

# A Contemporary Witch Hunt: The McCarthy Era at Cal Poly

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by

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The Second Red Scare, starting in 1947, continuing through the 1950s and into the early 1960s, can be described as a contemporary witch hunt. McCarthyism, described as “a method, a tactic, an attitude, a tendency, a mood, a hysteria, an ideology, and a philosophy,”<sup>1</sup> was in full force as Senator Joseph R. McCarthy began to play on the panic the public felt regarding the USSR and communism. McCarthy dedicated five years attempting to expose communists and other “left-wing loyalty risks” within the U.S. government. Due to the “hyper-suspicious atmosphere” of the Cold War, even insinuating disloyalty was enough to convince Americans that their government was packed with Commies and Reds. McCarthy’s accusations were so intimidating that few people dared to speak out against him. It was not until he attacked the Army in 1954 that his actions earned him the censure of the U.S. Senate. And though he was removed from politics in the mid-1950s, the hysterics revolving around labeling supposed “Communists” began to infiltrate many institutions, including the university systems in the United States. Due to McCarthy’s reckless allegations, many professors, administrators, and students fell victim to the plague of McCarthyism.

Many researchers and historians in the field of Cold War studies have overlooked how the Second Red Scare and McCarthyism have impacted various aspects of university life, tending more toward the political and economic implications it had. However, since anti-Communism was so driven into Americans’ minds at the time, historians like Ellen Schrecker, Leo Breiman, and Jane Sanders have noted that McCarthyist behavior had been deeply entrenched in

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas C. Reeves, “McCarthyism: Interpretations since Hofstadter,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, Vol. 60, No. 1 (Autumn, 1976): 47, accessed January 31, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu/stable/4635090>

University life. Schrecker, often noted as “the dean of the anti-anti-Communist historians,”<sup>2</sup> explains how throughout the university system, there was an intense intellectual conformity occurring, and it was better, due to the fear of being labeled a communist, to pledge allegiance to the cause of fighting Communism rather than oppose it.<sup>3</sup> Breiman, a student at UC Berkeley during the mid 1950s, explains that during his time as a student, he participated in and was president of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and actively fought against California’s Loyalty Oath, which had explicit specifications for professors and teachers to follow and espouse California’s constitution while discouraging communistic behavior. However, his personal choices as a student reflected terribly on his future.<sup>4</sup> Shortly after his graduation, he joined the military, only to experience backlash during his service. The military, after being targeted by McCarthy, investigated Breiman's past, and after finding out about his ACLU presence, discharged him from his duty. Reeves, another Cold War historian, focuses on administrative disciplines throughout the Red Scare and how McCarthyism affected the outcomes. Overall, though the historiography of Red Scare implications on universities is limited, historians seem to be in agreement that the McCarthyism found its place on campuses nation-wide.

Cal Poly’s records show parallels with other universities’ attempts to subdue communism. Records show that Cal Poly was staunch in its anti-Communist policies, like

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald Radosh, "The Truth-Spiller: *Red Spy Queen: A Biography of Elizabeth Bentley* (Book Review)," *National Review* (Feb. 2003), 52-53.

<sup>3</sup>Ellen Schrecker, "Political Tests for Professors: Academic Freedom during the McCarthy Years," *The University Loyalty Oath Symposium*, October 7, 1999, accessed January 31, 2016. [http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/uchistory/archives\\_exhibits/loyaltyoath/symposium/schrecker.html](http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/uchistory/archives_exhibits/loyaltyoath/symposium/schrecker.html)

<sup>4</sup> Leo Breiman, "On McCarthyism at Berkeley: The Enemy Is Us," *Daedalus*, Vol. 131, No. 2, On Intellectual Property (Spring 2002), 130.

denying alleged communist speakers such as Jimmy Hoffa<sup>5</sup> (a International Brotherhood of Teamsters labor union activist)<sup>6</sup> to campus for fear that having these speakers would damage the school's democratic and nationalistic reputation. Cal Poly president Julian McPhee also seemed very interested in suppressing anti-capitalist speech during the Red Scare, as demonstrated by various correspondences and interactions with students and professors. Cal Poly's student body also seemed to sometimes recoil from Communist activity, however others seemed to take a much more moderate stance. Some seemed to have a defensive nature about the USSR and the Communist party, while others argued in defense of Communism and the USSR, documented by various articles and letters to the editor in the *El Mustang*.

This paper's intent is to argue that Cal Poly's administration followed in the footsteps of more conservative, intolerant schools, like Princeton and Harvard,<sup>7</sup> in its attempts to deter subversive behavior among not only the student body but also its professors. Administrative decisions and policies, like loyalty oaths and bans on communist and socialist speakers, parallel decisions made by the federal government as well as universities around the country. Cal Poly's stereotypically conservative student body was surprisingly not all conservative with respect to McCarthyism. Varying student responses in documents like articles in the *El Mustang* demonstrate a split between opinions and perceptions regarding Communism: some of the students followed the national pathway and loathed Communism, while other students attempted to argue that anti-Communism was a Republican agenda and a very loaded phrase with very little understanding.

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<sup>5</sup>McPhee to inquirors about Cal Poly Speakers, 5 January 1962. Box 32 Folder 144.02 Campus Speakers Communism, 1961-1962. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur A. Sloane, *Hoffa* (Boston: MIT Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 240-256.

### Historiography

Documented information about McCarthyism at universities is slim, so experts in this field are few. Due to this stunted research, historiographical debate among historians, in regards to anti-Communist behavior, seems to be all in agreement that McCarthyism had found a presence in university life. Though there are hardly any contemporary researchers in this field, the ones that exist do make overarching explanations for anti-Communist behaviors at universities based often on the more extreme sides of the political spectrum like extreme conservatism or extreme liberalism. These historians, including the leaders of this field Ellen Schrecker and Jane Sanders, both argue that anti-Communism was a very prevalent political ideology from the late 1940s into the late 1950s with McCarthy-esque views still infiltrating present-day perceptions and teachings.

Ellen Schrecker is the pioneer of contemporary research into McCarthyism at universities. She argues throughout all her works that university life, including the faculty, administration, and students, were heavily influenced by the anti-communist sentiment seeming to engulf the nation.<sup>8</sup> In her book, *No Ivory Towers: McCarthyism and the Universities*, she delves deep into the deceitfulness of the era in regards to the education system nation-wide. Schrecker is quick to place blame on the liberals. She argues that McCarthyism at universities started with the “attack on [Henry] Wallace.” When the liberals joined those attacks, they “helped transform anti-communism from a right-wing to a mainstream concern.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it was liberal faculty’s responsibility to stand up for the “vulnerable colleagues” who practiced

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<sup>8</sup> Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 24.

<sup>9</sup> Schrecker, *No Ivory Tower*, 48.

what that era would deem “subversive behavior.”<sup>10</sup> However, according to Schrecker, they simply did not.

In the beginning of the nation's attempt to control subversive behavior, Schrecker argues that universities did not administer severe restrictions on individuals but more so on activities and groups. Her example was Cornell regarding its tolerance for the Academic Youth Development, or AYD, which had ties to the American Communist Party that were not hushed. Edmund E. Day, president of Cornell, explained that the university is “watching its progress-or rather its lack of progress-with interest....and I am confident that it will never become necessary for us to confer upon its members the dignity of martyrdom.”<sup>11</sup> Cornell implemented an increasingly common approach known as the “membership lists.” Basically, it was a way for the university to keep track of all members of certain groups, mainly those representing a Communist agenda. Robert Fogel, an economic historian, stated that “such lists represent a threat to the security of our members and abridgement of civil rights.”<sup>12</sup> And though many young liberals objected to it, case studies at other universities, like Harvard, show that the membership lists did exactly what they were meant to do. Instead of providing these lists like Deans of schools asked, many chapters of Communist affiliated groups, like the AYD, disbanded instead for fear of government involvement.<sup>13</sup>

Schrecker’s most compelling evidence, though, is her research into the denial of tenure for “potentially” Communist faculty members. She was the first historian to access the American Association-University Professors archives, after six years of supplicating. These records show

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<sup>10</sup> Lionel S. Lewis, *No Ivory Tower: McCarthyism and the Universities* Book Review, *Academe* Vol. 73, No. 1 (Jan. - Feb., 1987): 48.

<sup>11</sup>Schrecker, 86.

<sup>12</sup>Schrecker, 87.

<sup>13</sup>Schrecker, 87.

nearly 75 professors that were unable to find jobs after being indicted to the academic blacklist.<sup>14</sup>

She argues that though universities attempted to sweep the reasoning for the denials under the rug, it was obvious that teachers deserving of tenure had it withheld due to potential pervasive political behavior. One example of unrightful withholding of tenure was a psychologist named Ralph Gundlach. Gundlach had never self-identified as a Communist or “intellectual Marxist”; however he was known for his passionate, but often radical political nature. With Gundlach’s refusal to comply with this “trial” of sorts, in a majority vote, the committee found Gundlach guilty not explicitly being a part of the Communist Party, but being “just as effective as an agent of the communist party,”<sup>15</sup> which resulted with the termination of his professorship.

Jane Sanders, author of *Cold War on the Campus*, took a close look at the cases regarding tenure at the University of Washington. Sanders’ main intent of this book is to show “the relationship during 1947-1948 between the campus community and the Caldwell Committee, the state legislature’s Interim Committee on Un-American Activities.”<sup>16</sup> She argued that it might seem strange that these tenures in question did not cause a backlash or spark complaints of breach in academic freedom. However, she goes on to explain that it is expected because many university faculty believed that the campus was no place for Communist behavior.<sup>17</sup> Sanders discussed three professors’ cases in particular in regard to the tenure conflict that was sweeping the nation.

Both sources hold immense amounts of information regarding a national presence of Communism on campuses. However, as shown by a plethora of book reviews regarding both

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<sup>14</sup>Ellen Schrecker, “Correspondences: McCarthyism at Universities,” *Academe* Vol. 73, No. 3 (May - Jun., 1987): 7.

<sup>15</sup>Schrecker, *No Ivory Towers*, 103.

<sup>16</sup> Irving G. Hendrick, *Cold War on Campus* Book Review, *Pacific Historical Review* Vol. 50, No. 4 (Nov., 1981): 545.

<sup>17</sup> Jane Sanders, *Cold War on Campus* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979).

works, Sanders' seems to be a book with less of an agenda than Schrecker's. An interesting review by Lionel S. Lewis regarding *No Ivory Tower* was very blunt calling her work too "ideological to be of any scholarly value" reiterating that the Cold War was not "as grim...as Schrecker would have us believe."<sup>18</sup> Schrecker, in a correspondence back to Lewis, defended her way of researching through interviews and countering his skepticism with "a careful historian will approach all sources with considerable skepticism."<sup>19</sup> She reiterates her points, confirming that she and Lewis must have differing "ideologies". However, to me it seems like her agenda regarding the Communist Party is more than just to offer research results. I am not calling her a Communist, but her writing is skewed towards berating the liberals who let McCarthyism take over campus instead of concisely and subjectively giving both perspectives and contexts. She said "other scholars will, I hope, follow up with other leads,"<sup>20</sup> and though her work has pioneered other historians' endeavors into this topic, I am glad there are other works that seem to be more subjective, like Sanders'.<sup>21</sup>

One thing to note about this subject, though, is that there is a lack of documentary evidence, thus making it hard to have concrete research without including interviews as a primary source. Schrecker, in her bibliography, explained that without her interviews with witnesses of McCarthyistic infiltration, her research would have never come together. Lewis condemns her for this in his review. I, however, am facing similar problems to Schrecker's in my research of McCarthyism at Cal Poly. Schrecker summed up this struggle fairly concisely when she explained that "ideally...it would have been best if contemporary documentation had been available for everything I wanted to examine. But, given the hysteria of the 1950s and the desire

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis, 48.

<sup>19</sup> Schrecker, "Correspondences," 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, 48.

of institutions and individuals not to leave a paper trail, there were often few sources of any type for some of the more sensitive aspects of academic community's response to McCarthyism."<sup>22</sup> She turned to interviews because she researched the book in the 1980s and, due to the recency of the event, there were still people alive to tell their stories. However, conducting research in 2016 is much harder because the availability of sources to interview is limited. Luckily, though, I found McCarthyesque decisions throughout the administrative records at Cal Poly as well as student body concern voiced in articles in the student newspaper, *El Mustang*.

### McCarthyism Entrenched in Cal Poly Administration

The administration's decisions, particularly President McPhee's, were heavily influenced by the national witch hunt conducted against potential Communists. The end of the 1940s and up through the early 1960s held a lot of pressure on the world of academia, especially on the heads of administrations, so McPhee was often forced to be vocal about his stance regarding various Communist outlets.

One of the most shocking displays of McCarthyism on Cal Poly's campus is the blatant denial of alleged "Communist or Socialist" speakers on campus. To Cal Poly's defense though, this wasn't limited to one campus but all of California's state universities. Due to the public's intense concern regarding "red infiltration" onto campuses statewide, the people and the media pushed for Dr. Buell Gallagher, chancellor for state colleges, to make a statement on whether or not to ban Communist speakers from campuses. Gallagher decided that the decision needed to be made at the college level by "individual presidents because the state college board of trustees has not taken a stand."<sup>23</sup> The majority of campuses decided to put a ban on Socialist and Communist

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<sup>22</sup>Schrecker, "Correspondances", 7.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Davis, "9 Colleges Lack Policy on Reds," *The San Diego Union* (San Diego, CA), Jan, 20, 1962.

speakers, however the black sheep of the group was the President of Sonoma State, Dr. Ambrose R. Nichols, who would consider letting a Communist speak. McPhee's statement on the matter is as follows; "I prohibit them [Communists] altogether, and before any controversial figure comes on the campus I want him well screened."<sup>24</sup> Come to find out, though, that soon after, McPhee made it mandatory that every visiting speaker be screened to make sure they were up to the reputable Cal Poly standards. Though no club ever asked to bring an alleged Communist speaker to campus in a documented correspondence to McPhee, McPhee took the screening very seriously. Dale Andrew, an advisor for the Business Club, wrote to McPhee inquiring about a "special speaker for [the] business club."<sup>25</sup> However, after finding out the guest was James "Jimmy" Hoffa, Teamster head and known associate of criminals, McPhee responded with "Why would we want or need a person with such a questionable reputation come to Cal Poly which would surely result in poor publicity?"<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, attached to the upcoming list of speakers sent from McPhee to Dr. Glenn Dumke, the Chancellor, he made certain to include this clause. "We have had no speakers who are known Communist or members of other similar extremist groups. Likewise, we have not found it necessary to exclude any speaker from our campus in the period on this inquiry."<sup>27</sup> McPhee, though it is not terribly obvious whether he was politically against Communists or wanted to protect Cal Poly's reputation, was staunch in his attempts to subdue subversive behavior.

Another hotly debated topic beginning in 1949 and continuing throughout the Second Red Scare was the controversy regarding state employees signing the California Loyalty Oath.

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<sup>24</sup> Davis, a4.

<sup>25</sup> McPhee to inquirors about Cal Poly Speakers, 5 January 1962. Box 32 Folder 144.02 Campus Speakers Communism, 1961-1962. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Davis, a4.

After WWII, Communism became the United States' main concern and, in May of 1949, the California Loyalty Oath read as follows:

I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of California, and that I will faithfully discharge the duties of my office according to the best of my ability; that I do not believe in, and I am not a member of, nor do I support any party or organization that believes in, advocates, or teaches the overthrow of the United States Government, by force or by any illegal or unconstitutional means.<sup>28</sup>

On June 24, the latter part was changed to make specific reference to the Communist Party:

“...that I am not a member of the Communist Party or under any oath or a party to any agreement or under any commitment that is in conflict with my obligations under this oath.”<sup>29</sup> This clause worried many professors all over California, but especially at universities like the University of California, Berkeley. Teachers who refused to sign the oath were more often than not released from their positions on campus and put on an academic blacklist, unable to find jobs at other universities. Students also fought against this oath and among them was Leo Breiman. Breiman was a student at the University of California, Berkeley and the first president of the ACLU. The group “worked for repeal of the loyalty oath legislation and were tireless and highly visible advocates of free speech on campus...Free speech...meant free speech for all-liberals and conservatives, Nazis and Communists, no matter how odious their beliefs.”<sup>30</sup> However, after graduation and his entrance into the military, his visible advocacy for freedom of beliefs was

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Greenberg, “The Loyalty Oath at the University of California: A Report on Events, 1949-1958,” *Free Speech Movement Archives*, accessed Feb. 27, 2016, [http://www.fsm-a.org/stacks/AP\\_files/APLoyaltyOath.html](http://www.fsm-a.org/stacks/AP_files/APLoyaltyOath.html).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Brieman, 130.

very costly. After McCarthy targeted the military, “the Army had promised to weed out new inductees suspected of previous disloyal activities,”<sup>31</sup> Army investigators found out about his ACLU presence and Breiman was interrogated for almost two years until the judge decided against undesirable or dishonorable discharge. He was eventually given honorable discharge, but he still says he has “nightmares about that period.”<sup>32</sup>

The loyalty oath at Cal Poly was not as controversial as elsewhere, but there was a brief deliberation about whether or not it had to be mandatory. On September 7, 1950, recorded in the SLO President’s Council Minutes and Agenda, Harold Wilson, dean of the Voorhis Unit (now Cal Poly Pomona), reported a conversation with McPhee and Simpson in which Simpson asked that the loyalty oath be taken on a voluntary basis. It was also suggested that the oath be put before the Faculty Advisory Committee. However, there were no minutes from meetings that reflect this issue was ever put before this committee.<sup>33</sup> Later, in the October 13, 1950 President’s Council minutes, it was announced that the loyalty oath had recently become mandated by law: all state employees would have to sign it or they would not be put on the payroll.<sup>34</sup> Whether this discussion was due to the statewide problems other universities were facing or a more personal level that was undocumented about Cal Poly faculty, it is very interesting that the administration brought up even making it voluntary. It seems like they were trying to dodge future lawsuits or potential uproar from faculty and students regarding the oath.

Another interesting finding was a statewide correspondence between presidents of state colleges that was written to determine what incompatible activities were going to be prohibited

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>33</sup> SLO President’s Council Minutes and Agenda for 1950-51, 7 Sept. 1950. Special Collections and Archives, California. Polytechnic State University, 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

from faculty. Most of these activities included such things as professors being required to have enough time for grading, teaching, answering questions for students; however, it wasn't until McPhee added more political restraints did these incompatible activities have McCarthyesque undertones. On January 19, 1950, McPhee wrote to the other presidents and for the State Personnel Board's approval that "no member employed by the California Polytechnic College shall participate in unethical political activities as may be defined as unethical in the statutes of the State of California."<sup>35</sup> He also wrote "that no member employed by the California State Polytechnic College shall hold membership and/or participate in any un-American subversive organizations."<sup>36</sup> With McPhee's addition to these activities, it further shows his efforts to control his faculty's teachings and outside endeavors.

The thing that is questionable, though, is the lack of documented opinions or evidence from the faculty during this decade. Neither the Faculty Advisory Committee nor the Staff Conference meeting minutes show any discussion about the loyalty oath, freedom cases, or any political aspects differing from the national norm. It seems that there was no discussion on paper about faculty that were either sympathetic or against Communism because, as Schrecker had explained, the punishment for leaving a paper trail was much too threatening. The faculty glossed over many impending statewide and national issues due to the looming potential of becoming another name on the academic blacklist.

Since there was no evidence in Cal Poly's archives to show the faculty's opinions regarding Communism, I looked to other organizations that could potentially hold answers and came across files housed at George Washington University. These files are from the AAUP's

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<sup>35</sup> McPhee's correspondences with other presidents, 19 Jan. 1950. Box 99 Folder 2, 144.02 State College Presidents, Incompatible Activities, 1950-52. Special Collections and Archives, California Polytechnic State University.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*,

records and are about two cases regarding Cal Poly faculty that fall into similar time frames as potential loyalty oath cases would have. Unfortunately, I was not able to look into these files nor get any information about them, due to distance, so if this research is to be continued further, that would be a good place to look. These files hold the potential to prove that some Cal Poly faculty didn't agree with the anti-Communist ideology, however inside these files could be a plethora of other things as well.

### Student Perceptions of McCarthyism on Campus

The student opinion about Communism on campus is harder to decipher than that of the anti-Communist administration. Traditionally known as a more conservative campus, and having long traces of primarily Republican roots, the response to national cases of subversive Communist behavior has a far more lively debate than expected. Keeping in mind that the documents in the school newspaper *El Mustang* are from voluntary response and that usually people who write publicly have strong opinions one way or the other, the documentation not only from the *El Mustang* staff but also the student body's letters to the editor are both matching and contrasting with the free speech mentality discussed by Breiman.

Before getting into the discussion of more liberal responses, there are students' responses that parallel the administrative decisions. One is the highly unusual obituary of 29 year old Ag Business major Piero Cariecia. Traditional obituaries usually contain the deceased's accomplishments, family, legacy, etc., but Cariecia's focused on his anti-Communist activism back in his homeland of Italy.<sup>37</sup> Cariecia's obituary shows just how anti-Communism was and how deeply engrained it was into daily life that his biggest accomplishment was fighting Communism. It is not clear whether Cariecia's anti-Communism was due to his roots in Fascist

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<sup>37</sup> "Services Pending for Student," *El Mustang* (San Luis Obispo, CA), Oct. 26, 1962.

Italy before attending Cal Poly or not, however it is interesting how an American idea and hysteria became embedded into a foreign mind.

These back and forth disagreements between anti-Communist students and the more moderate to liberal students continued throughout the decade. For instance, the editor of the newspaper, John M. Patterson, wrote an editorial discussing the American Youth for Democracy (AYD) and its speculated sympathy to the Communist Party. After some issues with this organization on other campuses, like Colorado University where the president of the University, Robert L. Stearns “killed that chapter,” Patterson took to the paper to write: “It is our belief that if such organizations are not allowed the same protection that other organizations enjoy by precedent, interpretation, and consent of the Constitution, the democracy as we understand it has failed.”<sup>38</sup> The student body took this as Communist sympathy, and attacked Patterson. Among those was S.Q. Jackson who wrote:

“As for the justification of President Robert L. Stearns’ action in the Boulder Campus case, all I have to say to comrade J.M.P. is that it was the same breed of simple minded lugger-heads as you, J.M.P., that raised the old cry of ‘unconstitutional,’ in defense of the Bunds [Communist party in Russia], or has our editor forgotten those friendly little organizations. Just one more thing before I lay my pen aside. I hear that “ Uncle Joe” [Joseph Stalin] is giving away autographed pictures of himself to all of his good comrades in the U. S., and I thought the editor might want one.”<sup>39</sup>

This response holds a lot of parallelism between student thoughts and national thoughts. Even the mere mention of Communism in a different fashion had students, like Jackson, up in arms.

His thoughts and writing style, to put frankly, show his despisal of any Communism, even down

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<sup>38</sup> John M. Patterson, “Communism--Democracy?” *El Mustang* (San Luis Obispo, CA), April 10, 1947, 4.

<sup>39</sup> S.Q. Jackson, “To Comrade J.M.P.,” *El Mustang* (San Luis Obispo, CA), April 17, 1947, 2.

to his referral to J.M.P as comrade alluding to Karl Marx's works. This example shows the true discrepancies in thoughts between students on campus and just how intolerant they were of other views. There is a multitude of other exchanges paralleling this between staunch anti-Communists and those who were not as stalwart in their beliefs.

An interesting connection that student Donald Miller tried to make in his article "Switch List" was the synonymy between Republicans and Communists. He argued that "the former [Republicans] is hindering European aid; the latter [Communists] wants an economically chaotic Europe."<sup>40</sup> Now the author is not saying ideologically Republicans and Communists are the same, but both political groups are "destroying" Europe in similar ways. The US's denial of funding European aid to stop Communism was, according to Miller, a Republican choice, so what Miller is saying is that Republicans were potentially at fault for the spread of "Communist paralysis."<sup>41</sup> Donald Miller's article found much rebuttal in the next week's edition of the paper, particularly the letters to the editor. Juan Marin, a student at Cal Poly, wrote a well worded, but essentially Republican retaliation that defended Republican politicians in the House and Senate. Another letter, published with the author's name withheld, started off with the inflammatory statement "Donald Miller and pinhead are synonymous." He wrote "by his line of thinking, he is admitting that he once was a Communist himself,"<sup>42</sup> arguing that he agrees with what Miller is essentially arguing, except for the comparison between Communists and Republicans. This argument furthers this idea that the word "Communist", not necessarily the ideas, was what people feared and abhorred.

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<sup>40</sup>Donald Miller, "Switch List," *El Mustang* (San Luis Obispo, CA), Jan. Dec. 12, 1947,6.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Name withheld, "Letter to the Editor to Donald Miller," *El Mustang* (San Luis Obispo, CA), Dec. 19, 1947, 6.

The idea of hating the word is also documented in another letter to the editor regarding a previous statement by the *El Mustang* staff on their stance against Communist input through letters in the newspaper. The staff wrote “we stand firm in our belief that the mail in general and ours in particular should not be sullied by the pro-Communist pap that is poured into it endlessly.”<sup>43</sup> The author of the letter to the editor, Russell C. Gates, counters with his views that the word Communism is much more loaded than the political ideology itself. “Communism to me is definitely a loaded word. It carries a lot of meaning today that has been very misleading to the public. I don’t want to create the impression that I am a so called “red,” but it is because of my respect for our present form of government that I am writing this letter.”<sup>44</sup> He goes on further to ask the newspaper to open up its pages to students who want to write about fascism, socialism, communism, or any other ideology that they choose, because it is a student newspaper. He ends with a call-to-action to the editors: “Don’t let the ‘red scare’ influence the freedom of the press and education. You know and I know what happens when that sort of thing takes place.” The staff responded to this letter by saying “Such material, regardless of its content, has no place in *El Mustang*, which is not printed to use as a political science textbook. We were aware of the activities of the communist organization which sent the material. Their return address was plain. We want no affiliation with them. We returned the magazine and we shall continue to do so to material of a like nature...”<sup>45</sup> What is intriguing about this confrontation is this break in stereotypical nature. Newspapers are typically seen as very liberal entities, so the *El Mustang*, particularly under the editorship of Don Johnson, conferring with extreme conservative notions is out of the norm. Gates shows parallels to students fighting at liberal colleges like UC

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<sup>43</sup> Russell C. Gates, “Letter to the Editor,” *El Mustang* (San Luis Obispo, CA), Aug. 27, 1948, 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Don Johnson, “Response to Russell C. Grant,” *El Mustang* (San Luis Obispo, CA), Aug. 29, 1948, 2.

Berkeley in his ideas, but instead of finding support in the student run newspaper, his ideas were essentially shut down and equated to pro-Communist propaganda.

The student body at Cal Poly had an awareness about the loyalty oath crisis affecting many other California schools. In an article titled “It Could Happen Here,” G. Hall Landry wrote about the University of Washington’s “red purge”, which was later investigated by historian Sanders, and how the anti-Communists could potentially come after the liberals on the Cal Poly campus:

It could happen here, just as at the University of Washington which during the latter part of July underwent a Red purge by the state legislature’s all-Republican Little Un-American Activities committee. The committee fired the opening gun by charging 150 profs as being all shades from pink to red, 40 subpoenaed, the rest investigated. In the klieglight hearing, with the National Guard and the state police for protection, the Little Un-Americans put the faculty on trial. Among a thousand faculty members they unearthed one who would bear witness against his colleagues and who swore he remembered seeing some faculty men at Communist meetings 11 years ago.<sup>46</sup>

He ends his article by talking about how the presence of the anti-Communists on campus could cause turmoil at Cal Poly. “Yes, it could happen here. If Tenney and his gang [anti-Communists] decide to visit Cal Poly, the liberals on campus (and in the hospital with appendicitis), who believe in their right to free speech...may be put under the klieg-lights.”<sup>47</sup> It never did happen at Cal Poly, however the campus had its own ideas when trying to keep Communism at bay.

In 1961, six students and Business and Law instructor J.R. Jones decided to advocate for an Anti-Communism Committee on campus. Ed Carnegie, a student spearheading the creation of

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<sup>46</sup> G. Hall Landry, “It Could Happen Here,” *El Mustang* (San Luis Obispo, CA) Aug. 27, 1948, 2.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

this committee, said “the purpose of this Committee on Anti-Communism is to inform, to educate and to create a patriotic responsibility not only to students on the campus, but to the general public as well.”<sup>48</sup> This group also advocated their purpose being to inform rather than dictate. This committee seemed to fizzle before it got any actual backing, but it shows that not only did some students follow the anti-Communist principles with fervor, other students, which thwarted this club’s success, believed at least in moderatism in regard to Communism. This case shows the true discrepancy that was reflected in the student’s’ actions against Communism at Cal Poly. It shows the parallelism in moderatism versus anti-Communism that was entrenched not only in campus’ nationwide in but politics nationwide as well.

### Conclusion

\_\_\_\_\_ Cal Poly is an interesting case in the sense that the administration was staunch in its anti-Communist principles, the faculty seemed to be fearful of the academic blacklist and essentially lacked a voice, and the perceived conservative students held ideals that were often much more in line with the moderates. This nationwide witch hunt was very much entrenched within the university system nationally with Cal Poly being no exception. Administrative decisions reflected McCarthyism while the student body not necessarily fought against that conceived notion but held ideals often differing with the administration. While researching this project, though, I discovered that McCarthyism was so entrenched in daily lives and daily decisions that there wasn’t a great deal of direct documentation of McCarthyist verbiage and phrasing. It was a lot of connecting the dots, but after seeing the bigger picture, Cal Poly’s stereotypically conservative nature was furthered by the administration and faculty but questioned by the student body.

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<sup>48</sup> Wayne Cox, “Group Hopes To Sponsor Anti-Communist Meeting,” *El Mustang* (San Luis Obispo, CA) Nov. 21, 1961, 1.

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