energy Commission (RG 326), Records of the Office of Public Information, Press Releases, box 2.

¹⁰⁶ Radio commentator Fulton Lewis Jr. broke this story in early May, using material leaked to him from an unknown source, and commented on it extensively that month. See "Summary of the Current Situation," FAS internal memo, 2 June 1949, Atomic Scientists of Chicago Records, box 1, folder 1.

they were stored.¹⁰⁷ Members from both parties at times expressed frustration with the troubled relationship.

The hearings were also a wedge for critics of Lilienthal and the AEC to air grievances and maneuver for leverage. Issues as minor as contracts for bus service to the atomic facility at Oak Ridge received attention in the media, especially on the Fulton Lewis radio program. As an observer from the FAS noted to group members, the hearings were an opening for “Lilienthal-haters, opponents of civilian control, conservative Republicans, and plain-and-fancy sensationalists” who were “feeding the fires of public fear in hopes of advancing their particular causes.”¹⁰⁸ Clearly, however, the issue of secrecy and security dominated the controversy and hearings, as it dominated much of the dialog about the atomic program in the early Cold War. Even though “virtually everyone’ in Washington considered the allegations “spurious,” the Joint Committee held twenty-four public and twenty-one private hearings over a ten-week period in the summer of 1949.¹⁰⁹ Lilienthal defended himself in a way that echoed Childs’ columns of the previous year, pointing out that the AEC had made impressive progress in weapons development and dramatically solidified the weak security procedures inherited from the Manhattan Project, while also improving the morale of the nation’s scientific community that contributed so much to the development of atomic energy.¹¹⁰ The Commission also released a copy of the loyalty oath required of all those who accepted the AEC

¹⁰⁷ See correspondence between McMahon and Lilienthal, 14 and 17 October 1947, Atomic Energy Commission (RG 326), Records of the Office of the Chairman, Senate Correspondence, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁰⁸ “Attack on the AEC,” Internal FAS memo, 25 June 1949, Atomic Scientists of Chicago Records, box 2, folder 5.

¹⁰⁹ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, 39.

¹¹⁰ “Statement, May 22, 1949, by David E. Lilienthal, Chairman, AEC, in Reply to Senator Hickenlooper,” Atomic Energy Commission (RG 326), Records of the Office of Public Information, Press Releases, box 2.

fellowships, along with additional explanation of the selection process for the program, which, as the release made clear, was outside of Lilienthal's control.

Childs responded to the latest round of controversy in a variety of ways. First, he defended the right of scientists to think and act freely without government restraint. Fear that one or two leftists would obtain a minor research fellowship position with no access to classified work or materials was self-defeating. The Nazis, he claimed, failed to make bold achievements in science because of Hitler's demand for ideological purity and paranoia about controlling German scientists. Allowing fear to turn the nation into a totalitarian state would hamper progress, as well as limiting individual freedoms.¹¹¹ It might have been a mistake to give the fellowship to a Communist, he conceded, hinting that a number of letter-writers had chided him for not taking that stand, but giving in to fear and allowing the government to proscribe correct opinions was far more dangerous. "Freedom itself," he noted, "is a calculated risk."¹¹²

A second, and more comprehensive, aspect of Childs' commentary was to decry the way the debate had once again become a partisan squabble, which was a long-time concern. He had always felt the subject demanded that those in position to influence decisions rise above partisanship and many of the current charges, he felt, were little more than grandstanding for political effect in a political culture awash with "atomic jitters."¹¹³ A number of the members of the Joint Committee, including Hickenlooper, faced elections in 1950 and Childs worried that much of the criticism of Lilienthal and the AEC was an attempt to impress voters

¹¹¹ Marquis Childs, "Free Inquiry and the Atom," *Washington Post*, 18 May 1949, 9.

¹¹² Marquis Childs, "Fear's Havoc," *Washington Post*, 31 May 1949, 10.

¹¹³ Marquis Childs, "Politics and the Atom," *Washington Post*, 2 June 1949, 11.

concerned over headlines about atomic espionage and security lapses.¹¹⁴ Equally worrisome was the behind-the-scenes political maneuvering of those who would place strict oversight on, or entirely dismantle, the AEC and give control over the atomic program back to the military. Although Hickenlooper denied that this was his objective, Childs believed that it was the goal of many of the senator's allies. When Republican Senator Harry Cain of Washington introduced a bill to restore control to the men in uniform, Childs singled him out for at least being frank and "calling a spade a spade."¹¹⁵

One final element of Childs' involvement with the debate over Lilienthal's tenure deserves notice because it drew him into a public spat with a fellow journalist and elicited a round of commentary about the role of the press in a time of controversy. Although Lilienthal got "mixed, though generally sympathetic reviews" in the press at this time, Childs was angered by the way conservative opponents of the chairman used the press and radio to campaign against him. He incorporated a stinging critique of the practice of leaking what he termed potentially inflammatory material to ideological allies in the media into his writing.¹¹⁶ Several columns during this period point out that Lilienthal's foes appeared to be leaking to "a section of press and radio deeply hostile to the chairman" in an effort to smear him.¹¹⁷ He compared this to the press campaign that had recently driven Secretary of Defense James Forrestal from office and perhaps contributed to his suicide, although the parties to that controversy were not the same. What was the same, however, was the way he believed rumor

¹¹⁴ Ibid.; Marquis Childs, "Atomic Fishing Expedition," *Washington Post*, 8 June 1949, 11; Marquis Childs, "The Atom in Politics," *Washington Post*, 23 June 1949, 11.

¹¹⁵ Marquis Childs, "Politics and the Atom," *Washington Post*, 2 June 1949, 11.

¹¹⁶ Hogan, *A Cross of Iron*, 261-262.

¹¹⁷ Childs, "Politics and the Atom," 11. Most of the columns from this period touch on this aspect of the situation to a greater or lesser degree.

and innuendo, mixed with facts taken out of context, were being used in an effort to “get Lilienthal.”¹¹⁸ Even though Childs himself often took advantage of inside information and sometimes used his column in ways that no doubt stung people he wrote about, this kind of journalism clearly fell outside of his definition of an acceptable practice of the craft.

Although he didn’t mention him by name, Childs was most certainly thinking of Fulton Lewis Jr. as he wrote these critiques. Lewis had been first to break the story of the problems with the AEC fellowship program and he used his popular program on the Mutual Broadcasting System to rail against Lilienthal through May 1949 as the controversy developed. Lewis exacerbated the situation by directly attacking Childs in his May 13 and May 19 broadcasts, showing that the attack on Lilienthal would be expanded to include the chairman’s supporters in the press. Lewis called Childs “left-wing” and a “radical,” and accused him of doing his job by rewriting press releases, among other shoddy and suspect journalistic practices. The first program focused largely on Childs’ support for the nomination of John Carson, a friend of labor and enemy of the powerful National Association of Manufacturers, to the Federal Trade Commission.¹¹⁹ The second touched directly on the Lilienthal controversy, misstating Childs’ position on the fellowships to make it appear he had no concern for atomic security, and hinting, in a mocking tone, that the columnists’ friendship with Lilienthal tainted his work.¹²⁰ Needless to say, Childs was angered by what he saw as a high-profile insult to his professional integrity and the mobilization of a right-wing smear campaign directed against him. He quickly wrote to Frank White, president of MBS, asking for equal time to respond. After some

¹¹⁸ Marquis Childs, “Forrestal and Lilienthal,” *Washington Post*, 25 May 1949, 9.

¹¹⁹ Childs was supportive of Carson in his column and Lewis frequently used his program to harshly criticize the nominee. See Joseph P. Harris, *The Advice and Consent of the Senate: A Study of the Confirmation of Appointments by the United States Senate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1953), 209-211.

¹²⁰ Transcripts of Fulton Lewis Programs, 13 and 19 May 1949, Childs Papers, box 8, folder 1.

back and forth between Childs and MBS, as well as carbon copies of letters being sent to Wayne Coy at the FCC, Childs earned his chance to respond and comment on the role of the press in the controversy.¹²¹

Childs' June 7 address, aired between 10:15 and 10:30 p.m. Eastern time, elaborated on themes evident in his recent columns.¹²² Part of the address was a defense of his own professionalism, pointing out that he was no stenographer. He worked twelve to fourteen hours a day talking to sources, attending hearings and press conferences, and doing research and was certainly no stenographer. He had no agenda other than to provide thoughtful analysis and comment as he saw fit. Other portions spoke more directly to the climate of hostility and fear that Childs felt Lewis and others spread in their attempt to smear Lilienthal and promote a fundamental change in the governance of the atomic program. These men employed "smear words and smear phrases that carefully skirt the law of libel and slander." In a "sneering, jeering tone of voice" they engaged in character assassination; taking words and actions out of context, they used the "half-truth and half-lie" and abused the power granted them by virtue of their place as commentators. What was needed at this critical time, and what he believed he did as a columnist, was "honest and forthright criticism" of public servants to ensure that their actions were "open and above board." Childs received a number of positive letters from radio listeners, but the address did little to tone down the partisan rancor, either in the press or in the Congressional hearing rooms.¹²³

¹²¹ Correspondence in Childs Papers, box 8, folder 1.

¹²² "Broadcast by Marquis Childs, Mutual Broadcasting System, Tuesday, June 7, 1949," Childs Papers, box 5, folder 3.

¹²³ Letters in Childs Papers, box 8, folder 1.

By the end of June 1949, it was clear to Childs that the Hickenlooper allegations could not be sustained and that the investigation was reduced to “scratching up trivialities.”¹²⁴ Still, it appeared that the Joint Committee would impose new restrictions on the fellowship program and exercise greater oversight of the AEC, a rebuke to Lilienthal. Although Lilienthal remained in his position, the AEC was weakened and turned increasingly security-minded.¹²⁵ The final irony was that the investigation had actually extended the chairman’s tenure. Lilienthal had confided to Childs privately in the spring that he wanted to leave the position. He had tired of the heavy responsibility and felt that the AEC was on solid ground, ready to be passed to a fresh administrator. But when Hickenlooper’s charges began to circulate and the investigation began, Lilienthal was forced to stay on the job. Resigning under fire at that moment would have been seen as admitting fault. Childs hoped that the final report of the Joint Committee investigation would be a vindication for Lilienthal, but he knew that the minority report would be a “yes, but...” document that left a shadow on his reputation, especially to those already critical.¹²⁶ Everyone had lost something in the fight and finding a well-qualified successor in the current political climate would be exceedingly difficult.

It was in this context that Truman announced to the nation that the Soviets had exploded their own atomic device. Attention once again turned to the question of international relations. Childs’ first columns after the announcement betray little surprise as he had expected the Soviet bomb within the decade. What was needed, he argued, was action and not shock or finger-pointing. He hoped it would rouse Americans from their dangerous complacency and

¹²⁴ Marquis Childs, “The Atom in Politics,” *Washington Post*, 23 June 1949, 11.

¹²⁵ Hogan, *Cross of Iron*, 262-263.

¹²⁶ Marquis Childs, “Successor to Lilienthal,” *Washington Post*, 22 July 1949, 23. Lilienthal announced his resignation from the AEC at the end of 1949 and left the job in early 1950.

divisiveness and generate some honest self-reflection.¹²⁷ Four steps were needed. First, the completion of the early warning radar system had to be expedited. Second, a realistic and comprehensive plan of civil defense would have to be designed and implemented, with public support, in a way that wouldn't frighten the nation. Third, the atomic arsenal would have to be expanded and new, more powerful weapons developed.¹²⁸ He couldn't have realized it then, but within a few months he would be writing columns about the hydrogen bomb controversy. Finally, Childs was not ready to give up on negotiations. The Soviets, he felt, had an incentive to come to limited terms on a basic agreement for control and inspections. The comprehensive agreement long so elusive in the UNAEC was unnecessary if a limited, but tough, mechanism could be devised. "It may be that no realistic agreement whatsoever will be possible," he admitted, but "the American conscience- and, for that matter, the conscience of the Western World- will not be satisfied until every avenue has been thoroughly and honestly explored." In the meantime, Americans were advised to steel themselves. "There is no single way to peace and security," he wrote. "Although the awareness of it is only growing, what we are engaged in is Operation Survival."¹²⁹

Conclusion

Childs was largely correct about the future of international control of atomic energy. No workable plan emerged from the UN atomic energy commission and the arms race and mutual terror of the Cold War that Childs wished to avoid became a defining reality through the rest of his career. The Baruch Plan, which he characterized in 1948 as a "great sky sign advertising

¹²⁷ Marquis Childs, "Shattered Illusion," *Washington Post*, 27 September 1949, 12.

¹²⁸ Marquis Childs, "Operation Survival," *Washington Post*, 5 October 1949, 13.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

America's willingness to sacrifice so much for security," came to nothing.¹³⁰ As will be discussed in more detail in chapter four, he spent the next two decades covering the arms race and arms control, constantly warning of the danger of the bombs as they got bigger and more powerful. On the domestic scene, the record was more mixed. The post-Lilienthal AEC arguably grew more conservative, but also less politicized. Commercial development of atomic energy emerged, but it was carefully monitored; the military never regained total control over the atom as Childs had feared. On the other hand, the "atomic jitters" Childs wrote about played a major role in the emergence of McCarthyism and the postwar red scare that destroyed careers, created a climate of fear and conformity, a weakened national unity in a time of peril. Childs' response to McCarthyism, the focus of the following chapter, tied directly to his ideas about national security discussed in these first two chapters.

In his later years, he wrote of his sense of futility and despair over his inability to explain the enormity of the Atomic Age to his readers. In retrospect, an analysis of his writings shows that he was too critical of his own efforts. Certainly few in the press worked harder to inform readers and keep the atomic issue front and center in the public mind. Although his writing was at times alarmist and pessimistic, it was a reflection of the times in which he lived and worked. This chapter has offered examples of some of the more colorful language he employed, but it should not be forgotten that the columns also presented a sound argument, based on reported facts and deeply immersed in the mindset of postwar liberalism. Childs' writing was part of a broad effort, undertaken by government officials, the scientists' movement, and others in the press, to inform and persuade Americans to see the atom, and

¹³⁰ Marquis Childs, "The Atom in Politics," *Washington Post*, 27 October 1948, 11.

those responsible for controlling it, in a responsible and pragmatic manner. He used the column to promote the leaders and experts who shaped his understanding and shared his opinions, as well as to defend them against unfair criticism in an acrimonious public sphere. As he himself came to realize, the power of a columnist is always limited, an exercise in indirect influence.¹³¹

¹³¹ Childs, *Witness to Power*, 268-269.

Chapter 3

I do not believe that people should be prosecuted or persecuted for their thoughts and opinions. The line between thoughts and acts may be a narrow one but I believe it is of the utmost importance to preserve it if we are to preserve the basic fundamentals which distinguish our system from totalitarianism¹

“Senator McCarthy has from time to time attacked me for defending certain individuals charged with one thing or another. What I have defended and will continue to defend is the right to a defense and a fair and proper defense.”²

Viewers tuned to the NBC program *Meet the Press* on the evening of 7 August 1951 were in for a surprise. Regular viewers, accustomed to seeing Marquis Childs on the panel of journalists, saw a familiar face. Few newsmen, in fact, appeared more frequently on the show over the years. And guest Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, Republican of Wisconsin, was then at the height of his notoriety and press exposure. He would have been known to nearly everyone who saw the show. What was surprising was the way McCarthy turned the tables on the panel and used the program to chastise a prominent critic rather than answer the questions put to him in the usual fashion. According to Childs’ later recollection, the two met briefly in the dining room before the taping and he lightheartedly greeted the senator as “the victim.” McCarthy replied sardonically, “We’ll see about that” and left Childs to his meal.³ When the program began, McCarthy immediately challenged Childs and then turned the questioning around, reading from a sheaf of clippings that he brought into the studio to charge that Childs had defended Communists, whitewashed subversive activities, and undermined national security by disrupting the work of the House Committee on Un-American Activities and other investigative

¹ Robert W. Bliss to Marquis Childs, 17 February 1950, Childs Papers, box 8 folder 2.

² Childs to Sevellon Brown, editor of the Providence (RI) *Journal and Evening Bulletin*, 8 January 1953, Childs Papers, box 2, folder 5.

³ Marquis W. Childs, *Witness to Power* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 65-66.

bodies.⁴ Fuming and caught off guard by the sudden attack, Childs tried several alternative lines of questioning, but found himself challenged and accused at every turn. Undeterred by moderator Martha Roundtree, whom Childs later learned had been aware of McCarthy's plan, the senator continued through the rest of the show to assail his critics in the press and Childs in particular. Childs was left "feeling battered" by the experience, thinking that "he should have known better than to go on a program" with McCarthy.⁵

In retrospect, this episode was a classic McCarthy attack, one of a number of instances when he attempted to intimidate a critic from the Fourth Estate. As will be discussed below, the senator was enjoying a wave of public support and generally positive press coverage, but he was also on the defensive in his anti-Communist crusade, having just been the subject of an adverse bipartisan subcommittee report and facing a call by Senator William Benton, Democrat from Connecticut, that he be removed from office.⁶ Childs was more than just a convenient target for McCarthy's rage on a bad day; the columnist was one of the earliest and most consistent critics of McCarthyism, someone whom the senator wanted to marginalize and embarrass by whatever means possible. When challenged to provide evidence for his accusations or account for his roughshod tactics, McCarthy often lashed out at opponents and changed the subject by launching a new set of allegations. The confrontation between Childs and McCarthy on *Meet the Press* is a fitting symbol of the relationship between this newsman and the lawmaker he later dubbed the "antihero."⁷

⁴ *Meet the Press* transcript, 7 August 1951, box 205, Lawrence Spivak Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁵ Childs to Mrs. William Timmons, 21 September 1951, Childs Papers, box 9, folder 4.

⁶ David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 214-217.

⁷ Childs, *Witness to Power*, 65.

This chapter examines Mark Childs' reporting on Joseph McCarthy and the broader anti-Communist movement in the early postwar years that bears his name. "McCarthyism" has become a catch-all phrase to describe a variety of anti-Communist activities that both predate and postdate the years of McCarthy's direct influence.⁸ In fact, despite the consistent press attention he generated, McCarthy was only one of many players in the red scare of the 1940s and early 1950s. He had nothing to do with the prosecution of Alger Hiss, the exposure of the Hollywood Ten, or the conviction and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, among other high profile events of the period. Although the senator was, and remains, the most well-known of the anti-Communist extremists, it is necessary to look more broadly to understand the relationships among Childs, anti-Communism, and postwar liberalism. In addition to McCarthy's efforts in the Senate, the anti-Communist movement discussed here includes the work of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), FBI and Justice Department investigations of subversion, the Senate Internal Security Sub-Committee, and government loyalty boards. Childs reported and commented frequently on the activities of these bodies and used his column to alert readers to the dangers he believed they posed to civil rights, national security, and the democratic system of government, as well as the lives of unfortunate innocent men and women.

⁸ The literature on McCarthyism, American anti-Communism, and the "Second Red Scare" is voluminous. The best early overview is David Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge Under Truman and Eisenhower* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978). Walter Goodman, *The Committee* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968) remains an excellent study of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, as is Earl Latham, *The Communist Controversy in Washington* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966). Thoughtful overviews of the period include Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) and Ellen Schrecker's more recent *Many are the Crimes: McCarthyism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1998).

Childs was a major, though now largely overlooked, contributor to the anti-McCarthyism movement who aired his opinions conspicuously at a time when many in the mainstream press remained silent. As the previous two chapters demonstrate, he was among those heavily involved with articulating a strong liberal vision for the postwar world. His writing often challenged powerful conservative interests in policy debates about foreign policy and atomic weapons. His critique of McCarthyism was, in some ways, a defense of postwar liberalism generally, but to an important degree he was also fighting for his own position and legitimacy as a commentator on public affairs. His column featured prominently in the opinion pages of important anti-McCarthyism papers like the *Washington Post*, the *New York Post*, and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. Although Childs' name does not often come up as an example of anti-McCarthy journalism, these newspapers were widely recognized for their opposition to the excesses of the red scare.

Furthermore, Childs offered a sophisticated and multifaceted critique of McCarthyism that deserves close attention. He was not only a civil libertarian concerned with free expression and the right to a fair defense, though many of his columns spoke cogently to those issues. Instead Childs saw McCarthy's demagoguery as a dangerous distraction from real Cold War problems at home and a serious hindrance to American diplomacy abroad. McCarthyism damaged the nation's ability to conduct a strong foreign policy, stifled debate, and hindered scientific advancement necessary for the national defense at a time when the rivalry with the Soviet Union and other global events were reaching a critical point. His writings on these subjects are instructive in terms of understanding his attitudes about civil liberties and democracy, but they also offer insights into the liberal response and reaction to the

phenomenon of McCarthyism that so weakened the American left in postwar political culture. Childs emerged from the red scare relatively unscathed, but the damage to many other prominent liberals, and the liberal position generally, was more severe.⁹

Scholarship on the press and McCarthyism typically follows a general pattern laid out by Edwin Bayley's 1981 book *Joe McCarthy and the Press*, which focuses on McCarthy's supposed mastery of publicity and manipulation of the conventions of objective reporting.¹⁰ In this view, McCarthy took advantage of press schedules by holding news conferences or releasing reports right before deadline so reporters had little time for fact checking or analysis. He also favored friendly reporters with valuable material and bullied those who wrote critical stories. Furthermore, reporters played into McCarthy's hands because professional conventions required them to report his charges and allegations uncritically.¹¹ Other reporters were drawn to McCarthy, because of shared beliefs about the danger of Communism, his value as a reliable source for usable, front-page information, or the fact that they simply enjoyed taking a drink and sharing jokes with him. Whether because of sympathetic attitudes among reporters and editors or because of the practice of the trade, McCarthyism went relatively unchallenged in the pages of the daily press until a series of events turned public opinion against excessive red

⁹ Mary Sperling McAuliffe, *Crisis on the Left: Cold War Politics and American Liberals* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1978), 84-88; Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes*, 409-413.

¹⁰ Edwin R. Bayley, *Joe McCarthy and the Press* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1981). The point was first made by Douglass Cater in "The Captive Press," *The Reporter* 6 June 1950, 17-20. *The Reporter* and *The New Republic* published articles on McCarthy and the press in the early 1950s. Issues of trade publications like *Nieman Reports* and *Problems in Journalism: The Proceedings of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* from the time also reveal some of the internal discussion of these problems among journalists. Richard H. Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959), remains the classic interpretation of McCarthy as demagogue and opportunistic manipulator of opinion.

¹¹ David R. Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers, 1945-1965* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), 40-46; Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*, 185-190. Chapter 4 of Donald A. Ritchie, *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) is an exceptional study of McCarthy's allies in the press. See also Jim Tuck, *McCarthyism and New York's Hearst Press: A Study in Roles in the Witch Hunt* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995) and Lloyd Chiasson Jr., "McCarthy's Journalism," in Lloyd H. Chiasson Jr., ed., *The Press in Times of Crisis* (Westport: Praeger, 1995), 161-162.

hunting and emboldened Senate leaders who finally took action to moderate the political climate.

The role of opinion columnists during this period is relatively unexamined. Absent the handcuffs of objectivity, columnists and editorial writers were free to engage in the “interpretive reporting” that many in the field saw as the antidote to McCarthyism. Most studies of journalism in the period point to a significant minority of anti-red scare opinion among a handful of editorial pages and the senator’s often bitter response to his critics.¹² Several of the nation’s premiere syndicated columnists also regularly challenged the abuses and excesses of the loyalty board, congressional hearings, and other anti-Communist actions.¹³ Childs, then, was not a lone voice against McCarthyism. Historians, however, have neglected his contribution and the role of opinion journalism in the red scare saga and this chapter refocuses attention on one of McCarthy’s vocal opponents and examines the complexity of the arguments against McCarthyism that animated the liberal press. It also examines the potential consequences Childs faced for raising his voice during a period in his career when practical and professional considerations might have forced him to remain silent. Childs’ livelihood as a syndicated columnist to some degree depended on his remaining within the margins of acceptable opinion so as to maintain a lucrative subscriber base, and yet he remained steadfast

¹² Consistently anti-McCarthy papers included the Madison (Wis.) *Capital Times*, the *Milwaukee Journal*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *New York Post*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Washington Post*, and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, among others. See Bayley, *Joe McCarthy and the Press*, ch. 5 and Lawrence N. Strout, *Covering McCarthyism: How the Christian Science Monitor Handled Joseph R. McCarthy, 1950-1954* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999). New York *Post* editor James Wechsler’s experiences as a McCarthy critic are recounted in *The Age of Suspicion* (New York: Random House, 1953), ch. 12-15. See also Karen Miller, “Typical Slime by Joe McCarthy”: Ralph McGill and Anti-McCarthyism in the South,” *American Journalism* 13: 3 (Summer 1996): 319-332. Pro-McCarthy opinion is discussed in Jack Anderson and Ronald W. May, *McCarthy: The Man, the Senator, the “Ism”* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), 287-294.

¹³ Robert W. Merry, *Taking on the World: Joseph and Stewart Alsop- Guardians of the American Century* (New York: Viking, 1996), 212-225, 271-277; Oliver Pilat, *Drew Pearson: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Harper’s Magazine Press, 1973), 25-31, *passim*.

in expressing his opinions and offering a substantial critique of what he believed to be a dangerous and un-American political trend.

Postwar Anti-Communism

As discussed in the previous chapters, the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union collapsed in the face of postwar realities. Americans' attitudes gradually, but irrevocably shifted to an increasing distrust and fear of Communists overseas and at home, especially after the detonation of the Soviet atomic bomb and the start of the Korean War. In this heated atmosphere, those on the left, including anti-Communist liberals like Childs, found themselves suspect as the specter of Communism came to dominate the political arena. In many ways, he was a figure of the emerging Cold War consensus, but his opinions also became suspect in the fraught political culture of the time. Childs made his first comments on the problem of domestic Communism in 1946, writing in response to two separate issues: the growing concern about atomic espionage, as discussed in chapter 2, and the use of red-baiting tactics in the fall elections of that year. In each case, Childs set out a careful argument against the excesses of anti-Communism and tried to point out what he considered the most responsible way to contain the Communist threat. Childs refined and explored with more depth the attitudes reflected in these early columns as McCarthyism took root, but the themes and general principles that he expressed in 1946 remained at the heart of his critique of red scare politics through the entire period.

The February 1946 announcement that Canadian authorities had apprehended a ring of suspected atomic spies triggered Childs' first column on the Communist threat. Unlike some on the left, Childs never attempted to deny that there had been, and might still be, disloyal and

potentially traitorous men and women engaged in espionage and subversion, which he likened to a “fifth column.”¹⁴ This belief was at the heart of all of Childs’ writing during the period; his anti-McCarthyism was not based on a naive assumption that there was no reason to be concerned about subversion. “Many in this group are eccentrics and fanatics,” he wrote, “but others have positions of power and influence” that made them dangerous. However, even while acknowledging the threat, Childs worried that the nation’s response would prove more damaging than the Communists themselves. As his writing on the Lilienthal hearings and other early Cold War events made clear, he believed there was a right way and a wrong way to fight Communism and the distinction was the very basis of the difference between what he called the “American system” and the Soviet Union. Writing with great prescience, he worried about “wholesale action” that would deprive “thousands or hundreds of thousands of citizens of their liberty,” which would do “perhaps irreparable violence to the American form of government.” He also saw that innocent people would be injured in the process and argued that the victims would be “thousands of innocent liberals, radicals and progressives, loyal Americans who think in terms of economic changes within the American framework. They would be likely to be caught in a dragnet and the way would be opened to the persecution of anyone who deviated from political normalcy in any way.” Subsequent columns published in the following years reported and commented on exactly these kinds of situations.

Childs also wrote with concern about the partisan use of the Communist issue in the 1946 elections. In May he condemned Senator Theodore G. Bilbo, a Mississippi Democrat, for describing Henry and Clare Boothe Luce as Communistic in a “fantastic and absurd” campaign

¹⁴ Marquis Childs, “Fifth Column and the Atomic Bomb,” *Washington Post*, 18 February 1946, 7.

speech.¹⁵ Childs recognized the charge as ridiculous, but he was more concerned about the harmful effect of this strategy on the political culture. In the aftermath of the elections, Childs observed that journalists and political experts had largely overlooked the negative impact of the Communist issue as a factor in the campaign. He pointed out that in races across the nation, Republicans had used the Communist charge as a “smear word to be hurled at liberals and middle-of-the-roaders along with extreme leftists.”¹⁶ He criticized FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover for providing ammunition to the Republicans during a September speech in which he exaggerated and sensationalized the Communist threat. In Childs’ opinion, cultivating resentment and paranoia in order to win an election was cynicism at its worst. Anti-Communism was not the sole domain of one party or the other and an effective national security program, in Childs’ mind, could only emerge from bipartisan action. He perceived that public resentment against strikes and labor unions, coupled with a growing tendency for politicians to exploit the issue, set the stage for “the kind of red hunt that took place after World War I.”¹⁷ This was the same anti-labor resentment that prompted Senator Joseph McCarthy, newly elected, to charge in his first post-election appearance in Washington that union leader John L. Lewis should be drafted and then court-martialed. Childs felt the speech was “shocking” and “contrary to everything we think of as the American way of life.”¹⁸ Still, he wrote, McCarthy was merely reflecting a public mood that was setting the stage for a witch hunt. Red baiting in the manner used in the 1946 campaigns, to Childs’ mind, only made the problem worse.

¹⁵ Marquis Childs, “Bilbo’s Campaign,” *Washington Post*, 3 May 1946, 6.

¹⁶ Marquis Childs, “Communism in Politics,” *Washington Post*, 2 December 1946, 7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Marquis Childs, “Dangerous Drift,” *Washington Post*, 6 December 1946, 8.

McCarthy, however, was not yet the primary concern for Childs and others who feared a new age of political repression. The greater problem was the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and particularly Rep. J. Parnell Thomas of New Jersey and Rep. Karl Mundt of South Dakota. Childs had little respect for the committee, which he had criticized during the war as a headline-seeking body that did little but interfere with the FBI's efforts to stamp out espionage and subversion.¹⁹ In the summer of 1946, the committee was busy investigating leftist influence in the CIO and attempting to sway public debate on liberals in government positions, like the atomic scientists Childs defended from charges they were security risks.²⁰ Childs turned his attention to the committee's harassment of the State Department and Assistant Secretary of State Donald Russell, which the columnist believed diverted attention from more critical issues and caused good public servants to leave government. In language that would be familiar to readers of his later columns on McCarthy, Childs accused HUAC of carrying stupidity to "unbelievable lengths" and playing the game of "political dart-throwing." Thomas and Mundt were called "men with narrow and bigoted minds." Summing up, he wrote

The Un-American Activities Committee is a menace because it is so incompetent and because the random shots it fires, more often than not, hit innocent persons. There is a place for a committee- perhaps a joint committee of House and Senate- that, with skill and courage, could investigate the extent of Communist influence on American life and, at the same time, could expose the Fascists activities of hatemongers like the Ku Klux Klan. But far more harm than good is done by ignorant bumbler.²¹

This column is a clear statement of the beliefs that would be the foundation of much of later writing during the red scare. Looking back at the end of 1946, Childs wrote that the nation was

¹⁹ Marquis Childs, *I Write from Washington* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944), 92-93.

²⁰ Goodman, *The Committee*, 182-184.

²¹ Marquis Childs, "Congress's Witch-Hunt," *Washington Post*, 10 August 1946, 6.

entering a period of “mortal peril” and a “drift toward something alien, something, in that much abused word, un-American. It is toward force and violence.”²² The sheer volume of his writing on the subject shows that he resolved to use his column to reverse the trend if he could.

Childs had frequent opportunity to comment on the excesses of the anti-Communist movement during the following years, even before Senator McCarthy took center stage. The issue became increasingly contentious as the Cold War took shape and high profile allegations and investigations made headlines nationwide. It also became more difficult for anti-Communist liberals like Childs to differentiate themselves from the philosophy and activities of the more extreme red hunters whose methods and anti-democratic tendencies they opposed. This was a central rationale behind the creation of Americans for Democratic Action, a group of anti-Communist liberals that Childs helped form, as described in previous chapters.²³ He himself was not a Communist and he did not believe they could be a legitimate part of the nation’s political culture. “Those who have entered the Marxist church are beyond reasoning,” he wrote to one reader.²⁴ His writing from this period, then, is both a strident critique of anti-Communist extremism and a subtle discussion of important nuances and distinctions, some of which were likely lost on readers absorbed by the mood of fear and anxiety that pervaded the era.

Childs’ writing on the Communist issue in the late 1940s can be grouped into several broad areas. First was a series of columns that continued to challenge the operations of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Childs was impressed with the way the

²² Marquis Childs, “Dangerous Drift,” *Washington Post*, 6 December 1946, 8.

²³ His association with ADA, despite its brevity, haunted him in the McCarthy years. Letters in the Childs Papers show that he sometimes tried to disassociate himself from the group.

²⁴ Childs to Ken Hansen, 18 March 1947, Childs Papers, box 7, folder 3.

Canadian government handled the atomic spy ring investigation and he wondered, in an early January 1947 column, why the Americans couldn't work in a similar manner. The HUAC, which had recently announced another foray into investigating Communists in Hollywood, was likely to create more distrust and confusion. "By parodying the methods of the Russians- by witchhunting, for example- we descend to their level," he wrote, "That is one of the perils under which we live: resisting the encroachments of totalitarianism, all our values will become so perverted that the difference between the authoritarian and ourselves will cease to exist."²⁵ One his central complaints against the committee was that the accused were often denied a chance to defend themselves in public. For example, in March 1948 he castigated the HUAC for not allowing the respected scientist Dr. Edward Condon the opportunity to reply to charges after eight months of rumor.²⁶ A later column chided the committee for setting itself up as the nation's expert on Americanism, in this case as the arbiter of which textbooks could be used in schools.²⁷

President Truman's government loyalty program, established in 1947, also made Childs wary, especially the vague language that he feared could easily be used to target nearly anyone expressing a dissenting viewpoint. His first column after the policy's announcement highlighted a visit of a delegation from the American Civil Liberties to Attorney General Tom Clark to voice the group's concerns. "The problem...will be," he opined, "to distinguish between freedom of thought and outright disloyalty."²⁸ A later column pointed out the burden and wastefulness, in terms of money and manpower, inherent in investigating hundreds of

²⁵ Marquis Childs, "Soviet Espionage Network," *Washington Post*, 25 January 1947, 7.

²⁶ Marquis Childs, "Pattern of Persecution," *Washington Post*, 12 March 1948, 22.

²⁷ Marquis Childs, "School Book Probe," *Washington Post*, 14 June 1949, 12.

²⁸ Marquis Childs, "Test of Our Liberties," *Washington Post*, 19 April 1947, 7.

thousands of men and women. The resulting delays and inefficiencies meant that important jobs remained unfilled and work remained undone.²⁹ Childs also used his column to call attention to the plight of federal employees caught in the snares of the loyalty system. This was the case with Mrs. Anne Alling, a fifty-nine year old typist who worked for the Veterans Administration. Alling was nearly blind and worked typing out correspondence from Dictaphone recordings. None of the material that crossed her desk was remotely sensitive, yet the loyalty board threatened her job because she, like so many Americans, had donated to the liberal Labor Defense Fund in the 1930s and knitted some sweaters for Russian War Relief during World War II.³⁰

Two specific cases from the late 1940s had a personal connection for Childs. Although it is unclear whether Childs was acquainted with Alger Hiss, the journalist felt an intellectual and political affinity with the accused official. Hiss was a State Department official who, among other activities, had helped organize the 1944 Dumbarton Oaks conference that led to the formation of the United Nations and served as an advisor to President Franklin Roosevelt at the 1945 Yalta Conference. In 1947, Hiss was president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and well respected by political liberals. Whittaker Chambers, an ex-Communist on the staff of *Time*, told the HUAC in August 1948 that he had known Hiss as a Communist in the mid-1930s, launching what became one of the most high profile cases of the red scare era. Hiss was ultimately convicted of perjury after denying under oath that he had

²⁹ Marquis Childs, "Loyalty in a Circle," *Washington Post*, 7 April 1948, 15.

³⁰ Marquis Childs, "Loyalty Probe Absurdities," *Washington Post*, 15 June 1949, 13; "Shotgun Loyalty Methods," *Washington Post*, 16 June 1949, 17.

passed secret documents to Chambers.³¹ Childs followed the Hiss hearings and trials closely, as did the many liberals who took special interest in the case. For Childs, the attack on Hiss was another wedge issue that was part of a larger attack on the New Deal as whole by conservative forces who sought to unmake the liberal state. Hiss's guilt by extension damned the "long-hairs and liberal intellectual elites and, therefore, the whole political and social experiment of the 1930s."³²

Childs shared an intellectual orientation with Hiss as a New Dealer. Both were among the generation of young, energetic men and women who went to Washington in the 1930s anxious to take part in what seemed to many a revolution. Although he himself had not been a fellow traveler, Childs was aware that many liberals had been drawn to Communism in the 1930s and he was reluctant to dredge up the past in cases where the "misguided" individual posed no lingering threat. He himself had taken part in small ways in some of the leftist activist groups of the time, which would cause trouble for him in the future. In terms that would become familiar to readers of his McCarthy columns, he was careful to distinguish between belief in a political ideology and committing criminal acts of subversion, noting that "when this is pushed to the point of prosecution- and persecution- of men and women for the ideas they hold, then we imperil the very base of free society. We make ourselves over to the

³¹ Goodman, *The Committee*, 252-267. The Hiss case remains hotly contested among historians of the postwar years and there remains no clear consensus as to his guilt or the significance of the documents in question. The classic account of Hiss as guilty is Allen Weinstein, *Perjury: The Hiss-Chambers Case* (New York: Knopf, 1978). Recent publications by historians Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, based on newly available documents decoded by the FBI known as the Venona transcripts, support the case against Hiss.

³² Marquis Childs, "Hiss and the New Deal," *Washington Post*, 18 December 1948, 9; "Era on Trial," *Washington Post*, 24 June 1949, 24. Childs elaborated more fully on the relationship in "The Hiss Case and the American Intellectual," *The Reporter*, 26 September 1950, 21-27, which he thought at the time was "one of the most important articles I have ever written." Childs to Max Ascoli, 11 August 1950, Childs Papers, box 2, folder 1.

deformed image of what we profess to loathe.”³³ Even though the columnist believed that Hiss was guilty of lying about his past, he sought to minimize the impact of the case on the left. He argued, for example, that the stolen documents were insignificant, based on a discussion with an unnamed, but influential official who had examined the files. He also stressed that the prosecution of Hiss was being conducted in a manner that “makes this supposedly rich and powerful country look ludicrous beyond words.” The hearings were conducted “like an early Mack Sennett comedy. We have everything but an exchange of custard pie.”³⁴ He commented on the Hiss guilty verdict on 24 January 1950, admitting again that Hiss likely had been a Communist in the 1930s, but he attempted to put the diplomat’s action into the context of the crisis of the depression and the promise of the Soviet Union as an ally in the fight against German fascism.³⁵ Defending the right of Hiss to get a fair trial and working to deflect the broader attack on the New Deal, Childs sought to maintain the legacy and effectiveness of the time and the ideas that informed the core of his own political outlook.

Hiss was an intellectual compatriot, but not a personal friend of Childs. The same cannot be said of Laurence Duggan, a State Department official who committed suicide in December 1948 after being named by Chambers and questioned by the FBI.³⁶ In the hours after Duggan’s death, Karl Mundt of the HUAC publicized the previously secret investigation that linked the dead man with Communist espionage, creating a fresh round of headlines.

³³ Marquis Childs, “Meaning of the Hiss Case,” *Washington Post*, 24 January 1950, 8.

³⁴ Marquis Childs, “Hocus-Pocus,” *Washington Post*, 14 December 1949, 12.

³⁵ Marquis Childs, “Meaning of the Hiss Case,” *Washington Post*, 24 January 1950, 8.

³⁶ Goodman, *The Committee*, 267. Recent scholarship suggests that Duggan did have contact with Soviet intelligence in the late 1930s. If the Venona transcripts are to be believed and if Duggan was, in fact, the person referred to in the documents, he supplied a number of State Department reports and general information to a Soviet agent in 1937 and 1938 before cutting off contact. The Soviets, for their part, tried on several occasions to re-establish a relationship with him as a source. See John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, and Alexander Vassiliev, *Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 220-245.

Although Richard Nixon and other members of the committee sought to downplay the link with Duggan and Chambers later withdrew his allegations, the damage was done. Childs had met Duggan in Mexico in 1940 when the reporter was investigating the sale of Mexican oil to Nazi Germany and he found the diplomat to be a skilled promoter of inter-American relations. The two became friends and Duggan's death, especially in this manner, infuriated the columnist. He wrote to defend his deceased friend's reputation and legacy, asking "how anything can justify such injustice and cruelty."³⁷ Duggan's death personalized the red scare for Childs, but by no means caused him to become a critic of anti-Communist extremism. By the end of 1949, he had already written over seventy-five columns that touched on the issue in one form or another and his position was increasingly sophisticated and very public.

Childs emerged as a vocal critic of the extreme anti-Communists in the late 1940s at some peril to his professional career. He had left the security of his job at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in early 1944 and relied for his income on earnings from his United Feature Syndicate contracts with subscriber newspapers, in addition to freelance magazine articles and paid speaking engagements. In the climate of fear and suspicion of late 1940s and early 1950s, Childs had every reason to worry that taking a strong position against the prevailing tide of opinion would lead to cancelled subscriptions, rescinded invitations, and loss of income.³⁸ To some degree, he already suffered from a reputation as "soft on Communism" in some quarters of the right wing press and leadership and was occasionally forced to act in defense of his reputation. The *Chicago Tribune*, for example, routinely chastised him through the period for

³⁷ Marquis Childs, "Laurence Duggan," *Washington Post*, 23 December 1948, 17. See also Marquis Childs, "Duggan's Work," *Washington Post*, 8 February 1949, 12.

³⁸ Childs' correspondence with Larry Rutman of United Feature Syndicate in Box 7 and 8 of the Childs Papers shows that he kept close track of his subscriber base, asking for continual updates and writing to editors to ask for suggestions or to find out why the column was dropped.

seeing the world “thru New Deal lenses” and authoring “plugs for socialism.”³⁹ He received a lot of negative mail from readers who chastised him for being “soft” on Communism or for “defending” Hiss.⁴⁰ In November 1946, Representative Karl Mundt of South Dakota referred to Childs in a speech as socialist, likely as a result of the columns critical of HUAC, some of which included harsh comments about Mundt personally. The speech was brought to Childs’ attention by Merton Tice, who at the time was running against Mundt in a Senate race and hoped to use the incident to create negative publicity for his opponent.⁴¹ Childs followed up with a series of letters, but Mundt denied the charge and accused the local press of misconstruing his comments.⁴² In a similar occurrence, an editorialist for the *Wisconsin State Journal* on 12 March 1949 wrote that Childs was a “propagandist” for socialized power. Childs responded briskly to *State Journal* editor Don Anderson to express his dismay and explain his position; Anderson replied that he had spoken with his editorialist.⁴³

A more significant episode involved the May 1949 radio broadcast by Fulton Lewis Jr. described earlier. Lewis, angered by Childs’ support for David Lilienthal, called the columnist a “radical” and challenged his professional reputation.⁴⁴ Childs’ June 7 response aired over the Mutual Broadcasting System dealt with his own reputation and the facts of the Lilienthal case, but it also was part of his stance against the red scare and a statement against those in the press and radio who helped create the climate of fear and distrust that plagued the nation. Childs told

³⁹ “Interested Parties in the Hiss Trial,” *Chicago Tribune*, 17 July 1949, A18; “A.D.A. As a Criminal Conspiracy,” *Chicago Tribune*, 15 July 1950, A6.

⁴⁰ Childs mentions the letters in “Justice and the Communists,” *Washington Post*, 9 April 1949, 7.

⁴¹ Merton Tice to Childs, 12 October 1946, Childs Papers, box 7, folder 2.

⁴² See correspondence related to this episode in Childs Papers, box 7, folder 2, especially a letter from Mundt to Childs dated 4 January 1947.

⁴³ Childs to Anderson, 24 March 1949, and Anderson to Childs, 28 March 1949, Childs Papers, box 8, folder 1.

⁴⁴ “Transcript of Fulton Lewis, Jr. broadcast- May 13, 1949,” Childs Papers, box 8, folder 1.

listeners that he was not a left-wing columnist or a right-wing columnist, but was a reporter who believed in the free exchange of ideas and the right to dissent. He also asked for more common sense on the Communist issue and reminded the audience of the importance of responsible journalism.⁴⁵ Childs took this threat to his reputation seriously and he made an issue out of Lewis' attack in order to protect his own legitimacy.

These charges do not appear to have damaged Childs' reputation among his fellow mainstream journalists or the mass of the reading public. However, records do show that Childs' subscriber list dropped from 154 in May 1946 to 147 on February 1949, though the accompanying documents do not indicate that the cancellations were related to the issue of leftist bias or anti-Communist sentiments.⁴⁶ At the end of the McCarthy era, only 133 papers took the column, so the decline was noteworthy if not dramatic, though again the documentation does not prove that the cancellations were due to political considerations.⁴⁷ Childs also earned some money from radio and television appearances during this period, including his attempt to create a syndicated political talk show called *Washington Spotlight* in 1951-1952, and numerous studies have shown that the networks and broadcast stations were particularly sensitive about employing controversial figures during the McCarthy period.

Enter McCarthy

The story of Senator Joseph McCarthy's sudden entry into the public stage of anti-Communism has been told many times. The senator quickly established himself in the forefront of the movement. However, because McCarthy's charges came in the midst of an

⁴⁵ Transcript in Childs Papers, box 5, folder 3.

⁴⁶ Lawrence Rutman to Childs, May 14, 1946, Childs Papers, box 7, folder 2; Rutman to Childs, 19 February 1949, Childs Papers, box 8, folder 1.

⁴⁷ Raymond Crowley to Joseph Pulitzer II, 25 August 1954, Reel 103, Joseph Pulitzer II Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

already heated public debate about Communist subversion in the government, many observers, including Childs, considered him a latecomer who hoped to use the issue for purely political advantage. Scholars continue to debate McCarthy's motivation and sincerity in launching his crusade against Communist influence in government. His early political career made no use of it. In fact, the first Childs column that mentioned McCarthy, published after the 1946 Wisconsin Republican primary, commended McCarthy for his international vision and for not "leaning on the 'Red Menace' as Republicans in some states are doing."⁴⁸ For the rest of the 1940s McCarthy largely stayed out of the public eye and drew little additional comment from Childs.

Speaking at a Lincoln Day dinner in Wheeling, West Virginia, on 9 February 1950, McCarthy told the audience, "I have here in my hand a list of 205 that were known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party and who nevertheless are still working and shaping the policy of the State Department."⁴⁹ The next day, at an impromptu press conference at the Denver airport, McCarthy told reporters that there were 207 "security risks" in the State Department; at Salt Lake City later in the day the number was down to fifty-seven.⁵⁰ Despite the confusion about McCarthy's actual words and the number of cases involved, the story became a sensation and garnered attention in newspapers across the country.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Marquis Childs, "Wisconsin Politics," *Washington Post*, 16 October 1946, 8.

⁴⁹ Ritchie, *Reporting from Washington*, 71. Ritchie here quotes the *Wheeling Intelligencer's* story from the day after the speech.

⁵⁰ McCarthy entered into the *Congressional Record* a version of the Wheeling speech that referenced the 57 figure. See Senator Joseph McCarthy, "Speech at Wheeling, West Virginia, February 9, 1950," reprinted in Ellen Schrecker, ed., *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1994), 211-214.

⁵¹ Bayley, *Joe McCarthy and the Press*, 17-25.

Childs was slow to comment on McCarthy's charges in his column, which reflects his general belief that McCarthy was an opportunistic late-comer to the anti-Communist crusade and that his charges were not new or significant. The early weeks of 1950 found the columnist traveling around the country talking to politicians and voters in anticipation of the congressional elections coming up in November. His columns touched on domestic issues, civil rights legislation, and atomic weapons. Having dedicated so many columns to the Communist issue over the previous few years, Childs felt no compunction to report immediately on McCarthy's speech.

Childs' first column dealing with the McCarthy allegations came on February 23, the day after Senate Resolution 231 created a bipartisan Senate committee, under the chairmanship of Maryland Democrat Millard Tydings, to investigate McCarthy's claims.⁵² Childs criticized McCarthy for airing "vague charges about the State Department without supporting names or facts," which he believed was "merely to feed the atmosphere of suspicion and apprehension. It does not contribute to the security of the United States at home or abroad." He pointed out that only one of four specific people named by McCarthy, John Service, still worked for the State Department and that Service had been cleared by former Secretary of State James Byrnes after an investigation. Similarly, he showed that only forty-four names on McCarthy's "list" were current government employees and that all of them had remained on the job only after careful review and scrutiny. Again, Childs was not naïve about the threat of subversion. He wrote that there "was too much carelessness on security, and particularly during the war...and in the immediate aftermath," but he believed that the government's review process was

⁵² Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy*, 243-44.

successful in weeding out threats. These systems deserved the public's trust, he argued. He also called for stronger laws against actual espionage or treason, and wrote that the FBI was the proper investigating body for these charges. "If the objective is to sabotage American foreign policy," he wrote as a warning, "then McCarthy and those who join him in this kind of business are succeeding better than they realize."⁵³

Writing the same day to Robert W. Bliss, editor of the Janesville (Wis.) *Gazette*, Childs shared his thoughts on the matter. Bliss had written to the columnist to pass along some criticism from readers of the recent Hiss column and express his belief that Childs must not be soft on the issue because "Washington is playing a dangerous game in its complacency towards the Communist."⁵⁴ Childs responded by reminding the editor that his column for the day called for stronger laws and vigorous investigation by the FBI. He continued

I do not believe that people should be prosecuted or persecuted for their thoughts and opinions. The line between thoughts and acts may be a narrow one but I believe it is of the utmost importance to preserve it if we are to preserve the basic fundamentals which distinguish our system from totalitarianism. I also believe in the right of free inquiry without interference from the long arm of government.

He concluded by stating that he felt there were few, if any, Communists in government service and that McCarthy's charges were "dangerous, irresponsible and in essence unfounded."⁵⁵

By mid-March, after a short vacation in Florida, Childs focused his attention on the issue and responded with a series of fourteen columns on McCarthy and anti-Communism, spread over the next several weeks. These columns set out a broad indictment of the senator's recent actions and the nation's response to them and outlined Childs' initial position against him. He accused the McCarthyites of casting a "shadow" over the country and described them

⁵³ Marquis Childs, "Spreading Confusion," *Washington Post*, 23 February 1950, 9.

⁵⁴ Robert W. Bliss to Marquis Childs, 17 February 1950, Childs Papers, box 8, folder 2.

⁵⁵ Childs to Bliss, 22 February 1950, Childs Papers, box 8, folder 2.

as “bent on destroying our freedoms here at home.”⁵⁶ He accused McCarthy of contributing “to the uncertainty, the fear and the suspicion that undermine the hopes for a positive, constructive American foreign policy” and resorting to the dangerous and reckless “technique of the indictment by association and smear.”⁵⁷ Because “it was too much to expect McCarthy himself to show a sense of responsibility,” Childs called for a reexamination of Senate rules of conduct and asked the other senators to hold McCarthy accountable for his actions.⁵⁸ Two columns criticized influential Republican Senator Robert Taft’s alleged encouragement of McCarthy and pointed out the potential damage to the Republican Party unless they reined him in.⁵⁹ Childs reiterated his concern about the “very effective espionage network” the Soviets maintained and urged readers to support the FBI in its investigative efforts.⁶⁰ He challenged McCarthy to make his allegations away from the Senate floor in a forum where he did not enjoy immunity from charges of libel or slander.⁶¹ Finally, Childs complained that McCarthy’s actions were embarrassing the United States in the eyes of its allies in Europe when the moment called for greater unity and resolve.⁶² In sum, this series of early columns offered a strident and multifaceted critique of McCarthy in his earliest stages and served as a call to arms to rally moderate Republicans and liberals in an anti-McCarthy effort.

Childs continued to attack McCarthyism on different fronts through 1950 and 1951, even when it meant occasionally having to apologize to subscribing editors for making them

⁵⁶ Marquis Childs, “Chipping Away at Freedom,” *Washington Post*, 14 March 1950, 10.

⁵⁷ Marquis Childs, “McCarthy’s Smears,” *Washington Post*, 15 March 1950, 13.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* See also Marquis Childs, “Bipartisan Policy,” *Washington Post*, 6 April 1950, 13.

⁵⁹ Marquis Childs, “McCarthy’s Helpers: Need for Republican Leadership,” *Washington Post*, 30 March 1950, A11; “Frustrated GOP: Demagogy Instead of a Program,” *Washington Post*, 31 March 1950, 25.

⁶⁰ Marquis Childs, “Communist Espionage: How Not to Meet It,” *Washington Post*, 4 April 1950, 12; “Subversive Loopholes,” *Washington Post*, 29 April 1950, 9.

⁶¹ Marquis Childs, “Senator’s Protection: Immunity and Discipline,” *Washington Post*, 12 April 1950, 15.

⁶² Marquis Childs, “McCarthy’s Damage,” *Washington Post*, 22 April 1950, 7.

defend their choice to run his column.⁶³ Childs picked up on his earlier defense of civil liberties. Numerous columns decried the tendency to punish Americans for their beliefs and to deny them basic access to a fair hearing. In the wake of the June 1951 conviction of eleven Communists under the Smith Act, Childs distinguished once again between acts and thoughts to warn against persecuting those who merely teach “unpopular reform.”⁶⁴ Another theme was the detrimental effect of McCarthyism on education and scientific achievement in a time when Cold War exigencies demanded the nation’s best efforts.⁶⁵ On the Fourth of July 1951, he urged Americans to display the courage and boldness of the founders when confronted by “a new kind of tyranny,” rather than responding with “fear” that has “a numbing and paralyzing effect, blighting the very freedom of which we are proud.”⁶⁶ In two instances, he defended personal friends, both of whom he knew to be loyal and dedicated to the nation’s cause. Radio commentator Raymond Swing thanked Childs for a supportive column written at a time when he was facing a smear campaign determined to keep him from a job with the Voice of America.⁶⁷ When McCarthy charged General George Marshall with perpetrating “conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man,” Childs rallied to the defense. “When even a patriot of the sincerity of Gen. George C. Marshall is not immune from such mudslinging,” he wrote, “then we have sunk low indeed.”⁶⁸

This was in line with his long-standing fear that McCarthyism kept exceptional public servants from participating in public life and undermined American diplomacy abroad by

⁶³ Childs to E.C. Hoyt, Managing editor of the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, 27 March 1950, Childs Papers, box 8, folder 3.

⁶⁴ Marquis Childs, “Civil Liberties,” *Washington Post*, 23 June 1951, 7.

⁶⁵ Marquis Childs, “The Threat to Education,” *Washington Post*, 15 November 1951, 19.

⁶⁶ Marquis Childs, “Independence Day: The Enduring Struggle,” *Washington Post*, 4 July 1951, 9.

⁶⁷ Swing to Childs, 30 July 1951, Childs Papers, box 2, folder 1.

⁶⁸ Childs, “Loyalty Programs: The Government’s Loss,” *Washington Post*, 16 June 1951, 9.

blackening the country's reputation among allies and enemies alike. As discussed in the first two chapters of this study, Childs had no doubt that the Soviet Union sought to expand its influence around the globe, even at the risk of war, and he believed that strong alliances and aggressive foreign aid were the best weapons. He was an erstwhile supporter of the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the Marshall Plan for European reconstruction, all of which he saw as vital bulwarks against Communist expansion. Senator McCarthy, however, threatened these important institutions by creating fear and uncertainty among government employees and diplomats, forcing them to waste valuable time defending themselves against unwarranted charges, and making skilled people hesitant to enter public life. As he explained, the "nasty political mud hurled by such smearers and Joe McCarthy... would make most men think twice before entering government service." How long, he asked, "are we destined to go on inflicting on ourselves the wounds?"⁶⁹ In a summer 1950 Colgate University speech, Childs spoke of the disbelief of "our friends... who have been unable to understand how we could be distracted in such a time of danger by so frivolous and seemingly irrelevant a quarrel."⁷⁰ Furthermore, McCarthy hurt the State Department by forcing officials to censor their reports out of fear that someday unpopular opinions would come back to haunt them.⁷¹

Another tactic Childs employed was to publicize and laud McCarthy's opponents in government, some of whom were personal friends of the columnist, as he had done on previous occasions when he wanted to influence public discourse on events close to his heart. He always felt that McCarthy would ultimately have to be confronted and reined in by his

⁶⁹ Childs, "Loyalty Program" 9.

⁷⁰ Marquis Childs speech before the Colgate Conference on American Foreign Policy, 7 July 1950, Childs Papers, box 17, folder 1.

⁷¹ Marquis Childs, "Loyalty Smears: Undermining Diplomat's Reporting," *Washington Post*, 1 August 1951, 9.

colleagues in the Senate. When the Tydings committee report came out in July 1950 highly critical of McCarthy's initial allegations, Childs wrote favorably of the report and those who signed in the majority. Tydings was singled out for conducting a thorough investigation while bearing the brunt of "six months of abuse" from McCarthy's supporters.⁷² Childs supported Tydings in his ugly race for reelection in November 1950 and afterwards wrote about McCarthy's questionable actions on behalf of the Republican opponent, including the circulation of a composite photograph that showed Tydings with Communist Party leader Earl Browder. In the summer of 1951, Childs praised three senators- Mike Monroney of Oklahoma, Robert Hendrickson of New Jersey, and Margaret Chase Smith of Maine- for their subcommittee report that chastised McCarthy for his interference in the Maryland race.⁷³

These efforts generated a certain amount of support from readers. For example, John Gagne, Director of the Woodrow Wilson School of Foreign Affairs at the University of Virginia, wrote to tell the columnist he was "doing an excellent job in continuing your fight against mccarthyism." This is just one of many similar letters that Childs received. Of course, he continued to get hostile mail from readers as well.⁷⁴ And, despite his efforts to insulate himself, he became a target for angry citizens' groups and found himself the target of suspicion. In one case, a talk that Childs was scheduled to give to the Foreign Policy Association of Detroit was moved to a new venue when members of the Women's City Club,

⁷² Marquis Childs, "McCarthyism Confounded," *Washington Post*, 25 July 1950, 8.

⁷³ Marquis Childs, "GOP Spurns McCarthyism," *Washington Post*, 10 August 1951, 20. See Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*, 214-217 on the Maryland investigation.

⁷⁴ John Gagne to Childs, 11 October 1951, Childs Papers, box 2, folder 2. Although Childs occasionally mentioned hostile mail from pro-McCarthy readers, he apparently did not keep many of the letters. The Childs Papers contain just a few samples of this type. He did respond to critics, however. Writing to Reverend Edward W. Day of Clear Lake, Iowa, the testy Childs wrote, "I assume that you are a minister of the Christian faith. I certainly would not know that from the tone of your letter. I did not 'defend Alger Hiss.' I did defend the right of an American citizen to get a fair trial. As a good Christian do you prefer lynch law?" Childs to Day, 29 June 1950, Childs Papers, box 8, folder 3.

who had initially agreed to host the event, objected to Childs' participation. According to the available records, an influential member of the group's board, believing Childs to be a "borderline red," demanded that he not be included on the speaker's list. The Foreign Policy Association cancelled the series and found a new sponsor, after which Childs was again invited to participate.⁷⁵

A more damaging incident involved Childs' scheduled appearance at an event at Miner Teachers College in Washington, DC. School superintendent Hobart Corning, concerned about the image of the event, asked HUAC to check its files and "clear" the scheduled speakers before allowing them to appear. Childs was one of those whose names appeared in HCUA files and he was subsequently removed from the program.⁷⁶ Due to the public nature of the incident, Childs opted to use his column to make a public statement. When he first learned of the files, he contacted HUAC and found that he was mentioned three times, first as a participant in the American Writers Congress in 1937, and in two other instances as a member of groups supporting the Spanish government during the civil war, the Friends of Spanish Democracy and the Coordinating Committee to Lift the Embargo. According to the files, these had been listed as "Communist front" groups.⁷⁷ In the February 1 column, Childs wrote that he had never heard of the American Writers Congress and certainly never participated in any event sponsored by the group. He had, however, supported the Spanish loyalists in the civil war against fascism after spending a few weeks covering the war in 1937. The column pointed out

⁷⁵ Correspondence between Childs and Mary Benson, executive vice president of the Foreign Policy Association of Detroit, 11 November 1950, 14 November 1950, and 15 November 1950, Childs Papers, box 8, folder 4. Childs briefly considered suing for slander, but in the end the individual who had raised the objection could not be identified with certainty.

⁷⁶ Elsie Carper, "4 More Prominent Figures Added to School's Blacklist," *Washington Post*, January 28, 1951, M1.

⁷⁷ House committee report, 29 January 1951, Childs Papers, box 9, folder 1.

that he felt that it had been a reasonable act in the context of late 1930s politics. He admitted that some of these groups had been taken over later by Communists, but he felt no regret or sense of shame and offered the incident as an example of the “poison of distrust” at work in the nation.⁷⁸ The incident generated a lot of adverse publicity for the school and the event was later held, with Childs’ participation.⁷⁹

It was in this context that McCarthy and Childs met on the August 7 *Meet the Press* program. By that point, Childs had written literally dozens of columns critical of McCarthy’s methods, often blaming him not only for his own actions, but for contributing to the overall hysteria of the anti-Communist effort. Many of them contained pointed personal references to the senator and there is little wonder that McCarthy, bristling at the charges, sought to use the national television forum to respond. The senator had little respect for Childs in any case. At a Washington party, a drunken McCarthy had accosted Childs’ daughter, the novelist Malissa Redfield, with a kiss on the mouth and the comment, “that’s for your father!”⁸⁰ For his own part, McCarthy faced a severe challenge to his leadership of the anti-Communist initiative and, possibly, his seat in the Senate. Based on the report of McCarthy’s “dishonest and malicious” involvement in the 1950 Maryland Senate race, William Benton of Connecticut introduced a resolution to force McCarthy from the Senate.⁸¹ The resolution was doomed to fail, but when the camera started to roll at the *Meet the Press* studio, no one knew what might happen next.

⁷⁸ Marquis Childs, “Poison of Distrust,” *Washington Post*, 1 February 1951, 13. Childs sent a detailed letter to committee chairman John S. Wood that explained his involvement in these groups and lodged his complaint over inaccuracy in the records. Childs to Wood, 1 February 1951, Childs Papers, box 9, folder 1.

⁷⁹ Elsie Carper, “Board Adopts New System of Selecting School Speakers,” *Washington Post*, 8 February 1951, 1; “Marquis Childs, Two Others, Cleared as School Speakers,” *Washington Post*, 14 February 1951, 1

⁸⁰ Author correspondence with Prentiss Childs, 12 May 2007.

⁸¹ Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*, 217-221.

McCarthy on Top

By 1952, all eyes were on the upcoming elections. McCarthy survived Benton's call for his removal and consolidated his strength, but everyone wondered how he would fare among the voters in Wisconsin come November. At issue was also McCarthy's effect on the presidential race. Would the Republican Party nominate a pro- or anti-McCarthy candidate? Could the Democrats find a candidate who could survive the onslaught of the McCarthy forces and the overcome the widespread public disapproval of the Truman administration? Campaign coverage was one of Childs' specialties and he had long-time ties to Democrats and liberals in Wisconsin, dating back to his undergraduate days in Madison.

Senator Robert Taft of Ohio emerged as the frontrunner for the Republican nomination in the early part of the year. To Childs, the question was whether the Ohioan would embrace McCarthyism or the more moderate, internationalist Republicanism that he respected and appreciated as a vital element of a strong, bipartisan foreign policy. In late January, Childs wrote that the Taft campaign was "out-McCarthying McCarthy" in its charges against the Truman administration.⁸² In March, Childs followed the efforts of Wisconsin Democrats to find the suitable candidate to run against McCarthy in the Senate race, describing the mood in the state as "a political vortex where passions are stirred as rarely in our political life."⁸³ He had many friends in the Wisconsin press, including William Evjue of the (Madison) *Capital Times* and Lindsay Hoben of the *Milwaukee Journal*, both of whom were leaders in the state's anti-McCarthy effort. He got updates on the voter projections and other inside information

⁸² Marquis Childs, "Taft's Energy as Campaigner," *Washington Post*, 29 January 1952, 8.

⁸³ Marquis Childs, "Showdown on McCarthy," *Washington Post*, 4 March 1952, 12. See also Kent Pillsbury, Eau Claire, Wis., to Childs, 5 March 1952, Childs Papers, box 10, folder 2.

from Morris Rubin of the *Progressive*.⁸⁴ He visited the state several times to report on “the younger generation of Democrats” who were promoting the candidacy of Thomas Fairchild.⁸⁵ Wary of Taft’s isolationist past, Childs used his column to advance General Dwight Eisenhower as the best Republican candidate. He felt that Eisenhower, as a popular war hero, had the personal strength to stand up to McCarthy and unify Americans by lowering the heat surrounding the Communism issue. He also knew that Eisenhower was dedicated to a strong internationalist foreign policy and could be counted on to confront the Soviets in a manner that Childs thought was appropriate.⁸⁶ On the Democratic side, Childs promoted Adlai Stevenson as the liberal alternative to Truman Democrats and challengers on the right. He worked to counter allegations that Stevenson and the Democrats were weak on defense and soft on Communism.⁸⁷

The election results hardly pleased Childs. McCarthy handily won reelection, although observers pointed out that he earned a smaller percentage of the vote than Eisenhower took in the state.⁸⁸ Adlai Stevenson’s lopsided defeat hinted at the weakness of the liberal anti-Communist position that Childs and others had long promoted.⁸⁹ Childs decried the tone of the campaign and the influence of the “shotgun charges of Communism and treason” brought on by

⁸⁴ Morris Rubin to Childs, 16 September 1952, Childs Papers, box 10, folder 4.

⁸⁵ Marquis Childs, “Wisconsin Battleground,” *Washington Post*, 18 July 1952, 20; “McCarthy Confident His Star Still Rising,” *Washington Post*, 7 October 1952, 8.

⁸⁶ Marquis Childs, *Eisenhower: Captive Hero* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1958), 144-147. See also Marquis Childs, “McCarthy Puts GOP on the Spot,” *Washington Post*, 26 August 1952, 8; “Ike-McCarthy Puzzle,” *Washington Post*, 8 October 1952, 15.

⁸⁷ Marquis Childs, “The Hard Way,” *Washington Post*, 20 September 1952, 9; “Inspiring Words in This Campaign Year,” *Washington Post*, 30 September 1952, 14.

⁸⁸ Marquis Childs, “McCarthy’s Attitude,” *Washington Post*, 26 February 1953, 15. McCarthy won 54% of the vote in his race; Eisenhower attracted 61% of the state vote in the presidential race. See also Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy*, 453-457, for an analysis of the 1952 vote.

⁸⁹ McAuliffe, *Crisis on the Left*, 85-88; James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 252-260, is a thoughtful overview of Stevenson and the 1952 campaign.

McCarthyism, which he described as a “cancerous growth on the American body politic.”⁹⁰ He called on moderates in both parties to rise above the “fear and suspicion that has risen like a noxious gas” by appointing an independent non-partisan commission to take up the Communist issue in the future. In the days after the election, Childs again pointed to lingering investigations of McCarthy ongoing in the Senate and reminded readers of the seriousness of the charges against the junior senator from Wisconsin.⁹¹ He hoped that Senate leaders might refuse to seat McCarthy when the new session began because of the cloud of controversy. These efforts, however, came to naught. Senator Benton was defeated and the Republicans had, in fact, taken control of the chamber after the election so no serious effort to unseat McCarthy was forthcoming.⁹² Moreover, as a member of the majority, McCarthy was now in a position to take control of a Senate committee. He made a home for himself in the Subcommittee on Investigations and from this position launched a series of high profile hearings, using his subpoena power and seemingly unlimited budget to hire assistants and pay informers, many of them former Communists of dubious credibility. Those who thought the Republican victory would slow McCarthy’s charges and allegations were proven wrong when the senator challenged some of Eisenhower’s early appointments and sought to pressure

⁹⁰ Marquis Childs, “The Communist Issue,” *Washington Post*, 5 November 1952, 9.

⁹¹ Marquis Childs, “McCarthy Question Before the Senate,” *Washington Post*, 11 November 1952, 12.

⁹² Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 57-58; Marquis Childs, “Report on McCarthy Neatly Sidestepped,” *Washington Post*, 6 January 1953, 8. Childs kept in touch with Benton, who became publisher of *Encyclopedia Britannica*. In one letter, Childs wrote that Benton was “badly missed” in Washington and that “no one had the guts to say a word against McCarthy.” Childs to Benton, 28 July 1953, Childs Papers, box 3, folder 3.

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.⁹³ In many ways, 1953 was the high point of McCarthy's influence, the point when many considered him unstoppable.

Childs responded to McCarthy's newest round of allegations with renewed vigor. Two years of covering the senator afforded him ample time to study McCarthy's techniques:

Essentially it is a technique of distortion. A little fact or mere rumor or hearsay is seized upon as the basis for flat assertions and charges that grow in magnitude...it is a method of leaping from one exaggeration to a greater distortion that overwhelms men accustomed to traditional political debate.⁹⁴

Childs warned of the danger presented by a new weekly television series, funded by the Texas oil millionaire H. L. Hunt, that promoted McCarthy's ideas, the consequences of which would be "little short of explosive."⁹⁵ He expressed astonishment at the assertion by J. B. Matthews of McCarthy's staff that the Protestant clergy were "the chief resource of the Communist conspiracy."⁹⁶ This same column attacked Harvey Matusow, hired by McCarthy to investigate subversion in the press, and castigated McCarthy assistants Roy Cohn and David Schine, recently back from a fact-finding trip to Europe that became "a grim joke in the European press."⁹⁷ Another column that summer once again championed Senator Margaret Chase Smith for her continued efforts to resist McCarthy.⁹⁸

One of the most significant events of 1953 for Childs, and for journalists interested in the McCarthy issue, was the Senate testimony of *New York Post* editor James Wechsler in April

⁹³ Marquis Childs, "McCarthy's Attitude," *Washington Post*, 26 February 1953, 15; "President Incensed over Bohlen Fight," *Washington Post*, 27 March 1953, 26. On Dulles and McCarthy, see Jeff Broadwater, *Eisenhower and the Anti-Communist Crusade* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 112-117.

⁹⁴ Marquis Childs, "McCarthy's Technique," *Washington Post*, 28 March 1953, 11.

⁹⁵ Marquis Childs, "McCarthy on TV: Texas Oil Men Back Senator," *Washington Post*, 18 June 1953, 21.

⁹⁶ Marquis Childs, "Belated Explosion," *Washington Post*, 16 July 1953, 13. Childs cut apart these claims in "New Techniques Needed," *Washington Post*, 23 July 1953, 13. The attack on the clergy, needless to say, generated a great deal of controversy nationwide.

⁹⁷ Marquis Childs, "Belated Explosion," *Washington Post*, 16 July 1953, 13.

⁹⁸ Marquis Childs, "Independent Lady from New England," *Washington Post*, 18 August 1953, 8.

and May. Wechsler had been a member of the Young Communist League during his undergraduate days in the late 1930s, but had since publicly renounced Communism to become one of the more visible figures in the Americans for Democratic Action and liberal anti-Communism generally. Under Wechsler's editorship, however, the *Post* engaged in vigorous anti-McCarthy commentary through its editorials and columns and, particularly, a seventeen-part series on McCarthy called "Smear, Inc."⁹⁹ Ostensibly called because two of his books were in USIA libraries overseas, Wechsler quickly found himself under attack and forced to defend his "alleged" break with Communism and the *Post*'s editorial policy.¹⁰⁰ Wechsler answered the charges as best he could and made a call for the American Society of Newspaper Editors to investigate the hearing as a violation of press freedom.¹⁰¹ In exchange for McCarthy's promise that the hearing transcripts would be made public for review by the ASNE, Wechsler provided the committee with the names of several of his former associates from his Young Communist League days.

The Wechsler hearing became a controversial event among journalists and Childs was involved in the matter on several fronts. In a way, Childs himself was threatened by the incident and he tried to take action. He and Wechsler were friends who shared many of the same political beliefs. The *New York Post* was a reliable subscriber to the "Washington Calling" column and Childs' most high profile forum in New York City. The columnist responded to the Wechsler testimony with a strongly worded column that outlined "demagogic

⁹⁹ Oliver Pilat and William V. Shannon, "Smear, Inc.," *New York Post*, 4 September-22 September 1951. Copy in Box 15, James Wechsler Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin. See also, Bayley, *Joe McCarthy and the Press*, 142-143.

¹⁰⁰ *Hearing Before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations*, 24 April 1953 (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1953).

¹⁰¹ Wechsler describes the incident in *Age of Suspicion*, 266-288.

attacks” aimed by McCarthy and others against the press.¹⁰² The column revisited the senator’s earlier attempts to pressure journalists through calls for readers or listeners to boycott advertisers who sponsored his critics.¹⁰³ It also spoke to those in the press, reminding them of their responsibility to “supply a vital corrective” to falsehoods in the public debate, even when it was unpopular with many readers. This was followed by another column that specifically addressed the Wechsler incident and strongly supported the *Post* editor. “This is intimidation in a crude form,” he wrote, adding that it was part of a new campaign by McCarthy to intimidate his critics.¹⁰⁴ Wechsler sent a note of thanks.¹⁰⁵

The controversy surrounding Wechsler’s testimony lasted through the summer. Wechsler appeared on *Meet the Press* on May 17 and Childs sat as one of the panelists. The questions focused on the topic of McCarthy’s threat to press freedom, with most of the debate leaning toward the belief that there has been no violation of the rights of the press because Wechsler successfully defended his position and refused to be intimidated.¹⁰⁶ Childs took issue with the conclusion that no harm had been done and repeatedly gave Wechsler the opportunity to make his case when the debate threatened to turn against him.¹⁰⁷ Childs also used a less public forum to express his support. In his commentary about the show, *New York Times* columnist Arthur Krock echoed the belief that McCarthy’s challenge to Wechsler was no threat to press freedom.¹⁰⁸ Childs wrote to the *Times* on May 22, urging Krock to reconsider and

¹⁰² Marquis Childs, “Dissent is Vital to a Free Society,” *Washington Post*, 28 April 1953, 14.

¹⁰³ The *Milwaukee Journal*, *Time* magazine, and the columnist Drew Person were among those singled out in his calls for boycotts at different times.

¹⁰⁴ Marquis Childs, “Campaign Against Press,” *Washington Post*, 9 May 1953, 11.

¹⁰⁵ Wechsler to Childs, Box 14, Wechsler Papers.

¹⁰⁶ “Meet the Press” transcript, 17 May 1953, Box 208, Spivak Papers.

¹⁰⁷ See Nancy E. Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947-1960* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 169-174 for further analysis of the broadcast.

¹⁰⁸ Arthur Krock, “In the Nation,” *New York Times*, 19 May 1953, 28.

understand that just because the attempt was unsuccessful, it did not mean there had been no violation; what mattered was the intent and journalists should be concerned. Childs further stated that he believed an investigation into the matter by the ASNE was warranted.¹⁰⁹ The letter was not printed and Krock did not mention it in his latter column discussing the response to his first writing on the subject. The ASNE committee did investigate the incident in a contentious set of meetings and letters, ultimately deciding in a majority report that Senator McCarthy had not technically violated press freedom. Childs was not involved in this deliberation and made no further mention of the incident in the column, but he, like liberals in the press generally, was doubtless unsatisfied with the ASNE response.¹¹⁰

The columnist continued to keep his eye on McCarthy during the rest of 1953.¹¹¹ In November, Attorney General Herbert Brownell accused former President Truman of appointing Harry Dexter White to the International Monetary Fund, even though he knew White had been investigated for espionage.¹¹² White's name, along with that of Alger Hiss, had come up back in the 1948 HUAC testimony of Whittaker Chambers and its re-emergence in 1953, years after White's death, rankled liberals. Childs interpreted the allegation as the Eisenhower administration's attempt to curry favor with McCarthy.¹¹³ He believed Eisenhower to be weakened and politically damaged by Brownell's act and worried that the whole episode, one

¹⁰⁹ Childs unpublished letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, 22 May 1953, copy in Box 14, Wechsler Papers.

¹¹⁰ See David R. Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers*, 47-48; Bayley, *Joe McCarthy and the Press*, 144-145. The minority report backing Wechsler was reprinted in *Nieman Reports* (October 1953): 27-29. ASNE did hold a roundtable on McCarthy and the press at the 1954 national meeting. See *Problems of Journalism: Proceedings of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, 1954* (Washington, DC: ASNE, 1954), 96-106, for a transcript.

¹¹¹ He also expressed support for the anti-McCarthy effort in private, largely symbolic ways. In one instance, he decided to switch to Ford automobiles out of appreciation for the Ford Foundation's backing of a number of initiatives that assisted in exposing McCarthy or giving his opponents a voice. Childs to Henry Ford II, 18 May 1953, Childs Papers, box 3, folder 1.

¹¹² Ellen Schrecker, *Many are the Crimes*, 238.

¹¹³ Marquis Childs, "Revival of White Case," *Washington Post*, 11 November 1953, 15.

of the many ill effects of McCarthy's presence in public life, was another embarrassment to the nation on the world stage.¹¹⁴ Through the winter of 1953/54, Childs commented on the increasing weakness of the Eisenhower White House as the president, in his mind, sought to accommodate McCarthy.¹¹⁵ He never forgave Eisenhower for failing to defend General Marshall from attacks.¹¹⁶

The political situation was clearly disappointing for the liberal Childs. He had believed that Eisenhower's election might stem the tide of McCarthyism. Instead, despite his own best efforts, the grip of McCarthyism had not abated. He shared his sense of discouragement in a thank you letter to former Ohio Governor James Cox, who had written a note of support and appreciation for a recent column.¹¹⁷ Events also took a physical toll on Childs. The columnist wrote one supporter that his doctor had recently told him to cut down on his travel and limit speaking engagements so that he could get more rest.¹¹⁸ These factors perhaps explain Childs' decision, early in 1954, to rejoin the *Post-Dispatch* full time. As he explained in letters to two subscribing editors, he was afraid that he could no longer "maintain the standards of honesty and integrity that I have always set as my goal." He worried that he might become a "continuously croaking Cassandra" if forced to keep writing so much about the current state of affairs.¹¹⁹ Considering the future of the column, Childs debated whether or not he had the energy to keep it up. However, as he wrote one friend and fellow newsman, he finally decided

¹¹⁴ Marquis Childs, "Brownell Attack Hurts U.S. Abroad," *Washington Post*, 13 November 1953, 24.

¹¹⁵ Marquis Childs, "McCarthy Gets Way with Administrators," *Washington Post*, 15 December 1953, 10; "McCarthy Getting More Power in FCC," *Washington Post*, 22 January 1954, 22.

¹¹⁶ For example, Marquis Childs, *Eisenhower: The Captive Hero* (New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1958), 151-154.

¹¹⁷ Childs to Cox, 11 November 1953, Childs Papers, box 3, folder 5.

¹¹⁸ Childs to Herman Edelsberg, 22 September 1953, Childs Papers, box 3, folder 4.

¹¹⁹ Childs to James Lawrence, *Lincoln Star*, and Childs to Charles Puckette, *Chattanooga Times*, 22 January 1954, Childs Papers, box 4, folder 1.

to continue writing it, due to the “feeling that I might be retreating in a moment of furious battle.”¹²⁰ Finally, Joseph Pulitzer II of the *Post-Dispatch* made Childs a lucrative offer to return to the paper and the United Feature Syndicate agreed to distribute the “Washington Calling” column three days a week rather than five. This removed some of the pressure that Childs faced, both in terms of having to produce so much material every week and in terms of having the support of a home newspaper. The *Post-Dispatch* was solidly anti-McCarthy and Childs would be comfortable returning to the fold.¹²¹ Robert Lasch, the main editorial writer for the paper and a columnist for the *Progressive*, was widely known for his distaste for McCarthy.

Exit McCarthy

Mark Childs’ return to the *Post-Dispatch* did not end his commentary on Joseph McCarthy, but the columnist did spend much of 1954, McCarthy’s last year in the spotlight, overseas covering other stories. In February he left the United States for Berlin, where he reported on the Foreign Minister’s Conference that was meeting to debate the possibility of German reunification. As he traveled inside Germany in March he sought, among other things, to gauge German attitudes about America. His talks with the Europeans led him to believe that America’s image was in fact deeply tarnished overseas, as he had frequently written, with many people there no longer viewing the nation as a beacon of freedom.¹²² One thing he found was that Germans remained fascinated by the role McCarthy played in American politics. The reaction was mixed, with some viewing the situation with concern for their ally and others

¹²⁰ Childs to Charles Puckette, 28 January 1954, Childs Papers, box 4, folder 1.

¹²¹ Daniel W. Pfaff, *Joseph Pulitzer II and the Post-Dispatch* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1991), 307-322.

¹²² Marquis Childs, “Voice Must Combat McCarthy’s Abroad,” *Washington Post* 19 February 1954, 22.

happy to see America suffer so much embarrassment.¹²³ Childs kept a journal on the European trip in which he recorded thoughts and observations. Published in 1955 as *The Ragged Edge: The Diary of a Crisis*, the journal provides insights that are not apparent from his newspaper writing.¹²⁴ From Germany, Childs traveled to Geneva where the world powers were trying to reach an accord to end the French colonial war in Indochina. There he saw that McCarthyism seriously limited the influence of John Foster Dulles and the American negotiators; efforts to avoid any appearance of being “soft” on Communism and the unrealistic position of “non-recognition” of Communist China narrowed the range of options available to the American team at the sessions in Geneva and threatened to drag the nation into an unwanted land war in Asia.¹²⁵

Childs was overseas when Edward R. Murrow aired his famous expose of McCarthy on the 9 March 1954 *See it Now* program and made no comment about it at the time.¹²⁶ He did, however, observe the other major television event that involved McCarthy. Back in the United States for a short time during May 1954, Childs covered the action in what became known as the “Army-McCarthy hearings.” He described the hearings as a kind of political theater, fueled by “blind hatred,” in which McCarthy was forced to create new extremes and sensations at each turn. The hearings were, in his mind, a “distortion, the debasement of the system of law and law-making fundamental to the capacity of men to govern themselves in a democratic

¹²³ Marquis Childs, “McCarthy Eagerly Studied in Germany,” *Washington Post*, 12 March 1954, 24.

¹²⁴ Marquis Childs, *The Ragged Edge: The Diary of a Crisis* (New York: Doubleday, 1955).

¹²⁵ Childs, *The Ragged Edge*, 86.

¹²⁶ Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) is the best source on Murrow and McCarthy. See especially pages 163-180. See also James L. Baughman, *Same Time, Same Station: Creating American Television* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 239-242. Childs did watch Murrow’s program when he could. He wrote to Murrow’s producer Fred Friendly in 1953 that the show was “just about the best thing on TV.” Childs to Friendly, 5 June 1953, Childs Papers, box 2, folder 2.

society.”¹²⁷ The hearings were also irrelevant to the position of the United States in world affairs in this era of crisis. “No one,” Childs wrote, “can pretend for a moment that the outcome will contribute, whatever the outcome may be if any, to the strength of the West...for this nation at this moment to indulge in such a luxury as self destruction is fantastic beyond belief. There simply is not time enough. The tide of Communism will not wait.”¹²⁸ The overall result of the hearings, which many people watched on television day in and day out, was the pervasive feeling that “something strange and alien is happening” to American government.¹²⁹

By the end of June, Childs feared that McCarthy’s actions had so damaged the institution of the Senate and the trust among senators that the body could no longer function as an effective instrument of government. He wrote about the proposal, offered by Senator Ralph Flanders of Vermont, to remove McCarthy from his committee chairmanship, but reported that few believed it had any chance to succeed.¹³⁰ Childs’ writing in the summer of 1954 conveyed a sense of pessimism, which was not atypical, and reinforced some of his common themes about the dangers of McCarthyism, namely that it was a pointless distraction from the nation’s pressing concerns and dangerous blow to public morale in a time when resolve and courage were most necessary.

¹²⁷ Childs, *The Ragged Edge*, 145-146.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Marquis Childs, “McCarthyism and Growth of Nazism,” *Washington Post*, 23 June 1954, 10. On viewership of the hearings, see Michael Gauger, “Flickering Images: Live Television Coverage and Viewership of the Army-McCarthy Hearings,” *Historian* 67:3 (Winter 2005): 678-693.

¹³⁰ Marquis Childs, “Smears and Tears Plague the Senate,” *Washington Post*, 30 June 1954, 12. The Flanders resolution opened the door to the formation of the Watkins Committee that eventually brought censure charges against McCarthy. See Arthur V. Watkins, *Enough Rope: The Inside Story of the Censure of Senator Joe McCarthy by His Colleagues* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 23-25.

Childs returned to Geneva in early July to continue his coverage of the Indochina negotiations and his columns from those months contain little on McCarthyism, which reflects his general feeling from the time that the issue was secondary in importance compared to the high-stakes diplomacy in Europe. By the fall, however, Childs noted that “McCarthy’s stock is falling in the political stock market” as opposition grew and the movement toward censure quickened.¹³¹ Censure hearings began on August 31. Even though the columnist was physically absent during the initial deliberation, he was in effect part of the story. One of Senator Flanders’ charges against McCarthy specifically pointed to the senator’s abuse of journalists and named Childs as an example, perhaps in reference to the 1951 *Meet the Press* confrontation. This particular issue was dropped as the Watkins’ Select Committee narrowed the censure resolution to include only breaches of Senate decorum and procedure.¹³² The censure question hung heavily over the November elections, which appeared to many to be a referendum on McCarthyism. The Republican leadership understood that McCarthy hurt the party’s chances and worked to keep him under wraps as best they could. The columnist did not believe, however, that McCarthy was finished. He had seen McCarthy rebound from too many crises, emerge unscathed from too many seemingly impossible situations. In fact, Childs thought it was possible that McCarthy would use the expected Republican electoral defeats as evidence of public disapproval for those Republicans who favored censure, thus building on voter resentment to reclaim the initiative.¹³³ Even after the censure resolution passed, Childs

¹³¹ Marquis Childs, “McCarthy Still Hurts U.S. Abroad,” *Washington Post*, 21 September 1954, 16. The effort to censure McCarthy in the Senate is described in Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense*, 472-494.

¹³² The full list of charges against McCarthy is reprinted in the committee report, titled “Report of the Select Committee to Study Censure Charges,” (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1954), 63-66. See also Watkins, *Enough Rope*, 77-79.

¹³³ Marquis Childs, “McCarthy Silent, but Not for Long,” *Washington Post*, 26 October 1954, 14.

was not entirely certain that McCarthy was done with his crusade.¹³⁴ As it turned out, however, this was one question that he was wrong about.

McCarthy's censure did not end the red scare, but the extreme anti-Communists were relegated increasingly to the political margins. In the days following the censure vote, Childs wrote, in fact, that the core of the extremists might, in fact, be turning more vocal. Finally, however, Childs felt comfortable describing the behavior of the extremist fringe as "self-defeating" because it would only turn mainstream political opinion further against them. The only audience for the extremist message after McCarthy's downfall was the "lunatic fringe who are already infected with the virus of hate."¹³⁵ Childs' final substantial comment on McCarthyism before the resurgence of the far right in the early 1960s came in a series of columns in 1955 on the defection of former Senator Harry P. Cain from the McCarthyite ranks. Cain, as a member of the Senate and later the Subversive Activities Control Board, had been noteworthy for his "wild-eyed statements about the Communist danger," but in early 1955 became a critic of the abuses of the loyalty system.¹³⁶ Childs also used his column to publicize the admission of former Communist and prized government witness Harvey Matusow that much of his testimony before the HCUA and McCarthy's committee had been fabricated. Matusow in fact called Childs to apologize for spreading lies about him and, with a certain amount of nerve, asked to borrow money. Childs came away from the conversation convinced that nothing Matusow said was credible and he recounted the various instances in which the informer had provided false evidence that caused real harm to people's reputations.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Marquis Childs, "McCarthy Support at New Low Point," *Washington Post*, 7 December 1954, 14.

¹³⁵ Marquis Childs, "Case will Pose New McCarthy Vote," *Washington Post*, 17 December 1954, 22.

¹³⁶ Marquis Childs, "What Cain Raised," *Washington Post*, 21 January 1955, 19.

¹³⁷ Marquis Childs, "Unraveling the Matusow Claims," *Washington Post*, 11 February 1955, 30.

In Retrospect

McCarthy's dramatic fall during the spring and summer of 1954, and thus the beginning of the end of the era of McCarthyism, is usually attributed to the power of television. Murrow's *See it Now* program and the recklessness on display during the televised Army-McCarthy hearings finally turned the public against the senator, which allowed his opponents to gain the upper hand. Childs himself, in fact, gave much of the credit for McCarthy's downfall to Murrow.¹³⁸ And yet, more recent interpretations suggest a smaller role for the visual medium. Not as many people watched the hearings as has been assumed. Public approval rates for McCarthy did not drop as much as has been assumed in the wake of the broadcasts.¹³⁹ This opens the door to reevaluate the role played by Mark Childs and others in the liberal press. Edwin Bayley and Jeff Broadwater have pointed out that criticism in the liberal press did much of the groundwork that led to McCarthy's censure.¹⁴⁰ Critical newspaper commentary over the McCarthy years formed the context for public reaction to the 1954 Murrow program and the Army-McCarthy hearings. The programs gave visual credence to negative feelings and opinions that first began to germinate due to editorials and columns on the printed page. Persistently holding McCarthy and his misdeeds before the eyes of readers for nearly five years, Mark Childs was as much a part of this effort as any other journalist and he should be recognized for his contribution to the effort.

¹³⁸ Childs, *Witness to Power*, 65.

¹³⁹ See Gauger, "Flickering Images," 690-693; Brian Thornton, "Published Reaction when Murrow Battled McCarthy," *Journalism History* 29:3 (Fall 2003): 133-146; Baughman, *Same Time, Same Station*, 227-229.

¹⁴⁰ Bayley, *Joe McCarthy and the Press*, 216-217; Broadwater, *Eisenhower and the Anti-Communist Crusade*, 14. On viewer response to the Murrow program, as measured through letters to the editor, see Brian Thornton, "Published Reaction When Murrow Battled McCarthy," *Journalism History* 29:3 (Fall 2003): 133-143.

In the end, his career suffered little from the encounter with McCarthyism. Back home at the *Post-Dispatch*, Childs remained a popular and respected commentator, maintaining a solid subscriber base for the column and continuing to appear regularly on *Meet the Press* and other television and radio programs. Seen in one light, he had taken risks that might have done significant damage to his own career. On the other hand, his writing in a sense protected him and ensured that he and his fellow liberals in the press and elsewhere would be able to remain viable participants in the political culture. Postwar liberalism was bloodied during the period of McCarthyism, but not destroyed. Childs and his ideological allies continued to have a place in the national dialog about the foreign policy, defense spending, the arms race, civil rights and liberties, and other major issues of the era. By successfully defending this right, he helped to keep open the space from which he could continue his interpretive reporting and commentary. As liberals began to offer a substantive critique in the later Eisenhower years and asserted a new vision of liberalism centered on John F. Kennedy, Childs was a key player.

When McCarthy died in 1957, Childs felt no compulsion to comment, leaving the grim chore to others. As discussed in the following chapter, he believed at the time that the nation was still weakened by the red scare in some ways. It had sapped the nation's vitality and undermined the political and social cohesion necessary to wage the Cold War with purpose. Even in death, the junior senator from Wisconsin cast a long shadow. Writing at the tail end of his career however, Childs recalled McCarthy as a "second rater," someone who was amazing in that he could do so much damage with so little ammunition. He was driven by a constant hunger for power at any cost and lived merely to create his own image. Summing up, in comments that can apply the McCarthyites as a group, Childs concluded, "this was one of the

weaknesses of the antihero, the need for an image, always self-admiring, and the television image was his triumph until he began to fall, the Senate at last censuring him for having broken every rule.”¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ Childs, *Witness to Power*, 69.

Chapter 4

In assessing the reason for whatever complacency may exist, the campaign promises of peace and prosperity, together with a policy of keeping up a facade of determined optimism, must be taken into account.¹

In the 17 swiftly moving years since the mass death that burst over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the nuclear arms race has come to be taken for granted. The sense of shock and horror- of a new and incalculable dimension in the affairs of men- has been eroded away...²

On the last Friday before Thanksgiving 1963, Mark Childs was enjoying a collegial lunch at the National Press Club with his friend and rival in the “commenting game” Walter Lippmann. Childs was arguably at the peak of his career; his long years of interpretive reporting in Washington had earned him wide-ranging respect and he had close access to the powerful newsmakers in the liberal Kennedy administration and on Capitol Hill. As the two men finished their meal, a waiter came up to tell them, two of the best-connected newsmen in the country, that President Kennedy had been shot while riding in a motorcade through the streets of Dallas. In a rush, they hurried to the offices of the *Washington Post*, where, amid the chaos, Childs first tried to piece together the details of the story coming out of Texas.³ As the magnitude of the event began to sink in, he would have gone quickly back to his own office. As the head of the *Post-Dispatch* Washington bureau, he was responsible for overseeing coverage of what would clearly become one of the biggest stories of his career. His friend and colleague Richard Dudman, in Dallas with the presidential party, was sending news as fast as it

¹ Marquis Childs, “Grim Crisis Finds U.S. Unprepared,” *Washington Post*, 18 October 1957, 18.

² Marquis Childs, “Where is Today’s Sen. McMahon?” *Washington Post*, 27 July 1962, 14.

³ This story comes from Ronald Steel in *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1980), 542. Childs himself left no first-hand account of the event.

could be gathered. As Childs worked, he no doubt thought deeply about the loss of the young president in whom he had placed so much hope for a resolution to the crisis of the Cold War and nuclear arms race. Childs had followed Kennedy, whom he called “the embodiment of the young, vigorous America,” from Boston to Los Angeles, from Washington to Paris, Vienna, and Berlin.⁴ Along the way he had expressed hope and disappointment, and sometimes fear, as the tide of world affairs flowed from one crisis to the next.

Childs was among those who came to back the untested senator from Massachusetts as the nation’s best hope in the global struggle against Communism. He admired the Kennedy style and coolness, as well as his determination to revitalize America’s position in the world. In Childs’ estimation, the nation was drifting dangerously at the end of the Eisenhower presidency, its direction lost while it fell behind the Soviets in the race for security and prestige. Although he had been close to Eisenhower since World War II, by the late 1950s he no longer thought the general was capable of leading the nation effectively. Childs took seriously Kennedy’s call to action and sense of purpose and he used his column to support the young president. In many ways, he shared Kennedy’s Cold War world view, the sense of mission formed out of the experience of World War II and the Truman era, that demanded forceful resistance to the Communist threat. This led him to praise Kennedy’s aggressive rhetoric and attention to expanding and modernizing both the conventional and nuclear weapons America needed for defense. He gave Kennedy the benefit of the doubt when events turned against American interests and always urged renewed efforts to negotiate. Throughout, he depicted Kennedy as a calm and deeply rational leader who would arrive at the right decisions, while at

⁴ Marquis Childs, *Witness to Power* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 181.

the same time serving as the very symbol of America's renewed vigor and promise to the rest of the world. In the final year of Kennedy's life, Childs' characteristic pessimism about the troubled world lessened to a degree, making the loss of the president in Dallas that much more painful.

This chapter is an analysis of Childs' writing on Cold War topics during the late 1950s and early 1960s and his relationship, personal as well as in print, with Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy. By this time, Childs had emerged as one of the nation's preeminent columnists; he was firmly established among the journalistic establishment that, according to many estimations, held broad influence over public opinion and policy.⁵ This chapter examines the positions Childs' took on issues like the test ban negotiations and arms race, the standoffs in Cuba and Berlin, relationships among the Western allies, and the place of liberal foreign policy in American politics. In many cases, Childs took bold positions and used what influence he had in the attempt to move policy; this is especially apparent in his writing on the 1961 Berlin crisis and the protracted test ban negotiations in Geneva. In other cases, he did as much as anyone to give shape to the conventional wisdom about America's place in the world, the necessity to spend heavily on defense and wage active Cold War. Certainly, he was deeply embedded in the Cold War consensus described by Daniel Hallin and others mentioned in the introduction. He was also, in a sense, wrong about the two leaders. The major thread of

⁵ Donald Ritchie, *Reporting from Washington: A History of the Washington Press Corps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) is the best general treatment of the power and influence of the press in this era. See also Louis Liebovich, *The Press and the Modern Presidency: Myths and Mindsets from Kennedy to Clinton* (Westport: Praeger, 1998). Several important older studies should be consulted. See Douglass Cater, *The Fourth Branch of Government* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959); Bernard C. Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); James Reston, *The Artillery of the Press: Its Influence on Foreign Policy* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1966); and William L. Rivers, *The Opinion Makers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965).

Eisenhower revisionism underway since the 1980s shows that Childs' assessment of the General as a weak and passive leader was inaccurate.⁶ Kennedy, too, has been subject to much revisionism and he is now often described as unnecessarily reckless and provocative, having overseen a massive increase in defense spending and gotten the nation mired in conflict around the globe.⁷ This chapter shows that Childs made his assessments based on careful first-hand observation and understood the leadership styles, the successes, and the failures of the two men, through the prism of his own analysis and experience.

Childs, Eisenhower, and the Cold War in the late 1950s

The relationship between Mark Childs and Dwight Eisenhower began during World War II when Childs made several reporting trips to England, where he interviewed Allied politicians and military planners and met General Eisenhower and his staff for the first time. Childs was immediately impressed with the soft-spoken leader and the efficacy of his press relations team. Harry Butcher, the former CBS public relations man who served as Eisenhower's press liaison in Europe, became a good source and friend to Childs and worked to promote the idea that Eisenhower was a natural master of press relations.⁸ The image of

⁶ Childs' interpretation began to fade with reassessments such as Mary S. McAuliffe, "Commentary: Eisenhower as President," *Journal of American History* 68:3 (December 1981): 625-632, and Anthony James Joes, "Eisenhower Revisionism: The Tide Comes In," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 15:3 (Summer 1985): 561-571. Fred I. Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), was the first of many important books along these lines, some of which are cited later in this chapter. This trend has culminated in Evan Thomas, *Ike's Bluff: President Eisenhower's Secret Battle to Save the World* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2012).

⁷ The essays in Thomas G. Paterson, ed., *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) argued from this general point of view. More recent critical analyses of Kennedy include James N. Giglio, *The Presidency of John K. Kennedy*, 2 ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006) and Stephen G. Rabe, *John F. Kennedy: World Leader* (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2010), as well as several studies cited later in this chapter.

⁸ Marquis Childs, *Eisenhower: Captive Hero, A Critical Study of the General and the President* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958), 65-66. Eisenhower's wartime relationship with news reporters is discussed in Jean Edward Smith, *Eisenhower in Peace and War* (New York: Random House, 2012), 208-209. According to the most systematic study of Eisenhower's relationship with the mass media described the war years as a "five-star

Eisenhower as a popular hero became firmly implanted during this time and it served as the basis for Childs' writing about him for the next decade. His overt support continued in the postwar years when Childs wrote favorably of Eisenhower's leadership of the new Joint Chiefs of Staff. This was in part due to the general's close association with George Marshall, with whom Childs was also friendly and deeply impressed, as discussed in chapter one. The two remained on good terms during Eisenhower's transition into political life, meeting several times, for instance, at Columbia University where Eisenhower served as president. Childs wrote later that he was the first to really understand Eisenhower's political orientation and warned liberal Democrats not to rush to "draft" him for the 1948 presidential nomination. In a moment of candor, Eisenhower told the reporter that his political thinking was mostly in line with that of Senator Harry Byrd of Virginia, a prominent old-line conservative, which was startling news to Childs' liberal friends at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia.⁹

When Eisenhower was preparing to run for the 1952 Republican nomination, Childs viewed his potential candidacy positively. He went so far as to offer Eisenhower some advice on managing his relations with Republicans who were attempting to pressure him to announce his candidacy in early 1951. "Some of the poison pen artists," he warned, "are beginning to open up here again. I am sure their intention is to try to blackmail you into a declaration of your private intentions for the future and I hope you will not be intimidated."¹⁰ However, the

debut" during which Eisenhower mastered the art of press management. See Craig Allen, *Eisenhower and the Mass Media: Peace, Prosperity, and Prime-Time TV* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 12-15.

⁹ Childs, *Witness to Power*, 62-63.

¹⁰ Childs to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, 20 March 1951, Childs Papers, box 2, folder 2. See Smith, *Eisenhower in Peace and War*, 501-503, on Eisenhower's decision to run in 1952. According to one account,

columnist ultimately preferred the Democrat Adlai Stevenson, with whom he enjoyed an even closer friendship. After Stevenson's nomination, Childs wrote to him praising the acceptance speech and telling him that "my personal wish is to help you in any way I can."¹¹ At the same time, he was comfortable with the idea of an Eisenhower presidency. Cold War tensions with the Soviets were far and away his major concern during the election and he believed the Republican candidate and John Foster Dulles, the likely Secretary of State, would guide the nation ably in the long-running conflict.¹² He also recognized, his warm feelings for Stevenson aside, that the hero Eisenhower could hardly fail to win after the contentious Truman years. As he put it later, "no matter what Eisenhower had done, from the very first day of the campaign, he couldn't have lost the election."¹³ He did not believe that Eisenhower ran a particularly effective campaign, but it was more than enough for victory.¹⁴ After the Eisenhower victory, Childs wrote a series of columns that portrayed him as a decisive leader who would reinvigorate America's confused and lagging Cold War effort.¹⁵

Eisenhower hoped to be "drafted by a seemingly unsought groundswell of public demand" that would correspond to his image as a loyal public servant. See Ira Chernus, *General Eisenhower: Ideology and Discourse* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2002), 269.

¹¹ Childs to Adlai Stevenson, 28 July 1952, Childs Papers, box 10, folder 3. Despite these private words of support, Childs chose not to publicly join a national organization of liberals mobilized behind the Democrat. He turned down their request, writing "in the very nature of my job I cannot be part of a political organization; not even an independent organization." Childs to Mrs. Edison Dick, National Volunteers for Stevenson, 30 September 1952, Childs Papers, box 11, folder 1.

¹² Childs had known Dulles since World War II as well. See "Transcript of Recorded Interview with Marquis Childs for the John Foster Dulles Oral History Project," Princeton University, 12 January 1966, Childs Papers, 1967 addition, box 2, folder 3.

¹³ Interview with Marquis W. Childs for the Adlai E. Stevenson Project, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University. Childs recorded the interview in 1969 and it was published until 1977.

¹⁴ Childs to Elizabeth Bragdon, Bobbs-Merrill Co., 15 October 1952, Childs Papers, box 2, folder 4. In this letter, Childs said the campaign was a "sad showing" of Eisenhower's merits as a potential leader.

¹⁵ For example, see Marquis Childs, "Problems Facing Ike," *Washington Post*, 8 November 1952, 9; "Need to End Demoralization," *Washington Post*, 18 December 1952, 13; "Burden of State Portfolio," *Washington Post*, 20 December 1952, 15.

As a rule, his coverage of Eisenhower and Dulles was positive through the early and mid-1950s. He had a good working relationship with press secretary James Hagerty and sought to keep open the lines of communication between himself and the administration.¹⁶ The major foreign policy exception to this generally positive orientation was on the subjects of nuclear weapons and defense spending. As discussed earlier in this study, Childs was a proponent of robust defense spending from the earliest years of the Cold War. He was also extremely disturbed by the onset of the atomic arms race, having dedicated dozens of columns to the effort to control and limit, if not ban outright, the weapons he feared so much. It is no surprise, then, that he was wary of the Eisenhower administration's shift on defense strategy, which sought to cut spending on traditional armaments and rely on the deterrent power of the new generation of hydrogen weapons. The New Look, as the general strategy was dubbed, called for a smaller Navy and fewer American troops stationed overseas. Attacks by the Soviets or others would be met with massive retaliation in the form of missiles and strategic bombers deployed with the newest nuclear bombs. This "all or nothing" strategy, it was hoped, would effectively deter any aggressor nation that might consider moving against the interests of America or its allies.¹⁷ Although Eisenhower augmented this new policy with a variety of peaceful proposals, for example a plan to share non-military atomic technologies and a stated

¹⁶ See James C. Hagerty to Childs, 16 December 1952, Childs Papers, box 2, folder 4. An early assessment of Eisenhower's generally open and friendly relationship with Washington journalists can be found in Douglass Cater, "The President and the Press," *The Reporter*, 28 April 1953, 26-28.

¹⁷ The literature on the New Look strategy is expansive and recent scholarship argues that Eisenhower's thinking paid off, in the sense that the United States and the Soviet Union never fought an open war, let alone a nuclear war. See Robert R. Bowie and Richard M. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Campbell Craig, *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) for recent analyses of this kind. Robert Divine's brief, but thoughtful *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981) shares this point of view. Dulles' contributions are also well-catalogued. See Frederick W. Marks, III, *Power and Peace: The Diplomacy of John Foster Dulles* (Westport: Praeger, 1993) for one overview.

willingness to reach a *détente* with the Soviets through endless summits and negotiations, there was little question that the arms race had accelerated and that the “nuclear terror” Childs wrote about since the 1940s had only grown.

Childs’ reporting on *New Look* offered a mixed assessment; he was wary of the strategy and at least one column put the spotlight on Pentagon critics of the plan, but he was also willing to give Eisenhower and Dulles the benefit of the doubt for the time being on defense matters.¹⁸

As he wrote to Senator Albert Gore, Democrat of Tennessee, at the time, “to say that I hope the Administration knows what it is doing sounds childish, but there are occasions when one is forced back to the simple, direct reactions of childhood.”¹⁹ His main concern was that it represented defensive thinking rather than innovation and might lead to complacency. “The aggressive force of Communism,” he wrote, “can be contained only by strength.”²⁰

Furthermore, if the outbreak of war would necessarily lead to a nuclear holocaust that had no victor, skillful diplomacy was vital to national survival.²¹ As discussed in chapter three, Childs believed that the postwar red scare had weakened America’s diplomatic corps and constrained negotiators’ ability to make compromises that might be seen as soft on Communism. Cuts to appropriations for diplomatic missions and foreign aid added to the problem. There might be some excess spending in the budget, he admitted, but he added “this should not, however justify arbitrarily chopping into funds essential to sustain...strength in the free world.”²² Under these circumstances, *détente* between the great powers proved hard to reach. However, many

¹⁸ Marquis Childs, “New Military Policy,” *Washington Post*, 6 February 1954, 11.

¹⁹ Childs to Albert Gore, 9 February 1954, Childs Papers, box 4, folder 2.

²⁰ Marquis Childs, “America’s Dilemma: Power Vs. Restraint,” *Washington Post*, 10 September 1954, 22.

²¹ Marquis Childs, “Cold Peace Requires New Diplomacy,” *Washington Post*, 24 February 1954, 20; “America’s Curtain Needs Reappraisal,” *Washington Post*, 9 September 1955, 20.

²² Marquis Childs, “Budget Cuts Post Paradox of Power,” *Washington Post*, 3 May 1957, 16.

observers considered Eisenhower “the nation’s single most valuable asset” in the Cold War and Childs continued to believe that the president could find some path toward peaceful coexistence that would lessen the threat of nuclear war.²³ For example, he noted that Eisenhower’s stated policy was to seek a ban on atmospheric nuclear testing and his columns on the subject blamed Soviet intransigence for the lack of progress. A testing ban, valuable in itself, was also considered an important symbol of shared understanding about the dangers of war and a necessary first step toward broader disarmament agreements.

By the end of the decade, however, a series of events compelled Childs to rethink his position. In part, this was due to the health problems that cast doubt on Eisenhower’s leadership and engagement with the pressing issues of the day. As will be discussed in the following chapter, Childs was also disappointed with Eisenhower’s passive stance on civil rights, which made the United States look bad in the eyes of the world.²⁴ More broadly, however, Childs began to question the entire premise of the Eisenhower approach as it played out in Cold War planning, strategy, and diplomacy. His estimation of Dulles, which had begun to slip after what he saw as mistakes in handling the Indochina and Suez crises, also further soured.²⁵ Childs was not alone in this reevaluation; broad criticism from Democrats, factions in the Pentagon, intellectuals, and the general public offered a sometimes harsh counter narrative to the image of peace and prosperity that had marked the earlier part of the decade. Childs did not take up the popular critique of mass culture that animated the writing of many other liberals

²³ Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War*, 123.

²⁴ See Marquis Childs, “Ike’s Smile Masks Back-Stage Rows,” *Washington Post*, 27 September 1957, 16.

²⁵ Privately Childs came to believe press coverage of Dulles to this point had been “exceedingly kind,” partly due to the workings of the secretary’s public relations staff. He thought Dulles had “an almost pathetic desire to be thought well of” and “needs and desires this kind of crude flattery.” A 1956 memo to Raymond Crowley at the paper’s newsroom in St. Louis said “I don’t think the *Post-Dispatch* should play this game.” Childs to Crowley, 11 January 1956, Childs Papers, box 27 folder 1.

of the era. Few of his columns touch on the issues of mindless popular culture, excessive materialism, and bland conformity that other observers blamed for America's supposed distraction and weakness in the Cold War arena.²⁶ Rather than cultural complacency, he saw a drifting weakness and confusion of political leadership similar to the problem he wrote about in the late Truman years. Although he did not completely alter his understanding of Eisenhower- he never stopped thinking that Ike's personal appeal could be effective- Childs markedly increased his criticism and began to call for a new direction.

Historians have widely observed that the Soviet launch of the *Sputnik* satellites in the fall of 1957, using powerful rocket boosters that could deliver a nuclear warhead across the Atlantic, was a major blow to American prestige and self-perception. The launches set off a wave of panic about the nation's technological inferiority in the "space race" and its vulnerability to a nuclear attack.²⁷ For Childs, however, the *Sputnik* crisis was not so much of a shock as an affirmation of concerns he had already identified. His column had warned that danger from rockets was just around the corner ever since his first-hand observation of V-2 rocket damage in wartime London. More recently, two articles from the months before the

²⁶ On postwar cultural critiques, see Warren Susman, "Did Success Spoil the United States: Dual Representations in Postwar America," in Lary May, ed., *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 19-37. Daniel Horowitz, *Consuming Pleasures: Intellectuals and Popular Culture in the Postwar World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) is a magnificent study of the multiple threads of 1950s cultural criticism. The gendered language of much of the critique is thoughtfully assed in K.A. Courdileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005), ch. 3.

²⁷ See Walter A. McDougall, *The Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), and Paul Dickson, *Sputnik: Shock of the Century* (New York: Walker & Co., 2007) on the response to the Soviet launch. Robert A. Divine, *The Sputnik Challenge: Eisenhower's Response to the Soviet Satellite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) credits Eisenhower for pursuing a solid missile and space research program, but takes him to task for failing to adequately reassure the American public. See also Zuoyue Wang, *In Sputnik's Shadow: The President's Science Advisory Committee and Cold War America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009) on how the event enhanced the role of scientific advisors in Cold War policymaking. According to one study, American newspapers added to the spirit of crisis and defeatism though their coverage of the launch. See Jack Lule, "Roots of the Space Age: *Sputnik* and the Language of U.S. News in 1957," *Journalism Quarterly* 68: 1/2 (Spring/Summer 1991): 76-86.

October 4 *Sputnik* launch told readers about the looming danger of Soviet missile advances and warned about a weak American missile program. On August 30, in a rare column that ran on the front page of the *Washington Post*, Childs broke a story about recent successful Soviet tests of an ICBM with a range of at least 4000 miles. The report provided an inside account of the development of the Jupiter and Thor missile systems based on information obtained by Childs' *Post-Dispatch* colleague, retired General Thomas Phillips.²⁸ America held "a real advantage in the missile race," he wrote, but defense budget cuts and the rivalry between the two American missile programs might slow further progress. Inter-service rivalry and cost overruns in the Air Force Thor program were the focus of a second column, running the week before *Sputnik*, that criticized the president for failing to assert control over the planning process.

Childs attempted to make sense of the changed situation in a series of ten columns over the following month. Following *Sputnik*, his opinion of the relative strength of the two rivals had changed; where the earlier column assured readers that America was leading the arms war, he now wrote "it is clear the United States is lagging behind" in the technological race because the Soviets could launch a 180-pound object into space and the US could not. He travelled to southern California to talk with officials at the Douglas Aircraft Company, which was manufacturing the Thor missiles for the Air Force. He concluded that the government should launch a peacetime effort similar to the Manhattan Project to coordinate and accelerate production.²⁹ In the face of a barrage of criticism, some Republicans sought to put the blame on Truman, implying that the previous administration should have started developing missiles

²⁸ Marquis Childs, "Reds Fire 6 Missiles of Intercontinental Range Over Siberia," *Washington Post*, 30 August 1957, 1.

²⁹ Marquis Childs, "Rivalry Snagging U.S. Missile Drive," *Washington Post*, 15 October 1957, 12.

more aggressively.³⁰ Childs agreed, pointing out that a bold missile plan had been put forward in 1950, but rejected. Such speculation was just “spilt milk,” however, and he argued that looking to the past was unproductive.³¹ The real blame, he felt, belonged to Secretary of State Dulles and the others in the defense establishment who allowed rivalry and penny pinching to come before the national interest. Furthermore, he blamed Republicans generally for creating a stifling atmosphere that lulled Americans into a false sense of security. Their message was that Democratic administrations bring war while Republicans were the party of peace. “If this did not produce complacency, with the comfortable conviction that so long as Mr. Eisenhower was in the White House all would be well,” he wrote, “it produced something very like it.” The ramifications could be extremely dangerous. This same column suggested, based on an off-the-record conversation with CIA Director Allen Dulles, that Soviet threats to use their new missiles to attack Paris and London forced the Western withdrawal in the Suez Crisis the year before. American planes armed with atomic bombs were in the air, creating a very unstable situation.³² As he wrote to Eugene Rabinowitch, editor of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, “I quite agree with you that it is a dangerous game and that with the uncertainty and evident insecurity now prevailing here and perhaps in Moscow as well, there could be a fatal accident.”³³ This and several columns complained about the excessive secrecy that prevented the press and public from understanding the true nature of the dangerous world.

³⁰ Wang, *In Sputnik's Shadow*, 72-73.

³¹ Marquis Childs, “Alarm on Missiles Sounded in 1950,” *Washington Post*, 16 October 1957, 12.

³² Childs, “Grim Crisis Finds U.S. Unprepared,” 18.

³³ Childs to Rabinowitch, 12 November 1957, Papers of Marquis W. Childs, University of Iowa Special Collections, Iowa City, Iowa, box 1. Childs does not appear to have been in the same close touch with the scientists movement as he had been at the dawn of the Atomic Age, even though he continued to share many of their concerns.

Another column argued for a comprehensive congressional investigation, which he hoped would “be a real contribution to national security and public understanding.” Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee told Childs that “the public reaction to the *Sputnik* is something rarely seen in its universality and its widespread reflection of concern for the security of the nation.” Only careful deliberation could put an end to the confusion and finger pointing and outline a constructive agenda for the future.³⁴ Additional columns from this period examined the significant propaganda effect of *Sputnik* and the likely negative influence it would have on American relations with the Western allies. The crisis, he believed, could, if properly handled, be used to reignite the international anti-Communist effort. For this to occur, though, “a strong lead must come from the White House in the weeks and months that follow to reverse the defense slowdown, with all that it has cost in preparedness and prestige.” The Little Rock crisis, defense budget squabbles, and *Sputnik*, however, had “chipped away” at Eisenhower’s reputation to such a degree that “even his role as a military leader has been dimmed.”³⁵ Childs was unimpressed with Eisenhower’s “chins up” speeches, in which the president tried to reassure the American public that the nation was still well-defended and, in fact, well ahead in the arms race.³⁶ When Eisenhower prepared to travel to Europe for a

³⁴ Marquis Childs, “Senate Weighing Sputnik Hearings,” *Washington Post*, 22 October 1957, 12. Congressional reaction to *Sputnik* and the missile gap issue is discussed in Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 79-83.

³⁵ Marquis Childs, “Will *Sputnik* Bind Ties of Alliance?” *Washington Post*, 23 October 1957, 20. See also “New Red Surprise Feared on Nov. 7,” *Washington Post*, 25 October 1957, 16.

³⁶ Marquis Childs, “New Missile Feuds Brew in Pentagon,” *Washington Post*, 13 November 1957, 12. As many scholars have since shown, Eisenhower knew that U-2 reconnaissance flights and other intelligence showed that American military superiority remained intact, but the president was reluctant to reveal this classified information. See James Ledbetter, *Unwarranted Influence: Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Military-Industrial Complex* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 89-90. If Childs’ sources in the defense establishment informed him about the U-2 flights and the intelligence they produced, nothing in his column or private papers indicates it. According to biographer Stephen Ambrose, allegations such as those made by Childs were quite hurtful to Eisenhower. See Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 457.

meeting of NATO officials, Childs depicted him as a weakened and ailing leader who “cannot be unaware of the drastic alteration taking place in public attitudes toward him.” However, Childs recognized that Eisenhower’s strength had always been in projecting the image of the heroic warrior. Perhaps, he hoped, “a return to Europe in the role of the crusader” might reinvigorate both the president and the national prestige.³⁷

These events had several effects on Childs reporting and commentary on Eisenhower’s Cold War at the end of his term.³⁸ In addition the more generally critical tone, described above, Childs also refocused his energy on nuclear disarmament and, as a first step, a ban on further nuclear weapons testing. Although he wrote many columns about atomic weapons, dating back to 1945, his post-*Sputnik* writing took on a renewed urgency and he paid more attention to related issues like fallout from atmospheric testing.³⁹ The mechanics of the test ban agreement were challenging, and Childs expressed concern that some of the nuclear scientists, Edward Teller, in particular, and factions at the Atomic Energy Commission and in the Pentagon,

³⁷ Marquis Childs, “Ailing President Set on Paris Trip,” *Washington Post*, 10 December 1957, 14.

³⁸ It is also worth noting that the major work on Childs’ 1958 book *Eisenhower: Captive Hero* was completed around this time and his assessment of the president as a relatively weak leader was colored by his perceptions at this historical moment. The book has been criticized for adding to the false image of Eisenhower that revisionist historians began to dismantle starting in the 1980s. Childs himself did not see it as a particularly critical account. In a 1957 letter to the editor of *Holiday* magazine, he called the project “in no sense a muck-raking job. Far from it. It is written with compassion and, I hope, understanding.” Late the following summer, after the book’s release, he wrote to the editor of the Worcester (Mass.) *Telegram* that his objective not been to criticize Eisenhower directly, but to “stimulate discussion on the office of the President.” “Frankly, it seems to me more or less irrelevant whether Mr. Eisenhower is popular or unpopular today,” he wrote. “No one could be more likeable than Mr. Eisenhower as a human being, but I do not think this qualifies him as a President.” Childs to Ted Patrick, 28 June 1957, and Childs to Leslie Moore, 26 August 1958, Childs Papers, University of Iowa, box 1.

³⁹ For example, see “Marquis Childs, “New Storms Due on Fallout Issue,” *Washington Post*, 3 March 1959, 14. The important major study of atmospheric testing is Howard Ball, *Justice Downwind: America’s Atomic Testing Program in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), which focuses on the adverse health consequences of radioactive fallout and the emergence of testing as a domestic political issue.

distorted the debate with unrealistic claims and unnecessary secrecy provisions.⁴⁰ “It is like a debate being held in almost total darkness, with only a voice heard and identified now and then,” he wrote. Opponents claimed that no verification and inspection system could be put in place to monitor the ban, but Childs used information from physicist Hans Bethe’s secret testimony to a Senate subcommittee on disarmament to argue that advances in monitoring technology did allow for almost total accuracy.⁴¹ The issue of excessive secrecy featured prominently in his column because he felt that the public was being misled.⁴² In a letter to Turner Catledge of the *New York Times*, he wrote

It may be that no test agreement is possible given the precarious balance of terror. But I think it profoundly important that the American people know there are two sides to the question and that distinguished scientists do disagree. I feel this particularly because, in my opinion no arms race in history has ever been halted short of war and the race in which we are now engaged means, as President Eisenhower and almost everyone else has told us, the destruction of our civilization.⁴³

Paradoxically, he continued to advocate a more robust missile program. He accepted the existence of a “missile gap,” which emerged as major theme in the 1960 presidential campaign.⁴⁴ This was an element of the more dynamic foreign policy that he believed Kennedy likely to pursue in the coming years. These conflicting beliefs forced him to sit uncomfortably

⁴⁰ The broad outline of the atmospheric testing ban negotiations and the question of monitoring can be found in chapter 3 of David Tal, *The American Nuclear Disarmament Dilemma, 1945-1963* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

⁴¹ Marquis Childs, “Nuclear Testing Debate Mushrooms,” *Washington Post*, 25 February 1959, 12. See also “Military Lobbying Against Test Ban,” *Washington Post*, 5 June 1959, 14. It is unclear who told Childs about the secret testimony, but it must have been a member of the committee or his staff.

⁴² Marquis Childs, “Argus Blindfold Rouses Senate Ire,” *Washington Post*, 25 March 1959, 12.

⁴³ Childs to Turner Catledge, 30 March 1959, Childs Papers, box 28, folder 1.

⁴⁴ Childs first used the term “missile gap” in a column marking the approaching one year anniversary of *Sputnik* and he ascribed the term to columns by Joe Alsop and Drew Pearson. Marquis Childs, “Missile Program Still Not in Orbit,” *Washington Post*, 24 September 1958, 12. Alsop was an aggressive proponent of the missile gap idea, writing about it often and working with Senator Kennedy to make it a political issue. See Robert W. Merry, *Taking on the World: Joseph and Steward Alsop- Guardians of the American Century* (New York: Viking, 1996), 342.

in the position of advocating limits on, even the abolishment of, nuclear weapons on one hand, but also urging steep increases in America's nuclear arsenal and ICBM capabilities as long as no disarmament agreement was likely. Although his writing from the time reveals no self-awareness about this contradiction, it was one of the many complicated realities that confronted Childs and other Americans as they sought to make sense of global situation in the late 1950s. Regardless, he was fully committed to a new, dynamic direction, as he made clear in a forceful column, written at the end of 1958, about those who praised America for "standing firm."

This, it is scarcely necessary to add, is a tragic confusion of the meaning of the events of the past year. Merely to stay in place- to stand firm- in the deadly race with Communism is to lose by default. While expending so much effort staying in place, the West has seen Communism advance in decisive areas of conflict...it is in the failures and evasions leading up to the crisis- that one more brink- which seem...to be the perhaps fatal flaw in American foreign policy.⁴⁵

"Knowledgeable critics," he warned in a column, "are saying that the missile lag will shortly leave this country in a precarious condition." At a moment that calls for decisive leadership from the president, "those close to him say that today...he simply refuses to be engaged. The impression is of a man serving out a sentence with the patience and stoicism he can muster."⁴⁶

Childs spent long periods of 1958 and 1959 in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe reporting from Cold War hotspots and covering the minutia of a series of major diplomatic meetings designed to reach international agreement on arms control and other pressing issues. Here was one area where he saw a revived hope, especially in late 1959. After Secretary Dulles

⁴⁵ Marquis Childs, "Is 'Standing Firm' Only U.S. Policy?" *Washington Post*, 30 December 1958, 8.

⁴⁶ Marquis Childs, "Is Eisenhower Bored or Tired?" *Washington Post*, 13 January 1959, 11. One of these knowledgeable critics was Senator Stuart Symington, the Missouri Democrat who sat on the Aeronautical and Space Sciences committee. Symington provided Childs with his own estimation, based on information available to the committee, that the United States faced a 4-1 disadvantage in total operational missiles, a figure he described as "conservative." It is unclear where Symington got this figure, which was out of line with those released by Secretary of Defense Neil McElroy around the same time. Stuart Symington to Childs, 30 January 1959, Childs Papers, box 4, folder 4.

died of cancer in May, Childs wrote that Eisenhower took it upon himself to assert a more active and personal role in diplomacy. Childs covered Eisenhower's trip to Western capitals and then the long, eleven-nation tour in the fall of 1959, reporting favorably on the massive crowds that greeted the president and the "outwardly confident and smiling" Eisenhower who, Childs hoped, might use his "old magic" to settle disagreements among the Western allies and come to terms with Soviet Premier Khrushchev.⁴⁷ He picked up a broad sense of hopefulness from the foreign trips and, even though no major breakthroughs emerged from all of the talks, he described the trip as a "qualified triumph."⁴⁸ Childs had enjoyed covering Khrushchev's whirlwind American tour and he was heartened by the apparent thaw in U.S.-Soviet relations. He wasn't entirely positive; his columns could still be sharply critical and a speech he gave in 1959 in Madison, Wisconsin, complained of "a sense of being stuck on dead center, of being cut adrift in a chartless ocean" as well as the "brooding and awesome presence of the vast accumulation of weapons of unimaginable destructiveness."⁴⁹ Still, he found a little room for optimism in his writing. At the end of the year, Childs wrote of the president "he has committed himself to peace on earth and good will for all men...If the diverse people to whom he has spoken fail to heed his message it will not be held against him."⁵⁰ This mood carried over into the early part of Eisenhower's final year in office and Childs expected that the upcoming Paris summit meeting might lead to a significant breakthrough.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Marquis Childs, "Eisenhower Magic Working its Spell," *Washington Post*, 1 September 1959, 14.

⁴⁸ Marquis Childs, "The Grand Tour: Qualified Triumph," *Washington Post*, 8 September 1949, 14.

⁴⁹ Speech at Public Relations Institute, Madison, Wis., August 1959. Childs Papers, University of Iowa, box 3.

⁵⁰ Marquis Childs, "The Grand Tour: A Post-Mortem," *Washington Post*, 25 December 1959, 14.

⁵¹ Smith, *Eisenhower in War and Peace*, 749-750. Childs went to Europe in advance of the summit to do background reporting and prepare for what he hoped would be a major world event. He planned to spend the whole summer overseas and took an \$8,000 advance from the *Post-Dispatch* to cover expenses. See memos sent between Childs and Ray Crowley in the Childs Papers, 1972 addition, box 12, folder 3.

These hopes proved short-lived, as did Childs' revived faith in the efficacy of Eisenhower's personal diplomacy. A Soviet anti-aircraft missile shot down an American U-2 reconnaissance plane on 1 May 1960.⁵² Childs was already in Europe preparing for the summit when he learned of the incident. He did not mention the plane during the initial stages of the controversy; perhaps he believed the White House's initial version of the story, which was that a weather plane had unintentionally strayed over Soviet airspace. Eisenhower's credibility was severely compromised when Khrushchev revealed that the Soviets had recovered the pilot of the aircraft, along with its cameras and other surveillance equipment. The Americans were caught in a clear lie. At first, Childs characterized it as another sign of poor leadership, an indicator that "the left hand and the right hand are operated by quite different sets of intellectual and emotional controls" and "the visible signs of leadership, the friendly grin to one side, are fewer and fewer."⁵³ Eisenhower's negotiating position was severely undermined. "No international meeting," Childs wrote, "has ever begun under such a shadow of darkness." When the heads of state did meet, Khrushchev berated the president for lying about the nature of the flights and then stormed out of the room, effectively ending the summit before it even began.⁵⁴ The spirit of hopefulness that led to the summit had evaporated.

This outcome, which he described as "one of those watershed events in the course of world events," triggered a rash of distraught columns from Childs. The diplomatic disaster was

⁵² The link between the missile gap controversy and Eisenhower's decision to continue the U-2 overflights is discussed in Gregory W. Pedlow and Donald E. Welzenbach, *The CIA and the U-2 Program, 1954-1974* (Washington DC: History Staff Center for the Study of Intelligence, 1998), 157-174.

⁵³ Marquis Childs, "Lack of Support Perils Arms Talks," *Washington Post*, 13 May 1960, 18.

⁵⁴ See Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President*, 513-514.

a severe blow to him, and his writing shows the strain.⁵⁵ He could sometimes be hyperbolic and fatalistic, almost alarmist, in his writing and these columns are good examples of that tendency. His understanding of the situation led him to believe that Eisenhower had been totally outmaneuvered by the much shrewder Khrushchev and the Soviets' trust and confidence in him was "shattered." "So complete is the disaster...and so grim is the prospect ahead," he added, "that it is idle to speculate on what the future might hold." The Western allies were "tense and uncertain, awaiting with trepidation and even dread the next move."⁵⁶ The resulting distrust might, he thought, lead to the end of any effort to negotiate. The "cold war warriors" on both sides might use the crisis to wield greater authority on both sides, which could only make the conflict more dangerous. Khrushchev was in "an extremely embarrassing position" and he had to "react with violence" in order to hold his grip on power.⁵⁷ All of the parties to the summit were diminished by the failure, but the Soviets now held the upper hand. "The West," he lamented, "has not taken a major independent initiative since the Marshall Plan" and now they were forced to react to the unpredictable Khrushchev.⁵⁸ Childs' great hope that the summit could produce some initial step toward nuclear disarmament was dashed. He feared that new rounds of testing on more and more powerful weapons would ensue. At best, future disarmament negotiations might "be kept flickeringly alive," but they would have to begin where they last left off before Paris, "which was nowhere."⁵⁹

⁵⁵ A short time later he wrote to *Post-Dispatch* publisher Joseph Pulitzer "I don't think I was ever more deeply involved in an assignment than on that one in Paris." Childs to Pulitzer, 1 August 1960, Childs Papers, box 12, folder 4.

⁵⁶ Marquis Childs, "Balance of Power Shifts in Geneva," *Washington Post*, 18 May 1960, 16.

⁵⁷ Marquis Childs, "The Grim Outlook After the Summit," *Washington Post*, 20 May 1960, 18.

⁵⁸ Marquis Childs, "Sorting the Rubble from the Summit," *Washington Post*, 24 May 1960, 16.

⁵⁹ Marquis Childs, "The Next Moves in the Cold War," *Washington Post*, 25 May 1960, 22.

Childs, Foreign Policy, and the 1960 Election

Childs came back to the United States in the disheartening aftermath of the failed summit and shifted his energies to covering the upcoming presidential campaign. “I am slowly coming out of the bends induced by the experience in Paris,” he wrote to Ray Crowley back in St. Louis. “A little more decompression should do it.” He wouldn’t go with Eisenhower on any more trips; instead he planned to travel across America talking with candidates and voters, attending the conventions, and, if possible, to travel with the nominees in the last weeks of the campaign.⁶⁰ He considered coverage of national elections one of his specialties and an important element of his success as a syndicated columnist. Correspondence and bylines indicate that he made reporting trips to at least twenty states for campaign and convention coverage. In the fall he spent about a week travelling by train and airplane with each of candidates as they made their final appeals to voters. Because there was little doubt that Vice-President Nixon would be the Republican nominee, Childs paid less attention to the GOP until the convention. The majority of his time, and the majority of his election-related writing, was spent on the Democratic race, Senator Kennedy’s campaign in particular. Scholars like W. J. Rorabaugh have pointed out that many of the reporters who covered the campaign favored Kennedy over his rivals, even if more conservative editorial pages and publishers tended to endorse the Republican ticket.⁶¹ Campaign press secretary Pierre Salinger observed this as well.⁶² Kennedy counted influential journalists like Joseph Alsop and Ben Bradlee among his personal friends and he had learned early in his career to pay attention to his relationship with

⁶⁰ Childs to Crowley, 25 May 1960, Childs Papers, box 12, folder 4.

⁶¹ W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Real Making of the President: Kennedy, Nixon, and the 1960 Campaign* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 173-174. See also Gary A. Donaldson, *The First Modern Campaign: Kennedy, Nixon and the Election of 1960* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 141-143.

⁶² Pierre Salinger, *With Kennedy* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 46-47.

reporters.⁶³ Childs was no exception to trend of favorable coverage; from the start his columns betray a pro- Kennedy slant. This was in part due to the columnist's long standing dislike of Richard Nixon, dating back to the red scare era, but it was also a manifestation of his fascination with the Kennedy image and a sincere belief that the young senator could lead the nation.

The 1960 presidential election was remarkable for a number of reasons, including innovative uses of television and the narrow margin of victory. This chapter, however, discusses Childs' writing on defense and foreign policy, as well as the larger issue of national strength and presidential leadership. Columns from this period dealt with the day in, day out mechanics of the campaign, but a number of them also afforded him an opportunity to express his thoughts about America's place in the world and the need for effective leadership to meet the challenges of the modern era. Apart from his normal focus on policy and powerful individuals, he drew from and contributed to two related threads of a broader national discourse evident during the 1960 election season: the search for a so-called "national purpose" and the reimagining of a version of liberalism updated for a new and more complex age.⁶⁴ Numerous books and articles sought to diagnose and treat the national malaise and those on the left in particular worked to reclaim the mission of "vital center" liberalism of an earlier time.

Like many others, Childs believed, or at least hoped, that these two threads came together in the person of the senator from Massachusetts who emerged in the late 1950s as a forceful critic of Eisenhower's foreign policy and who promised to close the missile gap and

⁶³ Among many other sources, Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 275-279, discusses Kennedy's efforts to maintain beneficial relationships with reporters.

⁶⁴ See John W. Jeffries, "The 'Quest for National Purpose' of 1960," *American Quarterly* 30 (Fall 1978): 451-470.

reaffirm American commitment to fighting the Cold War. Childs wrote his first substantial column on Kennedy in 1957, suggesting that he was already putting a campaign organization together.⁶⁵ Childs also took note of Kennedy's famous 1958 missile gap speech, which drew from material provided by Joseph Alsop and associated Kennedy with the issue in the public mind.⁶⁶ By mid-1959, a year before the convention, Childs had decided that the Kennedy momentum was "irresistible." He had a significant money advantage, enabling him to fund campaign staffs in each of the 50 states. "Kennedy still looks like a Harvard graduate student out to get his Ph.D. in political science," Childs wrote, "but he is in fact a formidable contender for the presidency."⁶⁷ Childs found much to like in Kennedy's message that Eisenhower had allowed the nation to fall behind the Soviets in power and prestige and that the next president would have to press for greater defense spending and take a firm, active stand in the global arena.

In fact, certain themes central to the Kennedy campaign, found in speeches and position papers, echo ideas and language that Childs was using at the same time. There is no evidence to suggest that Childs played any role in crafting the candidate's message, but the parallels in

⁶⁵ Marquis Childs, "Talk of Kennedy for 1960 Mounts," *Washington Post*, 15 May 1957, 12. Childs' interest extended to considering writing a book about the Kennedy family in the late 1950s. He spoke with Senator Kennedy, as well as Joseph P. and Rose Kennedy. According to his letter to Harper & Row publisher Cass Canfield, Childs believed he was a good person to write the book because he was "a Protestant and somewhat to the left of center" so nobody would suspect him of "doing a prettying-up job." Childs dropped the project, according to his memoir, when the elder Kennedy demanded too much control of the manuscript. Childs to Canfield, 27 March 1957, Childs Papers, box 4, folder 4; Rose Kennedy to Childs, 3 May 1957 and Joseph P. Kennedy to Childs, 20 May 1957, in same folder. See also Childs, *Witness to Power*, 166-167.

⁶⁶ Childs, "Missile Program Still Not in Orbit," 12; "New Woes Ahead for Both Parties," *Washington Post*, 5 November 1958, 14. According to Donald Ritchie, Alsop learned of the missile gap from CIA Director Allan Dulles. See his *Reporting From Washington*, 141. On Kennedy's use of the missile gap issue to define his early campaign, see Christopher A. Preble, "Who Ever Believed in the Missile Gap?: John F. Kennedy and the Politics of National Security," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 33:4 (December 2003): 803-808. Other Democrats angling for the nomination took up the issue as well. See Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, "Lyndon Johnson, Foreign Policy, and the Election of 1960," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 103:2 (October 1999): 147-172.

⁶⁷ Marquis Childs, "Youthful Kennedy Paces the Field," *Washington Post*, 7 July 1959, 10.

content and tone indicate a shared worldview and sense of urgency.⁶⁸ Kennedy's forceful calls to "get America moving again" and reverse the national decline fit easily alongside the message apparent for years to readers of Childs' column. The statement announcing his run for the White House contains phrases like "fateful choice," "time of maximum peril," and "threaten our very existence," as well as words like "collapse" and "decay." In his first major speech as a candidate, delivered on 14 January 1960 at the National Press Club where Childs likely was in attendance, Kennedy outlined a vision of the presidency and criticized Eisenhower. The Sixties demanded "a vigorous broker of the national interest" and not "a passive broker" or "a bookkeeper who feels that his work is done when the numbers on the balance sheet come even." It was time, Kennedy concluded, for a president who would act "with a real fighting mood."⁶⁹ A book Kennedy's campaign prepared and released early in 1960 reinforced this language and style. Alan Nevins, who edited the volume, argued that Kennedy was "a believer in the American mission," a reaffirmation of the central tenet that had motivated Cold War liberals like Childs since the late 1940s.⁷⁰ The policy statements and multi-part agendas laid out in the book further echo many points of view that aligned closely with Childs' thinking. Although Kennedy was notably younger than the fifty-nine year old columnist and could be seen as inexperienced, the energy and dynamic thinking evident in the campaign overshadowed any doubts Childs may have felt.

⁶⁸ A number of scholars have comments on the strident and, even alarmist, nature of some of Kennedy's rhetoric. For example, see James T. Patterson, *Great Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 486-487).

⁶⁹ Full text transcripts and page scans of Kennedy's campaign speeches are available online through the Kennedy Presidential Library at www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Ready-Reference/JFK-Speeches.

⁷⁰ Alan Nevins, "Introduction to *The Strategy of Peace* by John F. Kennedy" (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), ix.

He was also willing to shift his allegiance from his friend Adlai Stevenson, whom many liberals in the party were urging to make a third run for the highest office. Although Stevenson never declared his candidacy and did no active campaigning, some prominent liberals like Eleanor Roosevelt urged him to run again. Childs mentioned Stevenson in a handful of columns, but he did not believe the former standard-bearer was a viable candidate in 1960. For one thing, he didn't believe Stevenson actually wanted the nomination. More importantly, however, he no longer felt Stevenson was the right candidate to face the challenges confronting the nation. His style was too cerebral and passive.⁷¹ In this way, Childs became a proponent of the new liberalism described by scholars like Robert D. Dean and K.A. Cuordileone. In this interpretation, liberals who had felt weak and marginalized during the 1950s sought to associate themselves with Kennedy, who was preoccupied with projecting an image of strength and masculinity.⁷² Stevenson was still revered as the embodiment of core liberal principles, but many liberals, especially younger intellectuals, shifted to Kennedy and worked though writing and organizing to mobilize support on the left.⁷³ Arthur Schlesinger Jr., a friend of Childs' since the "vital center" days of the late 1940s, was the major figure in this movement and his short book *Kennedy or Nixon: Does it Make Any Difference?* was the most high profile attempt to link Kennedy with both the liberal tradition and the dynamic future. Other liberal academics and journalists like Alan Nevins and John Kenneth Galbraith advised

⁷¹ Childs interview for Adlai Stevenson Oral History Project, 17-19.

⁷² As Dean noted, scholars often discuss Kennedy's focus on vigor and strength as a matter of *style*, when in fact it can be seen as a useful reflection of a broader ideological construction that animated liberals in general. See Robert D. Dean, "Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 22:1 (Winter 1998): 30. Chapter 4 of Cuordileone's *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005) is a provocative assessment of this relationship.

⁷³ Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s*, paperback ed. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1986), 3-29. See also G. Calvin Mackenzie and Robert Weisbrot, *The Liberal Hour: Washington and the Politics of Change in the 1960s* (New York: Penguin, 2008), 38-85.

the candidate and helped write position papers. Childs did not write about Kennedy explicitly in terms of gender or masculinity, but he can be seen as part of the broad effort to make Kennedy palatable to an older generation of liberals and to sell him as a candidate against Richard Nixon in the fall election. This was especially true of his writing about foreign policy issues in summer and fall of 1960.

In the period before the convention, Childs had little doubt that Kennedy would win the nomination. His political operation and personal wealth was one factor.⁷⁴ He was also fairly successful at crafting an image as a “moderate yet forward looking leader.”⁷⁵ Childs was uncertain, however, that Kennedy or any Democrat could beat Nixon in the fall. In a June letter to James Loeb of the *Adirondack Enterprise*, he said that he was hearing more and more people say that Kennedy was the only Democrat who could win.⁷⁶ However, he revealed in a speech shortly before the election, that he had believed Nixon would be elected until about the first of October, when he changed his mind.⁷⁷ Columns written before the U-2 incident pointed out that Nixon could confidently run on the message that Republicans had been the party of peace and that the 1950s had been “the best seven years of your lives.”⁷⁸ Although his estimation of Eisenhower’s leadership was diminished, he understood that the general remained incredibly popular; his message that America was safe and prosperous was “just what his fellow-citizens

⁷⁴ Marquis Childs, “Kennedy’s Engine Picking up Steam,” *Washington Post*, 15 January 1960, 12.

⁷⁵ Marquis Childs, “The Packed House that Jack Built,” *Washington Post*, 29 March 1960, 16.

⁷⁶ Childs to James Loeb, 15 June 1960, Childs Papers, box 12, folder 4.

⁷⁷ Marquis Childs, “The Political Picture, 1960,” speech delivered at Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 17 October 1960. Childs Papers, University of Iowa, box 3.

⁷⁸ Marquis Childs, “Confident Nixon Ignores Jibes,” *Washington Post*, 29 January 1960, 14.

want to hear.”⁷⁹ Nixon could capitalize on this and brush aside attempts to dredge some of the less noble events from earlier in his career.⁸⁰

Childs sought to emphasize his own perception, based on information drawn from sources in Congress and the military, that the nation was in danger of falling behind and that the Eisenhower/Nixon message was false security. The president, he argued, was unwilling to even listen to advisors who warned him to take more action. This “mounting chorus of denunciation” worried high-ranking administration officials, some of whom revealed to Childs that they felt “the line between economy and defense spending has been drawn too narrowly.” He also worried that new polls showed that America’s image among foreign nations continued to suffer. Clearly, a Nixon campaign based on a message of “four more years of the same” was not enough, even if the vice-president was talking about taking some modest steps to bolster defenses.⁸¹ A hard-hitting column in mid-April took candidates from both parties to task. The complexities of the nuclear arms race and an increasing Communist threat in Latin America showed that more than talk was necessary. “It is particularly easy at campaign time to demand that Uncle Sam flex his muscles,” he wrote. “The real test of toughness is to take decisions that may be unpopular; decisions based on knowledge and understanding transcending the popular emotions of the moment. A President who flunks that test could lead the nation into war.”⁸²

The failed Paris summit altered the situation for both parties. “New and deep seated fears,” Childs wrote, “have been stirred as to the capacity of the men most conspicuous on the

⁷⁹ Childs, “President’s Words Tranquelize Public,” 10.

⁸⁰ Marquis Childs, “Abuse Alone Can’t Topple Mr. Nixon,” *Washington Post*, 3 February 1960, 14.

⁸¹ Marquis Childs, “Concern Increases Over Defense Gap,” *Washington Post*, 4 March 1960, 10.

⁸² Marquis Childs, “Is Foreign Policy a Sleeping Issue,” *Washington Post*, 12 April 1960, 14.

presidential horizon.”⁸³ He thought that the “so-called peace issue,” which was Nixon and the Republican’s strong point, “had been yanked out from under them” and they were left “in an anxious search for the proper posture.”⁸⁴ Nixon’s own position was complicated by Nelson Rockefeller’s brief re-emergence in the race, running on the missile gap issue. Others believed the crisis would help the Republicans in a rally-round-the-flag manner. Childs was irritated with the wave of patriotism that swept the party in the capital. They were “a bit smug” in their belief that the crisis atmosphere would be a boon. Such a thought repulsed Childs, who wrote

Things may turn out this way in November, but it will be a sad commentary on the democratic process and the choice of a free people if that choice is posited on the threats and imprecations of the dictator of a totalitarian state, with Americans told they must keep silent because of those threats.⁸⁵

The crisis opened the door to attacks on Kennedy’s experience and maturity. Doubts arise, he wrote, about “his youth, and even his youthful appearance, against the background of the shattering consequences of what happened in Paris in May.” He could foresee the Republican plan: they would seek to “dismiss him as a fine young man who may someday be seasoned and mature enough to aspire to the Presidency, a fine young man who finds himself where he is because of his father’s wealth and ambition.”⁸⁶ After the Democratic convention in Los Angeles, Childs reported that Republicans were gearing up their efforts to portray Kennedy as “a slight young man, a boy almost, confronted with a terrifyingly tough world” with the assistance of “the powerful and overwhelmingly Republican press.”⁸⁷ This same press, he complained, ranged “from friendly to all-out support” for Nixon and fails to press Republicans

⁸³ Marquis Childs, “Pro-Nixon Tactics Irk Rockefeller,” *Washington Post*, 7 June 1960, 14.

⁸⁴ Marquis Childs, “The Weak Points in Nixon’s Armor,” *Washington Post*, 8 June 1960, 16.

⁸⁵ Marquis Childs, “The Flag-Wavers Forget the Past,” *Washington Post*, 10 June 1960, 18.

⁸⁶ Marquis Childs, “Kennedy’s Youth Worries Governors,” *Washington Post*, 28 June 1960, 14.

⁸⁷ Marquis Childs, “Campaign Knives Now Being Honed,” *Washington Post*, 20 July 1960, 14.

on recent foreign policy disasters like Cuba and the U-2 debacle.⁸⁸ Kennedy's campaign machine, smooth and efficient as it was, would have a difficult time overcoming this disadvantage.

Childs sought to right this imbalance by portraying Kennedy as an equal to the more experienced Nixon. Despite the rhetoric of "toughness" that informed much of the election commentary, Childs also remained a firm believer in negotiations with the Soviets to minimize the threat of war or, as he put it in a letter to a reader, "the grave danger in a world in which both sides are armed with weapons of total destruction."⁸⁹ From the beginning of the Cold War he had advocated a version of strength based on the ability to negotiate wisely from a position of power, not aggressive defense buildup for its own sake. This manifested in a column on negotiations over the test ban treaty, which had stalled in Geneva. Kennedy, he wrote, would "take a strong stand" for renewed negotiations and allocate additional funds for new research into a sure-fire mechanism for detecting future Soviet tests. He could stand up to those who lobbied for more and more powerful weapons, including Edward Teller and his allies in the Pentagon.⁹⁰ Both candidates promised a bolder foreign policy, but Kennedy, Childs believed, had the more realistic approach. He understood that "a contest with Vice-President Nixon over who can be roughest on Premier Khrushchev" would harden attitudes so that negotiation with the Soviets on any level would become impossible. He might be younger and less experienced, but Childs wrote that Kennedy had "remarkable poise" and engaged in "serious and thoughtful preparation" for the burdens of the presidency.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Marquis Childs, "Nixon Strategists Brim With Cheer," *Washington Post*, 23 August 1960, 10.

⁸⁹ Childs to Robert O. Snyder, 16 August 1960, Childs Papers, box 12, folder 4.

⁹⁰ Marquis Childs, "How the Nominees Stand on Testing," *Washington Post*, 19 August 1960, 16.

⁹¹ Marquis Childs, "Kennedy Foresees a Difficult Road," *Washington Post*, 6 September 1960, 12.

Even though Childs believed that travelling with the candidates for an extended period of time was “futile,” as he complained to *New York Post* editor James Wechsler, he did end up spending about a week with Kennedy in early September.⁹² The resulting columns helped to shape the Kennedy image in a way that made him palatable to hesitant liberals and those concerned about his potential weaknesses.⁹³ He was still doubtful about Kennedy’s chances and wanted to help- and it is best to see these columns as helping Kennedy rather than merely news analysis.⁹⁴ An important column directly addressed the question of Kennedy’s liberalism. Watching Kennedy meet voters and give stump speeches, Childs saw the emergence of “a New Dealer who speaks with confidence of the powers of the Presidency to reinvigorate what he charges has become a complacent and laggard America.” Childs was impressed with the candidate’s call for an active government that would play a direct role in managing economic growth.⁹⁵ Attaching the New Deal label to the new Democrat was a self-conscious attempt to help Kennedy win over older, skeptical liberals. Another important column dealt with the problem of Kennedy’s Catholicism, which many believed would cost him votes. After a number of high-profile Protestant clergy released a statement questioning the influence of Kennedy’s faith, he made an important speech in Houston to lay aside concerns.⁹⁶ Childs worried about this “bigotry,” which he wrote could be “the decisive factor” in the election.⁹⁷

⁹² Childs to James Wechsler, 5 August 1960, Childs Papers, box 12, folder 4.

⁹³ Childs got letters from Stevenson liberals who were lukewarm toward Kennedy. See for example Vern E. Edwards, Professor of Journalism at Ohio Wesleyan University, to Childs, 9 September 1960, Childs Papers, box 12, folder 4.

⁹⁴ Childs to William Benton, 1 September 1960, Childs Papers, box 12, folder 4.

⁹⁵ Marquis Childs, “Kennedy Sounds New Deal Tocsin,” *Washington Post*, 9 September 1960, 12. See also Marquis Childs, “A Cool Brahmin Wins the Crowds,” *Washington Post*, 16 September 1960, 14.

⁹⁶ Rorabugh, *The Real Making of the President*, 143-146.

⁹⁷ Childs wrote to Nelson Poynter of the *St. Petersburg Times* that he was “torn between believing that Kennedy will win and a deep apprehension over the religious issue.” Childs to Poynter, 26 October 1960, Childs Papers, box 13, folder 1.

He was at the Houston speech, which was filmed and widely re-played by the campaign, and his reporting reassured readers that Kennedy was a strict adherent to church-state separation and that there was no question he would fulfill his duties to the public if elected. The issue, he wrote, was “a kind of smoke screen obscuring realistic discussions of the issues and the far-reaching problems of America in the world today.”⁹⁸

Childs also continued to write about Nixon in a way that would undermine his advantage on the foreign policy issue. Childs rode the Nixon campaign train for a few days in late September and used these columns to link the candidate with a criticism he had earlier leveled at Eisenhower: that he was just telling the public what it wanted to hear. “The voter,” he wrote, “is entitled to a discussion of the mistakes in foreign policy.”⁹⁹ He worried that Nixon, in his effort to distance himself from Eisenhower, was swayed by the far right and, perhaps, too aggressive.¹⁰⁰ A bold, but thoughtless foreign policy was counter-productive and could not lead to the negotiations with the Soviets necessary to solving long-term problems.¹⁰¹ The final columns before the election reminded his readers that the most pressing issue for the next president was to “try to negotiate a slowdown in the nuclear arms race and some easing of the tensions of the cold war that constantly threaten a hot war.”¹⁰² The last column on Kennedy tamped down the religion issue one more time and portrayed the tired candidate as a “man with a new and evident confidence,” a man with “a poise, a serenity even, a sense of knowing where

⁹⁸ Marquis Childs, “Kennedy’s View of Church Issues,” *Washington Post*, 14 September 1960, 20. The column sparked a number of letters from readers, to which Childs replied with a note that attempted to downplay the issue. See letters in Childs Papers, box 13, folder 1. Childs had particularly wanted to see Kennedy in action in Texas, where he knew “the religious issue will be hot.” Childs to Ray Crowley, undated, but August 1960, Childs Papers, box 12, folder 2.

⁹⁹ Marquis Childs, “Democrats Avoid Old GOP Tactics,” *Washington Post*, 21 September 1960, 16.

¹⁰⁰ Marquis Childs, “Nixon’s Campaign, Folksy or Fiery?” *Washington Post*, 12 October 1960, 16; “Nixon Campaign Moves to the Right,” *Washington Post*, 18 October 1960, 14.

¹⁰¹ Marquis Childs, “Promises Menace Peace Negotiations,” *Washington Post*, 14 October 1960, 22.

¹⁰² Marquis Childs, “Nuclear Race and the Next President,” *Washington Post*, 28 October 1960, 18.

he is going.”¹⁰³ Nixon, on the other hand, confronted the same problem he faced at the start of the campaign, “essentially the problem of identity: Who is he? What does he stand for?” In Childs’ depiction, Nixon was frustrated, “striking out angrily at his rival” in the “tumultuous” final days.¹⁰⁴ It was hardly the image of a man to negotiate wisely with the Soviets and lead the nation in a time of crisis.

Childs, Kennedy, and the Cold War

Like many Americans, Childs waited up late for the final returns in an extremely close election. When he knew at 5:30 a.m. that Kennedy had been elected, he felt a sense of relief and sat down to write his next column.¹⁰⁵ Despite the initial relief, however, he understood that Kennedy faced major challenges and that the world remained as troubled as it had the day before. The column that ran in the *Washington Post* on Election Day had told the story: “The Congo, Cuba, Berlin, Korea, Laos- in one precarious situation after another only a slight tremor could produce a new crisis.”¹⁰⁶ Post-election columns laid out a series of assessments and predictions about how a Kennedy administration would face up to these and other problems, paying close attention to key cabinet appointments and policy announcements.¹⁰⁷ The issue of nuclear weapons and war remained central. Childs wrote that Kennedy faced two vital decisions in the first days of his administration: whether to provide NATO with a nuclear strike

¹⁰³ Marquis Childs, “Smell of Success in Kennedy Camp,” *Washington Post*, 2 November 1960, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Marquis Childs, “The Big Question of Nixon’s Image,” *Washington Post*, 4 November 1960, 14.

¹⁰⁵ Childs to Jeannette Hopkins, Harcourt, Brace, 16 November 1960, Childs Papers, box 13, folder 1.

¹⁰⁶ Marquis Childs, “The Problems of Transition,” *Washington Post*, 8 November 1960, 16.

¹⁰⁷ It appears that Childs attempted to help his friend Stevenson get the Secretary of State job in the weeks before the election, even though he understood that Kennedy’s inner circle did not support the nomination. He told Stevenson he spoke to Kennedy about it, but got a lukewarm response. Childs to Stevenson, 1 September 1960, Childs Papers, box 12, folder 4. He used later columns to suggest that Stevenson would make a good Ambassador to the United Nations and then explain why Dean Rusk was a wise choice for Secretary of State. Marquis Childs, “Kennedy Prepares an Administration,” *Washington Post*, 15 November 1960, 18; “Kennedy Chooses Team for State,” *Washington Post*, 14 December 1960, 14.

force and how to make meaningful progress toward a test ban treaty. Childs opposed giving nuclear weapons to NATO, which he feared would lead to proliferation and make war more likely. He had always backed the test ban, but now worried that the “scare propaganda” put out by the “Pentagon-atomic energy lobby” might make it hard for Kennedy to act.¹⁰⁸ In a pre-Inauguration speech in Philadelphia, Childs said he was cheered that Kennedy understood “the necessity for vigorous and positive leadership from the White House,” but he warned that “it would be impossible to exaggerate the formidable nature of what he must try to do.” Still, he told the audience that recent conversations with CIA and State Department sources gave him “a cautious optimism” about the arms race. The Soviets, he thought, were ready to talk.¹⁰⁹

In order to give his readers a close account of the president-elect’s thinking, Childs arranged with Pierre Salinger to meet privately with Kennedy in New York for an interview.¹¹⁰ The next several columns betrayed more of this sense of optimism. Kennedy was “calm and collected in the eye of the hurricane.” He understood that “no quick solution” to the Soviet problem could be achieved, but he would “close no doors” and “keep the lines of communication open.”¹¹¹ The foreign policy team being formed promised “to come up with bold, imaginative programs” and “ideas of dramatic impact” and make “a new beginning” on the problem of the arms race.¹¹² Kennedy’s advisors and cabinet appointees were “as able a group as has ever been brought together in the national administration.”

¹⁰⁸ Marquis Childs, “Kennedy’s Two Nuclear Decisions,” *Washington Post*, 16 November 1960, 16; “NATO Problems Facing Kennedy,” *Washington Post*, 20 December 1960, 14.

¹⁰⁹ Marquis Childs, Speech to the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, 5 January 1961, Childs Papers, University of Iowa, box 3.

¹¹⁰ Childs to Crowley, 4 January 1961, Childs Papers, box 13, folder 2.

¹¹¹ Marquis Childs, “Kennedy Before His Inauguration,” *Washington Post*, 10 January 1961, 12.

¹¹² Marquis Childs, “Search for Clues to New Policies,” *Washington Post*, 13 January 1961, 14.

Childs was clearly impressed by the famous words of Kennedy's Inaugural speech. "The lofty tone," he wrote, "pervaded the whole ceremony. Here was the new generation, and even the most hostile and doubting critic could hardly have been unimpressed." The president "conveyed above all a sense of his preparation for what lies ahead and his courageous readiness to meet it."¹¹³ The initial weeks of the administration were marked by a "careful realism" with no attempt at "playing the game of dragon killer."¹¹⁴ In these columns, Childs depicted a cool and thoughtful leader, tough but not rash. Columns with titles like "Ideas Bubbling Around Kennedy" and "Youth and Style, but Also Work" told the same story. Another even excused Kennedy's cynical use of the missile gap rhetoric during the campaign.¹¹⁵ Privately, Childs was even more effusive. He wrote a note to Kennedy telling him that he left the first of the televised press conferences overwhelmed with the feeling "thank God, at last we have a President!" He added, "If this sounds out of character for the Fourth Estate and its critical function, I am sure you will know that I shall, from time to time, be a critic, but it will always be as a critic who hopes profoundly for your success."¹¹⁶

This support and patient optimism carried through the first challenging months of the Kennedy administration. Childs was taken with President Eisenhower's Farewell Address warning about the influence of the "military-industrial complex" and devoted a number of

¹¹³ Marquis Childs, "Kennedy Didn't Doze in England," *Washington Post*, 24 January 1961, 8.

¹¹⁴ Marquis Childs, "The New Style in U.S. Diplomacy," *Washington Post*, 31 January 1961, 10.

¹¹⁵ Marquis Childs, "Missile Gap a Tricky Phrase," *Washington Post*, 15 February 1961, 20.

¹¹⁶ Childs to John F. Kennedy, 26 January 1961, Childs Papers, box 13, folder 2. The administration likely understood that Childs could be a useful press ally, but Kennedy and others also attempted to appoint him to a formal government position. According to a 17 March letter, Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles called Childs to offer him a position, but the columnist turned it down, saying he wasn't "the right man for the job" and that he "might have had some confirmation trouble, because I have made some enemies up there." The surviving correspondence does not indicate what the position was, although it was an appointment that required Senate confirmation. Childs to Bowles, 17 March 1961, and Bowles to Childs, 23 March 1961, Childs Papers, box 13, folder 3.

columns to the influence of defense contractors, ranking military officers, and government officials he believed were unduly influencing defense policy and spending. He was, of course, a firm believer in the need for greater defense spending under the new administration, but he feared that advocates for wasteful or redundant programs were responsible for dangerous inefficiencies.¹¹⁷ He also continued to worry that certain atomic scientists and others distorted the debate about the test ban.¹¹⁸ As James Ledbetter has noted, the speech caught the attention of many prominent journalists and the early post-election period saw a number of journalistic studies of the phenomenon.¹¹⁹ Childs was among a small group who gave the issue sustained attention, particularly to urge the president to resist this pressure. The topic featured in his public speeches from the period as well. He told a group of women students at Westbrook Junior College in Portland, Maine, that he worried about “a scientific elite increasing allied with the military.” He felt this was movement toward “a managerial society” and “a grave threat to the freedoms of the people.”¹²⁰

Matters came to a head in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Ironically, Childs had published a stern warning against just such a plan on the morning of his private meeting with Kennedy in early January.¹²¹ He had heard rumors that a force of Cuban exiles was preparing to invade, but the column counseled against such a move. It was “too late” for such a

¹¹⁷ Marquis Childs, “JFK Confronting Web of Power,” *Washington Post*, 22 March 1961, 14; “Speechmakers- and Peacemakers,” *Washington Post*, 12 April 1961, 16. Oddly, Childs did not directly comment on Kennedy’s March request to Congress for \$3 billion in additional defense spending on both nuclear and conventional armaments.

¹¹⁸ Marquis Childs, “Counsel of Fear Imperils Test Ban,” *Washington Post*, 10 March 1961, 16.

¹¹⁹ Ledbetter, *Unwarranted Influence*, 128-143.

¹²⁰ “Excerpts of Talk at Westbrook Junior College, April 20, 1961,” Childs Papers, University of Iowa, box 3.

¹²¹ Much has been made of the story that President Kennedy attempted to suppress a *New York Times* story prior to the planned invasion. Childs had no problem learning about and reporting the plan and there is no evidence that Kennedy said anything about the column when they met that day. As Douglass Cater subsequently noted in *The Reporter* magazine, numerous stories about the training of the exiles appeared in the months before the invasion. Douglass Cater and Charles L. Bartlett, “Is All the News Fit to Print?” *The Reporter*, 11 May 1961, 23-24.

maneuver. Overthrowing Castro this way was “all but impossible,” because the Cuban leader was well-prepared, well-defended, and enjoyed broad support among the population. “Surely our own intelligence must know the heavy odds against an invasion,” he wrote.¹²² When the invasion went forward, Childs prepared a column, written on the day the fragmentary news first became known, that downplayed American involvement. Kennedy had decided against an invasion, Childs wrote, suggesting that he initially believed the action taking place in Cuba was unrelated to the pre-existing plan for an exile invasion. He hedged his bets, however, by warning that an increasing amount of Soviet military equipment, including two destroyers, was making its way to the island. “This could hardly be judged a serious threat to the United States itself,” he wrote, “but the power of harassment of such a force in the Caribbean was taken very seriously.”¹²³ Later, after the true nature of the invasion became apparent, Childs sought to protect Kennedy by reminding readers about how many challenges he faced and deflecting blame for the fiasco away from the president.¹²⁴ Although Kennedy was ultimately responsible for the decision, Childs suggested that the intelligence on Cuba was faulty; the CIA relied too heavily on wishful thinking from the Cuban exile community and under-estimated public support for the Castro regime. This was part, he wrote, of a pattern of over-reliance on quantitative assessments of military strength without taking into consideration reality of public opinion.¹²⁵

As the fallout from the Bay of Pigs settled over Washington, Childs left for Europe in advance of the president’s summit meeting in Vienna with Khrushchev. There he found “a

¹²² Marquis Childs, “Cuban Dilemma Threatens U.S.” *Washington Post*, 6 January 1961, 18.

¹²³ Marquis Childs, “Were Soviet Ships Bound for Cuba,” *Washington Post*, 18 April 1961, 14.

¹²⁴ Marquis Childs, “The Worst Week for Mr. Kennedy,” *Washington Post*, 21 April 1961, 16.

¹²⁵ Marquis Childs, “Behind the Errors on Cuban Invasion,” *Washington Post*, 26 April 1961, 18.

shock of surprise and dismay” among America’s allies. Although many he talked to expected Kennedy to take the setback “with as good a grace as possible, learning from an early mistake,” Childs understood that Kennedy had lost some of the goodwill and “remarkable prestige” he had amassed.¹²⁶ He had this in mind as he reported on tensions plaguing the NATO alliance, the negotiations about both Laos and nuclear testing, and the simmering crisis in Berlin. Columns wired from Oslo, Geneva, and Paris in May and early June reiterated the challenges Kennedy faced and attempted to lower expectations of any dramatic resolution to the thorny problems of the Cold War. The American position in Europe was “in quite appalling disarray.”¹²⁷ At the same time, he took pains to note that in the larger sense, the situation was not much changed. For example, he wrote “despite the somewhat sensational news reports, nothing has essentially changed in the state of the western alliance on Berlin.” “The year may end,” he added, “with little or no change in the situation.”¹²⁸ Admittedly the Americans were in a weak position and perhaps the summit was ill-timed, he suggested, but the hope that had been dimmed by the “tragic miscalculation in Cuba” was “likely to be revived.” Of course, he added, “an aura of goodwill can hardly suffice if within a relatively short time it is certain to evaporate with a renewal of the old disputes.”¹²⁹ Childs wanted to give Kennedy a chance to make a difference if he could, but he also didn’t raise unrealistic expectations among his readers.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Marquis Childs, “How Cuba Looks to the Europeans,” *Washington Post*, 3 May 1961, 16.

¹²⁷ Marquis Childs, “Allies in Trouble as NATO Meets,” *Washington Post*, 9 May 1961, 12.

¹²⁸ Marquis Childs, “Berlin Time-Bomb Still Ticks Away,” *Washington Post*, 12 May 1961, 20.

¹²⁹ Marquis Childs, “How Europe Feels About the Summit,” *Washington Post*, 19 May 1961, 20. See also “Time Ill-Chosen for Talks,” *Washington Post*, 30 May 1961, 12.

¹³⁰ Marquis Childs, “A New Player Joins Old Game,” *Washington Post*, 2 June 1961, 14.

Many historians of the era have examined the tense meetings between the two world leaders, described by one as “the diplomatic equivalent of a food fight,” and determined that Kennedy was outmatched and overwhelmed by his Soviet counterpart, leading to a deepening of the Cold War.¹³¹ Although the White House minimized the confrontational nature of the meetings, James Reston of the *New York Times* got the real story directly from the president and American readers learned that the president was disappointed.¹³² For his part, Childs attempted to downplay the severity of the incident and portray events in the best light in the interest of helping maintain Kennedy’s position. The Russians had acted with an “outward, almost boastful, confidence,” but Childs wrote that off to a propaganda show to impress the non-aligned nations. His sources led him to believe that in private the parties had a more evenly-matched give and take with both sides recognizing some shared basic understanding of global problems.¹³³ In fact, Khrushchev saw “a resolute man who could say without bluster that the United States would stand firm.” Kennedy, according to Childs’ take on the summit, had bought himself time to recover from a weakened position after setbacks in Laos and Cuba, and, he added hopefully, had lessened the danger of war. Privately, however, Childs was unnerved by the situation. Returning home after the summit, he wrote to one of his subscribing editors that he “had not exactly returned in an optimistic mood...but then optimism is a scare commodity.”¹³⁴ A short time later he wrote to his friend James Wechsler that he felt “a deep sense of disquiet about what is or is not happening here and, above all, the timidity that

¹³¹ Rabe, *John F. Kennedy: World Leader*, 40.

¹³² Even though Kennedy was frank with Reston, the reporter significantly downplayed the incident so as not to cause a panic. John F. Stacks, *Scotty: James B. Reston and the Rise and Fall of American Journalism* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2003), 196-200.

¹³³ Marquis Childs, “How the Russians Spoke in Private,” *Washington Post*, 7 June 1961, 18.

¹³⁴ Childs to Lawrence Miller, editor of the *Berkshire Eagle*, 23 June 1961, Childs Papers, box 13, folder 4.

Kennedy increasingly displays.”¹³⁵ Even later, talking to researchers, he admitted that he knew Kennedy had been “over scared” in Vienna and that the weakness he displayed led directly to the Berlin crisis later in the summer.¹³⁶ He kept these dark thoughts out of the column, however.

Childs had been wrong to write that the situation in Berlin was stable. Sensing momentum on his side, Khrushchev accelerated plans to sign a treaty with East Germany and turn over control of East Berlin and access to West Berlin to the East Germans. He also hoped to turn Berlin into a “free city,” which would require the removal of western military forces.¹³⁷ Kennedy gathered foreign policy experts, including Dean Acheson, to help devise a response and publically reiterated the American commitment to the city, and European defense in general. Although Childs was concerned about the increasingly heated rhetoric, he counseled restraint.¹³⁸ “There is still time to talk and to talk with calmness and reason and with hope that a rational and fair solution can be found,” he wrote. As with his writing on the test ban, he was worried that some of the more aggressive hawks were putting unnecessary pressure on the president who, perhaps lacking confidence after the summit, might make a rash move. There were people who seemed to believe “a little bloodletting might be a healthy thing- as though a

¹³⁵ Childs to Wechsler, 31 July 1961, Childs Papers, box 13, folder 4.

¹³⁶ Interview with Marquis Childs, 2 February 1978, Box 1, Kern-Levering Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Mass.

¹³⁷ Georg Schild, “The Berlin Crisis,” in Mark J. White, ed., *Kennedy: The New Frontier Revisited* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 103-111.

¹³⁸ He also wrote to his friend Walter Lippmann and asked if he would “speak out again on the Berlin question.” Childs was “very concerned about the Acheson influence in very high quarters” and hoped Lippmann could use his influence on the issue. Childs to Lippmann, 7 July 1961, Childs Papers, box 13, folder 4. According to his interview with Montague Kern, he got information about the internal policy debate from General Maxfield Taylor and presidential advisor Arthur Schlesinger Jr., although he also believed that the White House was deliberately leaking some of the more aggressive options to selected reporters to convey a tough message to the Soviets and American conservatives who were calling for a strong response. Interview with Marquis Childs, 2 February 1978, Box 1, Kern-Levering Papers.

little bloodletting over an issue the magnitude of Berlin were possible in a nuclear age.”¹³⁹ He took particular aim at the Air Force Chief of Staff, General Curtis LeMay, the “zealous” advocate of aggressive first strikes who, Childs wrote, was telling anyone who would listen that nuclear war was inevitable.¹⁴⁰ Another column told readers about the “Acheson Plan” that called for dangerous escalation that would surely lead to confrontation rather than peaceful resolution.¹⁴¹ As an alternative, he wrote about the more peaceable voices in the debate, such as Senators John Sherman Cooper, Mike Mansfield, and Hubert Humphrey, who were urging calm and putting forward reasonable solutions.¹⁴²

Childs was in Germany on a reporting trip when the Soviets and East Germans began to build the barrier dividing the city to prevent East Germans from escaping to the West. A column dispatched from Berlin on the day before the barrier went up highlighted the serious problem of these refugees for the Communist powers. They came west “in an unending stream, bearing bags, bundles, boxes- whatever they have been able to carry away.” He talked to some of these Germans in makeshift refugee camp to hear about the lives they left behind. The western part of the city “with its neon glow, its glittering shops, its fine restaurants” was a beacon to people seeking a new life. He wrote that the border could be sealed, but it would take a “stern measure” to create a “death strip” with armed guards, mines, and barbed wire.¹⁴³ He was in Bonn when he learned of the barrier and reported that the mood among the public

¹³⁹ Marquis Childs, “Berlin Crisis Has a Time Limit,” *Washington Post*, 21 June 1961, 18; “President Calm on Berlin Crisis,” *Washington Post*, 23 June 1961, 14.

¹⁴⁰ Marquis Childs, “Atmosphere of Military Fatalism,” *Washington Post*, 19 July 1961, 14.

¹⁴¹ Marquis Childs, “The Acheson View on Holding Berlin,” *Washington Post*, 28 July 1961, 14.

¹⁴² Marquis Childs, “Beyond Building Military Strength,” *Washington Post*, 23 July 1961, 12.

¹⁴³ Marquis Childs, “The Fuse Burns on Berlin Bomb,” *Washington Post*, 15 August 1961, 12. An attentive copy editor noted at the top of the column, which ran on the day news of the barricade reached American readers, that the column had been written two days earlier. Childs often complained to his syndicate about the excessive telegraph costs and time delays in publishing columns he sent from overseas.

there was one of dejection and fear that a military conflict over the city was now unavoidable.¹⁴⁴ Returning to Berlin, he found that city unexpectedly calm and was surprised by “how perfectly normal everything appears.” In this period of flux, Childs was able to go into the Soviet sector of East Berlin and spend a day walking around the city and talking to nervous East Berliners. The column relating his tense trip, the only one he wrote in first person, described a relatively weak military presence, but a deep fear running just beneath the surface of people’s normal lives.¹⁴⁵ Few people were in the streets, but several East Berliners, upon learning that he was an American, begged him to tell their stories to the outside world.

In the aftermath of the border closing, Childs continued to urge caution and negotiation while many others, in the press as well as policy making positions, were talking war. According on one study of press coverage of the Berlin crisis, he was one of the only major columnists avoid the rush to confrontation.¹⁴⁶ He recognized that Kennedy was under great pressure from many directions to respond militarily, but he didn’t believe, as he had written in the past, that it was worth risking a nuclear war over. The president reiterated America’s determination to protect its interests and sent a moderate reinforcement to bolster the military garrison defending the city. Vice-President Johnson and Lucius Clay, the popular former administrator of American occupation in Berlin, were also sent to the city in a show of solidarity. Kennedy’s measured response was the right one, Childs wrote, “handled with wisdom and restraint, given the need for both a cold and a hot response.”

¹⁴⁴ Marquis Childs, “The Mood in Bonn: Tense with Fear,” *Washington Post*, 16 August 1961, 16.

¹⁴⁵ Marquis Childs, “A Day’s Journey into East Berlin,” *Washington Post*, 22 August 1961, 10.

¹⁴⁶ Montague Kern, Patricia W. Levering, and Ralph B. Levering, *The Kennedy Crises: The Press, The Presidency, and Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 85-87.

The crisis precipitated by the closing of the border presented the Kennedy administration with a most unhappy dilemma. Intervention was ruled out as almost certainly meaning war over an issue that did not directly involve the security and freedom of West Berlin. But at the same time the fear and the uncertainty of West Berliners and the possibility they might begin to flee to West Germany was a serious threat. The answer was Vice President Johnson and the token movement of more troops to the city.¹⁴⁷

When the situation settled into a tense, but stable face off, Childs wrote that serious problems remained at a “dangerous impasse,” but he was relieved that it hadn’t turned out worse.¹⁴⁸

Although many times during his earlier career Childs used heated, hyperbolic language and arguably added to the uncertainty with his alarmism, the more mature Childs of the Kennedy era proved to be a reliable voice for patience and restraint. The serious setbacks to the American position, from the Bay of Pigs to Berlin, worried him deeply and caused him to privately express concerns about Kennedy’s ability to handle the crisis. In his column, however, he remained a supporter of the president and counseled him to resist the most hawkish advice and pressure from those who cried appeasement.

During the following year, Childs kept his attention on the high-level negotiations that he hoped would somehow lead to a breakthrough, especially on the test ban treaty. The Soviet Union resumed testing in September 1961 and Kennedy followed in kind, first with underground tests and later with the atmospheric tests that generated the dangerous and controversial fallout.¹⁴⁹ Although in favor of a treaty, he worried about the details and understood that complex issues held up the decision-making process. January 1962 columns, written as Kennedy was deciding whether to resume atmospheric testing, laid out all sides of the debate. The Soviets, he admitted, could not be trusted and any agreement must include at

¹⁴⁷ Marquis Childs, “Age of Adenauer Draws to an End,” *Washington Post*, 25 August 1961, 14.

¹⁴⁸ Marquis Childs, “A Wall of Wills Divides the West,” *Washington Post*, 20 October 1961, 16.

¹⁴⁹ Tal, *The American Nuclear Disarmament Dilemma*, 180-191.

least some inspections until the time that scientific advances produced reliable monitoring equipment. At the same time, hard liners overlooked the fact that America retained a significant nuclear advantage and limits on testing would help maintain the technological edge.¹⁵⁰ As the next round of arms negotiations opened, he expressed weariness: “so many false starts have been made that that day anyone is optimistic over the future of disarmament is a wild exaggeration.”¹⁵¹ President Kennedy decided in April 1962 to proceed with atmospheric tests, which drew a disappointed response. The president, Childs argued, had been swayed by the hawks and had not been open to counsel from all sides. The peace movement outside of government, the “small groups made up of clergymen, college students and others” were not heard.¹⁵² Although some of his sources hinted that the conclusion of the current round of testing might open the door to a future agreement, Childs was inclined to believe that the arms race had its own momentum that would make it impossible to stop.¹⁵³ A June column titled “Is There Anything to Cheer About?” indicated that he believed “attitudes are hardening.” “The forces within the country interested in a reasonable and constructive peace,” he wrote, “seem

¹⁵⁰ Marquis Childs, “President Faces New Test Decision,” *Washington Post*, 8 January 1962, 12; “A Major Decision Debated in Secret,” *Washington Post*, 10 January 1962, 14; “What Lies Behind Test Decision,” *Washington Post*, 12 February 1962, 14.

¹⁵¹ Marquis Childs, “A Lonely Lady is Wooed Again,” *Washington Post*, 19 February 1962, 14.

¹⁵² Marquis Childs, “A-Test Debate was One-Sided,” *Washington Post*, 23 April 1962, 10. In June, Childs told an audience that privately Kennedy said to him he had a “strong visceral reaction” against atmospheric testing, but that the “arguments from those who should know are too overbearing.” Transcript of talk at the 1962 Workshop on Liberal Arts Education, Colorado Springs, June 1962, Childs Papers, box 29, folder 5. Childs got correspondence from peace advocacy groups, but rarely mentioned them in his column. Instead he focused on positions held by various policy-makers. According to one study, the peace movement of the early 1960s was marginalized by the press. See Andrew Rojecki, *Silencing the Opposition: The Antinuclear Movement and the Media in the Cold War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 79-90.

¹⁵³ Marquis Childs, “Testing Refrain: Just One More,” *Washington Post*, 4 May 1962, 14.

pale and fragmented alongside those of the angry and frustrated who inveigh against a ‘no win’ policy.”¹⁵⁴

Childs’ worst fears about the arms race were nearly confirmed in late October during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The columnist was in California reporting on the gubernatorial race during the first days of the crisis and if he knew anything about the secret deliberations taking place in the White House he did not write about them.¹⁵⁵ He later recalled that he spent the evening of October 27, the Saturday that was the moment of highest tension, at a movie with his family. Worried almost to hopelessness, he wondered if somehow he had failed to communicate the magnitude and urgency of the atomic age through his writing.¹⁵⁶ At the time, however, his column betrayed little fear and, in fact, dwelt on relatively mundane aspects of the crisis, such as how it might affect the upcoming midterm elections. He also wrote the peace activists and pro-war groups marching in front of the White House. Certainly, he thought, there were not similar groups outside the Kremlin. Throughout, he characterized the decision-making process as urgent, but controlled, and Kennedy as a calm leader taking advantage of the best minds.¹⁵⁷ As the historian Alice George has argued, although the real story of the deliberative process remains shrouded, press coverage of Kennedy’s handling of the crisis

¹⁵⁴ Marquis Childs, “Is There Anything to Cheer About?” *Washington Post*, 18 June 1962, 12.

¹⁵⁵ Childs later told an interviewer that his friend General Chester “Ted” Clifton, the military advisor who delivered the president’s daily intelligence briefings, was a valuable source during the crisis. He recounted that he was “very closely in touch” with the general. Interview with Marquis Childs, 2 February 1978, Box 1, Kern-Levering Papers. In his memoir, he said Clifton was an “unfailing source of hour by hour information that kept me abreast.” Childs, *Witness to Power*, 175. It is not clear what Clifton told him. A memo cited in *The Kennedy Crises* suggests that Clifton was involved in the effort to manage press coverage of the crisis. Kern, Levering, and Levering, *The Kennedy Crises*, 262.

¹⁵⁶ Childs, *Witness to Power*, 175.

¹⁵⁷ Marquis Childs, “What Triggered Kennedy’s Move,” *Washington Post*, 24 October 1962, 22; “A Long Ordeal Led to Decision,” *Washington Post*, 26 October 1962, 18; “Action in Cuba Seen as Helping Ins,” *Washington Post*, 29 October 1962, 14.

generally glorified the president as the hero, and Childs' writing fits this general pattern.¹⁵⁸

According to Childs, Kennedy acted with a "calm and restraint that was unbroken" and made decisions with "an unshaken singleness of aim."¹⁵⁹

Childs and the Maturing President

In the aftermath, Childs expressed some uncharacteristic optimism. He wrote to a number of readers that he thought there would be renewed effort to "learn to live together" after the narrowly-averted disaster.¹⁶⁰ His primary hope was that the crisis might spur some progress toward an agreement on testing or some other tangible thaw in Cold War tensions. He believed that Kennedy had a firm upper hand after his masterful handling of the crisis. Events had demonstrated that American conventional forces were prepared for efficient and rapid deployment to meet any threat, which would prove an effective deterrent against future encroachments.¹⁶¹ He also sought to downplay the controversy that erupted over "news management" after Pentagon spokesmen Arthur Sylvester ruffled the feathers of the Fourth Estate by claiming that the government had a right to lie in times of crisis and that the press was to be used as a tool in the Cold War. Although someone in his position might have been expected to take the administration to task for its abuse of the press, Childs found the middle ground on the controversy and refrained from joining the chorus of protest from editors and

¹⁵⁸ Alice L. George, *Awaiting Armageddon: How Americans Faced the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 175. One attempt to puncture the lasting myths about Kennedy and his advisors during the crisis is Sheldon M. Stern, *The Cuban Missile Crisis in American Memory: Myths Versus Reality* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012). Alexandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, Kennedy, and the Cuban Missile Crisis, 1958-1964* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997) is a thorough overview of the events that includes useful material from the Cuban and Soviet points of view.

¹⁵⁹ Marquis Childs, "A Victory that Calm Heads Won," *Washington Post*, 31 October 1962, 18.

¹⁶⁰ Copies of these notes are in box 1, folders 1 and 2 of the 1967 addition to the Childs Papers. He got quite a few postcards and notes from anxious readers of the column.

¹⁶¹ Marquis Childs, "Our Strong Hand in Cuban Poker," *Washington Post*, 16 November 1962, 18; "Test Talks and Strike Strategy," *Washington Post*, 26 November 1962, 16.

reporters.¹⁶² Admittedly, “troubling questions” about the administration’s handling of information arose, but he was inclined to give Kennedy the benefit of the doubt due to the magnitude of the crisis.¹⁶³ He himself had not reported everything he knew about the situation and sometimes, he wrote, the public did not need to know everything in the heat of the moment. The hopeful mood lasted into the new year, when he wrote “the most conspicuous feature of the international scene is not what is happening but what is not happening.” There had as yet been no armed clash over Berlin or Cuba.¹⁶⁴ After the president’s skillful handling, Cuba was more of a political risk than a military risk.¹⁶⁵

Although Childs was deeply concerned about world events in 1963, including the civil rights movement and America’s deepening involvement in Vietnam discussed in subsequent chapters, his outlook on US- Soviet relations and the broader Cold War continued to be relatively optimistic. He sensed a continuing, if gradual thaw that offered a chance for real progress. He wrote frustrated columns about the un-ending difficulties of smoothing out differences among the Western allies in Europe, the still-stalled test ban negotiations, and the further encroachment of what he called the “military-industrial-political complex.”¹⁶⁶ However, two events that year gave him reason for hope. And in both cases, he was influenced by Kennedy’s memorable June 10 American University speech in which the president called for further cooperation and new attitudes in foreign policy that would bring a new era of

¹⁶² The flap caused a great deal of commentary and protest from individual news organizations and professional groups like the American Newspaper Publishers Association. For one example of a critical commentary, see Clark B. Mollenhoff, “Managing the News,” *Nieman Reports* (December 1962): 3-6.

¹⁶³ Marquis Childs, “How Much Should the Public Know?” *Washington Post*, 19 November 1962, 16; “On the People’s Right to Know,” *Washington Post*, 21 November 1962, 16.

¹⁶⁴ Marquis Childs, “K Warms to West as Red Rift Grows,” *Washington Post*, 21 January 1963, 14.

¹⁶⁵ Marquis Childs, “Cuba is Risky Political Risk,” *Washington Post*, 18 February 1963, 12.

¹⁶⁶ Marquis Childs, “Arms Race Seen Infecting Politics,” *Washington Post*, 20 March 1963, 16. See also “A Nation Divided by Arms Dollars,” *Washington Post*, 10 May 1963, 18, and “Test-Ban Failure Bodes Arms Hike,” *Washington Post*, 3 June 1963, 16, as examples.

peace.¹⁶⁷ Childs took a cue from the speech and mentioned it a number of times as he commented on Kennedy's growing maturity and renewed dedication to find a resolution to the arms race.¹⁶⁸

This attitude was reflected in Childs' coverage and analysis of Kennedy's European trip later in the summer. He travelled with the president's party to Germany, England, Ireland, and Italy, watching Kennedy give speeches and greet large crowds of supporters. In Germany, he sensed that Kennedy was on his way to becoming a hero to the West. His visit reassured the shaky Germans and sent a signal to friend and foe alike that Berlin, and Europe, remained vital to America's interests.¹⁶⁹ Childs admitted that "the situation could hardly be more precarious," but he thought that progress was on the way. "This is a new man in a new Europe," he wrote. "No one who saw those wildly cheering crowds on that brilliant warm day in Berlin will soon forget them."¹⁷⁰ Several columns laid out the serious problems that stood in the way of greater allied unity and attempted to give fair play to the concerns of France and England, as well as the complexities of Germany's internal politics. At the end of the trip, he wrote that "the balance is, as a whole, favorable" and that Kennedy's position was "greatly strengthened." He was even willing to speculate, based on conversations with unnamed sources, that a testing moratorium was likely, as a precursor to a formal testing agreement and a possible summit meeting in the fall. Dealing with the Soviets in the high stakes Cold War was a gamble, but

¹⁶⁷ The American University speech is discussed, among other places, in Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 231-232, and Thomas G. Paterson, "Introduction: Kennedy and the Global Crisis," in Thomas G. Paterson, ed. *Kennedy's Quest for Victory: American Foreign Policy, 1961-1963* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 19-20. Most scholars view the speech as more of a rhetorical exercise than a true indication that Kennedy's foreign policy was altered in a significant way. Paterson especially sees continuity in Kennedy's thinking about defense and foreign policy.

¹⁶⁸ Marquis Childs, "Why JFK's Plea Had Urgent Tone," *Washington Post*, 14 June 1963, 16.

¹⁶⁹ Marquis Childs, "President to See a Sunny Germany," *Washington Post*, 17 June 1963, 14.

¹⁷⁰ Marquis Childs, "JFK's Message in New Europe," *Washington Post*, 26 June 1963, 20; "Berlin and Britain Buffet President," *Washington Post*, 1 July 1963, 14.

“the odds may be on a favorable outcome. What he termed the “American University doctrine” was bearing fruit.¹⁷¹

No one was more surprised, or pleased, when test ban negotiations suddenly led to an agreement during a new set of meetings in Moscow. A mixture of new technological processes for monitoring tests and softening of the Soviet position meant that an agreement to ban testing in the atmosphere and underwater was possible.¹⁷² Childs warned readers not to get their hopes up when optimistic news came from Moscow. “History could repeat itself,” he wrote.¹⁷³ A few days later, when the deal seemed imminent, he turned his attention to the politics of Senate ratification of any treaty. Many senators, including Democrat Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, had already been working on the issue through public statements and a non-binding resolution urging the administration to forge an agreement. After talking with his sources, Childs was “reasonably hopeful” that a treaty would be ratified, although he warned that Teller and the other members of the anti-ban group would seek to undermine it. Though the limited test ban was “a very small beginning” in the overall push toward broader disarmament, it was still “a sizeable contribution.”¹⁷⁴ When news of the agreement broke, Childs was understandably happy. “The world does move, even though at a snail’s pace,” was his first comment. Again discussing the politics of ratification, he laid out a series of arguments that sought to allay any concerns: the dangerous fallout would end, the ban would limit proliferation to non-nuclear states, new monitoring technology removed the need for on-site inspections, and the treaty

¹⁷¹ Marquis Childs, “A Balance Sheet on JFK’s Trip,” *Washington Post*, 3 July 1963, 14.

¹⁷² See Tal, *The American Nuclear Armament Dilemma*, 226-233, on the final stages of discussions that led to the agreement.

¹⁷³ Marquis Childs, “Moscow Round on the Test Ban,” *Washington Post*, 8 July 1963, 16. His column the next day speculated about the motivation behind the Soviets’ willingness to compromise. Marquis Childs, “Behind Moscow’s Opening to the West,” *Washington Post*, 17 July 1963, 18.

¹⁷⁴ Marquis Childs, “View from Hill on Test-Ban Pact,” *Washington Post*, 24 July 1963, 16.

would help maintain America's already massive nuclear superiority. Perhaps it would be "at least a tentative pause in the arms race. The sense of a shadow lifting gives mankind a glimpse of hope."¹⁷⁵

As Childs suspected, the Senate debate on the treaty was not a sure thing for advocates of the test ban. Although he wrote that "a firm consensus" supported ratification, some powerful senators, military officials, and scientists- the group he referred to again as the military-industrial complex- would oppose it during the hearings. These men, Childs wrote, would never accept any negotiation and sought to create a "fortress America" regardless of the risks or cost.¹⁷⁶ Treaty opponents, he warned, would not "let myth and fantasy get in the way of facts in the debate." He chronicled some of the more outrageous claims he heard during the debate and complained that the atmosphere of excessive secrecy about nuclear weapons allowed fear mongering and distortion in the place of rational debate.¹⁷⁷ He also wrote about the various motivations of those who opposed or wavered on the treaty. Democratic Senator Henry Jackson of Washington and Republican Governor of New York Nelson Rockefeller both had extensive personal or political connections to powerful defense contractors that influenced their votes. Arizona Republican Barry Goldwater was planning to run for president in 1964 and hoped to hand Kennedy a political setback; he was an uncompromising anti-Communist zealot in any case. There was no sound reason, he concluded, to oppose the treaty except to

¹⁷⁵ Marquis Childs, "Glimpse of Hope for All Mankind," *Washington Post*, 29 July 1963, 12.

¹⁷⁶ Marquis Childs, "On the Test Ban, Firm Consensus," *Washington Post*, 14 August 1963, 18; "Air Force Lobby and the Test Ban," *Washington Post*, 18 September 1963, 16.

¹⁷⁷ Marquis Childs, "The Present Price of Past Secrecy," *Washington Post*, 16 August 1963, 16.

score cheap political points.¹⁷⁸ When the treaty was ratified by an eighty to nineteen vote in late September, Childs was glad, but he also turned his attention to the larger problem of nuclear weapons stockpiles that the treaty did nothing to limit or reduce.¹⁷⁹ There was still a long way to go before the world was really any safer.

This was the situation when Childs learned about the shooting in Dallas. After Kennedy's death, Childs did not take time to write about his personal feelings or try to capture the national mood of mourning. There was little time for eulogy or reflection in a world where new problems arose at a moment's notice. Instead he quickly moved on to the problems facing President Lyndon Johnson. As he always did when a new administration took power, he penned a series of columns about the strengths and prospects of the new leadership. Childs and Johnson had come to Washington around the same time and had known each other for a long time. Childs had a great deal of respect for Johnson, especially with regard to his years as the Senate Majority Leader. His column would be a helpful ally to Johnson over the next few years as the new administration worked to enact major civil rights legislation and significant programs to address problems in education, jobs training, poverty relief, and urban renewal. He also continued to write about arms control and the struggle for non-proliferation and real reductions to American and Soviet arsenals. Finally, he dedicated more and more of his columns to the war in Vietnam that would gradually become the most potent issue on everyone's mind as the decade progressed. As the final two chapters of this dissertation show,

¹⁷⁸ Marquis Childs, "Test Ban Debate: The Lines Form," *Washington Post*, 26 August 1963, 12; "Does Goldwater Want a War?" *Washington Post*, 4 September 1963, 14; "Treaty Debate and Political Mileage," *Washington Post*, 9 September 1963, 12.

¹⁷⁹ Marquis Childs, "A Surplus Problem in Nuclear Bombs," *Washington Post*, 8 November 1963, 22; "Too Many Arms, Too Few Brains," *Washington Post*, 18 November 1963, 20.

both civil rights and the Vietnam War caused him to rethink deeply held convictions and, eventually, to turn against Johnson over the war.

As many observers have noted, Kennedy's image became fixed in time and his untimely death allowed for the emergence of a heroic narrative that obscured the reality of his true character and accomplishments.¹⁸⁰ Childs' writing from the 1960 campaign onward added to the relatively one-sided view that dominated discussion of Kennedy for the first couple of decades after his death. He later admitted that he had been at least partly wrong about Kennedy. "I was a great admirer of Kennedy," he told an interviewer, "but I'm afraid I failed to see the flaws."¹⁸¹ In a way he was wrong about Eisenhower as well. The general wasn't nearly as passive and captive to his image as Childs portrayed him, both in the column and in his book. At the same time, Childs' contemporaneous characterizations of the two men were based on his own careful, first-hand observation and many years of experience in Washington. Perhaps he was too close to the center of power to have the right perspective. His memoir suggests that he worried about the distorting effects that came with the access and proximity; this near-sightedness can be an occupational hazard for any well-connected journalist. Regardless, his reporter's sense of fairness and balance didn't always win out in his writing about the troubled postwar world. He allowed his own hopes for a secure America and a world safe from nuclear war to influence his writing, and maybe his judgment about the men entrusted to lead the nation through a time of great peril.

¹⁸⁰ See Alan Brinkley's essay "The Posthumous Lives of John F. Kennedy" in his collection *Liberalism and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 212-221, on the Kennedy mythology.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Marquis Childs, 2 February 1978, Box 1, Kern-Levering Papers.

Chapter 5

The peculiar drama of the civil rights struggle goes on and on, with the lines of conflict so blurred that it has long become impossible to tell where political expediency ends and the merits of the issue begin.¹

This is a moral rather than a political issue if it is to generate support sufficient to overcome the bitter-end resistance of the Southern bloc and its conservative Northern allies.²

The two offices, though in the same city, couldn't have been more different. Mark Childs was in Chicago in early 1966 to investigate housing and race relations, part of his effort to bring these complicated problems to his readers. The first office he visited was in a cheap third-floor walkup apartment on South Hamlin Street in the North Lawndale neighborhood. The walls had recently been painted and a few new boards had been quickly nailed into the floor; the landlord, Childs noted, had done some rare maintenance when he learned who had rented the place. Entering the apartment, Childs found Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. sitting with a small group of aides and talking in a "soft, persistent voice" about poverty and racial segregation in the workplace. Marking a new phase of the civil rights movement, they had set up a Southern Christian Leadership Council branch in the city to begin the task of addressing racial problems in the urban North in the wake of violent outbursts in many cities the year before. Chicago had a long history of racial segregation and violence; the city was a perfect location for launching the new campaign. Later, in the city's thriving downtown, Childs sat in "a handsome office as devoid of clutter as that of any big business executive" listening to Mayor Richard Daley talk about his city's \$30 million anti-poverty program and complain

¹ Marquis Childs, "Politics Spicing Civil Rights Stew," *Washington Post*, 16 August 1957, 14.

² Marquis Childs, "Churches Can Tip Civil Rights Vote," *Washington Post*, 6 September 1963, 16.

about Dr. King's potentially disruptive presence. The city was willing to work with the black community. Why then, asked the mayor, didn't King come to help us spend this money on programs that work? Of course, Childs wrote in his column that day, "life is not that simple." Race relations in the North had created "a conflict that cuts a dozen different ways."³

This chapter is an analysis of columnist Childs' thinking and writing on one of the most significant domestic issues of his day, the postwar African-American civil rights movement. It briefly discusses the emergence of the civil rights issue during the late 1940s and 1950s, but focuses more fully on the topic as it became more prominent in Childs' writing through the early 1960s. This was the era of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and significant government programs in urban renewal, anti-poverty, and jobs training. It was also the height of Childs' influence as a columnist. The chapter concludes with a focus on the lingering complex politics of civil rights as they became even more volatile in the latter part of the decade. Childs's column touched on civil rights from its inception in 1944, but because his major work on civil rights was published during the sixties, the majority of the chapter focuses on that key era. He can be criticized for his failure to recognize and use his column to address the problems of race relations in the early years of his tenure as a columnist. However, he was by no means alone in this failure. Historians of many stripes have made this argument about mainstream journalists and commentators on national affairs in postwar America.⁴ Civil rights was not the most pressing issue of the day in Childs' mind, especially before the mid-1960s, but even in the later period when civil rights stories filled the news

³ Marquis Childs, "New Ferment in Northern Ghettos, *Washington Post*, 28 February 1966, 12.

⁴ As the best recent book on the subject puts it, the postwar black press was home to almost all of the substantive coverage of discrimination, segregation, racial violence, and civil rights initiatives until the late 1950s. Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006), ch. 2.

columns and nightly news programs. As the preceding chapters have made clear, he was greatly concerned about geopolitics and international relations and he spent a great deal of time abroad covering summit meetings and visiting Cold War flashpoints around the globe. Still, he wrote a large number of columns on the politics of race relations and efforts to ameliorate racial bias in public life. Over the years, a substantial and thoughtful analysis and commentary emerged as Childs tried to explain the growing crisis to his readers and place it in the context of a broader understanding of domestic and world affairs. And for Childs, the postwar racial crisis was just as much an international problem as it was a domestic one.

Childs' liberalism extended to his attitudes about race, although he did not write about the subject with as much zeal as he brought to some other topics like the arms race and civil liberties for those caught up in the red scare. As a general rule, his attitudes were similar to those of other white northern liberals of his generation who believed in the rightness of the cause in that he believed in gradual integration, although his feelings about the desired pace of change shifted over time. Like other New Deal liberals, he thought of racial progress in terms of removing legal barriers that stood in the way of black political equality. He initially embodied a kind of thinking about race that Gary Gerstle described as motivated by civic nationalism, an approach, deeply rooted in the American experience, that prized the promise of equality expressed in the Declaration of Independence, but largely ignored the economic consequences of racism.⁵ He was impressed by the use of responsible non-violent tactics to press for legal and moral victories and the avoidance of any radical or separatist philosophy that would tear apart the fabric of political life as he saw it. He lauded and promoted efforts to

⁵ Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 3-13. Postwar liberal attitudes about race are also examined thoughtfully in Carol A. Horton, *Race and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), esp. 121-138.

pass bold civil rights laws as well as policies and programs that led to improved schools, job training, access to low-interest loans, and many other pragmatic steps he felt would bridge the gap between the “two Americas” he wrote about frequently. He supported the use of federal courts and federal law enforcement as mechanisms to guarantee that these new laws and programs would meet their objectives. As with so many issues on the national agenda, Childs sought centrist and moderate, but progressive action, using his column to promote public figures whose work on civil rights represented steps in the right direction, to keep the civil rights struggle clearly in the minds of his readers, and to warn against radicalism, either on the left or the right.

Early in his career as a columnist, this promotion of civil rights took the form of support for the federal fair employment and fair housing statutes that formed part of President Truman’s postwar domestic agenda.⁶ He wrote about the influence and limitations of Truman’s civil rights committee, which released a report titled “To Secure These Rights” in 1947. This study urged federal action to ensure fair access to the privileges of citizenship and equality of educational and economic opportunity, regardless of race and provided the rationale for the inclusion of a broad civil rights plank in the 1948 Democratic national platform.⁷ He was, however, among the large number of commentators who incorrectly believed the civil rights platform would doom Truman’s re-election bid, especially after conservative southern

⁶ See for example Marquis Childs, “Civil Rights,” *Washington Post*, 14 December 1946, 6, and “Seeds of the Southern Revolt,” *Washington Post*, 29 May 1948, 7;

⁷ Michael R. Gardner, *Harry Truman and Civil Rights: Moral Courage and Political Risks* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002), 51-58. A typical column on the politics of committee goals can be found in Marquis Childs, “Reconciling the South,” *Washington Post*, 9 November 1948, 14. Childs generally supported Truman’s limited efforts for civil rights, but he was also aware that the president’s racial attitudes were not entirely liberal. In his memoir, Childs recalled that Truman referred to African-Americans as “burr heads” and “niggers” in private conversation. Marquis Childs, *Witness to Power* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), 93.

Democrats splintered the party.⁸ His writing in support of civil rights, though limited in quantity, won praise from members of the black community, including Sherman Briscoe, leader of the NAACP in Washington, DC, and co-founder of the Capital Press Club, an organization for black journalists. His columns, wrote Briscoe, were helping to “create a climate of public opinion which will ultimately uproot the tentacles of race prejudice that make America un-American and undemocratic.”⁹ Childs also worked personally in a number of instances to advance the cause of black friends and colleagues. In the early 1950s, he assisted the United Negro College Fund with its fundraising efforts.¹⁰ The columnist was also one of the journalists who sponsored Louis Lautier, correspondent for the National Negro Press Association and *Atlanta Daily World*, when he applied to be the first black member of the National Press Club. With the support of Childs and others, Lautier won a close vote and became a member in 1955.¹¹

To date, the role and influence of the news media in the postwar civil rights movement remains understudied. Major histories of the period and biographies of civil rights leaders and policymakers of the 1950s and 1960s rarely incorporate any systematic analysis of the press. Among specialists in mass communications history, a notable body of literature has emerged in recent years. Thoughtful studies of daily press coverage of civil rights stories and of editorial columns of key southern papers have greatly enlarged our understanding of the topic, as have a

⁸ The debate over the 1948 party platform at the convention is detailed in Andrew E. Busch, *Truman's Triumphs: The 1948 Election and the Making of Postwar America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 106-107. See also Alonzo L. Hamby, *Man of the People: A Life of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 445-447.

⁹ Sherman Briscoe to Childs, 8 February 1950, Childs Papers, box 8, folder 2.

¹⁰ Coleman Jennings, UNCF, to Childs, 9 November 1951 and Childs to Jennings, 12 November 1951, Childs Papers, box 9, folder 4.

¹¹ Donald A. Ritchie, *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 42-43. See also “Color Bar,” *Time*, 31 January 1955.

number of recent articles on the strategic use of mass media by civil rights groups.¹²

However, relatively little attention has been paid to the major columnists believed to have an outsized influence on public opinion, the “opinion makers” as media scholar William Rivers called them at the time.¹³ As described earlier in this dissertation, Childs was very much member of the influential “press establishment” throughout the civil rights era.¹⁴ Political leaders paid attention to what he wrote and sought to influence his writing. Letters to the columnist from political figures, subscribing editors, and readers, writing from all across the country, indicate that people read and responded to his civil rights columns.

Careful analysis of Childs’ approximately 200 columns touching on race and civil rights suggests that his thinking on the subject changed over time and that his work can be grouped into three time periods. Before the early 1960s he was mostly interested in civil rights as a part of the political battle between the White House and Congress or as a problematic factor in the image that the United States projected overseas in the propaganda battle with the Soviet Union. Between 1963 and 1965 his columns indicate a more urgent and personal engagement; the

¹² Roberts and Klibanoff’s prizewinning *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* is the best recent treatment of news coverage of the civil rights story but it says almost nothing about the influential syndicated columnists. Excellent studies of local or regional journalism include David R. Davies, ed., *The Press and Race: Mississippi Journalists Confront the Movement* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001) and Roy Peter Clark and Raymond Arsenault, eds., *The Changing South of Gene Patterson: Journalism and Civil Rights, 1960-1968* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2002). See Vanessa D. Murphee, *The Selling of Civil Rights: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Use of Public Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2006) on strategic uses of mass media by civil rights groups.

¹³ William L. Rivers, *The Opinion Makers* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965). See also Ben H. Bagdikian, “A Golden Age of Oracles,” *Columbia Journalism Review* (Winter 1966), 11-16. Walter Lippmann, James Reston, Drew Pearson, and Joseph and Stewart Alsop remain the most well-known columnists of the postwar era, although major biographies and studies of their writings barely mention civil rights. For example, John F. Stacks, *Scotty: James B. Reston and the Rise and Fall of American Journalism* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2003); Robert W. Merry, *Taking on the World: Joseph and Stewart Alsop- Guardians of the American Century* (New York: Viking, 1996); and Ronald Steel, *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Atlantic-Little, Brown, 1980). Barry D. Riccio, *Walter Lippmann- Odyssey of a Liberal* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1994), 209-212, offers a short discussion of the most influential columnist’s civil rights columns, arguing that he viewed the problem in Cold War terms and consistently sought to reflect consensus values.

¹⁴ See for example, Karl E. Meyer, “The Washington Press Establishment,” *Esquire* (April 1964), 73-74.

struggle for civil rights in the South had become increasingly moral rather than a political and the gradualist approach he and other liberals had long supported no longer seemed adequate. Childs' coverage of the 1964 elections and the threat of a "white backlash" expressed great concern and urgency, and generated criticism from readers and subscribing newspapers. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Voting Rights Act in 1965, however, his message changed again. He wrote much more frequently about the racial crisis in the North, especially in the cities, and he tied racial issues to broader concerns about poverty and equal opportunity for lower class Americans to take part in the postwar expansion. During the entire postwar era, Childs struggled to find the appropriate balance of real progressive change on one hand and moderate stability on the other. As the racial crisis became more acute, he fretted about the increasing radicalism of the newer generation of civil rights leaders and black activists. His enthusiasm for a remedy to the problem remained, but was tempered by a growing fear that the kind of political or policy changes he favored would be overtaken by the new politics of the street. By the violent election year of 1968, Childs was largely at a loss as he sought to guide his readers through the complex changes that threatened to dislodge the establishment consensus politics he had long written about in his column and, to a degree, represented. In a way, this mirrors the broader trajectory of national attention to and awareness of the politics of civil rights through the 1960s. Childs was an active participant in this national conversation and because of his influence, especially with liberals and older readers, his columns helped inform the thinking of many Americans during a troubled time.

Childs and Civil Rights in the 1950s

Race related stories made their way into the papers, northern and southern, with some frequency in the postwar years, but for many northern journalists and news organizations, the trial of two defendants in the Emmett Till murder case, held in late summer 1955 in Sumner, Mississippi, was the first major civil rights story. Reporters and photographers from the wire services, national news magazines, and newspapers competed for seats in the small court room and covered all aspects of the trial.¹⁵ One participant has described the increasing news coverage of the civil rights stories like the Till murder trial in 1955, the Little Rock school integration crisis in 1957, and the Greensboro lunch counter sit-ins of 1960 as “stepping stones” to increasing awareness and engagement with civil rights.¹⁶ Whereas the major media largely ignored stories on race relations in the South before 1955, by 1960 such stories were common, both in print and increasingly on television. This new level of attention made civil rights a national political issue by the end of the decade and also granted new legitimacy to the efforts of southern blacks to attain some measure of the equality and protection granted by the Constitution.

Childs travelled a great deal in the 1950s, but he did not go to the South to cover these stories first hand. In fact, a full reading of his columns from the decade suggests that race and civil rights had a marginal place in his understanding of the major issues of the day. Writing four to six columns per week, he had ample opportunity to provide sustained reporting and in depth analysis, but such attention was absent from his work. At the time international stories

¹⁵ Robert and Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*, 90-101.

¹⁶ Julian Bond, “The Media and the Movement: Looking Back from the Southern Front,” in Brian Ward, ed., *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Struggle* (Tallahassee: University of Florida Press, 2001), 26.

like the rebuilding of Europe, the atomic arms race, and the deepening of the Cold War dominated his column. His columns on domestic affairs featured policy debates and the give and take of Washington politics, both areas where black Americans were largely overlooked and marginalized in the 1950s. When he did write about race, these tendencies informed the subject matter and approach of the columns and indicate that he saw race stories as political, or even geopolitical, rather than moral or relevant to basic human dignity. His 1950s columns that employed the phrase “civil rights” were most likely to focus on freedom of expression and the right to a fair hearing for leftists accused of harboring Communist sympathies or other unpopular ideas.

Historians of the civil rights movement in the United States, largely following the lead of Mary Dudziak, have argued that geopolitical concerns of this nature motivated national leaders to pay attention and take action on civil rights.¹⁷ Childs clearly fit this pattern. Like his friend Walter Lippmann and others, Childs was afraid that America’s race problem, especially the ugly 1957 confrontation in Little Rock that generated headlines worldwide, harmed the nation’s image abroad, most notably in regions in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East emerging from colonial rule. Over two dozen new nations were formed in Asia and Africa in the fifteen years after World War II, sometimes with American assistance or, at least, motivated by ideals of democratic self-rule and individual freedom modeled on American models and rhetoric. At the same time, some American civil rights figures like Martin Luther King Jr. were travelling to Ghana and India, drawing inspiration and sharing perspectives with leaders there.¹⁸ The

¹⁷ Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), is the major statement. Also see essays in Brenda G. Plummer, ed., *Window on Freedom: Race, Civil Rights, and Foreign Affairs, 1945-1988* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

¹⁸ Gerstle, *American Crucible*, 271-273.

Americans and the Soviets waged a long-running propaganda war to influence these nations and Childs understood that shameful stories and photographs coming from the South and finding print around the globe were a serious detriment to the American image and national prestige. He noted, for example, that the “propaganda advantage” created by the Little Rock crisis “could not possibly be bought with money...no matter how much gold was circulated through the Communist apparatus in North America.” Photos of angry, shouting mobs of whites jeering at and threatening the young black students exacerbated the problem. He did not believe that what was happening in Little Rock was typical of race relations in the nation, but as he wrote, the full explanation “never catches up with the drama recorded by the camera.”¹⁹ Cooler heads must prevail to moderate the “present war between the states” and avert “disastrous” results.²⁰

A number of columns in this period expressed similar concerns. Childs wrote in one instance to support the efforts of the magazine *America*, published by United States Information Agency and circulated inside the Soviet Union. A recent issue of the magazine that illustrated significant gains for American blacks had attracted hostile attention in the Soviet press. Childs saw the article as a necessary corrective to the normal Soviet message that the “tragic tension over integration in the South is the whole story of the Negro in America.” Facts and figures published in the magazine demonstrated that in many ways conditions were in fact improving significantly even though Soviet propaganda distributed around the world told a different story.²¹ Still, despite some limited progress the reality of the situation remained troubling. The spectacle of a handful of powerful southern Democrats using Senate rules to

¹⁹ Marquis Childs, “Arkansas Debacle an Aid to Reds,” *Washington Post*, 11 September 1957, 14.

²⁰ Marquis Childs, “Role of Moderates Crucial in South,” *Washington Post*, 2 October 1957, 10.

²¹ Marquis Childs, “A Little Magazine with a Big Audience,” *Washington Post*, 1 April 1959, 14.

block meaningful progress served as an “advertisement that American democracy is restricted and that at times it breaks down altogether.” President Eisenhower, he believed, was too passive and his strategy of “putting it off as long as he could, hoping common sense would prevail” meant that the “authority of the Federal Government is eroded away and the defiant power of the segregationists enhanced.”²² A “revolution of color” was spreading in all parts of the world; the nation that sought to present itself as a beacon of democracy looked, in fact, like a “weird anachronism” when it was seen debating rights that had been granted nearly 200 years earlier.²³ Gradual, evolutionary changes might be preferable, Childs wrote to a fellow journalist, but “given the revolution of color,” there was no longer time to “rest on this slow rate of progress.”²⁴

The more typical Childs column on race relations in the late 1950s focused on political battles at the national level, usually on Capitol Hill. He saw himself as a careful observer of Congressional affairs and he sought to give his readers the behind the scenes details or explain complex legislative strategies and alliances. Passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act, which split the liberal and conservative wings of the Democratic Party, struck Childs as a boon to the GOP, and in particular to the future presidential ambitions of Vice-President Richard Nixon.²⁵

Toward the end of the debate over the final provisions of the bill, Childs promoted compromise rather than principle because the moderate and liberal Democrats would be able to take credit for salvaging a deal. The compromise bill also contained a provision allowing the federal

²² Marquis Childs, “Ike’s Smile Masks Back-Stage Rows,” *Washington Post*, 27 September 1957, 16.

²³ Marquis Childs, “The Filibuster: A World View,” *Washington Post*, 8 March 1960, 14.

²⁴ Childs to H. Galt Braxton, Kingston (NC) *Daily Press*, 15 March 1960, Childs Papers, box 12, folder 3.

²⁵ Marquis Childs, “GOP Buoyant Over Civil Rights Gains,” *Washington Post*, 26 June 1957, 12; “Nixon Focuses on Main Chance,” *Washington Post*, 2 August 1957, 12; “Democrats Ask: Unity for What?” *Washington Post*, 6 August 1957, 14. On the provisions of the act, see Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: American in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 219-222.

government, through the Justice Department, to intervene in the South when necessary to enforce school integration and voter registration rights; as a political liberal himself, Childs often sought to equip the federal government with tools to solve problems. Like Walter Reuther of the AFL-CIO and Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, he urged the “half-a-loaf” theory. Conservative southern senators who used the “ugly spectacle of the filibuster” took the brunt of his criticism and he was glad to see them outmaneuvered.²⁶

In the aftermath of the final vote, he wrote, observers felt “there was little mileage in it for either party,” but Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson earned Childs’ praise for skillful maneuvering and demonstrating that a Southerner could have liberal views on race relations.²⁷ Using the column to promote the efforts of politicians he favored was a common tactic throughout Childs’ career and Johnson’s ability to form alliances to preserve civil rights gains continued to draw praise through the rest of the decade.²⁸ The columnist also came to the defense of Chief Justice Earl Warren, whose Supreme Court had done much to advance the cause of civil rights, including most notably the *Brown* decision that began the process of integrating the public schools. Warren came under “violent attack in the Congress, in the country at large and especially in the southern states,” as Childs put it. But Childs told readers that Warren was actually a moderate and a serene and fair-minded jurist upholding the only fair reading of the Constitution. Crises over the role of the courts in constitutional disputes were

²⁶ Childs, “Politics Spicing the Civil Rights Stew,” 14.

²⁷ Marquis Childs, “Democrats Nettled by Morse’s Barbs,” *Washington Post*, 10 September 1957, 14. Johnson’s role as a power broker and deal-maker in the late 1950s is best related in Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate* (New York: Knopf, 2002), especially chapters 30-32.

²⁸ Marquis Childs, “Are Democrats Losing Old Fire?” *Washington Post*, 16 January 1959, 14; “A Formidable Test for Sen. Johnson,” *Washington Post*, 16 February 1960, 14. In addition to Caro, Johnson’s role in the passage of the civil rights bill in 1957 is analyzed in William E. Leuchtenburg, *The White House Looks South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 260-265.

nothing new in American history and, he told readers, public sentiment would eventually come to side with Warren's views.²⁹

The 1960 Election and the Kennedy Years

Childs put a great deal of energy into covering and analyzing the 1960 presidential election, visiting a number of key states, attending both national conventions, and spending at least a week travelling with each candidate during the last month of the campaign. In keeping with the earlier pattern, however, the civil rights issue was crowded from the column by other topics he considered more pressing. As discussed in the previous chapter, he believed the nation faced a critical crossroads in 1960. In writing about the Republican contest for the nomination and the convention in Chicago in July, Childs had almost nothing to say about the party's or the candidates' stances on civil rights. The "southern strategy" that would help elect Nixon to the presidency in 1968 was yet to be perfected, but in 1960 the Republican candidate did attempt to win over voters in the South. Nixon made a number of speeches in North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama which, although not overtly racist, did seek to appeal to conservative Democrats angered by their party's candidate.

Neither party was widely seen as a champion of civil rights as the 1960 elections neared, and many observers gave the Republicans an advantage on the issue. Nixon's chances among black voters were bolstered during the campaign by public support from Jackie Robinson, the retired baseball hero who had become a columnist for the *New York Post*. Robinson carried on a high-profile argument with Democratic nominee John F. Kennedy in the summer of 1960, charging that the senator was too friendly with white southern opponents of

²⁹ Marquis Childs, "Little Rock May Repeat Tragedy," *Washington Post*, 29 August 1959, 12; "Angry Attacks Focus on Warren," *Washington Post*, 3 September 1959, 16.

civil rights. Both campaigns attempted to enlist the backing of the former All-Star, but Robinson eventually campaigned for Nixon.³⁰ Childs himself had a strong distaste for Nixon, dating back to the red scare years and his involvement in the investigation of Alger Hiss, but the columnist always recognized Nixon's shrewd talents in the political arena. He did not, however, write any columns about Nixon that touched on civil rights issues.

Despite Childs' earlier appreciation of Lyndon Johnson's handling of civil rights in the Senate, none of his columns on the race for the Democratic nomination mention it. As Sean Savage has pointed out in his study of the Democratic Party in this era, the civil rights planks of the two parties were very similar in 1960. The Democrats "more shrewdly and consistently coordinated their rhetoric...in order to maximize the civil rights issue as an asset in the north and minimize it as a liability in the south."³¹ The small, but growing population of black registered voters might make a key difference for the party that best appealed to their interests. Party leaders, however, were inclined to play it safe on civil rights rather than split the party along regional lines by pressing a strong civil rights position. For years Childs had written about the awkward bond that held the party together, but in 1960 he felt that it was necessary to maintain the coalition for the Democrats to have any chance at victory, even as he was frustrated by the party's need to placate racists.

One aspect of the campaign related to civil rights that Childs did note was the debate over Senator John F. Kennedy's liberalism, or lack thereof. To secure the nomination and the presidency, Kennedy had to win over the party's small, but influential pro-civil rights liberal

³⁰ Letters and other materials related to Robinson's political activities in 1960 are available in Box 5, Jackie Robinson Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Robinson actively endorsed Nixon in 1960, but later supported Kennedy's civil rights stance and then broke with the GOP in 1964 when the party nominated Barry Goldwater.

³¹ Sean J. Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 74.

wing, the idealists who preferred another run by Adlai Stevenson or another reliable liberal to the more centrist Kennedy. In part, this represented a concern among liberals that Kennedy would not press hard enough on civil rights and to combat this perception the senator's campaign made a concerted effort to bolster his reputation as a supporter of civil rights legislation and a friend to black Americans. The campaign sent out a flurry of press releases listing every vote or statement in support of civil rights bills or amendments, excerpts from speeches and media appearances with suitable quotes on the topic, and statements of support and endorsement from prominent liberal and civil rights organizations. One lengthy press release went so far as to reprint material from hostile editorials in "states rights" newspapers to show that the candidate was no friend of the segregationists.³² Arthur Schlesinger's brief campaign book *Kennedy or Nixon: Does it Make Any Difference?* intimated that Kennedy was the superior candidate on racial issues.³³

The previous chapter showed that Childs took a special interest in promoting Kennedy's campaign because of his belief that Kennedy would reinvigorate the nation's Cold War initiatives. This support carried over into the issue of civil rights as well. In his column, Childs noted the lack of enthusiasm for the nominee from the left, but made it clear that he saw Kennedy as a suitable liberal candidate and, though short of outwardly endorsing him, he sought to mitigate the controversy and pull the party together.³⁴ Childs himself had long been associated with the liberal wing of the party and his "blessing" probably carried some weight, especially among those who knew that Stevenson and the columnist were close friends.

³² Copies of many of these releases are available in Box 27B of the Theodore H. White Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, Mass.

³³ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *Kennedy or Nixon: Does it Make Any Difference?* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 41.

³⁴ Marquis Childs, "The Biggest Chink in Jack's Armor," *Washington Post*, 12 July 1960, 14; "JFK: A Portrait of a Cool Liberal," *Washington Post*, 19 July 1960, 12.

Privately, Childs confessed to former Democratic Senator William Benton that Kennedy was “in a very tight squeeze” between the party factions, but because the mood of the country was more conservative than the liberals would admit, he was likely to win more votes by running as a centrist. He admitted that he hoped the Democrats would have reason to celebrate in the fall, but that he had “serious doubts.”³⁵ In a similar letter to Stevenson, he described Kennedy as “a troubled man” who hoped to have “a separate relationship” with the two groups of Democrats. In any case, with the southerner Johnson as an active running mate, travelling nearly 3000 miles by rail and making over sixty speeches through the South, Kennedy was able to limit the party’s losses enough to achieve victory.³⁶ Many historians also point to Kennedy’s phone call to Coretta King and his campaign’s behind the scenes efforts to get Dr. King released from an Atlanta jail as factors that won over black voters without alienating too many southern whites.³⁷ Ultimately, Nixon garnered substantial support among southern whites, though Kennedy did better among black voters. The Republican won Florida, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia and polled well in Texas and South Carolina.³⁸ In his assessment of the election results, Childs pointed out that holding most of the South and running very strong among the black voters had made the difference in the incredibly close contest.³⁹

President Kennedy’s inaugural events were racially inclusive and he shared the celebration with many black Americans. Prominent entertainers like Mahalia Jackson, Harry Belafonte, Ella Fitzgerald, and Marian Anderson featured in concerts and inaugural programs.

³⁵ Childs to William Benton, 1 September 1960, Childs Papers, box 12, folder 4.

³⁶ Donaldson, *First Modern Campaign*, 154-155.

³⁷ W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Real Making of the President 1960* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 167-169.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

³⁹ Marquis Childs, “What Action on Rule 22?” *Washington Post*, 30 December 1960, 12.

For the first time, two black journalists, a reporter and a photographer from *Jet*, were included in the White House press pool that followed the new president from event to event; new Assistant Press Secretary Andrew Hatcher, the first black person to hold such a position, made press arrangements.⁴⁰ However, after the initial glamour and sense of progress, the reality was that the politics of race in America would not change rapidly under the new administration. As one scholar has noted, no other domestic issue occupied the Kennedy White House as much or as intensely, but this was not by choice. Kennedy had hoped to deal with the issue gradually, but events took their own course.⁴¹ Violent attacks against the Freedom Riders, the battle over the integration of Ole Miss, and the fire hoses and dogs unleashed on peaceful protestors in Birmingham forced the administration to make hard decisions and, finally, led to a bolder sense of mission and a more active federal response. John Kennedy and his brother Robert, who as Attorney General was the president's chief advisor on civil rights enforcement, emerged by 1963 as strong, if partly reluctant, defenders and advocates of the cause, ultimately becoming something of an inspiration to a young generation of activists and idealists who would bring a new level of engagement and urgency, as well as increased discord, to the public debate by the end of the decade.⁴²

It can be said that Childs also experienced a gradual, but significant awakening during the Kennedy years. Where his civil rights columns before then were often policy-oriented, viewing race as one more issue to be debated in the political arena, his later writings began to display new urgency and purpose. Still, he wasn't always on hand to report and comment on

⁴⁰ Nick Bryant, *The Bystander: John F. Kennedy and the Struggle for Black Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 209-211.

⁴¹ James N. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 2 ed. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 173.

⁴² *Ibid.*; see also Bryant, *The Bystander*, 463-466, and Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 517-523.

the major issues. The columnist was in Europe during the Freedom Riders crisis in early summer 1961 and had nothing to say about it in print. He was abroad once again in September 1962 when the conflict over James Meredith's integration of the University of Mississippi forced Kennedy to use federal power, like his predecessor, to maintain order and enforce federal rights. Showing that he still worried about the propaganda value, his commentary on civil rights in the early Kennedy years was largely limited to praise for the Peace Corps, which he felt would greatly enhance the nation's reputation in developing nations.⁴³ When he did write about domestic civil rights, he saw a "persistent and determined effort" by the Kennedys to expand the scope of existing law, even though the president had failed to press for any significant new civil rights legislation before 1963.⁴⁴ His frustration at the continuing ability of conservatives in the Senate to water down or fully block such legislation animated a number of columns leading up to and after the 1962 elections.⁴⁵ Election results were mixed for the Democrats; they gained a handful of Senate seats and lost a few in the House. Civil rights leaders and other liberal critics who chastised the president for failing to act boldly used election results to increase the pressure, but Childs wrote that Kennedy was "unlikely to respond to this demand." The president was "inclined to feel the mid-term elections proved" that his gradual approach was successful.⁴⁶

Childs saw no new advantage to either party or gains for the civil rights cause in the wake of the election. If anything, he felt that the Republicans faced the more challenging

⁴³ Marquis Childs, "The Peace Corps: Promise and Perils," *Washington Post*, 8 March 1961, 14.

⁴⁴ Marquis Childs, "A Candid Look at Bobby's Year," *Washington Post*, 5 June 1962, 14.

⁴⁵ Marquis Childs, "A Static Tableau on Capitol Hill," *Washington Post*, 11 May 1962, 20; "The Four Parties and the President," *Washington Post* 23 July 1962, 10; "Gains in Dixie Won't Help GOP," *Washington Post*, 9 November 1962, 16.

⁴⁶ Marquis Childs, "Cautious Advance, Selected Goals," *Washington Post*, 12 November 1962, 22.

dilemma over race in 1963. He wrote that some in the GOP felt the race problem was a winning issue that could be pinned on Democrats in the 1964 elections, but argued that the shrewder observers understood that many rank and file Republicans shared the stance of many southern Democrats. Nelson Rockefeller might be able to lead the Republican Party in a moderate, or even progressive direction on civil rights, but the ascendancy of Barry Goldwater as the party favorite likely precluded such a move.⁴⁷ Childs believed that Republicans had a great political opportunity to reach newly enfranchised black voters, as well as pro-civil rights northerners, if they could present the right kind of moderate proposals. The Democrats, he felt, could not fully capitalize on the issue as long as the southern wing of the party remained a necessary part of their governing coalition and continued to exercise influence in national politics.

One subject that drew an emotional response from Childs was the rise of the far right, especially the John Birch Society, which was motivated in part by opposition to civil rights legislation and enforcement. As a long-time opponent of the excesses of the far right, it is no surprise that Childs carefully noted and opposed this political development. This was the subject of a number of hard hitting columns that exposed the emergence of a “silence of fear” and other potentially subversive effects of the growing Bircher influence. These groups were too serious to simply dismiss as a “lunatic fringe,” he wrote. They undermined trust in public institutions by spreading unbelievable conspiracy theories and using the national climate of hostility toward Communism to discredit anyone even slightly on the left.⁴⁸ Privately, Childs

⁴⁷ Marquis Childs, “The GOP, A Party Without a Policy,” *Washington Post*, 29 May 1963, 16.

⁴⁸ For examples, see Marquis Childs, “Rightists Threaten Silence of Fear,” *Washington Post*, 28 May 1961, 10, and “The Best Cure for the Birchites,” *Washington Post*, 5 April 1962, 14. Opponents of civil rights frequently linked the movement and its leaders and supporters to Communism as a means to discredit and harass them. See

expressed his anger against these “fanatics who seem bent on dividing the country and turning Americans against each other at a time when we need to desperately to be united.” To teach hate and distrust, as they did, was a “deep disservice” to the nation.⁴⁹ Not all readers of the column agreed however; Mae Evans thought his interpretation was “hog-wash.” She wrote that she wasn’t a member now, but added “if you are against them, they must be a fine society,” suggesting that, at least in this one case, Childs had helped recruit a member.⁵⁰ The virulence of the far right would be a constant theme in columns through the mid-1960s and was one motivating factor in Childs’ increasing attention to and engagement with the civil rights story. By 1963, he wrote that the far right groups “live in a nightmare world and...they threaten to make the rest of us live in it too.” “They share that quality with the Nazis of Hitler Germany,” he added.⁵¹ Extremism on either side of the political spectrum troubled the columnist, but the goals and tactics of the far right were so contrary to his way of thinking as to verge on frightening. After his experiences during the McCarthy era, he was particularly upset with the way the Communist issue intruded into the discussion about civil rights.

The civil rights issue was finally reaching a crisis point. Now Childs believed the federal government had been too limited and unwilling to drive change. Federal power was disruptive and should be used as a last resort, he wrote, but “the pace is too slow and the fierce quarrel over integration has cut across the urgent need for growth and change.”⁵² He believed

Jeff Woods, *Black Struggle, Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004).

⁴⁹ Childs to Robert D. Morrow, Tucson Public School Superintendent, 7 July 1961, Childs Papers, box 13, folder 4.

⁵⁰ Mae Evans to Childs, 17 July 1961, Childs Papers, box 13, folder 3. No additional information about Evans is evident on the handwritten note.

⁵¹ Childs to Thomas Braden, 6 January 1963, Childs Papers, box 28, folder 4.

⁵² Marquis Childs, “Beyond the Limit of Federal Power,” *Washington Post*, 24 April 1963, 16.

that Robert Kennedy in the Justice Department planned to use the power of his office more vigorously to enforce voting rights in the South, but this “persistent and determined effort” was not enough.⁵³ Childs’ attention was also turning slowly to the problem of slums in the nation’s urban areas, where race and economics had come together to create a brewing social crisis. It was time to act, both in the North and the South, in order to solve the problems of inequality and poverty on one hand, but also to prevent the rise of dangerous social unrest. Although Childs was a respected voice on the left, he also sat well within the centrist consensus that saw radicalism and political violence as abhorrent to the American tradition. The mob action and terrorism in the South demonstrated that only bold action could prevent the rise of uncontrollable radicalism and increased violence and divisiveness.⁵⁴ While travelling in Germany in preparation for coverage of the president’s trip to Berlin, Childs noted that when reading the news from home “one can hardly escape the sense of a great nation on the verge of civil war.” In a noteworthy departure from his previous thinking, he wrote for the first time in the summer of 1963 that the crisis at home was “just as grave” as the crisis brewing in Germany.⁵⁵ The problem was now a “racial explosion” that threatened to create a “profound alteration” of the political system and Kennedy’s new civil rights program working its way through Congress in the summer of 1963 was a welcome step away from his timid earlier actions. Although he felt the “political pieces had not yet fallen into place,” Childs believed

⁵³ Marquis Childs, “A Candid Look at Bobby’s Year,” *Washington Post*, 5 January 1962, 14.

⁵⁴ Marquis Childs, “Bombs in Alabama Aid Black Muslims,” *Washington Post*, 15 May 1963, 18.

⁵⁵ Marquis Childs, “Why JFK’s Pleas Had Urgent Tone,” *Washington Post*, 14 June 1963, 16.

that the civil rights debate, along with the president's new assertiveness, meant change was inevitable.⁵⁶

As the nation's capital prepared for the March on Washington, held while opponents in Congress blocked action on the latest civil rights bill, he wrote that the stakes couldn't be higher. The time for gradualism and patience had run out, the "illusion" shattered by the police dogs and fire hoses of Birmingham. The march was a "dramatic demonstration of the refusal to wait...to wipe out the stigma of second-class citizenship and second-class living by reason of color." "Whether the Congress will heed the warning- the long pent up unrest in Chicago, in Harlem and elsewhere- is still to be determined," he added.⁵⁷ Childs was among the large contingent of press that attended the March on Washington, which took place only a few blocks from his office near the White House.⁵⁸ Between 200,000 and 250,000 marchers gathered from all over the country to listen to folk music from the likes of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez and orations, including Dr. King's majestic "I Have a Dream" speech. Childs found the event to be a major accomplishment for the movement, with the right blend of quiet dignity and moderation mixed with the determination of "an almost fierce political rally." The massive demonstration, he wrote, might not have a positive effect on the stalled legislative action, but it the event was "perfect," a day that would go down in history as "a triumph." King's closing

⁵⁶ Marquis Childs, "Race Issue Snarls Old Party Lines," *Washington Post*, 12 July 1963; 16; "Rights and Jobs Vie for Priority," *Washington Post*, 15 July 1963, 12.

⁵⁷ Marquis Childs, "The Conjunction of Three Crises," *Washington Post*, 28 August 1963, 16.

⁵⁸ According to one estimate, Washington, DC, police issued 1,900 special press passes, on top of the 1,200 that were usually available for covering public events in the city. Roberts and Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*, 346.

speech “rose above mere oratory.” It was an inspiration and all Americans, he wrote, should now get behind the push for racial equality.⁵⁹

Unfortunately the march did not have the broadly uplifting results Childs hoped for, even though it did mobilize and draw new adherents to the civil rights cause. In fact, the crisis deepened in the fall of 1963 after the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham that killed four black schoolgirls.⁶⁰ He had just published a column about the role of churches in the rights movement; religious leaders were conspicuous among the crowd at the march and he saw these figures as a moral force for justice and moderation, even though he wasn’t himself particularly religious.⁶¹ In the aftermath of the bombing, Childs wrote grimly that the nation’s reputation had suffered another, “perhaps fatal,” blow and that the radical right “had been given a big boost.” Black leaders had become more “vociferous and angry,” which in turn would serve as justification for additional violence from white extremists.⁶² He also noted that Kennedy was under increasing pressure from the liberal wing of the Democratic Party to use the power of the federal government more forcefully. Childs described the president’s effort on civil rights as “all-out,” but also noted that Kennedy had a “detached and even skeptical” view of the power of government to force change. It was a “political shooting gallery” for the young president. Coupled with the continuing need to maintain party unity, this coolness on the part of Kennedy meant liberals would always remain dissatisfied.⁶³ More broadly, Childs remained a firm supporter of Kennedy’s full agenda in national and foreign

⁵⁹ Marquis Childs, “Triumphal March Silences Scoffers,” *Washington Post*, 30 August 1963, 18; “Churches Can Tip Civil Rights Vote,” *Washington Post*, 6 September 1963, 16.

⁶⁰ Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-65* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 137-141.

⁶¹ Marquis Childs, “Churches Can Tip Civil Rights Vote,” 16.

⁶² Marquis Childs, “Alabama Bomb Has Grim Fallout,” *Washington Post*, 20 September 1963, 16.

⁶³ Marquis Childs, “Judging the Case Against Kennedy,” *Washington Post*, 11 September 1963, 18.

affairs, but, as the previous chapter shows, he had begun to take a more critical approach in his columns. He greeted the Kennedy administration with great hopefulness, but by 1963 he was starting to expect measureable results.

For the first time, the columnist decided to travel to the South himself for the specific purpose of seeing the race crisis and talking to participants first hand. The resulting series of columns suggested that Childs finished the trip feeling more distraught than ever about race relations and the possibility for meaningful action within the bounds of mainstream political culture. Extreme, organized, and wholesale opposition to the Kennedys manifested itself at public rallies in Mississippi.⁶⁴ Recent racial violence might have seemed “a tragedy, a disgrace, a shame to the world outside the south,” he wrote, but the mindset he found in many places was different. A “fanatical hatred [was] so deeply rooted” that more violence was sure to follow. In fact, several people in Mississippi stated flatly that the President of the United States would not be safe in their state because of the hatred his civil rights actions and other policies had stirred up.⁶⁵ Outsiders, especially northerners working on voter registration drives, were not accepted. The fear and hatred Childs saw could only have the effect of further alienating blacks, making it much harder for the moderates like King to rein in a violent response.⁶⁶ Childs was so alarmed that upon his return to Washington he made an appointment for a private talk with Kennedy. Childs had written a popular *Harper's* magazine article in 1936 about the hatred from conservatives that had arisen in opposition to the programs of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Kennedy's response was “close to anger” when Childs told him that he was the target of an equal hatred. Kennedy, who was well aware of the

⁶⁴ Marquis Childs, “A GOP Opera Rips JFK in ‘Ole Miss,” *Washington Post*, 28 October 1963, 16.

⁶⁵ Marquis Childs, “The Dark Mind of Mississippi,” *Washington Post*, 30 October 1963, 22.

⁶⁶ Marquis Childs, “Is Time on the Side of Racial Hatred?” *Washington Post*, 1 November 1963, 18.

conservative hostility generated during the New Deal, wouldn't believe that he was a target of a similar rage. Nor would he accept that his life would be in danger if he travelled in Mississippi. There is no place in the country that the president cannot travel to safely, he argued.⁶⁷ This was the last time that Childs saw President Kennedy before the trip to Texas.

Speaking to a group of students in Graham Chapel on the campus of Washington University in St. Louis days before the Kennedy assassination, Childs shared his concerns about the "tragic and fearful repercussions" that would ensue if the civil rights bill remained stalled in Congress and legal remedies were not put in place. Radicals on the right were already fragmenting the nation with their hatred and violence. He worried that a similar radical impulse on the left bubbled just beneath the surface. Only swift and meaningful action could prevent widespread and disruptive action, going way beyond the tactics of legitimate civil disobedience that would lead to chaos.⁶⁸ The same sentiments emerged from his columns at the time. The nation was on the brink of political turmoil unlike anything seen in a generation. The split in the Democratic ranks precluded the necessary action, and the Republicans were most likely to gain the advantage in the next round of elections. That party offered no real solution either, but the voters might turn to them as an alternative.⁶⁹

King, Johnson, and the Tenuous Liberal State

As has often been noted, Lyndon Johnson was able to succeed where Kennedy had failed on civil rights. The moderately liberal program that was tentative and thwarted in 1963

⁶⁷ Undated typed notes and observations from a conversation with President Kennedy in the Oval Office, box 1 of the 1979 addition to the Childs Papers. There is not a date on the document, but the conversation must have taken place close to 1 November 1963.

⁶⁸ "Transcript of address by Marquis Childs at Washington University, Nov. 18, 1963," Childs Papers, box 17, folder 2.

⁶⁹ Marquis Childs, "Stagnant Politics, Public Indecision," *Washington Post*, 11 November 1963, 18.

was briefly able to make headway in the changed atmosphere of the mid-1960s.⁷⁰ Like Childs, President Johnson had a personal belief both in the moral rightness and the pragmatic sensibility of significant, if still moderate, reform. Polls in early 1964 suggested that opposition to civil rights legislation had abated somewhat and that immediate action to push through the Kennedy program would be popular and successful. Johnson always saw civil rights at least in part as a political issue he could capitalize on if it was handled correctly.⁷¹ Childs, too, recognized that the moment was right to take action, given the mood of sympathy for the slain president and Johnson's skill at legislative maneuvering.⁷² Senators were wise enough to "see a storm coming that could sweep aside all moderation and reason" and create a "nightmare vision of race against race." Young idealists on college campuses, after a decade of relative quiet, were now becoming activists who would not wait for change. The new generation of activists, both black and white, was tired and impatient; failure to act could result in a "full-scale riot with blood in the street."⁷³ As was often the case, Childs' concern about possible dire consequences led to some dramatic language.

Childs travelled to the South again in June and July 1964 as the bill that would soon become the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was debated in Congress. It was also the time of Freedom Summer, a bold effort undertaken by the Council of Racial Equality (CORE) to organize and register black voters for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, an alternative to the racist Democratic party in the state. A large number of young civil rights volunteers, many of them

⁷⁰ Horton, *Race and the Making of Modern Liberalism*, 169-173.

⁷¹ Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 111-121.

⁷² Marquis Childs, "The Big Gamble in LBJ's Plans," *Washington Post*, 10 January 1964, 12.

⁷³ Marquis Childs, "The Coming Storm and Sen. Dirksen," *Washington Post*, 6 May 1964, 20; "Building Bridges, Johnson Style," *Washington Post*, 27 May 1964, 24.

white college students and religious leaders, travelled through the region holding meetings and talking with potential voters in their homes and on street corners.⁷⁴ The movement was highly organized and well-publicized; Childs noted their copying machines that churned out “a stream of releases, statements and organization charts.”⁷⁵ At the time of Childs’ visit, however, greatest attention was focused on three Northern activists who were missing and presumed dead in the area around Philadelphia, Mississippi. James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, all CORE volunteers in their twenties, disappeared shortly after being released from the county jail on the night of June 24. Childs joined the large contingent of national journalists in the south to report on the emerging story, many of whom faced resentment and hostility from local whites who believed press accounts were one-sided and offensive to local traditions.⁷⁶ Comments that appeared in the three columns resulting from the Mississippi trip suggest that Childs himself met with some of this attitude.

He reported that locals felt themselves victims of an invasion and blamed the disturbances on outside agitators. The region remained to him a “closed society” that was unwilling or unable to accept the changes of modern life. Hostility and resentment against outsiders was a hallmark, he wrote, as was the deeply-held sense of black inferiority among most white residents there.⁷⁷ Blacks and whites lived in separate worlds, divided by law and by culture. Segregationist points of view dominated the local television station and newspapers.

⁷⁴ Manfred Berg, *The Ticket To Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 183-184. An overview of Freedom Summer activities is provided in Sally Belfrage, *Freedom Summer* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995).

⁷⁵ Marquis Childs, “Mississippi Walls Begin to Tumble,” *Washington Post*, 26 June 1964, 18.

⁷⁶ On local anti-press attitudes, see Laura Richardson Walter, “In Their Own Backyard: Local Press Coverage of the Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner Murders,” *American Journalism* 23:3 (Summer 2006): 41-42.

⁷⁷ Childs, “Mississippi Walls Begin to Tumble,” 18; “Marshals Needed in Mississippi,” *Washington Post*, 29 June 1964, 16. Childs’ use of the term “closed society” also suggests that he was reading contemporary books on the South. James W. Silver’s influential and controversial book *Mississippi: The Closed Society* was published in early 1964 by Harcourt.

Prominent political leaders like Senator James Eastland took a consistent hard line and mobilized the white population against the civil rights activists and their northern allies. Governor Paul Johnson, whom Childs believed to be one of the more reasonable voices with his desire for moderate change, was too timid to take the necessary political risks in the face of a public determined to resist all change. In many places, he feared, the rule of law had completely broken down. Extralegal groups like the Klan operated outside of, or with the tacit approval of, local law enforcement, making it extremely dangerous for outsiders to take part in civil rights activism or even travel in parts of the state. After spending a week in Mississippi, Childs admitted that he finally understood the “violence and disorder, the prejudice and passion” that pervaded the fiction of William Faulkner, which before had seemed an “unreal world of the imagination.”⁷⁸ The Civil Rights Act passed easily in July, bringing with it the end of legal segregation of public accommodations and discrimination in voter registration. The question remained: Would it be obeyed? Could it be enforced?

The politics of civil rights played a significant role in the 1964 presidential election and Childs paid close attention to the issue in his column. The emergence of Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona as a major contender and eventual Republican nominee came in for the most scrutiny, especially after the moderate Republican Nelson Rockefeller faltered in early primaries. As early as 1961, Childs had written that Goldwater was potentially “a great danger.”⁷⁹ The Arizonan represented the far right wing of the party, popular in the West, and Childs worried that this stance would be increasingly attractive in a candidate at the national level. As mentioned above, Childs had been particularly interested in the message, tactics, and

⁷⁸ Marquis Childs, “Faulkner’s World Not So Fictional,” *Washington Post*, 1 July 1964, 20.

⁷⁹ Childs to Sen. Fulbright, 17 March 1961, Childs Papers, University of Iowa, box 1.

influence of the John Birch Society, the resurgent Klan, and similar fringe groups for some time. His friend and *Post-Dispatch* colleague Richard Dudman had recently published a book-length study of the leadership and financing of the new conservative movement. Could this group appeal to a winning majority in a supposedly liberal age?⁸⁰ Two groups, he thought, were vying for the far right wing of the GOP, a small extreme totally outside of the bounds of American politics and a larger and slightly less radical group that appeared to be driving the Republican effort. Writing about the politics on this end of the spectrum in the spring of 1964, Childs noted,

This kind of prejudice allied with fear could work havoc with long-accepted concepts of moderate and liberal in both parties. At the farthest right are those whom Richard Nixon called the kooks- a wild gleam in their eye, violent anti-Semites, their minds totally closed to reason. But they tag themselves so obviously they are not the threat to the Republican Party of the more restrained zealots. These are the men and women who have used the techniques of rule or ruin to gain controls over the party machinery that cannot be broken until 1966 and another election. Their hero is Senator Goldwater.⁸¹

The Republican National Convention in San Francisco that nominated Goldwater was not short on anti-civil rights rhetoric and occasional flourishes of anti-media hostility.

Hanging over the Goldwater nomination was the threat of a George Wallace candidacy. The Alabama governor showed surprising strength during a run for Democratic support in northern and midwestern states like Wisconsin and Indiana and he had no trouble raising large sums of money for television ads.⁸² Though not in the same party, Wallace offered an anti-civil rights message that resonated with many potential Goldwater voters and posed a threat to the

⁸⁰ Richard Dudman, *Men of the Far Right* (New York: Pyramid Books, 1962). Childs was at this time head of the Washington Bureau of the *Post-Dispatch*, in addition to his job as a syndicated columnist. In that capacity he was Dudman's boss.

⁸¹ Marquis Childs, "A Savage Politics of Rule or Ruin," *Washington Post*, 13 April 1964, 16.

⁸² Marquis Childs, "Wallace Waving New Bloody Shirt," *Washington Post*, 29 April 1964, 22.

Arizonan's campaign.⁸³ These developments were part of the so-called "white backlash" that many commentators believed would influence the upcoming election results. Motivated by anger at the disruptions brought on by the civil rights movement and the pro-civil rights stance of many liberals in government and the courts, these voters were expected to flock to segregationist and states' rights candidates in an effort to undo what they saw as dangerous changes to the political culture.⁸⁴ More generally, Childs saw the rise of Goldwater as a threat to the existence of the GOP as it had been known. The Goldwater movement, he felt, would drag down candidates in state-level races nationwide.⁸⁵ He also wondered if the "atmosphere of hate" among some on the far right was a threat to the president's safety as he travelled around the nation.⁸⁶

Childs' analysis of the politics of the far right and the anti-civil rights movement generated a great deal of criticism. The managing editor of the Lawton (OK) *Constitution*, which carried the Childs column, wrote that the columnist was "allowing his hatred of Goldwater to consume him."⁸⁷ Such an attitude from a number of subscribing papers had, in fact, led to a small decline in his syndication list. Writing to a friend and fellow journalist, he blamed "pressure from extremist groups" who were able to get newspapers to stop running the column.⁸⁸ Readers also wrote in with harsh comments and abusive language, as had happened earlier during the McCarthy era. In an interview with a reporter for the trade magazine *Editor*

⁸³ Marquis Childs, "The Rebel Yell Haunting Barry," *Washington Post*, 15 July 1964, 22; "Why Did Wallace Drop Out?" *Washington Post*, 22 July 1964, 23. Wallace withdrew from the contest early, but he remained a potent force in rallying conservative voters in both parties.

⁸⁴ The "white backlash" phenomenon is detailed well in Robert David Johnson, *All the Way with LBJ: The 1964 Presidential Election* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), especially in Chapter 3.

⁸⁵ Marquis Childs, "Conservative, but Defiant of History," *Washington Post* 17 July 1964, 18; "GOP disunity spelled F-B-B-S-F," *Washington Post*, 17 August 1964, 17.

⁸⁶ Marquis Childs, "The Campaign and the President's Safety," *Washington Post*, 12 August 1964, 21.

⁸⁷ Ted Ralston to Childs, 23 July 1964, Childs Papers, box 16, folder 3.

⁸⁸ Childs to Thomas Braden, Oceanside (CA) *Blade-Tribune*, 22 January 1964, Childs Papers, box 29, folder 1.

and *Publisher*, Childs revealed that he was receiving hate mail and threats, especially since the “Goldwater thing” started. Many of the letter writers, he noted, called him a “nigger-lover,” which, according to Childs, was something new in his long career.⁸⁹

The Johnson re-election campaign drew much less attention from the columnist. He attended the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City in August, where he wrote only briefly about the most high-profile civil rights story. A credentials controversy involving competing delegations from Mississippi, one all-white group and another black group representing the state’s Freedom Democrats, drew much unwanted attention to the race issue during at convention despite Johnson’s efforts to stage manage the event to avoid controversy and the public appearance of party disunity. In a tough compromise, the Freedom Democrats, led by Fannie Lou Hamer, were allowed entry to the convention hall, but not allowed to vote as credentialed delegates. Johnson hoped this would be seen as a symbolic moral victory for the cause while allowing him to tell southern Democrats that he had stood firm.⁹⁰ Childs wrote that the presidents’ legendary skill as a compromiser “seems to have fallen short in the Mississippi quarrel,” but in the end he made no further comment on the problem during the convention.⁹¹ Prioritizing the consensus approach over real change, Childs wrote that the convention was “a success because party squabbles were kept to a public minimum.”⁹²

Childs travelled extensively through the nation in the fall, including spending a few days following the president as he campaigned. He wrote little about civil rights. A column about Mississippi reminded readers that lawlessness and violence continued unabated in the

⁸⁹ “Hate Mail Piles up on Columnists’ Desks,” *Editor and Publisher*, 24 July 1964, 10.

⁹⁰ Johnson, *All the Way with LBJ*, 161-169. See also Branch, *Pillar of Fire*, ch. 34.

⁹¹ Marquis Childs, “Bland Convention Johnson’s Choice,” *Washington Post*, 26 August 1964, 16.

⁹² Marquis Childs, “The Many Men Who are LBJ,” *Washington Post*, 31 August 1964, 12.

state, but he believed that the Johnson administration was deliberately avoiding any open confrontation to minimize the risk of embarrassing the president in the final weeks of the campaign. He noted that Goldwater canceled a late Mississippi appearance because his victory there was “certain- as certain as anything can be in politics,” it would be “a waste of time.”⁹³

While visiting New York, Childs wrote two columns that foreshadowed themes that would soon materialize as primary topics. Summertime violence in Harlem and Brooklyn brought the “ghetto problem” to his attention and he spent several days talking with community leaders and residents to determine the roots of the racial unrest. Economic and political disenfranchisement, dirty and decrepit living conditions, poor schools, and lack of opportunity for advancement were creating a “deep-seeded rot” in the city and he lauded efforts to funnel money to community-oriented programs that engaged the youth of the area and offered job training. Moderate and constructive programs could prevent future riots and limit the influence of black nationalists, whom Childs believed would capitalize on the situation and provoke more antagonism.⁹⁴

Late in the campaign, Childs wrote to a friend at CBS News that he found it “singularly depressing and, perhaps, the weirdest” he had ever seen after thirty years in Washington.⁹⁵ Still, he was more than pleased with the outcome. Johnson scored a major victory, winning over sixty-one percent of the popular vote and ninety-one percent of the electoral college tally; he

⁹³ Marquis Childs, “The Dilemma That Mississippi Poses,” *Washington Post*, 30 September 1964, 16.

⁹⁴ Marquis Childs, “Harlem Problems in N.Y. Politics,” *Washington Post*, 7 September 1964, 16; “Where Any Spark Can Fire the City,” *Washington Post*, 9 September 1964, 20.

⁹⁵ Childs to Blair Clark, 14 September 1964, Childs Papers, box 16, folder 3. The campaign also featured the infamous “Daisy” television spot and numerous other examples of heated rhetoric that troubled observers on all sides.

only lost by one percentage point in Goldwater's home state of Arizona.⁹⁶ Many observers predicted that the Johnson landslide would ensure a long period of liberal, activist government and additional civil rights legislation. For Childs, the best news about the election was that the so-called "white backlash," which many had assumed would provide a significant edge to Goldwater, had not materialized. The "racist appeal failed," he wrote, adding that Republicans had done everything possible to stir up resentment and distrust, including the distribution of a number of deceptive and fraudulent films and pamphlets, but voters had not responded. In fact, he thought, many voters who might have been inclined to vote for Goldwater might have been offended by the campaign and either stayed home or cast their ballot for Johnson.⁹⁷ Subsequent commentary within the journalistic community wondered if the whole "backlash" phenomenon had been manufactured or at least exaggerated by the press.⁹⁸ But the broader point in Childs' mind was that the racist appeal had not paid off.

In 1965, Childs' thinking on the civil rights issue began another subtle shift. He continued to write about violence in the South, especially the brutality at Selma and the widely covered Selma to Montgomery peace march. His column linked this round of civil rights activity with the emerging debate over a new voting rights bill in Washington. Sooner or later, he wrote

The Negro in the South is...bound to vote in large numbers...The new Negro voter is unlikely to turn to a party that, at best, stood aside during his struggle and, at worst, aided and abetted the forces keeping him from the ballot box. But whatever the outcome, those pictures of marches [sic] going down before whips, clubs, and tear gas will continue to trouble the nation.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, 183-184.

⁹⁷ Childs, "Backlash Strategy Squelched by Vote," *Washington Post*, 6 November 1964, 20.

⁹⁸ For example, see Thomas F. Pettigrew, "What White Backlash?" *Nieman Reports* (December 1964): 7-9.

⁹⁹ Marquis Childs, "Selma's Tear Gas and GOP Votes," *Washington Post*, 10 March 1965, 20.

Republicans needed to reject the Goldwater style approach if they hoped to maintain their position in the South. In the wake of Selma, more stringent protection for voting rights passed Congress and Childs praised Johnson's leadership and desire to use the power of the federal government to ensure the constitutional right to vote. As the year went on, however, his attention turned to two new and related ideas: the economic roots of the race problem and the widespread racial strife in the North, especially the cities.¹⁰⁰ As has been noted, postwar liberalism had largely overlooked the economic aspect of race relations, tending instead to focus on integration and the removal of legal barriers to participation in public life.

Discrimination in housing policies, education, and hiring had created large pockets of minority populations in many cities in the North and West and most observers, including Childs, had paid little attention to this growing problem that has been called the "institutionalization of the American ghetto."¹⁰¹ The traditional, southern-oriented civil rights movement seemed to have little effect in this context and more radical voices were finding an audience among frustrated and impatient northern blacks.¹⁰² The president gave a speech at Howard University that addressed the fact that poverty, lack of access to jobs and job training, and inadequate housing were all part of the racial injustice in the nation. Childs immediately rallied behind the president's new programs, referred to variously as a War on Poverty or part of the Great Society initiative, to improve urban conditions and link racial strife and poverty. The speech, he wrote, told the "harshest truth," which he characterized as the premise that "everything done

¹⁰⁰ The history of civil rights activism and the politics of anti-poverty in the North is well told in Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008).

¹⁰¹ Horton, *Race and the Making of American Liberalism*, 130.

¹⁰² Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 314-315.

so far to right the centuries of injustice done the Negro is only the smallest beginning.”¹⁰³

Childs was again out of the country during the riots and fires in the Watts section of Los Angeles, but upon his return he seized on the violent event as the unfortunate, but logical result of a broken system.¹⁰⁴ “Without giant strides” to close the economic gap between races “the raw stuff of violence and hatred will break out of the black ghettos.” At the same time, the riots had done “incalculable harm” to the civil rights movement in the minds of white Americans who might have supported peaceful change and were now uneasy and defensive.¹⁰⁵ If Wallace and Goldwater had not sparked a white backlash in 1964, Childs feared that urban violence was likely to generate it the next time voters went to the polls.

In 1966, Childs wrote a number of columns about the standard of living in the northern ghettos, which he argued were getting worse, not better as some had written. New statistics from the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare showed, for example, that the infant mortality rate for black children was 64 percent higher than that of white children and the gap was increasing. Unemployment and other figures told much the same story. However, three-fourths of the American people paid no attention to the ghetto until an eruption of crime or violence made the headlines. These areas were a “closed world” just as much as rural Mississippi.¹⁰⁶ In February 1966 Childs travelled to Chicago to interview Martin Luther King in the new SCLC office.¹⁰⁷ King’s move north generated apprehension and controversy, but

¹⁰³ Marquis Childs, “The Two Nations and the President,” *Washington Post*, 9 June 1965, 24.

¹⁰⁴ The best overview of the Watts riots is Gerald Horne, *The Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ Marquis Childs, “Sense of Disquiet Abounds in the U.S.” *Washington Post*, 20 August 1965, 16.

¹⁰⁶ Marquis Childs, “The Closed World of the Negro Ghetto,” *Washington Post*, 4 February 1966, 16.

¹⁰⁷ The movement in Chicago is ably analyzed in Alan B. Anderson and George W. Pickering, *Confronting the Color Line: The Broken Promise of the Civil Rights Movement in Chicago* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986). King’s 1966 work there is detailed in pp. 190-269.

Childs wrote that he believed King's tactics of non-violent opposition and idealism would mitigate, not cause, problems in the city. The task in Chicago, he argued, was actually harder than anything King had faced in the South. "The goals of voting rights and lunch counters were comparatively simple," he wrote, "and the Negro community could be united behind them."¹⁰⁸ The next month found Childs in Los Angeles, talking with the locals about reforms and viewing the unrepaired buildings left over from the riots half a year before. It looked to the columnist as if "a selective tornado swept through the area."¹⁰⁹ A recently published government report on the Watts uprising emphasized that, even though progress had been made, it would be a long road to fully integrate the city and ensure that race-based discrimination was ended. As events had demonstrated, Childs noted, there was only so much patience available in a community with longstanding disadvantages and discrimination. "Watts was a costly lesson," he wrote.¹¹⁰ In case he needed to explain his position further, Childs responded to a reader who had written to him complaining about the high crime rate in black neighborhoods:

Is it not important to ask what were the conditions that created the lawlessness that prevails increasingly within the Negro ghettos? Are the young people who contribute to the rising rate of crime the product of conditions in an over-crowded, filthy, rat-infested slum, or are they inherently immoral? Is it not essential to anyone with a Christian conscience to answer this question?¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Marquis Childs, "New Ferment in Northern Ghettos," 12; "War, Civil Rights, and Illinois Voters," *Washington Post*, 2 May 1966, 16. King's time in Chicago is covered in Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 440-444.

¹⁰⁹ Marquis Childs, "Poverty, Politics, and Peril in Watts," *Washington Post*, 13 April 1966, 24.

¹¹⁰ Marquis Childs, "Disputed Lessons in the Watts Riots," *Washington Post*, 15 April 1966, 20. Commentary on what he saw in Watts is also included in "Negroes in Cities: The Next Rights," *Washington Post*, 13 May 1966, 24, and "Contrast in LA: Luxury and Want," *Washington Post*, 5 July 1966, 20.

¹¹¹ Childs to Ellen Taxis, Lansdowne, PA, 19 July 1966, Childs Papers 1967 addition, box 1, folder 4.

Childs did not usually write in terms of a Christian conscience, but his response does reveal the depth of his feeling on the subject. He was deeply concerned that the problems confronting the nation, especially the cities, were going to be very hard to solve and that they required more than stereotypical thinking and racist moralizing. Effective, level-headed leadership from the black community as well as government officials was part of the answer.

The sweeping anti-poverty and anti-discrimination programs enacted under Johnson appealed to Childs' long-standing liberal faith in the power of good government to do good for its citizens, and the columnist wrote frequently about new local job training offices and summer recreation programs for inner-city youth. However, he was often given to a brooding pessimism, or even fatalism. Many things could go wrong. Liberal social programs were expensive and required long-term application. In the wake of the Watts riots, the Ford Foundation, the Chamber of Commerce, the State of California, and others came forward with proposals for new hiring in the black community, but Childs worried that they would be inadequate and soon fade away. Despite the efforts of President Johnson and his allies in Congress, funding from Washington was unlikely to be adequate to solve all the problems. More than a few of his columns from this period note that the costs of the escalating war in Vietnam threatened to undermine funding for jobs training, slum cleanup, and educational reforms.¹¹² After speaking to several big-city mayors, Childs wrote in support of a federal aid to cities bill under discussion in Congress that would provide limited, but much-needed funds and establish a framework for federal-local cooperation. However, the nation's patience had

¹¹² Childs, "Poverty, Politics, and Peril in Watts," 24.

been already taxed for a long time during the racial crisis and the movement seemed, to Childs, to be toward the extremes.¹¹³

In addition to the funding problems, Childs argued that a significant racial prejudice stood in the way of real progress in cities, where as many as three quarters of the nation's black population lived. Many in the cities, including some elected officials, believed that blacks were incapable of raising themselves out of poverty or building good, respectable neighborhoods and therefore that expensive new social programs were a waste of time and money. According to this line of thinking, persistent poverty and run-down housing were a reflection of some inner weakness inherent in most black Americans rather than the result of generations of real and *de facto* segregation and lack of opportunity for growth and development. Childs hoped this was "no more than isolated bigotry," but he feared that such thinking was widespread and would prove to be a significant barrier to progress.¹¹⁴ Resentment among working class whites had failed to affect the outcome of the 1964 election, but it was only growing in strength as the next presidential contest approached. Furthermore, many blacks felt alienated and suspicious of the efforts of the "white establishment" to help them. Employing a phrase that would later feature in the Kerner Commission Report, Childs often described the lack of understanding between the races as the result of the existence of "two worlds, one white and one black." In this atmosphere, could significant, but moderate change take place rapidly enough to forestall additional violence and spur the growth of more radicalism?

Of course the center did not hold in the late 1960s. As Childs feared, predominantly minority neighborhoods in many American cities erupted with violence in 1967 and 1968,

¹¹³ Marquis Childs, "What a Cities Bill Can Demonstrate," *Washington Post*, 12 October 1966, 20.

¹¹⁴ Marquis Childs, "Negroes in Cities," *Washington Post*, 13 May 1966, 24.

claiming many lives and causing millions of dollars worth of property damage. These episodes dwarfed the violence of recent “long hot summers” and many Americans finally believed that the nation faced an acute crisis that called for drastic action. In late summer 1967, a poll indicated that a majority of the voting population believed urban violence and rioting to be the nation’s most significant problem and many were deeply uncertain about the nation’s future.¹¹⁵ Ronald Reagan had been elected governor of California in 1966 on a “tough on crime” campaign and shrewd Republicans were sure to adopt this stance in the coming national elections. As police and military units patrolled the streets of many American cities in the attempt to quell the riots, the tide was clearly turning against the poverty-related elements of Johnson’s Great Society that had to do with race. Hoping that a public educated on the causes of poverty and urban decay that fostered violence would reject extremism and instead support progressive and moderate social policy spending, Childs in this period frequently used his column to go behind the headlines to explore what he saw as the deep and tangled roots of the crisis.

The summer of 1967 was arguably the most dramatic and violent of the entire era of postwar urban violence. Disturbances and riots broke out in nearly 150 different communities, causing over 100 fatalities, mostly among blacks, and tens of millions of dollars in property damage. The July uprisings in Newark and Detroit were the most significant and drew the most attention from the mass media, but similar, if smaller, incidents occurred across the nation in cities like Tampa, Rockford, Milwaukee, Houston, and Phoenix. Television cameras captured dramatic images of burning stores, looters, and armed police and military units

¹¹⁵ Michael V. Flamm, *Law and Order: Street Crime, Civil Unrest, and the Crisis of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 101.

patrolling city streets. Breathless newspaper accounts, later shown to be wildly exaggerated, brought the story to readers worldwide.¹¹⁶

Through the summer of 1967 Childs penned a series of columns on the urban disorders with the primary goal of explaining the root problems of the ghettos that led to violence. As he had done in recent years, he travelled to different cities to talk with mayors, city officials, and leaders of community organizations to find first-hand perspectives to share with his readers. The columns had titles like “On Major Causes of Rights Turmoil,” “Big City Ghettos: A Desperate Need,” “A Growing Feeling on Riot’s Causes,” “New Jersey’s Riots and New Problems,” and “The Casting About for Real Reasons.” The themes were not much different from those that he had written on in years past, even if the crisis was more acute and the issue more firmly in the public eye. True to his core liberalism, Childs continued to blame the riots on alienation that resulted from widespread poverty, poor schools and living conditions, and lack of opportunities to participate in the prosperity of the era due to discrimination. The solutions he proposed remained focused on anti-poverty programs, increased job training, better schools and after-school programs, parks and clean public spaces, and similar efforts. As he travelled, he wrote about city officials who had established programs such as these only to see the initial funding dry up and community organizers increasingly frustrated with the shoestring budgets as well as the general lack of enthusiasm among large portions of the population.

¹¹⁶ The Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1968), known popularly as the Kerner Commission Report, took the nation’s news media to task for its inaccurate coverage of the 1967 urban disorders, which it blamed partly on a lack of black reporters, unfamiliarity with the issues of the ghettos, and over-reliance on harried city officials for estimates of damage and casualty reports without further verification.

One specific aspect of Childs' commentary in the summer of 1967 was to debunk the claim that "outside agitators" were to blame for the problems in the cities. This point of view had long been part of the rhetoric of southerners opposed to the civil rights movement, but by late 1967 it was being adopted by some in the north as well. Through his reporting, Childs found that "a large percentage" of whites he spoke with saw this as the primary factor behind the violence.¹¹⁷ Among the black population there was virtually no support for this explanation. Childs wrote that this attitude was the motivation behind the so-called Stokely Carmichael bill then being debated in Congress. This proposed law would impose stiff penalties on anyone convicted of travelling across state lines in order to provoke or incite violence. Although he recognized the frustrations that led some to support such a law, he knew it was unconstitutional in its current form. He feared that, if passed, it would eventually be overturned by the Supreme Court, giving a sense of vindication to the most radical advocates of black separatism and further eroding respect for the high court among whites.¹¹⁸ A side effect of these misperceptions was a growing paranoia. In a column about the dramatic increase in firearm sales, he wrote about wild rumors of caravans full of well-armed black men who were supposedly ready to swoop into small towns to wreak havoc. Residents in certain parts of some cities had legitimate concerns about safety, but the rampant paranoia could only lead to increased violence and innocent victims. Even sleepy town of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, which Childs described as "the most progressive" in the Midwest, had a near miss. As rumors circulated that 8000 armed blacks were readying an assault on the city, clear thinking public

¹¹⁷ Marquis Childs, "On Major Causes of Rights Turmoil," *Washington Post*, 12 July 1967, 20.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

officials worked to alleviate fears and local black residents spread the message to stay indoors or risk being attacked.¹¹⁹

The final two ideas evident in these columns point to the magnitude of the problem and the necessity for sustained and expensive remedies. The problem of the ghettos had been building for several generations as increasing numbers of black southerners migrated north and west to cities in search of new opportunities. At the same time they were increasingly marginalized and segregated in the inner city as more affluent whites moved to the suburbs, taking much of the tax base with them. Childs supported grass roots and local involvement with community development, but only state and especially federal funding could sustain it. He cited to Detroit as a case in point. Unions in the auto making industry had historically been at least partially open to black workers and a black middle class existed in the city. Before the riot, urban leaders there felt they were doing enough to maintain racial harmony through innovative programming in the less affluent parts of town. Afterwards, it was seen as clearly too little, too late.¹²⁰ Federal funding would have to increase, despite the costs of the war in Vietnam that drained resources that could be spent on aid to cities. If Congress would not act, state taxes might have to go up in order to generate the necessary revenue.¹²¹ When the Kerner Commission Report came out in early 1968, Childs was pleased to see that its findings largely echoed what he had been writing in his column and he hoped this official report would serve as a catalyst for lasting, meaningful change. The report was a statement of the “clear and present danger of simply doing nothing” that would have to be taken seriously.¹²²

¹¹⁹ Marquis Childs, “Magnificent Irony of Guns and Fear,” *Washington Post*, 14 August 1967, 14.

¹²⁰ Marquis Childs, “A Growing Feeling on Riots’ Causes,” *Washington Post*, 26 July 1967, 20.

¹²¹ Marquis Childs, “New Jersey’s Riots and New Problems,” *Washington Post*, 9 August 1967, 20.

¹²² Marquis Childs, “The Two Nations and Civil Disorders,” *Washington Post*, 4 March 1968, 12.

Around this time Childs also began to question the leadership of the fractured civil rights movement, including some of the people he had counted on in the past to provide sensible, moderate leadership on civil rights issues. He was uneasy about Martin Luther King's new involvement with the anti-war movement. Childs himself was a sharp critic of the Vietnam War by 1967, but he wrote that King's protest activity against the war made him too dangerous and vulnerable; the FBI was rumored to be waging not-so-covert war against the black leader and his effectiveness was at risk. Childs was relieved that King had resisted calls to run for the presidency in 1968 on a peace ticket with Dr. Benjamin Spock. Such a ticket would doom the Democrats and ensure a victory by Nixon or another law-and-order Republican.¹²³ In the final month of King's life, Childs wrote increasingly negative columns about the rifts and fragmentation of the old civil rights organizations, which had been effective in the early part of the decade, as King continued to be involved with the anti-war movement and more confrontational anti-poverty initiatives like the Poor's People's Crusade and as new, more militant black leaders attracted a following.¹²⁴ After King's assassination, Childs wrote a mostly positive column, but concluded by saying that in the final analysis the hero of the civil rights movement had not fulfilled his primary goals.¹²⁵

Childs also voiced concerns about radical separatists and black power, although this was not the focus of a sustained analytical effort on his part. A number of columns mention black radicalism through the 1960s, with an increasing frequency during times of upheaval, but he always characterized these groups as a marginal threat, potentially dangerous to be sure, but

¹²³ Marquis Childs, "A Role for King in Protest Politics," *Washington Post*, 12 May 1967, 24.

¹²⁴ Marquis Childs, "King's New Move and Rights Today," *Washington Post*, 6 March 1968, 22.

¹²⁵ Marquis Childs, "Fate of Dreamer Obscures Dream," *Washington Post*, 8 April 1968, 16.

ultimately not part of the legitimate discourse surrounding civil rights.¹²⁶ If his writing is any clue, he had little interest in or understanding of the black power movement or its culture. His knowledge about the real political aims of these groups was limited and he didn't appreciate the colorful artistic and stylistic elements that became broadly popular, even among many whites, in the late 1960s. In this, he displayed the kind of unease with the black "revolt of culture" described by William Van Deburg as a common response among whites.¹²⁷ This, of course, was true of most white journalists of the era who often misreported and caricatured groups like the Black Panthers.¹²⁸ Childs had no real contact with young black radicals in his personal life and the reporting evident in his columns shows that he tended to talk with city leaders and officials, who were usually white, or moderate liberal blacks who worked with city outreach and anti-poverty programs that fell in line with the columnist's understanding of reasonable solutions. This source bias likely had an effect on his reporting and commentary, but his deeply held, moderate liberalism also influenced his point of reference.

Conclusion: Upheaval and Reaction

As the nation geared up for another presidential contest in 1968, Childs was gloomy. The twin burdens of Vietnam and the urban crisis at home forced Johnson from the race. Childs had already turned against the war and his column was often quite bitter, but he remained a believer in Johnson's domestic agenda until the end. As the next chapter of this

¹²⁶ For example, see Marquis Childs, "On H. Rap Brown and Free Speech," *Washington Post*, 30 August 1967, 14.

¹²⁷ William Van Deburg, "Villains, Demons, and Social Bandits: White Fear of the Black Cultural Revolution," in Brian Ward, ed., *Media, Culture, and the Modern African American Freedom Movement* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 197-210.

¹²⁸ Jane Rhodes' *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon*, (New York: The New Press, 2007) offers a fascinating analysis of reporting on the black power movement in the late 1960s. Rhodes argues that most mainstream news organizations relied on framing tactics that emphasized the violence and aggressive posturing of the black radicals at the expense of sophisticated analysis of their message or the conditions from which the movement arose. Nowhere in Childs' many columns did he make a concerted effort to analyze what he called "extremism of the black nationalist stamp."

study will show, Childs in fact tempered his criticism of Johnson over the war because he hoped the president would remain powerful enough to make new progress on race and poverty. By mid-1968, however, Childs understood that the moment had passed. He believed that most whites, north and south, were more concerned with the rising cost of living and “law and order” than any further sustained effort toward racial equality. “What really concerns white, middle-class America,” he wrote, “is the complex of uncertainty and fear under the label of crime in the streets.”¹²⁹ Additional rioting and violence in the wake of Dr. King’s assassination, coupled with President Johnson’s seeming lack of resolve to firmly press toward a solution to the urban crisis, sparked a number of new columns. Despite the “public lamentation” over the assassination, he wrote, “the divide between the white and the black societies is as wide as ever.” The president’s decision to back away from a call for greater spending on the cities and instead ask for a national day of prayer was disheartening.¹³⁰

Childs took another trip to the South in May, this time to judge the George Wallace phenomenon first hand. The campaign was awash in new money, but nobody seemed to know where it was coming from. Wallace’s handlers were making a targeted effort to win over the working class in the industrial North and Midwest and Childs reported that they believed the majority of Wallace’s support in that region would come from traditionally Democratic voters. Both Wallace and Nixon used the recent urban violence to stoke fear and resentment in campaign speeches and ads. “The track on the right,” noted Childs, “is getting crowded.”¹³¹ As the election drew nearer, evidence suggested that this track was finding success among the

¹²⁹ Marquis Childs, “The Current Mood Across the Country,” *Washington Post*, 9 October 1967, 16.

¹³⁰ Marquis Childs, “A Divided Society More Divided Now,” *Washington Post*, 22 April 1968, 18.

¹³¹ Marquis Childs, “Unknown Factor: The Wallace Race,” *Washington Post*, 20 May 1968, 20; “South Inclines Sharply to Right,” *Washington Post*, 22 May 1968, 20.

working class and union members, the so-called backlash that failed to materialize four years earlier. Talking with laborers at a Dearborn, Michigan, auto plant, Childs found a great deal of support for Wallace despite the UAW's official alliance with Hubert Humphrey and the Democrats.¹³² Humphrey remained unable to emerge from the shadow of President Johnson. The war in Vietnam and war on poverty both appeared to be little more than costly stalemates and the loyal vice president waited too long to strike his own course during the campaign. No wonder that he generated so little enthusiasm.¹³³ The dramatic and sweeping program to solve the problems of race relations, urban poverty, and growing economic inequality that Childs advocated found no champions in the campaign.

In many ways, the year 1968 was a major turning point in American history. Richard Nixon's election in the fall turned the nation on a more conservative, if not reactionary, path. His law-and-order message resonated with conservatives and enough moderates give him a narrow victory. The kind of political liberalism that Childs had defended and, to a degree, helped define had few defenders on the left or the right.¹³⁴ A decade of nearly constant upheaval, great violence, and limited results had diminished the resolve of most Americans, including many liberals, to keep pressing for the old solutions to the problem of race in America. Childs wrote very little about civil rights in his 1974 memoir *Witness to Power* or in the unpublished autobiographical manuscript he left behind. If he had written more, and if he

¹³² Marquis Childs, "UAW Sample Shows Wallace Strength," Marquis Childs, *Washington Post*, 27 September 1968, 24.

¹³³ Marquis Childs, "Is Nixon Coasting to Sure Victory?" *Washington Post*, 14 October 1968, 20. See Lewis L. Gould, *1968: The Election That Changed America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1993), especially chapter 6 on Humphrey's dilemma last in the campaign.

¹³⁴ See Alan Brinkley, "1968 and the Unraveling of Liberal America" in Caroline Fink, et.al. eds., *1968: The World Transformed*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 220-222. The essay by Manfred Berg, "1968: A Turning Point in American Race Relations?" in the same volume is instructive.

had been honest in his assessment, he might have said the same thing that he wrote about King in 1968: his goals remained unfulfilled. In the end it is hard to gauge the amount of influence that Childs had on the course of the civil rights struggle in postwar America. He contributed a great deal of ink to the debate, but at the same time the policies he advocated and the political figures he championed were only partly successful.

Chapter 6

The war in Vietnam as it escalated on such a monstrous scale was in a sense a projection of Johnson's ego.

All things considered, he got a far better press than he deserved.¹

In late October 1966, with Congressional elections on the horizon and the prospects for Democrats looking gloomy, President Lyndon Johnson set out on a barnstorming tour to rally American allies in the South Pacific. Enthusiastic crowds of villagers in native dress performed folk dances and marching bands paraded past reviewing stands crowded with dignitaries. The president's entourage visited New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, and several other locales, but everyone wondered if Johnson would go to Vietnam, where the rapid escalation of strength he had ordered meant that roughly 400,000 American troops were at war. Travelling with the press corps, which included three camera crews and numerous print reporters, Mark Childs was impressed by the warm welcome offered the visiting Americans and he wrote several upbeat columns that betrayed little of the skepticism normally evident in his writing about Johnson's policies in Asia. When the group, clouded in secrecy, made its way to the American naval base at Cam Ranh Bay, Childs was moved by the spectacle and he marveled at the way Johnson worked the crowd of American and Vietnamese servicemen and local politicians. Shortly after the ceremony, Childs ran into the president on a footpath running between some camp buildings and tried to say how impressive it had been. Johnson, however, looked right through him and walked by without a word. If he didn't already realize

¹ Marquis Childs, *Witness to Power* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 207.

it, the columnist now knew that he had made an enemy. As Childs put it, Johnson believed that “as a critic of the war, an opponent of what he held best and bravest, I had no business there.”²

It is no surprise that President Johnson saw Childs as an enemy; the president frequently complained about what he saw as unfounded criticism from the Fourth Estate and is well known to have harbored bitter resentments against some journalists. What is perhaps surprising is that Childs, writing in 1974, remembered himself as an “opponent” of the war back in 1966. As will be discussed in detail below, he was certainly a critic. Dozens and dozens of columns pointed out the shortcomings of the war effort and questioned what he saw as misguided policy decisions. That, however, is different than being an opponent of the war. Although he frequently voiced significant dissatisfaction with the war, he never fully abandoned the fundamental premise of the war that motivated him for most of his career- namely that the United States should make every attempt to stop the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia. However, by the late 1960s Childs came to believe that the war could not be won using traditional military methods and that America would have to accept a negotiated peace to salvage at least some of its objectives in the region. This chapter is a study of Childs’ commentary on the war in Vietnam and an analysis of the nature of his critique of American policy, especially during the Johnson years. He, along with most other Americans, grew increasingly frustrated with Johnson’s bitter dilemma: the inability to make meaningful progress and the impossibility of total withdrawal. It briefly traces his writing back to the mid-1950s when he covered the peace conference in Geneva that marked the French defeat and created two separate Vietnams, as well as sparking a round of controversy over what role the

² Childs relates this story in *Witness to Power*, 211-213. See also Marquis Childs, “Historic Moment in the Asian Trip,” *Washington Post*, 28 October 1966, 20. He didn’t mention the snub in this or any subsequent column and continued to write positive, even glowing, accounts for the remainder of the Pacific tour.

United States should take in the region, but it focuses most fully on the years between 1965, when significant American involvement in combat operations began, and 1968.³ Additionally, it examines two aspects of “news management” and the role of the press in wartime: the ability of the press to obtain information about foreign policy and the war and the acceptability of voicing dissenting opinion in the public.

The chapter also looks at Childs’ response to the intense political discord generated by the war, both within the political system, where differences of opinion in the Pentagon and the halls of Congress raged, and among the broader public that split into sullen, angry, and often loud, factions. This bitterness had important ramifications for the style of postwar internationalist consensus that Childs championed and embodied. As discussed earlier, Childs had always championed American leadership in global affairs and, despite the hard truths about the world that he accepted during the Cold War, he still retained some of that idealism. He represented the consensus that informed the political culture of the era as much as any Washington journalist. His efforts to understand and explain the complex realities of Vietnam to his readers, breaking sharply at times with administration policy, reflect the emergence of competing values and beliefs that ultimately led to the unraveling and reshaping of liberalism, which has been discussed at length earlier in this study. As Doug Rossinow has explained, the Vietnam War proved disastrous to liberals’ bedrock faith that “determined state action and advanced technology were instruments of progress in American hands.” Liberals were forced to support the war “as a necessary anti-Communist venture” or to oppose it “in the name of

³ As noted earlier, Childs retired from full time management of the *Post-Dispatch* Washington Bureau in 1968, making a good end point for this study, even though he continued to produce the column, albeit decreasing less frequency as the 1970s progressed.

decency and reason.⁴ Childs himself was never able to resolve this dilemma, especially because he wanted to believe that Johnson's liberal mission in the field of civil rights, urban renewal, job training and education, and other areas was viable. The war in Vietnam, however, eventually proved for Childs to be painfully irreconcilable with his vision of America's just and proper role in the world and he ultimately broke with Johnson.

The chapter shows that Childs' opposition grew gradually through the 1960s. In many ways Childs was an opponent of the war by the end of the period, but he, like many postwar liberals, was also a believer in the dominant anti-Communist rationale for the war and a proponent of a foreign policy that would prevent the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia.⁵ He never used the phrase "domino theory" in his own writing, but his conception of America's role in the region was clearly influenced by the idea of an advancing Communism that should be checked. Although often critical, Childs endorsed the Kennedy/ Johnson idea of "limited war" and kept his faith in men like President Johnson, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and National Security Advisor Walt Rostow until late in the decade. Childs maintained his belief that the United States had to play some active role in Vietnam; he never publicly advocated full withdrawal of American support.⁶ As always, Childs believed that the nation should negotiate to limit Communist expansion to a reasonable extent, but that such negotiation

⁴ Doug Rossinow, *Visions of Progress: The Left-Liberal Tradition in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 233.

⁵ Among the many important studies of postwar liberalism, many of which are referred to earlier in this study, see Robert R. Tomes, *Apocalypse Then: American Intellectuals and the Vietnam War, 1954-1975* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), ch. 2, on the specific ways that liberals like Childs understood anti-Communism and containment in Southeast Asia.

⁶ On the other hand, it was uncommon for Childs to use the column to directly express a strong personal opinion about a future course of action. In the late 1960s, he continued to believe that his role was to report on the news of the day and offer insight and context to help readers understand what was happening. As he wrote one reader, "I don't consider myself an editorial columnist, relying largely on opinion." Marquis Childs to William H. Gibson, 7 March 1967, Childs Papers, 1967 addition, box 2, folder 7.

had to be from a position of strength. If not always a friend, Childs was certainly not the president's enemy when the two men met on that military base in Asia.

Scholarship on the role of the print media as an influence on public opinion during the Vietnam War tends to focus on the Tet Offensive in early 1968 as a dividing line. According to most accounts, before Tet the majority of news coverage and commentary was generally favorable to the war effort and after Tet a great deal more critical reporting and analysis was apparent.⁷ This chronology, although largely accurate, underestimates how much debate and criticism circulated in print before 1968. A heated and probing discussion of the war filled many newspapers, magazines, and popular journals and Childs was among those who actively debated and critiqued the deepening war long before the Tet Offensive. Writing on the media and Vietnam also usually focuses on the coverage generated by reporters in the field or in Saigon. Much excellent work on this subject is available, but it also overlooks the importance of reporting and commentary originating from Washington.⁸ Studies of the era's opinion journalism are also limited, with most attention placed on the two major columnists, the hawkish Joseph Alsop and the more dovish Walter Lippmann.⁹ This chapter seeks to broaden

⁷ Daniel Hallin is the major interpreter on this subject. See *The Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.) Another excellent book that uses the same general chronology is William M. Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998). Any number of books about Vietnam refer to 1968 and the Tet Offensive as a major turning point in press coverage.

⁸ For example, see William Prochnau, *Once Upon a Distant War: Young War Correspondents and the Early Vietnam Battles* (New York: Times Books, 1995); Clarence Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* (New York: Norton, 1993); and Andrew J. Huebner, "Rethinking American Press Coverage of the Vietnam War, 1965-1968," *Journalism History* 31:3 (Fall 2005): 150-161. Kathleen J. Turner's study is something of an exception. See her *Lyndon Johnson's Dual War: Vietnam and the Press* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

⁹ Alsop's hard line position on Vietnam is discussed in Robert W. Merry, *Taking on the World: Joseph and Stewart Alsop, Guardians of the American Century* (New York: Viking, 1996), ch. 29-30. Lippmann's writing from this period is best dealt with by Ronald Steel in the superb *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1980), especially ch. 43. Donald Ritchie offers a smart comparison of the two

the analysis of critical reporting and commentary on Vietnam in the print media by examining an important, but overlooked, newspaper columnist who closely monitored the story from the nation's capital.

Covering Early Debates over Indochina Policy

Looking back over the span of his long career, Childs felt regret about not recognizing the significance of the emerging story in Vietnam earlier. He wrote very little about Southeast Asia between 1954 and 1963, focusing instead on other major problems discussed in earlier chapters like the crisis in Berlin, the vexed relationship among the Western European allies, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the effort to negotiate a nuclear test ban treaty. Like many in the news media, he did not fully understand the significance until too late and he could not have foreseen that the nation would become so deeply, and tragically, involved in the war. In his memoir he admitted that he failed to realize magnitude of the problem President Kennedy faced in the early 1960s and that he should have recognized the 1961 Rostow/Taylor report as a significant turning point. Kennedy sent Rostow and General Maxwell Taylor to assess conditions in South Vietnam and bring back policy recommendations; their report to the president triggered a significant expansion of American involvement. Because of the report, Kennedy “had ordered the dispatch of 10,000 troops empowered to shoot at the enemy. That was the beginning.”¹⁰ Portions of the report made public at the time told a grim story. The Diem government was unable to rally popular support and Viet Cong units moved easily about

columnists on Vietnam in *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 147-157.

¹⁰ Childs, *Witness to Power*, 182. Of course, the Kennedy administration went to great lengths to downplay the problems in Vietnam and keep the internal policy disagreements out of the public eye. See Montague Kern, Patricia W. Levering, and Ralph B. Levering, *The Kennedy Crises: The Press, the Presidency, and Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 141-146.

the countryside; the status quo was fast becoming untenable.¹¹ Childs wrote about the new aid programs and the introduction of American reconnaissance aircraft to aid in patrols, but he did not write about the large number of personnel who would be sent. At the time, he only dedicated one column to the debate over the report within the administration and in retrospect he felt he had missed a major turning point.¹²

It is worth noting that despite the relatively few columns on the subject in the early 1960s Childs had been paying at least sporadic attention to the crisis in Indochina for a number of years. In the early 1950s, much of his writing about Asia focused on the Korean War and American policy regarding China. However, by 1954 the French position in Vietnam had collapsed, despite a massive influx of American military aid and surplus equipment and he devoted a great deal of effort to reporting on the crisis.¹³ Several ideas expressed in his writing during the mid and late 1950s are important because they informed his understanding of the conflict in Vietnam as the United States was gradually enmeshed in the early and mid-1960s. In fact, a number of significant points emerge in one of his earliest columns on the subject, on 16 February 1954. First, Childs noted that China was the primary enemy in Asia and that any policy in Indo-China must have the ultimate goal of checking Chinese influence and preventing the spread of Communism in the region. Second, he stressed that his sources among the policy-makers, whom he did not name, viewed the direct involvement of American forces, especially in a land war in the jungle terrain, as “a disaster” to be avoided. He described the war there as

¹¹ See Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 26-28.

¹² Marquis Childs, “An Inside Look at the Taylor Report,” *Washington Post*, 22 November 1961, 10.

¹³ At least one recent scholar has described this period as the transition from a colonial war to a proxy war, with French aims being gradually replaced by those of the Americans. See Ted Morgan, *Valley of Death: The Tragedy at Dien Bien Phu That Led America into the Vietnam War* (New York: Random House, 2010), ch. 2.

“strange and tragic,” wondering “how America at this point can salvage anything solid and sure out of the confused tangle no one can quite see.”¹⁴

He also, during this time, learned to be skeptical of official reports of progress. Five weeks after the first column, Childs worried that the approaching crisis could “no longer be concealed by the official optimism of Washington and Paris,” and that the Eisenhower administration would soon have to decide whether or not to intervene directly. The U.S already paid nearly three quarters of the cost of the war, but Childs argued that the continual French claims that victory was “just around the corner” were an attempt to create an illusion.¹⁵ At the time, the United States provided military equipment, direct financial aid to France and the anti-Communist forces in Vietnam, and funding for programs to provide health, education, industry, and infrastructure in the region. Already it was clear that American policy must strike a delicate balance. Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and others in the Far Eastern Affairs office at the State Department struggled to define an aid policy and defend the administration against criticism that it was doing too little while also seeking to avoid direct confrontation that might result in a major war.¹⁶

Reporting from Paris, Childs wrote that his private conversations with French Defense Minister Rene Pleven and Minister of War Pierre de Chevigne revealed the startling and desperate nature of France’s situation. The Frenchmen told him that unless a “very marked increase of striking force” was made available defeat was certain. Childs scarcely needed to remind readers that such a force could only come from the United States. And even with this

¹⁴ Marquis Childs, “Indo-China Plagues U.S. Policy Makers,” *Washington Post*, 16 February 1954, 12.

¹⁵ Marquis Childs, “Agonizing Debate in Indo-China War,” *Washington Post*, 26 March 1954, 26.

¹⁶ Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 78-79.

aid victory would still be “a formidable task.”¹⁷ This was the backdrop for the Geneva Conference, where the involved parties convened to negotiate a settlement to resolve the crisis. Already in Europe to cover talks on the proposed European Defense Treaty, Childs also reported on the Indochina conference, attempting to observe public meetings and press conferences and talking with as many negotiators and aides as he could behind the scenes.¹⁸ The conference took place as the French endured a long siege at Dien Bien Phu, the severity of which the French could no longer hide behind obfuscation and rosy reports from Saigon. Secrecy at the conference made it very difficult for the Americans to fully understand the situation in order to make wise policy and for reporters like Childs to keep abreast of the latest developments.¹⁹

Childs used his column to promote two general objectives at the heart of John Foster Dulles’ position in the talks. First was to avoid a cease fire or treaty that granted significant gains to the Communists and legitimized the Chinese Communist regime. Second was a plan put forward by Dulles to create a regional mutual defense pact that would give the United States an internationally recognized framework for intervention, if necessary, and ensure that any military action would be multi-national and not a strictly American effort.²⁰ This was very

¹⁷ Marquis Childs, “Indo-China Victory is Not in Sight,” *Washington Post*, 30 March 1954, 10.

¹⁸ In addition to a number of published columns sent from Geneva, Childs wrote a small book that revealed many of his personal thoughts on the conference, as well as some of the back story of his efforts to gather meaningful information about the negotiations. See Marquis Childs, *The Ragged Edge: The Diary of a Crisis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1955).

¹⁹ Marquis Childs, “Indochina Aid Hurt by Lack of Facts,” *Washington Post*, 21 April 1954, 12. Childs was also frustrated by the heavy security and lack of press access to the conference itself. See Childs, *The Ragged Edge*, 133-134. His columns from this period contain an atypical number of phrases like “is rumored to believe” and “is believed to have said,” indicating that he had difficulty obtaining verifiable information. His column on the impenetrable nature of the Chinese delegation’s press office is indicative, and somewhat amusing. See Marquis Childs, “Red Chinese Keep All Their Secrets,” *Washington Post*, 25 May 1954, 22.

²⁰ George C. Herring, “A Good Stout Effort: John Foster Dulles and the Indochina Crisis, 1954-1955,” in Richard H. Immerman, ed., *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

much in line with Childs' support, common among Cold War liberals, for organizations like NATO that ensured a multi-lateral approach in American foreign policy and created a rationale for intervention in regions where American interests appeared to be at risk.²¹ After Dulles created a stir with his refusal to meet with the Chinese delegation and his unwillingness to accept what the European allies saw as reasonable grounds for agreement, Childs was of mixed opinion on the American position, though primarily supportive. He considered the Dulles proposal for a Southeast Asian mutual defense treaty a "bold" plan that might "determine the balance between peace and war" and blamed the French and British for failing to be realistic about the problem.²² Yet he also continued to see the possibility of a rupture among the western allies that would hurt the American position in the Cold War more generally.²³ Back in the United States in June, Childs' sources led him to believe that Communist intransigence meant that American intervention was imminent and that "for the days and weeks ahead the United States will be on the edge of an abyss."²⁴ Two subsequent columns on the internal policy debate, based entirely on unnamed sources, explained that President Eisenhower

1990), 216-222. A slightly broader discussion of American thought and planning on the Indo-China crisis is Richard H. Immerman, "Between the Unattainable and the Unacceptable: Eisenhower and Dienbienphu," in Richard A. Malanson and David Mayers, eds., *Reevaluating Eisenhower: American Foreign Policy in the 1950s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 120-154.

²¹ Later, after the Vietnam War had become a frustrating stalemate, Childs reassessed Dulles' belief in the strategy of mutual defense organizations. In an interview for Princeton University's oral history program, he criticized the Secretary's "almost naïve conviction" in the value of such treaty organizations. Dulles' "perfectly colossal mistake" prevented him from seeing the realities of the situation in Southeast Asia. As will be discussed later in this chapter, Childs' thinking about Vietnam changed significantly by the mid-1960s and this no doubt colored his assessment of these earlier decisions. See "Transcript of Interview with Marquis Childs for the John Foster Dulles Oral History Project," Princeton University, 12 January 1966, 22-23. Childs Papers, 1967 addition, box 2, folder 3.

²² Marquis Childs, "Dulles Pushing Bold World Plan," *Washington Post*, 23 April 1954, 32; "U.S. Stymied at Geneva Conference," *Washington Post*, 30 April 1954, 38.

²³ Marquis Childs, "Eden Leads Critics of Dulles, Radford," *Washington Post*, 4 May 1954, 14; "Splits Among Allies Hurt Geneva Talks," *Washington Post*, 5 May 1954, 14; "We're Losing Allies over Asia Policy," *Washington Post*, 7 May 1954, 28.

²⁴ Marquis Childs, "U.S. Intervention Looms in Indochina," *Washington Post*, 9 June 1954, 10.

vacillated on the question of intervention and that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were engaged in a “fierce dispute” about the use of military force, the introduction of ground troops, and the nature of the likely response from the Soviets and Chinese should the Americans act. Judging by the way he framed the story, it is apparent Childs agreed with Army Chief of Staff General Matthew Ridgeway that intervention would necessarily lead to a ground war against the Chinese, a costly diversion that would distract the nation from its larger objective of countering Soviet Communism broadly.²⁵ Prudence, he believed, dictated that the United States accept a minor negotiated setback rather than risk being saddled with a much larger military conflict.

This attitude is reflected in Childs’ writing about the final treaty, which temporarily ended the military conflict, established a provisional boundary, and set up a framework for elections to be held in 1956. Childs saw the agreement, which the United States did not formally endorse, as both “a triumph and a tragedy.” It was a good for the French because it ended the disastrous fighting and it defused the immediate problem of American intervention. The public debate over American military action, he believed, explained the Chinese and Soviets’ willingness to accept a cease-fire even though the tide of the war moved in their favor. Still, there was meager satisfaction for the Americans because Childs’ sources led him to believe there was “little hope” that the South could be held and that the treaty was a “face-saving surrender, which will mean the loss of all Indochina within two to three years.”²⁶ In summing up, the columnist articulated two key points that were evident in 1954 and would remain part of his understanding of the Vietnam War into the next decade. The West had failed in Indochina, he wrote, because they failed to comprehend the true nature of the conflict there.

²⁵ Marquis Childs, “Military Chiefs Split on Indochina,” *Washington Post*, 15 June 1954, 12; “Ridgeway Opposes Indochina Troops,” *Washington Post*, 16 June 1954, 12. See Statler, *Replacing France*, 90-94.

²⁶ Marquis Childs, “Indochina Results,” *Washington Post*, 22 July 1954, 17.

It was “not the false revolution of Communism, but the revolution against colonialism” that motivated the other side. Childs wrote frequently on the turmoil resulting from the end of colonial rule in other regions and was able to understand the situation in Southeast Asia in this context.

Also at fault, according to his thinking, was the reliance on military power. In order to be successful, the West had to win the allegiance of the Vietnamese rather than exchange one colonial power for another.²⁷ Employing a phrase used often in later years, he wrote

The French have failed to win the allegiance of the peoples of Indochina. Or in any event that allegiance was not sufficient to persuade them to fight alongside the French. It is the political factor which American opinion, both public and private, has failed to take account of. This may well be the basic American weakness in the struggle with Communism; a reliance on guns and planes that too often disregards the necessity to win the hearts and minds of those who must shoulder the guns and fly the planes.²⁸

On the other hand, he was no advocate of withdrawal from the region. He firmly believed that the United States had to remain powerful and resolute to prevent the fall of all Asia to Communism, which was very much in line with his overall belief about American defense policy during the Cold War. “If one thing is certain,” he wrote, “it is that the aggressive force of Communism can be contained only by strength. Weakness, indifference, irresolution- that is the prescription for aggression and ultimately for war.”²⁹

For all the ink Childs dedicated to Indochina in 1954, it is surprising that he wrote so little about it over the next decade, the period when the Geneva accords collapsed because of concern over the weakness of the Western position and in which the United States took on a significant role in attempting to stabilize a government in South Vietnam under Ngo Dinh

²⁷ Marquis Childs, “Illusions as Cause of Allied Defeats,” *Washington Post*, 9 September 1954, 16.

²⁸ Childs, *The Ragged Edge*, 136-137.

²⁹ Marquis Childs, “America’s Dilemma: Power vs. Restraint,” *Washington Post*, 10 September 1954, 22.

Diem with massive assistance and advisors on the ground.³⁰ As discussed in chapter four, his attention during the late Eisenhower and Kennedy years remained focused on European issues like NATO and nuclear weapons. Mainstream American journalism generally paid less attention to Southeast Asia during this time. What Childs did write, however, fits comfortably into the pattern described by Kenneth Bindas in his study of the major newsmagazines' reporting.³¹ The primary subjects for his work and that of most non-specialists related to Diem's effectiveness as a leader who could ultimately rally his people to defeat the Communists in both the south and the north and the question of how much and what kind of American assistance would be necessary to achieve some measure of success. In 1955, Childs reported the Diem government was "so weak that it cannot possibly master the fiercely warring factions" and that "in plain truth, the drift of events in the Orient in recent months greatly jeopardized the hopes of the West."³² The situation was so dire, in fact, that Childs revealed that the elections might not be held at all, which was ultimately the case. "While no one will express it publicly," he wrote, "American policy-makers are believed to favor finding a pretext for avoiding elections and in the meantime giving Diem more and more backing." He also clearly termed the conflict in South Vietnam a civil war rather than framing it only as a struggle against Communism.³³

³⁰ Recognizing that a true nation-wide election would result in a victory for the Viet Minh and Ho Chi Minh, American and South Vietnamese officials ignored the Geneva mandate and instead established a permanent, separate nation in the South with Diem as head of state after semi-legitimate elections. See Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars, 1945-1990* (New York: Harper-Collins, 1991), 52-55.

³¹ Kenneth J. Bindas, "The American Periodical Press and South Vietnam, 1955-1960," *Journalism History* 17:3/4 (Autumn 1990/Winter 1991): 63-69.

³² Marquis Childs, "Asian Opinion Moves Against U.S.," *Washington Post*, 12 April 1955, 12.

³³ Marquis Childs, "A Goal Near Achievement," *Washington Post*, 10 May 1955, 23.

In 1961, as Kennedy was instigating a new counter-insurgency plan, Childs warned that “the French fought a brave, fierce, tough war with guerilla tactics to match those of the Communists for eight long and terrible years and yet they failed to check the ever-rising tide of Communist incursion and control.”³⁴ By 1962, after President Kennedy authorized continued aid and the introduction of American military trainers into South Vietnam, Childs continued to question Diem’s leadership and the efficacy of the military aid. “Economic aid from the outside,” he said, “is no magic formula if the will to reform is not there...no military formula can very well make up the difference if the will to resist is not there.” Summing up, he argued that administration policy appeared to be “to ignore the realities and to go on hoping that just a little more aid will somehow do the trick.”³⁵

Childs had little to say in 1963 when critical reporting started to become more common in the news columns and editorials of major newspapers. By this time, reporters like Childs’ *Post-Dispatch* colleague Richard Dudman, Malcolm Brown of the Associated Press, David Halberstam of the *New York Times*, and Neil Sheehan of United Press International had filed reports from Saigon, based on interviews with sources critical of the Diem regime, that called into question the rosy reports coming from the administration, irking President Kennedy and his advisors and opening the first real public debate about Vietnam. Diem’s harsh repression of the Buddhist protest movement and the ineffectual nature of the South Vietnamese Army raised hard questions among the Americans in Saigon and back in Washington and, despite his best efforts, President Kennedy was unable to keep discussion and criticism out of the papers.³⁶

³⁴ Marquis Childs, “The Grim Choices Posed at Geneva,” *Washington Post*, 16 May 1961, 12.

³⁵ Marquis Childs, “The Lost Words of Sen. Mansfield,” *Washington Post*, 21 February 1962, 24.

³⁶ Kern, et. al., *The Kennedy Crises*, 172-175. Richard Dudman, Childs’ colleague and friend in the Washington bureau of the *Post-Dispatch*, reported from South Vietnam in 1962, producing stories highly critical of the Diem

Increasing numbers of advisers and expanded use of American aircraft failed to solidify the hold of the Diem government on rural regions in the south. It was clear that Childs harbored significant reservations about the Diem regime and he worried that momentum was building gradually toward a full military escalation.³⁷ In the fall, shortly before Diem was overthrown in a coup, he questioned the nature of “victory” in Vietnam. He cited confidential reports from “high American authority in Saigon” that indicated the war could be won militarily in nine months and that, because the border was finally secured, the Viet Cong guerrillas were being “starved out.”³⁸ However the unpopular and increasingly autocratic nature of the regime led him to wonder, using a phrase common later in the decade, if we were going to “win the war and lose the peace.”³⁹

Nothing in his column in late 1963 or 1964 indicates that he thought Diem’s removal in a military coup made the situation better. Americans had to face up to the “grim facts of life.” The war against the Communist guerillas, he wrote, “is not being won” and might “be well on the way to being lost.” The situation “puts a fish or cut bait decision up to Washington.”⁴⁰ Childs was by no means the only columnist raising important questions about American policy in Vietnam, but during this time he expressed a great deal of skepticism and established a firm foundation for his later criticism. At no time, however, did he advocate in his column “cutting bait” by way of the neutralization proposal supported by Sen. Mike Mansfield and Childs’

government. Dudman, in fact, was not able to obtain a visa to re-enter South Vietnam to do additional reporting because his stories irritated the regime. See transcript of interview with Dudman, Feb. 8, 1978, Box 1, Kern-Levering Papers, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Mass.

³⁷ Marquis Childs, “Viet-Nam Recalls Lessons of Korea,” *Washington Post*, 22 April 1963, 14.

³⁸ This was in line with Kennedy and McNamara’s notably upbeat assessments at the time. In fact, in an attempt to demonstrate that progress was being made, Kennedy went so far as to announce that a small number of advisors would be withdrawn in the near future.

³⁹ Marquis Childs, “Viet-Nam: Where Victory is Defeat,” *Washington Post*, 13 September 1963, 18.

⁴⁰ Marquis Childs, “Facing Realities in South Viet-Nam,” *Washington Post*, 27 January 1964, 12.

press colleague Walter Lippmann, or a full withdrawal of American aid and support for the South Vietnamese government, a position that was beginning to attract some support among liberals in the Senate like Albert Gore, George McGovern, Wayne Morse, and Ernest Gruening, although privately he had expressed support for a similar plan of action in Laos in early 1963.⁴¹ The broader objective of containment obliged him to argue for a continued American presence in the region, even as he became increasingly frustrated with the results. The war was already “bitter and seemingly endless,” but it was also necessary. Pulling back now, he wrote, “would be to hand Communism and victory by default.”⁴²

Childs and the Decision to Escalate

The year 1965 marked the onset of direct American military action on the ground in Vietnam and the emergence of the conflict as a central topic for Childs’ reporting and commentary. His state of mind about the situation at the time was best expressed in a mid-January column about the limits of American power in an era of emerging nations. American military might no longer intimidated the new nationalists and the Cold War balance of power model failed to fully explain the political realities of places like Vietnam. “To believe that the line can be held in Viet-Nam or anywhere else with American bombs and American guns is to live in a dream of the past,” he argued.⁴³ This belief led him to dismiss claims that the conflict was driven by China, or even the Soviet Union, as some Cold War hawks believed. The North Vietnamese and their Viet Cong allies in the south were not puppets and they could not be turned on and off like a switch. Childs felt that the French, blinded by an imperialist mindset,

⁴¹ Marquis Childs to Col. G. Ashley, United States Air Force, 13 May 1963, Childs Papers, box 15, folder 2. See Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 129, and Robert David Johnson, “The Origins of Dissent: Senate Liberals and Vietnam, 1959-1964,” *Pacific Historical Review* 65:2 (May 1996): 270-273.

⁴² Marquis Childs, “Will U.S. Simply Throw in the Towel,” *Washington Post*, 1 March 1965, 16.

⁴³ Marquis Childs, “Affluence Plateau is U.S. Dilemma,” *Washington Post*, 18 January 1965, 16.

had underestimated their opponents because they could not understand the Vietnamese determination to rid their nation from foreign influence. In the wake of the first bombing raids against the North, ordered in retaliation for an attack on the U.S. base at Pleiku, he asked readers not to make a similar mistake. American success in Vietnam would require both military strength and a willingness to accept limited objectives in the place of dramatic victory.⁴⁴ “Finding a way out of disaster is all that matters,” he wrote, but the final result had to take place on American terms.⁴⁵

Military escalation, therefore, called for judiciousness. President Johnson framed the bombing and increased support for the south as a “limited war,” one fought to the degree necessary to win but also one fought proportionally and within the constraints of economic and political realities on the home front. Childs understood the logic of this approach, but also recognized that achieving the correct balance, amid the chaos in South Vietnam and the partisan to and fro of Washington, might be impossible. At this time, he remained optimistic that Johnson, whom Childs had respected for many years as a masterful politician, would find a way to manage the situation with the necessary finesse and resolve. A number of columns around the time of the first bombing raids depicted the president as a cautious leader, pulled in many directions by his advisors, his political opponents, and even members of his own party. Childs reported on February 22 that the president was in “a difficult box” and increasingly resentful of those calling for withdrawal or even negotiation from a position of weakness, as

⁴⁴ See Marquis Childs, “If It Goes Badly, It’ll Be LBJ’s War,” *Washington Post*, 12 February 1965, 20, and “The Asia Tangle Baffled Ike Too,” *Washington Post*, 17 February 1965, 20. Childs frequently drew comparisons between the war in Vietnam and earlier conflicts in Asia during this period of escalation. His long tenure as a political reporter and columnist allowed him to play the role of the elder advisor who could bring the perspective of history to bear on the debate.

⁴⁵ Marquis Childs, “Finding Way Out of Viet-Nam Bog,” *Washington Post*, 22 February 1965, 21.

well as those pressing for an all out military blitz that might lead to a total Asian war.⁴⁶

Although this column contained mild criticism of the president, for example describing him as having “an acute sensitivity to any criticism,” the overall effect was to express support for Johnson. He certainly wasn’t prepared to write Johnson off. In fact, as discussed elsewhere in this study, Childs was a major supporter and advocate of the president’s civil rights, job training, health care, and urban renewal agenda in the mid-1960s. Rather than turning on him due to the war, Childs continued to show the president was handling the burdens of office, delegating minor problems to others and working late into the night on major crises like civil rights, poverty, and the war in Vietnam.⁴⁷ Responding to a letter from a reader who wished the United States had a Churchill of its own to lead it through the crisis, Childs agreed, writing, “I wish I thought such another leader existed who could save us from the evils that loom all too large. Perhaps LBJ is that man. Stranger things have happened.”⁴⁸

At the same time, it is clear that Childs felt the war was not being managed properly and he was increasingly willing to make pointed statements about it in the column. He continued to describe the situation in the south as a civil war after a series of coups destabilized the Saigon government and betrayed the weakness of the entire American effort there. “One coup has followed another until now there is still one more attempt to get Humpty Dumpty back on the

⁴⁶ Childs, “Finding Way Out of Viet-Nam Bog, 21.

⁴⁷ Marquis Childs, “How New Role Fits Humphrey,” *Washington Post*, 26 February 1965, 16. Brian VanDeMark has argued that the Johnson landslide in 1964 emboldened liberals, sensing a mandate, to press Johnson harder on the domestic agenda and challenge him on the bombing, even though public opinion in 1965 appeared to support the bombing. See Brian VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 119-120.

⁴⁸ Marquis Childs to Walter B. Smalley, 5 February 1965, Childs Papers, box 29, folder 2. Childs had just returned from covering Churchill’s funeral in London and several of his recent columns had painted a very heroic image of the former British Prime Minister.

wall,” he wrote.⁴⁹ What, exactly, was American aid, training, and military force being deployed to protect? Here again Childs was influenced by *Post-Dispatch* correspondent Richard Dudman, who at the time was making his third extensive reporting trip to Vietnam. Dudman’s dispatches and correspondence revealed a number of disturbing facts that informed Childs’ thinking on the situation. First, Communist guerillas controlled so much territory in the south that supplies had to be delivered to military outposts by air. Second, the American bombing campaign, particularly the use of napalm, caused so much alienation among the local population that any strategic value from the raids was negated. Finally, the South Vietnamese army was unable to fulfill even rudimentary missions like guarding military bases, let alone conduct effective offensive maneuvers to take and hold territory against Communist incursions. The only conclusion, as Childs admitted frankly, was that “the war on the ground in South Vietnam is rapidly being lost.” “It is becoming more and more certain,” he added, “that American ground troops in division strength will have to be committed to Viet-Nam if the war is not to end in disastrous defeat.” Plans for such a deployment were already under advanced discussion, according to his unnamed sources, and he told readers that the decision to authorize up to 250,000 ground troops may have already been made.⁵⁰

Compounding the atmosphere of crisis was the growing secrecy, both in Washington and in South Vietnam, that limited the ability of news reporters to gather accurate and verifiable information about the war and its planning. Almost all of the information about the decision making process, according to Childs, resulted from competing leaks emanating from

⁴⁹ Childs, “Finding Way Out of Viet-Nam Bog,” 21.

⁵⁰ Marquis Childs, “The Bleak News from Viet-Nam,” *Washington Post*, 24 March 1965, 20.

the Pentagon or the White House and the situation was needlessly clouded in uncertainty.⁵¹

The Johnson administration was reluctant to admit that any plan other than the gradual escalation evident to the public was ever under consideration. "Answers are hard to come by," he complained.⁵² "The rule in Washington is more and more secrecy," he wrote to Dudman at the time. The president had started meeting with individual reporters, pulling private polling data out of his jacket pockets to convince them of public support for his policies. And Secretary of State Dean Rusk had "gone in for brain-washing in a big way."⁵³ Another column informed readers of the Pentagon initiative to fly friendly news reporters to South Vietnam on 10-day junkets, where they were taken on guided tours of military facilities and set up with carefully arranged interviews in the hope that press coverage of the war would be more favorable. Relations between the full-time Vietnam reporters and the military had long been strained, of course, but Childs argued, probably based at least in part on Dudman's first hand observations, that the news emanating from Saigon was managed more carefully than ever and critics were increasingly hesitant to express their doubts.⁵⁴ Dudman told Childs at the time that the relationship between the press and reporters in South Vietnam was "not so hot" and that he had seen many cases in which "official reports from the provinces were distorted to make bad news sound less bad."⁵⁵

⁵¹ Childs relied heavily on unnamed sources for information on these closed discussions. He tried to avoid being used as a strategic outlet for a leak and generally sought out sources rather than having policy makers approach him with information. Childs to Gibson, 7 March 1967, Childs Papers, 1967 addition, box 2, folder 2.

⁵² Marquis Childs, "A Viet-Nam Choice No One Discusses," *Washington Post*, 17 March 1965, 20.

⁵³ Childs to Dudman, 5 March 1965, box 1, folder 14, Dudman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington DC.

⁵⁴ Marquis Childs, "How 57 Newsmen Flew to Viet-Nam," *Washington Post*, 3 March 1965, 16. See also "The Tough Job of Getting News of Vietnam," *Broadcasting*, 31 May 1965, 52; "News Suppression is Problem in Vietnam," *Broadcasting*, 16 August 1965, 58.

⁵⁵ Dudman to Childs, 12 March 1965, Dudman Papers, box 1 folder 14.

Although he was certainly gloomy about the consequences of a full-scale war, he still believed holding the line in Vietnam was a necessary objective regardless of the cost. He worried, however, that the American public was not ready for the shock that would come from a sudden and dramatic escalation, with the resulting higher taxes, ever-expanding draft calls, and significant increase in combat fatalities. His casual attempts to gauge public sentiment indicated that few Americans paid close attention to news about the war and almost none thought a “real” war was imminent. He worried that the consequences of major escalation would lead to “surprise, shock, and deep disillusion” among the public.⁵⁶ Whether or not a ground war was the correct policy, Johnson would need a united and resolute nation standing behind the effort if it was to succeed. Years later Childs continued to believe that much of the divisiveness engendered by the war resulted from Johnson’s failure to adequately prepare the public and sell them on the war through a frank and honest appeal to their patriotism and sense of duty. As he put it, when the “full measure of the American tragedy became known, the country was torn apart.”⁵⁷ The so-called “credibility gap” that plagued the Johnson administration and motivated anti-war critics was clearly in place at this early stage in U.S. military involvement and Childs’ writing worked to highlight the distance between rhetoric and reality, as well as the important negative consequences arising from a partially informed public misled by inaccurate and manipulated news.

Childs’ also began to write in a somewhat bristly tone about the role of the critic as a necessary counter-balance to power and a healthy mechanism for discussion and debate in a

⁵⁶ Marquis Childs, “A Viet-Nam Poll in a Supermarket,” *Washington Post*, 19 March 1965, 20.

⁵⁷ Marquis Childs, transcript of speech delivered at the Frank R. Kent Symposium, Johns Hopkins University, 6 March 1974. Childs Papers 1972 addition, Box 2, folder 10. He added that the news media shared much of the blame, despite official secrecy and press management, for failing at the time to fully inform the public about the war.

democratic society. The president's penchant for unanimity and public resentment of criticism fostered the conditions from which a credibility gap would arise and dangerously limited his range of options at a time when clear solutions remained elusive. Although it is not clear that Johnson or his supporters expressed displeasure or pressured the columnist directly during these months of debate, Childs' writing on the subject of legitimate criticism and robust debate hints at some pushback from the White House or fellow journalists.⁵⁸ The columnist complained that Johnson seemed to believe the war would be a resounding success if it wasn't for "niggling criticism." Childs took pains to explain, however, that the seeming unanimity of the administration was largely a facade. His sources, whom he characterized as "responsible military men with first-hand knowledge," told him privately that strong differences of opinion existed at the highest levels and that plans for the introduction of up to 200,000 American troops were well underway. Such a drastic decision could never be justified under the "pretense of more of the same," which was how any new policy was always framed by the Johnson administration under the doctrine of limited war.⁵⁹ Even members of Congress who expressed criticism of Vietnam policy found themselves the target of "tireless and ceaseless" efforts to win their support or to curtail public statements. Johnson was "a man who must win and for whom criticism, in however abstract an intellectual form, appears as a personal reflection on his integrity and ability. The motivation is an almost tribal sense of loyalty."⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Administration officials did follow Childs' column during the period. In one instance, Johnson's press advisor Bill Moyers wrote to Childs to correct a factual error that he had made about the role of Admiral William Rayborn, who had just become Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, during a policy meeting. Bill Moyers to Marquis Childs, 21 May 1965, Childs Papers, 1972 addition, box 1.

⁵⁹ Marquis Childs, "Manpower Plans for Viet-Nam War," *Washington Post*, 7 April 1965, 20.

⁶⁰ Marquis Childs, "How LBJ Twists Senators' Arms," *Washington Post*, 17 May 1965, 16.

The president's behavior, according to Childs, cut him off from valuable advice and constructive consideration of the available options.⁶¹

Childs also dismissed the argument that criticism of Vietnam policy somehow helped the Communist side in the war, a charge that he was beginning to hear from administration supporters. It was true, he wrote, that Communist propaganda seized on reports of anti-war demonstrations or critical commentary in newspapers and magazines. The freedom to engage in robust debate on matters of public concern, however, was a strength, not a weakness of the American system. Childs had little use for the increasingly large groups of protestors who gathered in front of the White House, on college campuses, or other places; he saw that as an unproductive means to sway decision-making. "The sound and fury of demonstrations," he argued, "signify little." However, he did appreciate that a citizen's freedom to protest was part of the model of government the United States was trying to promote in Southeast Asia. In fact, he turned the "aid to the enemy" claim on its head by reminding readers that efforts to silence criticism were themselves un-American and helpful, ultimately, to nations that sought to tarnish the American image as a beacon of liberty.

If you don't agree with us, you must be wrong, that is the line. And the corollary to this is: If you disagree with us in public you give aid and comfort to the enemy. That is the iron rule of press and every media of communication in a totalitarian society...in Eastern Europe a shade of criticism, even of the arts, is equated with disloyalty. But that has not been the rule in a society that claims freedom as its hallmark.⁶²

⁶¹ Of course, Childs was not fully aware of the high-level debates taking place among the president and his senior advisors. Records now available show that the president sought advice from a large number of civilian and military advisors, as well as old hands like Dean Acheson and former President Eisenhower. These advisors advocated a number of competing policies, ranging from total withdrawal to massive escalation of air and ground forces. Johnson appears to have been open to all points of view and only decided to escalate the war with great reluctance, recognizing that his domestic agenda would necessarily suffer as a result. See VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, ch. 9, on Johnson's decision to send a large ground force in July 1965. See also David M. Barrett, *Uncertain Warriors: Lyndon Johnson and His Vietnam Advisers* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), ch. 2.

⁶² Marquis Childs, "Viet-Nam Policy: Critics Unwanted," *Washington Post*, 28 April 1965, 24.

With regard to the news media in particular, Childs resented the idea that he and his fellow writers were obligated to support the government unconditionally. He worried that increasingly Johnson's people were talking about "our press," complaining that it was letting down "our side" and equating critical commentary with disloyalty. The role of the press, in Childs' mind, was something different. Although the men of the Johnson administration were "dedicated" and "intensely hard-working," they were fallible beings and they made mistakes. Just as it was necessary for senior advisors and members of government to be free to disagree and debate vigorously, the news media also must be free to express criticism and point out mistakes. As he wrote in his column, "resentment of any criticism- indignation it often is- suggests that the press should be an aid to government, a billboard for official policy...From that attitude it is only one short step to controlled official reporting and the commentary that simply parrots the official line." "If the acts and policies of the highest officials in Government cannot be criticized on the editorial page and analyzed in the news columns," he added, "the press will have a role as subservient as *Pravda* and *Izvestia*."⁶³ He told Bill Moyers the same thing, writing "I have never believed in the infallibility of those who exercise power, no matter how conscientious and hard-working they may be."⁶⁴ As stated above, it is unclear whether or not the president or others tried to pressure Childs directly to tone down his criticism, but his writing from this period offers some evidence that he was upset generally by anyone who sought to limit his freedom to write and to equate anything less than full-throated approval of Vietnam policy with disloyalty. In part this is likely due to a sense of

⁶³ Marquis Childs, "The Duty to Stay Out of the Parade," *Washington Post*, 26 May 1965, 24.

⁶⁴ Childs to Bill Moyers, 2 June 1965, Childs Papers, 1972 addition, box 1.

professionalism; he firmly believed that he played a positive public role in clarifying and interpreting a complicated world to his readers and that mission could only be achieved if he was free to comment. In another sense, he didn't see himself as opposed to the war, or at least to a policy of aggressive containment in the region that might necessitate war. He preferred a more serious diplomatic effort to find a negotiated peace deal, including the use of economic incentives to the North Vietnamese, but he was not at this time opposed in principle to what President Johnson was attempting to do.

In this initial phase, debate centered on the effectiveness of bombing, in tactical terms and as a means to force the North into talks. While Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara hoped to limit the use of bombing as much as possible, Childs reported that "an influential and highly articulate wing of the Republican Party," embodied primarily in Senator Barry Goldwater, began to apply pressure for an all-out bombing effort, going so far as to encourage Pentagon leaders to undermine civilian authority over defense policy. He argued that these conservatives had an unwarranted belief that massive bombing would break the will of the North Vietnamese and their allies in the south.⁶⁵ His own view was that bombing was of limited effectiveness and would not be sufficient, partly because of frequent bad weather that made precision bombing nearly impossible. To this end, he drew heavily from military assessments of strategic bombing during World War II. Massive bombing of Japan did physical damage, but was not able to shake the nation's morale or political resolve; evidence suggested a similar result were North Vietnam subjected to a similar series of attacks. Bombing also inevitably led to collateral damage in the form of civilian deaths and the

⁶⁵ Marquis Childs, "Warrior-Politicos Assault McNamara," *Washington Post*, 21 June 1965, 14.

destruction of the homes and property of non-combatants, which Childs could not reconcile with his understanding of American interests.⁶⁶

On the other hand, he was still strongly opposed to the introduction of significant numbers of American troops. Two divisions of Marines had landed near Danang on March 8 to protect the airbase there. Pressure was mounting for the president to send a larger force and initiate offensive maneuvers. Influenced by long-standing concerns about getting “bogged down,” Childs was also concerned about how the nation’s Asian allies in the anti-Communist crusade would respond. He argued that Americans had a long history of misunderstanding Asian culture and politics and had to learn how to be sensitive to the negative ramifications of their actions. “If masses of American ground troops are sent into South Viet-Nam,” he wrote, “they will in Asia be seen as white men shooting at men of color. If nuclear weapons are finally used...this will be the second time that the leading Western power had turned the ultimate weapon against Asians.” President Johnson and the State Department had to work harder to assure the Japanese, Taiwanese, Indians, and Pakistanis to maintain regional alliances and support.⁶⁷

July 1965 was the point when more and more American troops were sent to South Vietnam and their combat role expanded to include patrols and raids on territory and villages. Johnson, after intense debate among his advisers, agreed to raise the number of troops to 175,000 by the end of the year, with more planned for the spring of 1966.⁶⁸ Johnson’s decision has subsequently been called “the closest thing to a formal decision for war in Vietnam,” but pronouncements from the White House at the time continued to frame the conflict as a limited

⁶⁶ Marquis Childs, “Whether Bombing Can End a War,” *Washington Post*, 19 April 1965, 16.

⁶⁷ Marquis Childs, “The Asians’ View of American Aims,” *Washington Post*, 26 April 1965, 16.

⁶⁸ VanDeMark, *Into the Quagmire*, 211.

war and the president attempted to shield the full magnitude of escalation from the press and the public.⁶⁹ In a way, this effort worked in the case of Childs. Although his columns mentioned the number of troops going overseas at different times, he didn't write about the president's decision as a turning point or even a notable change in policy. As with the Rostow/Taylor report, Childs had not been able to recognize a significant moment, either because the process was too shrouded in secrecy or because he misread the conflicting signs coming from his sources. He was also uncharacteristically influenced by reports of progress. By late August, Childs reported that a "cautious optimism" had spread through the capital and the Johnson was trying to win over support in Congress by saying that some of the troops might soon be withdrawn. Childs felt this was premature; he saw a "holding action" rather than a victory or even full pacification unfolding. Still, he continued to hold out hope that Johnson would find a way to force the Communists into meaningful negotiations. "Even those critical of President Johnson's Viet-Nam policy," he wrote, "do not question his dedication to the search for a peaceful settlement."⁷⁰ Privately Childs was less optimistic. He wrote to a friend with the *New York Times* that Washington was full of "more of the same," and that Johnson was talking about ending the war but offering "little that is at all specific about how he intends to accomplish this miracle."⁷¹

The columnist continued to worry about the deteriorating relationship between the press and the administration. After Morley Safer of CBS shocked viewers with his filmed report on Marines burning down huts in the village of Cam Ne, Childs urged readers not to support calls

⁶⁹ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 155.

⁷⁰ Marquis Childs, "Changing Attitude Toward Viet War," *Washington Post*, 25 August 1965, 16; "LBJ's Challenge: Viet-Nam Peace," *Washington Post*, 30 August 1965, 12.

⁷¹ Marquis Childs to Henry Raymont, *New York Times* correspondent in Buenos Aires, 24 August 1965, Childs Papers, 1967 addition, box 1, folder 2.

for greater press censorship. The relationship between the military and reporters in Vietnam was already tortured enough. Instead, it was necessary for the public to see what was really happening. “This is a dirty, brutal war and there is no reason why the public should not know it,” he argued.⁷² Childs also saw fit to defend Senator William Fulbright, who was taking a lot of heat from the administration and some in the press for his recent speech critical of Johnson’s foreign policy. The power of the executive should not be absolute, he wrote, and the president was using his vast influence to stifle debate on what had become “an undeclared war.” He warned that Johnson’s broad consensus could easily become a tyranny of the majority if administration critics were harassed.⁷³ In a speech at Brandies University around the same time, Childs told his audience that Johnson demanded “an almost tribal sense of loyalty” and that “no president...has ever been so sensitive to criticism in the press.” Therefore, debate over Vietnam policy had been “limited and inhibited.”⁷⁴

At the same time, Childs maintained his own distinction between legitimate and illegitimate forms of criticism and, in so doing, revealed a significant crack growing between factions in the liberal camp. He was sixty-four years old and his political sensibilities were formed in an earlier time when public displays of dissent were arguably more decorous and his temperament favored reasoned argument rather than noisy street theater. He had little use for the large anti-war demonstrations that relied on a “growing emotionalism.” He also was not impressed with the colorful appearance of many of the protesters, whom he characterized as

⁷² Marquis Childs, “The Censor’s Role in Vietnam War,” *Washington Post*, 24 September 1965, 24; “Government News Lacks Credibility,” *Washington Post*, 17 November 1965, 18. William Hammond’s official 1988 study of the relationship between the military and the press in Vietnam remains the most important source. See William M. Hammond, *The Military and the Media, Volume 1: 1962-1968* (Washington DC: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1988), 185-191 on Cam Ne and the tension that arose from the reporting on the incident.

⁷³ Marquis Childs, “Tyranny of the Majority in the U.S.,” *Washington Post*, 27 September 1965, 16.

⁷⁴ “Talk by Marquis Childs at Brandies University, May 6, 1965,” Childs Papers, box 29, folder 5.

“beatniks” and “nihilists who reject everything.” He was disdainful of “the badge of the long hair, the dirty blue jeans, the raffish behavior.”⁷⁵ On the other hand, he worried that an overheated response to these protests was also potentially dangerous. He didn’t believe that the protests were useful propaganda for the Communists, as Johnson and others argued. In fact, he reiterated, the freedom to demonstrate was one of the important things that set America apart from the Communists and this right had to be protected. He saw a “new McCarthyism” afoot in the effort to marginalize and discredit the conscientious protesters and lauded the efforts of the ACLU and Union of American Hebrew Congregations to defend and protect those who were arrested or beaten for burning draft cards or “disturbing the peace.”⁷⁶

Childs and the Liberal Dilemma

The year 1966 was the first in which American forces were engaged in full scale combat operations and it was also an election year. Childs started the year, as he often did, with a series of columns that summarized the major problems facing the nation and laid out what he expected to be important issues and themes for the coming year. In his own mind, he felt Johnson was dragging the nation “deeper and deeper” into the war.⁷⁷ A book review he published in *The New Republic* echoed these concerns. Johnson was “disastrously wrongheaded” about Vietnam policy, which had reached a “singularly dangerous moment.”

⁷⁵ “Marquis Childs,” “An Urgent Sense of Commitment,” *Washington Post*, 20 October 1965, 22. In the same way that Childs dismissed the black power advocates partially because they were so far outside of his reference, he does not appear to have taken any special steps to get to know and understand the point of view of the young, liberal members of the anti-war movement. However, Childs was by no means alone in his criticism of the “raffish” young protesters. As Melvin Small has demonstrated, most of the mainstream press portrayed the anti-war movement in a way that undermined the serious message behind the street theater and politics of style. Coverage tended to focus on the violent or frivolous minority of protestors that made more compelling journalism. See Melvin Small, *Covering Dissent: The Media and the Anti-Vietnam War Movement* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994).

⁷⁶ Marquis Childs, “War Psychology: Dangerous Consensus,” *Washington Post*, 19 November 1965, 24.

⁷⁷ Marquis Childs to Marriner S. Eccles, 25 January 1966, Childs Papers, 1967 addition, box 1, folder 2.

“The evidence accumulating in recent months,” he continued, “is that if Mr. Johnson once had a consensus on Vietnam, and in hindsight it must seem to have been a consensus based largely in ignorance and indifference, he has now lost it.”⁷⁸ In his column, however, he kept these pessimistic thoughts to himself. Instead he continued to portray Johnson as a man seeking peace in Vietnam against all odds, and even against the advice of some senior advisors. Childs wrote for the first time that Vietnam was a “trap,” but he told readers that Johnson had made a “commonsense decision” to conduct a holding operation to control the cities and military bases while making “a new and revitalized” attempt to win over public opinion in the rural areas.⁷⁹ In February, he wrote to Johnson privately to thank him for an inscribed photo of the two men in the Oval Office. Childs said the photo showed Johnson’s “undaunted confidence,” a phrase that showed the columnist still had faith.⁸⁰ The president had suspended the bombing raids over North Vietnam temporarily in the hope of coaxing the Communists to the bargaining table, but, as Childs reported, military advisors and some Republicans in Congress were pressing him to resume the bombing as well as take more aggressive steps like mining the harbor at Haiphong.⁸¹ Because “military dominance seems inevitable in Vietnam decisions,” he thought that Johnson would take this action soon, but he saw this outcome as a step toward a “larger war” that he hoped to avoid.⁸² Privately, Childs consulted with former Navy men to determine the tactical benefits and possible Communist response to the more aggressive

⁷⁸ Marquis Childs, “Johnson in the Big World,” *The New Republic*, 16 July 1966, 30.

⁷⁹ Marquis Childs, “LBJ: Searching Out of the Trap,” *Washington Post*, 17 January 1966, 16.

⁸⁰ Marquis Childs to Lyndon Johnson, 22 February 1966, Childs Papers, 1967 addition, box 2, folder 4.

⁸¹ Marquis Childs, “A Rising Pressure to Bomb Cities,” *Washington Post*, 25 March 1966, 22. On the failed bombing pause, see Lloyd Gardner, *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995), 279-284.

⁸² Marquis Childs, “Military Influences and Viet Choices,” *Washington Post*, 24 January 1966, 12.

approach.⁸³ When Johnson did restart the bombing campaign, Childs described the action as a decision “to use the full resources of American power to convince the Communist enemy the United States cannot be driven out of South Vietnam” and an indication of Johnson’s confidence. The president, Childs suggested, had found his stride as he entered his second full year in office and “profoundly desires peace.”⁸⁴ This inconsistency was not typical for Childs and it suggests that he sought to portray Johnson in a more positive light, perhaps in anticipation of the fall Congressional elections when Democrats might be expected to lose seats. Even if the war was not going well, Childs hoped the president would maintain a strong base of support for his domestic agenda in Congress and with the public.

Childs returned to his more familiar critical stance while reporting from Johnson’s Honolulu conference in February. South Vietnamese leaders met the president and his senior advisors in Hawaii to discuss the war and engage in a show of unity. Messages coming out of the conference were optimistic, suggesting progress in both the military and the psychological aspects of the war. Childs discounted the official optimism, as he often had since 1954. Referring to the announcement that American economic aid projects would soon win over public opinion in the rural areas, he pointed out that “any sensible bookmaker would quote long odds against the bet paying off.” “So much official cheer has in the past proved bogus that this must be taken with great skepticism,” he reminded readers. Summing up, he wrote

Judgment as of this moment must be tempered by skepticism. The clouds of euphoria generated here still hover on the horizon like the great white clouds that float over the

⁸³ For example, Retired Admiral John D. Hayes to Childs, 30 March 1966, along with a copy of a letter from Hayes to Admiral David L. McDonald, Chief of Naval Operations, 2 April 1966, Childs Papers, 1967 addition, box 2, folder 4. Admiral Hayes told Childs that mining the harbor at Haiphong was within America’s rights under international maritime law, but that it was a “great hazard” and not an effective way to neutralize shipping to and from the harbor.

⁸⁴ Marquis Childs, “LBJ Confident in Bombing Decision,” *Washington Post*, 28 January 1966, 18.

Pacific. It has happened before. Americans with resounding titles and impressive names fly out to Saigon, find their opposite numbers in the Vietnamese government only too ready to agree with what they propose, and then after a planeside expression of optimism about the future they fly back to Washington.⁸⁵

Back in Washington himself, Childs turned his attention to the high-profile hearings of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, chaired by war critic William Fulbright, that were just concluding.⁸⁶ Ambassador Maxwell Taylor and Secretary of State Dean Rusk, among others, fielded sharp questions and generally defended administration policy during the televised hearings.⁸⁷ According to Childs, the hearings “made the country more aware of the risks involved” in an expanding war, but “contributed little to means of getting out.” The results, he concluded, were “miniscule,” although he cited a recent Harris poll that showed public approval for Johnson’s handling of the war slightly down and speculated that troop buildup might slow briefly because so much attention was being paid to the war in the short term.⁸⁸

The more significant effect of the hearings, in Childs’ telling, was the way they threatened to upset Democratic party unity on the eve of elections. Childs always prided himself on his ability to report thoughtfully on political campaigning and he used many of his columns through the rest of 1966 for that purpose. His initial assessment was that Johnson’s war policy would be a wedge to the party, with more liberal Democrats coming out against military escalation and in favor of more serious efforts at negotiation. Other Democrats, he

⁸⁵ Marquis Childs, “Vietnam’s Future and the Generals,” *Washington Post*, 9 February 1966, 20; “Chance of Reform in South Vietnam,” *Washington Post*, 11 February 1966, 20.

⁸⁶ Childs had mixed feelings about Fulbright, supporting the senator’s effort to force a debate on the war, but also seeing him as a significant obstacle in the realm of civil rights. See Marquis Childs, “Fulbright’s Role as Sober Critic,” *Washington Post*, 4 April 1966, 16. Fulbright’s politics are discussed in Randall Bennett Woods, “Dixie’s Dove: J. William Fulbright, the Vietnam War, and the American South,” *Journal of Southern History* 60: 3 (August 1994): 533-552.

⁸⁷ On the Fulbright hearings, see Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 120-124. Johnson suggests that the president scheduled the Honolulu conference to deflect attention from the hearings.

⁸⁸ Marquis Childs, “The Political Cost of War in Asia,” *Washington Post*, 7 March 1966, 14.

wrote, believed the best plan of action was to avoid the increasingly controversial issue entirely until after re-election.⁸⁹ He also tracked public opinion polls that showed a growing sense of unease about the course of the war. Overall support for Johnson and his Vietnam policy remained high, but the numbers, Childs reported, were starting to change due to the uncertainty of the situation, along with talk of high inflation and new taxes.⁹⁰ Johnson worked aggressively to bolster support for the war as he spoke and campaigned for Democrats around the country, but the issue continued to divide the party, and the nation. As the summer wore on, Childs continued to write about the factionalization plaguing the Democrats, the party that had dominated American politics though most of Childs' tenure in Washington.⁹¹ Civil rights issues divided the party in important ways, but Vietnam threatened to do the most damage to the party that liberals like Childs looked to as the best hope of leading the nation in a progressive direction.

This, then, was the situation when Childs and President Johnson left on their tour of six Asian nations, which the columnist called "a many splendored thing...that will make the Broadway production of 'The King and I' look like the local hamburger joint."⁹² As has been discussed above, Childs was quite vocal in his criticism of certain of Johnson's policies and he was not afraid to ask probing questions about the effectiveness of American bombing and the wisdom of expanded ground warfare. At the same time, however, he had remained personally

⁸⁹ Marquis Childs, "Impact of War Stirs Politicians," *Washington Post*, 21 February 1966, 16.

⁹⁰ Marquis Childs, "Shadows of War Darken Polls," *Washington Post*, 18 April 1966, 16; "Politicos Ponder Outcome of War," *Washington Post*, 25 April 1966, 20; "American Opinion and a Long War," *Washington Post*, 20 May 1966, 24. According to one study, about half of Americans in 1966 said "no" when asked if getting involved in the war had been a mistake, down from 65% in August 1965. William L. Lunch and Peter W. Sperlich, "American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," *Western Political Quarterly* 32 (March 1979): 25.

⁹¹ Among many examples, see Marquis Childs, "The Deeper Effect of Our Bombings," *Washington Post*, 1 July 1966, 20; "U.S. Commitments Worry Senators," *Washington Post*, 5 September 1966, 24; "An Escalating War as Election Issue," *Washington Post*, 16 September 1966, 12.

⁹² Marquis Childs, "Manila: A Little Bit of Everything," *Washington Post*, 17 October 1966, 20.

loyal to the president and in many cases used the column to praise Johnson's leadership, integrity, and dedication to finding an honorable peace. The columns Childs filed from the Pacific were generally upbeat and he was clearly impressed with the spectacle. He also supported Johnson's renewed focus on economic aid and subsidies for large public works projects that would create jobs and help modernize the region. Although he continued to be doubtful about a clear solution to the war, he gave Johnson "an E for effort."⁹³ This fact probably explains Childs' surprise at his rude treatment from the president; he didn't really think he was being unfair or even particularly critical. To the notoriously thin-skinned Johnson, however, Childs' criticism was no doubt unwanted and he must have been irritated to run into the writer shortly after experiencing a public triumph. In the immediate wake of the trip, Childs ignored the president's snub and declared the conference a limited success. He wrote that the war there would "go on into the indefinite future," but reported on what he saw as many encouraging signs.⁹⁴ At least some in the administration appreciated Childs' positive coverage. Vice President Humphrey penned a short note thanking Childs for pointing out that the "conference was not, as many had feared, a hawkish council of war," a phrase taken from one of the recent columns.⁹⁵

In 1967, as America moved into a large-scale, land-based war with deepening costs and a growing casualty list, Childs' column once again took on a more critical tone, indicating that his own frustrations were growing. Although he would not advocate a full withdrawal of American forces, he clearly believed that the war had reached a stalemate. He wished someone

⁹³ Childs, "Manila: A Little Bit of Everything," 20; "The White Asians and Pacific Unity," *Washington Post*, 19 October 1966, 20; "Johnson's Aura Delights Aussies," *Washington Post*, 24 October 1966, 20.

⁹⁴ Marquis Childs, "Manila and After: Signs and Portents," *Washington Post*, 31 October 1966, 20. "The Asian Tour: Triumphant Foray," *Washington Post*, 4 November 1966, 20.

⁹⁵ Hubert Humphrey to Childs, 31 October 1966, Childs Papers, 1967 addition, box 2, folder 6.

with influence would come forward with a bold new plan. He wrote to one reader “I wish I knew of something that could be done, or someone to whom one might turn for an alternative that would be accepted, but frankly I have looked in vain.” He thought perhaps Robert Kennedy, who had recently given a speech promoting another bombing pause as a step toward negotiations, would emerge as that alternative, but he wasn’t very optimistic.⁹⁶ The column portrayed Johnson in a more and more critical light, often pointing to the president as an unrealistic leader who had fallen victim to his own wishful thinking. Childs had never really believed that the United States could “win” a land war in Vietnam without resorting to drastic and unreasonable measures, especially because he believed the Chinese would intervene more directly in the face of a massive American escalation. Limited objectives and honest negotiations remained, to his mind, the only way out. Through 1967, however, Childs noticed and wrote about Johnson’s new enthusiasm for victory on his own terms, what he termed Johnson’s plan for “peace through victory.”⁹⁷ The president still talked about negotiations, he wrote, but his comments had a “perfunctory and repetitious sound as though they were made solely for the record.” He also noted that Johnson told reporters at a recent press conference that he was “very sure of victory.” This was very much out of line with the information Childs was getting through “private statements of military men” who told him the war would go on at least 3 and maybe 10 more years.⁹⁸ The disjuncture between rhetoric and reality further deepened the credibility gap that plagued the administration and angered critics of the

⁹⁶ Childs to Mrs. James Allen, 7 March 1967, Childs Papers, 1967 addition, box 2, folder 6. A column from this same week indicates that Childs believed Kennedy would never be able to shake his image, dating back to his brother’s administration, as hawkish believer in aggressive containment in Southeast Asia. See Marquis Childs, “Bobby, Bombing, and the New Left,” *Washington Post*, 3 March 1967, 18.

⁹⁷ Marquis Childs, “Politics of Peace: Widening Division,” *Washington Post*, 10 March 1967, 22.

⁹⁸ Marquis Childs, “A Wartime Image for the President,” *Washington Post*, 20 March 1967, 16.

war. In a speech to the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative in Madison, Childs told his audience that distrust of the president was leading to serious divisions in the nation. Johnson, he argued, could not be re-elected in 1968 if the war continued in the same way.⁹⁹ Richard Nixon, whom he believed would be the Republican nominee, could say almost anything about Vietnam and garner support.

This isn't to say that Childs took up cause with the "raffish" anti-war protesters. He continued to maintain a distinction between legitimate criticism, such as his own writing, and the unproductive and selfish behavior of the young protesters. Of course, Childs was likely to be seen as out of touch by the youthful activists and protesters who were critical of the liberal consensus and the "establishment" that Childs represented.¹⁰⁰ In an attempt to make sense of the youth culture, Childs visited the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco in April 1967, just before the so-called Summer of Love. There he found the scene "a disconcerting expression of alienation." Although he noted that some of the young activists took the anti-war movement seriously or worked constructively on civil rights, Childs felt that most of the "hippies" he saw there had turned inward, disengaging from the political world and turning to drugs, music and other kinds of personal pleasure. "The average citizen," he wrote, "boils with indignation at the hippies." His hope was that sensational television reporting tended to exaggerate the phenomenon and that it would soon pass. He wasn't necessarily indignant, but he was uncomfortable with the alternative lifestyles on display and disappointed that the

⁹⁹ Excerpts of Marquis Childs talk to be delivered to the Wisconsin Electric Cooperative, dated 27 March 1967, Childs Papers, 1967 addition, box 2, folder 7. The speech was given on April 5 in Madison.

¹⁰⁰ Childs was clearly part of the "liberal establishment" that figured prominently in critiques emanating from the New Left and cast older, moderate liberals as defenders of failed policies and obstacles of true progress. See Rossinow, *Visions of Progress*, 242-248.

younger generation appeared unwilling or uninterested in taking up the fight for social change that had motivated him since his own youth.¹⁰¹

At the same time, however, he did not want the police or FBI to harass or intimidate the anti-war movement. Even though he disagreed with the tactics of the more aggressive and demonstrative young radicals, he recognized their right to be heard, disruptive or not. In particular he criticized the Pittsburgh police department for working with the FBI to illegally monitor and arrest on false charges a group of activists in that city. “The far out demonstrators who burn draft cards and American flags around intense feelings of anger and resentment,” he admitted, but that did not give the authorities the right to use unconstitutional methods to stifle dissent.¹⁰² He saw these efforts as further evidence that a new red scare was developing. This column prompted letters from the local police and from FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Hoover called Childs’ assertion that the FBI was involved, or that it engaged more generally in a campaign against the anti-war movement, “outrageous” and “unwarranted suspicions.” Childs replied that he was “astonished” by Hoover’s letter and that his information about the FBI’s investigation of the anti-war movement came directly from the White House.¹⁰³ As discussed earlier, Childs had been a champion of the FBI during the McCarthy period, often writing that Congressional investigations were unnecessary because the agency was sufficiently capable of uncovering spies and saboteurs. As late as 1962 Childs wrote a favorable review in the

¹⁰¹ Marquis Childs, “Hippie Convention: A Great Move-In,” *Washington Post*, 14 April 1967, 20. Careful reading of the column indicates that Childs spent most of his time in a taxi and based much of his impression of the Haight on the comments of the cabbie.

¹⁰² Marquis Childs, “Red Scare Revival in Official Hands?” *Washington Post*, 21 April 1967, 22.

¹⁰³ J. Edgar Hoover to Childs, 26 April 1967, and Childs to Hoover, 3 May 1967, Childs Papers, 1967 addition, box 2. Recent scholarship has shown the FBI engaged in a large-scale effort to monitor and disrupt the anti-war movement, sometimes using illegal techniques as Childs suggested. James K. Davis, *Assault on the Left: The FBI and the Sixties Antiwar Movement* (Westport: Praeger, 1997).

Washington Post of one of Hoover's ghostwritten anti-Communist broadsides.¹⁰⁴ By the latter part of the decade his attitude about the director had changed.

Childs was also disappointed with the tendency of war supporters to use the patriotic appeal to rouse opinion; the stakes were too high to resort to hide behind the flag or to counter criticism with charges of disloyalty to the national cause. "The flag," he wrote, "is a powerful weapon in the political armory and Johnson has shown that he means to use it." Popular support for the war was still relatively high in mid-1967, but Childs argued that the public really didn't understand the nature of the war or hold strong convictions about the rightness of the American cause. The president and his allies rallied the public with simplistic slogans, while at the same time trying to link criticism of the war effort with betrayal. In this climate, "courageous dissenters" like Senator George McGovern had become targets of abuse.¹⁰⁵ Already a "hardening conservatism" in the West and Midwest was mobilizing to unseat "doves" like McGovern and Frank Church of Idaho. He was heartened, however, that McGovern received ninety percent favorable mail after a recent speech in which he called the war a "disaster" and demanded an immediate bombing halt. Perhaps, he thought, this was enough to show "the minority critical of escalation to believe there is far more support than the polls show for independence and for outspoken criticism."¹⁰⁶ Writing on the Fourth of July, Childs chided Congress for the "welter of banality" evident in its debates over a bill that would impose a federal ban on flag burning. He reminded readers that patriotism could not be "legislated into being" and favorably quoted an opponent of the bill who said "America is not a

¹⁰⁴ Marquis Childs, "Hoover Takes Sensible View of Red Peril," *Washington Post*, 30 September 1962, 8.

¹⁰⁵ Marquis Childs, "Using Patriotism as Political Tool," *Washington Post*, 28 April 1967, 24.

¹⁰⁶ Marquis Childs, "Turbulent Climate for Senate Doves," *Washington Post*, 10 May 1967, 24.

country which needs to punish its dissenters to preserve its honor.”¹⁰⁷ This simplistic approach to talking about the war led, in Childs’ assessment, to a woefully uninformed public that seemed not to even realize the war was taking place. Aside from the relatively small number of protesters, most of the American public went about their business as usual. “What historians of the future are likely to look back on in this period with wonder and puzzlement,” he thought, “is how little visible evidence there is of the fact of a war involving directly or indirectly at least 600,000 Americans. You simply cannot find it.”¹⁰⁸

Though supportive of certain critics of the war, Childs was still uncertain about the path ahead on Vietnam. “In a grave time like the present,” he wrote, “to merely oppose is not enough. And an alternative course is hard to come by as each week the casualty lists grow longer and the emotional tensions in the country take a deeper hold.”¹⁰⁹ His columns from the months before the Tet Offensive do not reveal a clear cut plan of action. One theme that emerged over the summer of 1967 was that the large land-based force deployed in South Vietnam failed to adapt quickly enough to the guerilla tactics used by the enemy. He quoted General Moshe Dayan, Israel’s Defense Minister and the architect of that nation’s recent victory in the Six Day War, saying that the United States could use its technological might to win a conventional war, but it could not pacify the region or win “hearts and minds” in a guerilla war.¹¹⁰ This led to several subsequent columns where Childs sought out and quoted current and former American military leaders who advocated a more flexible and innovative style of combat to engage the enemy more effectively and do less harm to the civilian population.

¹⁰⁷ Marquis Childs, “Waving the Flag: Congress at Work,” *Washington Post*, 5 July 1967, 18.

¹⁰⁸ Marquis Childs, “The Current Mood Across the Country,” *Washington Post*, 9 October 1967, 16.

¹⁰⁹ Marquis Childs, “Politics and War: A Bleak Picture,” *Washington Post*, 5 June 1967, 20.

¹¹⁰ Marquis Childs, “Painful Decisions of the New Crisis,” *Washington Post*, 3 July 1967, 16.

Combined with an expanded program to build power plants, schools, wells, and medical centers, this approach could go a long way toward pacification.¹¹¹ He also gave attention to proponents of a bombing pause, including Senator John Sherman of Kentucky who was quoted a number of times. While he never explicitly endorsed a pause in the column, he quoted liberally from those who did.¹¹² In his private correspondence, he admitted that he didn't think a bombing pause would lead to the negotiations he so desired, but "it would put us in a better position in the world."¹¹³

Through fall 1967 and into early 1968 Childs had finally lost his faith in Johnson and was closing in on the conclusion that it was time to get out. "One harsh, brutal fact remains," he told readers. "An end to the war in Vietnam is as remote as at any time in the past two years." The North Vietnamese had taken up "a hardening line" and evidence suggested that "every effort is being made to build up morale for resistance into an indefinite future." A network of air raid shelters and trenches protected the citizens of the North against bombing and his sources told him "there is good reason to believe that even if Hanoi and Haiphong were leveled the North could continue to supply the few hundred tons a day of war material necessary to sustain the guerrilla attack in the South." "Against this background," he lamented, "a peace settlement by direct negotiations or through the United Nations must also seem futile."¹¹⁴ Furthermore, the war continued to divert funds away from important domestic programs while humanitarian projects related to the war, such as relocating and providing

¹¹¹ Marquis Childs, "A Marine's Marine with Hopeful Idea," *Washington Post*, 11 August 1967, 20; "Gen. James Gavin as the Alternative?" *Washington Post*, 21 August 1967, 14; "Updating Strategy for New Warfare," *Washington Post*, 23 August 1967, 20.

¹¹² For example, Marquis Childs, "A Bombing Pause and Reasons Why," *Washington Post*, 28 July 1967, 16.

¹¹³ Childs to Richardson Okie, 20 October 1967, Childs Papers, 1967 addition, box 2.

¹¹⁴ Marquis Childs, "The Harsh Fact About Vietnam," *Washington Post*, 22 September 1967, 24.

medical care to refugees, absorbed much of America's foreign aid in Southeast Asia when those funds should be promoting trade and economic development.¹¹⁵ The most important side effect of the war, however, was that it distracted the nation from other Cold War problems, most importantly control of nuclear weapons. Perhaps prudence would dictate that taking a loss in Vietnam, but maintaining a robust position in the broader Cold War was the best path forward. Brilliant men like Secretary of Defense McNamara had exhausted themselves on the problem of Vietnam while other issues were pushed to the side.¹¹⁶ Numerous scholars have pointed out that a growing number of Americans had reached similar conclusions in the winter of 1967/68, before the Tet Offensive. For example, Gallup Poll data show that over half of respondents felt that sending troops to fight in Vietnam had been "a mistake" by July 1967, seven months before Tet.¹¹⁷

Childs' relationship with the White House had also deteriorated significantly by this time. In August, acting as bureau chief, he wrote to Press Secretary George Christian complaining that the president had held recent background briefings for reporters and failed to invite anyone from the *Post-Dispatch*. "I can understand that perhaps he would prefer not to talk with me personally," he said. "But I should like to think that the *Post-Dispatch* will be accorded equal privileges with other news bureaus in Washington."¹¹⁸ Two months later he got a letter from Christian about a recent column on the politics of 1968. "I know you don't agree

¹¹⁵ Marquis Childs, "America in Asia: A Lonely Burden," *Washington Post*, 5 January 1968, 12.

¹¹⁶ Marquis Childs, "McNamara Turns to New Problems," *Washington Post*, 10 January 1968, 14. McNamara had already announced that he planned to resign from government and become the head of the World Bank. He left office at the end of February 1968.

¹¹⁷ Lunch and Sperlich, "American Public Opinion and the War in Vietnam," 25. The trajectory of this specific Gallup question between 1965 and 1971 is discussed in William Hammond, "The Tet Offensive and the News Media: Some Thoughts on the Effects of News Reporting," *Army History* 70 (Winter 2009): 7-16.

¹¹⁸ Childs to George Christian, 18 August 1967, Childs Papers, 1979 addition, box 1. The paper had been carrying Richard Dudman's critical reporting on the war since 1962 and opposed the war on the editorial page. Daniel W. Pfaff, *No Ordinary Joe: A Life of Joseph Pulitzer III* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 240-243.

with much of what the President does,” it began, and then denied the essence of what Childs had reported. Furthermore, he characterized the column as “little short of incendiary.” In response, Childs fired back that he got his information from “one of the President’s closest and most trusted associates...for whom I have the highest respect.” He then gave Christian a history lesson, relating that he had observed at least six presidential press secretaries in his career and that, in his opinion, James Hagerty had been the best, in part because of his “firm practice of never making a categorical statement about what the President had or had not said without being on absolutely sure ground.”¹¹⁹ Childs still believed strongly in the president’s domestic program, writing as late as January 1968 that Johnson’s civil rights and social welfare programs had “extraordinary scope.” But the same column spoke of his “stubborn bulldog quality that rules out compromise” and the “greatly enlarged” war in Vietnam that cast a “threatening shadow over his presidency.”¹²⁰ “Only the President can find a way out of the trap if there is a way,” he wrote. “And he seems at times to have dug himself in beyond rescue.”¹²¹

Tet and After

Childs’ few columns at the time of the Tet Offensive further displayed his distrust of official statements about Vietnam and his belief that that war was becoming a lost cause, but they do not represent a notable turning point in his understanding of the war. His observations, though frustrated, align with themes and sentiments in his columns from the winter before Tet. Although he was aware that in some cases news reports about the fighting were inaccurate and tended to create the false sense of a total collapse in the south, he saw no way to avoid

¹¹⁹ Correspondence dated 26 October 1967 and 30 October 1967, Childs Papers, 1979 addition, box 1.

¹²⁰ Marquis Childs, “Striking Parallels of Two Johnsons,” *Washington Post*, 12 January 1968, 16.

¹²¹ Marquis Childs, “Could, Will, and Hanoi’s Intent,” *Washington Post*, 17 January 1968, 20.

characterizing the situation as “stalemated.”¹²² He placed the blame for the latest setback squarely on the officials who were supposed to be trusted to lead. General Westmoreland, whom Childs described as a “political general,” set the need to reassure the American public ahead of realistic tactical considerations. His recent public comments about in the United States the progress of the war amounted to a “high-powered propaganda campaign” that falsely created the impression “that all was going well with the allied military operations” that were “bound to bring triumph in the foreseeable future.”¹²³ Childs sought to highlight the failure of intelligence that led to the dramatic surprise and initial success of the offensive. A month after the attacks, he wrote, bitter finger pointing and accusations behind the scenes threatened to disrupt any unity in policy-making. A “propaganda curtain” had been mobilized to cover up the dispute and boost morale, but Childs believed the CIA and other agencies were spread dangerously thin with extraneous tasks and thus unable to provide timely and accurate intelligence to commanders in the field.¹²⁴

The Tet Offensive had been at least a temporary setback to the American war effort, but the larger problem that vexed Childs was its broader meaning. In the “grim shadow of the disaster in Vietnam,” he argued that the progress and nature of the war demonstrated that it was illegitimate.

For all the rhetoric about helping free peoples to choose their own form of government, the massive escalation of the ground war and the intensive bombing- killing thousands of civilians and destroying hundreds of villages- have made a mockery of the declared objective.¹²⁵

¹²² Marquis Childs, “Disparity of Views; Media, Officials,” *Washington Post*, 14 February 1968, 22.

¹²³ Marquis Childs, “On Westmoreland, Generals, and War,” *Washington Post*, 7 February 1968, 20.

¹²⁴ Marquis Childs, “Intelligence Fails on VC Offensive,” *Washington Post*, 28 February 1968, 28.

¹²⁵ Marquis Childs, “A Greek Tragedy, World of Trouble,” *Washington Post*, 9 February 1968, 20.

American policy in the Cold War had always been, in Childs' estimation, designed to promote freedom and democracy. He argued as early as 1946 that containing the spread of Communism was necessary, despite the costs, to further these aims. The nation's strength rested on both military power and moral superiority over Communism. Recent events, like the war in Vietnam, but also including the nation's support for right wing militarists in Greece and Latin America, showed these principles to be hollow and undermined America's place as the leader of the free world and a beacon of hope and freedom for people worldwide. Furthermore, the war exacerbated global tensions because it followed outdated strategic thinking, albeit thinking that Childs himself had supported in earlier years. The nation, he wrote, "tends increasingly to be frozen on the containment, anticommunism line" at a time when greater flexibility was necessary. The war was "the biggest obstacle in the way of any change of policy easing tensions" with the Soviet Union and therefore prolonging it with no hope of a negotiated resolution was foolhardy. The United States no longer had unchallengeable power and could no longer "lay down the terms of action anywhere in the world." "In 1968," he wrote, "that power is relative. Every problem cannot be resolved by an American solution."¹²⁶

Childs was still not prepared to directly argue for an immediate withdrawal of American forces, however. In fact, two developments in the spring of 1968 temporarily revived his hope for an honorable resolution. On the evening of March 31, President Johnson made two dramatic announcements in a televised address to the nation. First, he had ordered a significant halt in bombing and naval operations and opened the door to good faith negotiations with North Vietnam. More surprisingly, he told viewers that he would not seek or accept re-nomination so

¹²⁶ Marquis Childs, "U.S. World Power Now Only Relative," *Washington Post*, 25 March 1968, 14.

he could dedicate his full attention to ending the war rather than campaigning.¹²⁷ Childs was stunned by Johnson's decision and dedicated his next column to an analysis of the factors that might have led to this "complete reversal of form." Although he saw the decision as a blow to the Democrats, he chose to frame Johnson's act as selfless and patriotic. If Johnson could achieve an honorable peace during his last nine months in office, "the history books will put a golden mark after his name."¹²⁸ When North Vietnam indicated that it was willing to sit down for talks, Childs wrote it was "a new ball game" and that the shrewd politician Johnson had made a bold move. He warned that "troubling doubts" clouded the prospect for peace and the present might be no more than "another evanescent moment, a brief flurry of wistful hope against the backdrop of a war inevitably enlarging from month to month."¹²⁹

Later in the month, as preliminary steps were being taken to open negotiations, Childs remained largely supportive of the president's determination to reach a peace agreement. The American Society of Newspaper Editors, at its recent convention in Washington, had publicized a committee report that accused Johnson of outright deceit on the war issue. Childs, however, argued that the credibility gap had narrowed and, charitably, that Johnson was guilty more of self-deception than deliberate falsehood; the president believed all the promises and predictions he had made, even as events proved them to be unfounded.¹³⁰ The columnist even became slightly optimistic though the spring and early summer of 1968, telling readers that the

¹²⁷ See Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 522-530, on Johnson's decision not to seek reelection. The bombing pause was selective and other military operations continued as normal. This opening, however, did lead to peace talks in Paris later in 1968. See Walter LaFeber, *The Deadly Bet: LBJ, Vietnam, and the 1968 Election* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 62-63.

¹²⁸ Marquis Childs, "Democrats Left to Face Realities," *Washington Post*, 3 April 1968, 16.

¹²⁹ Marquis Childs, "Doubts Remain, but It's a Start," *Washington Post*, 5 April 1968, 24.

¹³⁰ Marquis Childs, "LBJ is Prisoner of His Own Loquacity," *Washington Post*, 24 April 1968, 20.

armed forces of South Vietnam were finally becoming an effective fighting force after all the training and equipment provided by the United States. A majority ARVN troops fought bravely during the offensive, despite taking heavy casualties. Furthermore, civilians there had seen firsthand the violence employed by the Communists during the Tet Offensive and now better understood the stakes of a defeat. This didn't necessarily make the national government more popular, he wrote, but it provided a powerful negative alternative for the people.¹³¹ He quoted sources at "the highest level of civilian authority" to suggest that recent North Vietnamese attacks signified a desperate attempt to inflict heavy casualties that would weaken American resolve at the talks in Paris. Sources told him that infiltration into the South had slowed, even though American casualty rates were higher. "It may be merely a rationalization," he admitted, but these minor signs of progress could be interpreted as part of the path to peace.¹³²

This temporary optimism soon faded as the Paris negotiations generated no immediate results and Childs turned his attention to the presidential campaign, and particularly the race for the Democratic nomination. He wrote little specifically about Vietnam, but a number of his columns on the candidates reflect a sense of urgency about the war and, of course, the war was a central issue in the election. He feared that Johnson's decision not to seek re-election damaged the chances of the Democrats, whose party apparatus was caught off guard by the sudden departure of the presumed party leader.¹³³ Even before the president's decision, Childs knew the war issue was so divisive that he did not see how the party could rally around a candidate. Eugene McCarthy's surprise showing in New Hampshire and the subsequent entry

¹³¹ Marquis Childs, "Clifford Travels 2 Vietnam Paths," *Washington Post*, 3 May 1968, 24.

¹³² Marquis Childs, "Hanoi's Outlook Appears Darker," *Washington Post*, 26 June 1968, 16.

¹³³ Childs, "Democrats Left to Face Realities," 16.

of Robert Kennedy into the campaign indicated “little but trouble ahead.” “The rupture is in all probability irreparable,” he wrote.¹³⁴ He was not very impressed with Robert Kennedy’s potential, seeing him as divisive and saddled with his history as a Vietnam hawk earlier in the decade when his brother oversaw the first significant involvement in the conflict. Childs appreciated Kennedy’s message on civil and worker’s rights, but did not see him as a winning candidate.¹³⁵ He never believed Eugene McCarthy could be elected, even though he described his candidacy as “a righteous and reasoned voice of dissent to millions of Americans, and particularly...the young, shocked and angered by the war.” McCarthy, he thought, was too much of an ideologue “who confuses power with issues and ideas.” The volatile politics of 1968 called for a pragmatic candidate who could unite the party around viable solutions.¹³⁶

This left Hubert Humphrey, a reliable northern liberal and current vice president. The irony for Childs, and many others who shared his political orientation, was that the best candidate on the wide range of issues was also the one most closely associated with Johnson’s failed Vietnam policy. Regardless of his own feelings, the Humphrey stuck to the party line, arguing in campaign appearances that progress in the war was being made and that continued pressure would eventually lead to a negotiated peace on terms America could accept. Despite the lack of a clear cut peace plan, Childs took up the vice president’s cause, using his column to suggest a “new Humphrey” who was strong on civil rights, urban redevelopment, and other issues.¹³⁷ He argued that anti-war critics of Humphrey overlooked the complexity of policy-

¹³⁴ Marquis Childs, “Democratic Rift Will Grow Wider,” *Washington Post*, 20 March 1968, 18.

¹³⁵ For example, see Marquis Childs, “Dilemma Before RFK Strategists,” *Washington Post*, 31 May 1968, 20; “Bobby isn’t Jack and ’68 isn’t ’60,” *Washington Post*, 3 June 1968, 16.

¹³⁶ Marquis Childs, “Eugene McCarthy On a Lonely Road,” *Washington Post*, 26 February 1968, 12; “Democratic Rift Will Grow Wider,” 18; “The Political Void Left by Kennedy,” *Washington Post*, 10 June 1968, 20.

¹³⁷ Marquis Childs, “The New Hubert; A Contrast in Style,” *Washington Post*, 27 May 1968, 18.

making. A loyal vice president rarely disagrees in public with the president, but that does not mean he would have made the same decisions. When the final histories were written, Childs pointed out, the record would show that Humphrey was a voice of restraint in debates.¹³⁸ He understood, though, that this was unlikely to sway the more vigorous opponents of the war and he felt Humphrey would have an uphill battle on this point, even if he were to announce a radical break from his past. Still, compared to Nixon, Humphrey had the “communicable warmth” necessary to lead the “turbulent, troubled America” of 1968.¹³⁹

The turbulence, rather than the warmth, overshadowed Childs for the remainder of 1968.¹⁴⁰ He attended the Democratic National Convention in Chicago and found the spectacle “infinitely depressing.”¹⁴¹ Humphrey was experiencing an attack by “most of his one-time liberal allies. They ignore Richard Nixon...and they work hard to cut him up into such small pieces that it may be impossible come September to put the Hubert who fought for civil rights, for housing, education, medicare, higher social security benefits back together again.” “This,” he worried, “is a prescription for Nixon to glide into the presidency on an ebb tide of ‘fed up with it all.’”¹⁴² Assessing the factions at the convention, he feared that the “coalition that has meant a governing apparatus for all but eight of the past 36 years shows every sign of breaking up.” Worse, he saw elements at the extreme end of the spectrum, meaning here the student protesters in the streets outside, dedicated to destroying the whole party system with no regard

¹³⁸ In his memoir, Childs recalled private meetings with Humphrey in which the vice president was deeply disturbed about having to maintain a public facade of loyalty to Johnson’s policies. Childs, *Witness to Power*, 209.

¹³⁹ Marquis Childs, “Humphrey Image Doesn’t Tell All,” *Washington Post*, 19 June 1968, 20.

¹⁴⁰ It is worth noting that Childs’ wife Lue died in the summer of 1968 after several years battling cancer. Although he spent much time with her in the hospital, he continued to travel, write the column, and direct the *Post-Dispatch*’s Washington coverage.

¹⁴¹ Childs, *Witness to Power*, 219.

¹⁴² Marquis Childs, “Democrats’ Peril: Blowup at Chicago,” *Washington Post*, 21 August 1968, 20.

for what could emerge to take its place. He was saddened by the crowds of demonstrators outside his hotel shouting “fuck Daley” and “fuck Johnson” through megaphones; he sought escape in his son’s hotel room blocks away but they were still within earshot.¹⁴³ Worse, he thought, were the old New Deal intellectuals who were “anti-Humphrey and pro anyone who promises to end the Vietnam War.”¹⁴⁴ After several days in Chicago observing, Childs wrote “the Democrats have no place to go but up. After this hapless shambles of a convention, the climb out of the pit looks impossibly steep. The forces of anarchy in the streets were matched by anarchic conduct often prevailing in the convention hall.” “How the party’s candidate will live with the confused and warring factions coming out of Chicago, it is too early to say. The pieces of the puzzle are scattered on the floor.”¹⁴⁵

As the campaign wound down in late October, Childs spent a week with each candidate. Neither said anything new about the war that caught his attention. Finally, in the waning days Humphrey tried desperately to distance himself from the war, arguing that he had not supported all of Johnson’s decisions and that he would begin withdrawing American troops in 1969.¹⁴⁶ On the eve of the voting, President Johnson announced a new bombing halt and progress in the Paris peace talks. Even so, Childs thought it unlikely that Humphrey would get a victory. He was never able to step out from the shadow of the war that hung over him like Banquo’s ghost.¹⁴⁷ After the election, he wrote presciently “no test is more crucial for the incoming President than the Vietnam peace talks. If within six months a fairly rapid withdrawal of

¹⁴³ Childs, *Witness to Power*, 219. Prentiss Childs related this story in a telephone interview with the author on 6 December 2006.

¹⁴⁴ Marquis Childs, “Two Party System Needs a Miracle,” *Washington Post*, 26 August 1968, 20.

¹⁴⁵ Marquis Childs, “Kennedy Boomlet Born of Despair,” *Washington Post*, 30 August 1968, 20.

¹⁴⁶ LaFeber, *Deadly Bet*, 131.

¹⁴⁷ Marquis Childs, “Campaign Windup: Reasoning Apathy,” *Washington Post*, 4 November 1968, 24.

American forces...is not well advanced Richard Nixon will find himself in the same trap that has meant frustration and defeat for Lyndon Johnson.”¹⁴⁸

Childs retired from full time work at the end of 1968, but he continued to write his column as Nixon’s team took up the challenge of ending the war. He went to Vietnam again himself in 1969 and in 1970 won the first Pulitzer Prize for Commentary, in part for his writing on the war. It was the Johnson era, however, that saw his most thoughtful and probing analysis of American policy in Southeast Asia. All in all, Childs stayed on Johnson’s side longer than many of his fellow journalists, and certainly a lot longer than the students and intellectuals who protested so urgently in the streets. But the war eventually caused him to break with the liberal president whom he had admired for progress in civil rights and the war on poverty. The president had promised a limited war that would achieve American goals in Southeast Asia, but not cause so much disruption that his domestic agenda would be derailed. When this proved not to be the case, Childs saw the unraveling of much of the progress he had witnessed over the past four decades. The Democratic Party that he saw, for better or for worse, as the engine of social and economic progress was splintered and out of power. The war had broken a master politician and a great national political party built around a broad consensus for change. In this context it makes sense that, despite all of the outpouring of criticism, he still felt that Johnson was treated more kindly by the press than he deserved.

¹⁴⁸ Marquis Childs, “Paris Negotiation is Nixon’s No. 1 Job,” *Washington Post*, 13 December 1968, 28.

Conclusion

I have tried to weigh the figures I have known around the world during the last four decades in the balance of our time of troubles. What Hamlet said in warning to Polonius about actors being a mirror of their time is true of us who presume not only to record but to judge. I hope I have judged with understanding and compassion and with a realization that the demands have been such as to be almost beyond the capacity of mortal men, no matter how gifted.¹

Marquis Childs was, as his memoir suggested, both a “witness to power” and “a player in the game.” Only a select few journalists of each generation achieve his level of access and influence, or perceived influence, in public affairs. This dissertation has charted the course of his career in Washington during a time that he found deeply troubling. It shows that he was motivated by a set of core liberal principles that informed most of the writing that he did for nearly three decades. Prominent among these was the belief that the United States should play a positive, active role in global affairs. To do so, it must remain vigilant and strong, yet be open to negotiation to avoid conflict. He never questioned that the American system of government was superior to those of its adversaries and that the nation had a special mission to bring progress and democracy to the rest of the world. The atomic bomb and nuclear arms race provided the grim backdrop for everything he wrote and did much to shape his understanding of the peril of his time. He also believed in the power of government to protect rights and create a better world through education, jobs training, environmental protection, and the wise administration of policy toward democratic ends. For several decades, what Childs wrote on these subjects mattered in Washington and across the nation.

¹ Marquis Childs, *Witness to Power* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), 268-269.

As the dissertation has argued, he was a representative figure of the postwar consensus who played some role in giving shape to the intellectual contours of the era. The twin influences of La Follette-style progressivism and Wilsonian internationalism, re-imagined for the Cold War era and updated through first hand observation, marked his thinking until the end of his career. He carried with him as well the progressive's notion that information and reasoned analysis, disseminated to the public by expert interpreters, would lead to a better and more democratic future. Although he tried not to be seen as a special pleader, he was not afraid to be an advocate when necessary. In some instances, such as his role in crafting the foreign policy statement of Americans for Democratic Action in 1947 and his use of the column to promote liberals like David Lilienthal in 1948 and even Senator John F. Kennedy in 1960, this meant overstepping the bounds of traditional journalism. He also used his column to defend the rights and reputations of liberal allies caught up in the machinations of red scare politics or, like the atomic scientists, marginalized from the debate in a heated political culture. He took up liberal issues like the nuclear test ban, mutual defense organizations, democratization for former colonies, expansive foreign aid for development, open markets, comprehensive and affordable education, jobs training, and equality under the law for all citizens regardless of color. Although he wrote about hundreds of subjects over the nearly four decades of the most active part of his career, these issues remained fixed at the core of his urgent call for level-headed, practical change and forward-thinking leadership.

The world that he knew so well, however, was changing rapidly in the late stage of his career, and in ways that could not have pleased him. The strain of liberalism that had animated his thinking since the New Deal era was increasingly a thing of the past, done in by changing

political attitudes, intractable social and economic problems, and the catastrophic war in Southeast Asia. The world was changing so fast, he told graduates at the University of Iowa in 1969, that the nation's political and cultural framework could not contain it.² Although his thinking had evolved a great deal since his arrival in Washington in the 1930s, he had a hard time fitting the "new politics" that he wrote about in the late 1960s into his own framework of understanding. It represented the end of his era and posed serious challenges both to his status as an insider and to his effectiveness as an observer and participant in the game. Although he emerged in the early and mid-1970s as a somewhat unlikely friend and supporter of Henry Kissinger, he was generally excluded from the Nixon White House. All those years of criticism of Nixon, dating back to the red scare of the late 1940s, came back to haunt him and he found himself on the "enemies list" with so many other liberals and critics in the media.³ As the historian Doug Rossinow has argued, many liberals marked the era as "a requiem for progress."⁴ The liberal consensus in which Childs was comfortable had unraveled. The public was much less supportive of liberal ideas and policies and his old allies in government and the press wielded less influence.

In the broader sense, journalism itself was changing rapidly. This was due in part to the rise of television and the gradual diminishment of the newspaper- and its political columnists- that had been underway for two decades. Syndicated columnists still populated the pages of

² "Mass Man in a Technological Society," commencement address at the University of Iowa, 6 June 1969, Childs Papers, University of Iowa, box 2.

³ When Nixon wrote to congratulate him on his Pulitzer Prize, Childs, always the reporter, responded with a request for a private interview at the White House. Childs to Richard Nixon, 11 May 1970, Childs Papers, 1972 addition, box 1. Childs later reported on Nixon's historic trip to China, but this was the result of his relationship with Kissinger and not with the president himself. See Childs, *Witness to Power*, 223-240.

⁴ Doug Rossinow, *Visions of Progress: The Left-Liberal Tradition in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 213.

American newspapers in impressive numbers, but their influence had started to wane. When Walter Lippmann died and Joseph Alsop retired in 1974, an era, one that Childs also helped to define, came to a close.⁵ No longer was a Reston or a Lippmann equally as important as a senior senator or ranking diplomat, as some in the heyday of the political columnist had believed. At the same time, public attitudes about the mass media were becoming more complex. On one hand, the Fourth Estate enjoyed a brief period in limelight after Watergate when, according to industry lore, eager undergraduates flocked to journalism schools. But positioning the new generation of investigative journalists as “folk heroes of a new era,” as did one enthusiastic media scholar, misses the larger picture.⁶ Starting among critics of press coverage of the civil rights movement, but soon becoming widespread among those on the right, a new critique of the so-called “liberal media” began to take deep root in American political culture.⁷ This manifested most forcefully in the early 1970s in Nixon and Vice-President Spiro Agnew’s “assault on the media,” but more broadly the conventions and ideological underpinnings of the press became part of the political discourse, not merely the site in which this discourse took place.⁸

Childs himself viewed these changes with a deep concern. He understood the political backlash against news organizations as a “concerted attempt to intimidate the media” and believed it found a welcome reception among many in the public who felt the press had gone

⁵ Donald A. Ritchie, *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 157-158.

⁶ James H. Dybert, *The Investigative Journalist: Folk Heroes of a New Era* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976).

⁷ See David Greenberg, “The Idea of ‘the Liberal Media’ and its Roots in the Civil Rights Movement,” *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture* 1: 2 (December 2008): 167-186, and Mark Major, “Objective But Not Impartial: *Human Events*, Barry Goldwater, and the Development of the ‘Liberal Media’ in the Conservative Counter-Sphere,” *New Political Science* 34:4 (December 2012): 455-468.

⁸ See William E. Porter, *Assault on the Media: The Nixon Years* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976) and William Small, *To Kill a Messenger: Television News and the Real World* (New York: Hastings House, 1970).

too far.⁹ He discussed these concerns in his column and other published writing, as well as a number of speeches to journalism students and civic groups. In the mid-1970s he worked on a project funded by a Ford Foundation grant to study shifts in public attitudes about the mass media.¹⁰ As Childs and other media analysts from the time found, the profession was losing the battle to maintain the public trust. In his role as an interpretive reporter, it was necessary for his audience to meet him halfway and this was less likely to happen in an era when the credibility of all institutions was in decline.

Some of the change, however, came from shifts within the news media itself. One trend saw the development of a much more critical, and even aggressive, attitude toward power on the part of many Washington journalists.¹¹ Childs had never been deferential to individuals in positions of authority. As numerous examples from this dissertation have shown, he could be as forceful as anyone with a critique. However, he did share an older style of respect for and deference to the institutions of power that no longer held sway.¹² He believed in the system and was, in his own way, an insider, a part of the “establishment” that shared a set of ideas from an earlier time about how government should operate. This understanding informed the nature of his critique of those in power. In other ways, mainstream political journalism became less oppositional at the same time. Many in the business retreated from more overtly liberal

⁹ This was the theme of two speeches he gave in the early 1970s. See “Speech to Banquet of Sigma Delta Chi,” 16 November 1973, and “The White House and the Media,” Johns Hopkins University, 6 March 1974, Childs Papers, 1995 addition, box 2, folder 10.

¹⁰ The Ford Foundation awarded Childs nearly \$84,000 to finance the study. Although he did the research and wrote a long report, no work from the study was published. Research materials and the unpublished manuscript are in Childs Papers. The Ford Foundation made correspondence and internal communication about the project available to the author in 2006.

¹¹ Thomas E. Patterson, *Out of Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 79-81.

¹² James L. Baughman, *The Republic of Mass Culture*, 3 ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 181-182. See also James L. Aucoin, *The Evolution of Investigative Journalism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 48-49, 56-62.

attitudes about the issues of the day.¹³ At the same time, market forces, especially the dramatic decrease in newspaper competition, meant that editors downplayed controversy and sought a broad, middle-of-the-road audience.¹⁴ Childs' column had found a place on the editorial pages of many newspapers in competitive markets and was frequently used by editors to provide the liberal viewpoint on issues.¹⁵ With more columnists to choose from and less incentive to publish hard-hitting liberal material, there was less of an opportunity for a writer like Childs to achieve wide readership and influence.

In his own time, however, Marquis Childs made a place for himself on the pages of the nation's newspapers as a reliable member of the liberal consensus, a proponent of a dynamic American foreign policy, a reluctant but unwavering Cold Warrior, and a constant voice for civil rights and civil liberties. He used his skills as a reporter to cultivate a wide array of sources among the nation's political elite and translated this access into columns that informed his readers and, to a degree, influenced public opinion about the issues of his day. He wasn't always right about these people and events, but, as the quote at the beginning of this final section indicates, he tried to judge them fairly. He did his best to make sense of the troubled world that he was forced to live in.

¹³ David S. Broder, *Behind the Front Page: A Candid Look at How the News is Made* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 326-332.

¹⁴ Baughman, *Republic of Mass Culture*, 183-186.

¹⁵ A. Gayle Waldrop, "Diversity of Opinion on Editorial Columns," *Editor & Publisher*, 5 September 1953, 12, 49-50, and "A Fighting Balance of Ideas that Conform," *Editor & Publisher*, 12 September 1953, 12, 32.

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