



McCarthy's Americans: Red Scare Politics in State and Nation, 1935-1965

M. J. Heale

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Was the communist witch-hunt unleashed by Senator Joe McCarthy an aberration, or has red scare politics been an intrinsic part of American political life since the 1930s? Was McCarthyism a populist or an elitist phenomenon? Was Senator McCarthy virtually irrelevant to the phenomenon?

McCarthy's Americans shows that some of the contending interpretations of McCarthyism are mutually compatible and reveals the importance of pressures usually overlooked. M. J. Heale's deeply probing study of McCarthy's "hinterland" in the American states demonstrates that what is usually called McCarthyism was part of a political cycle that emerged in the 1930s and took two decades to run its course.

Heale also argues that much of the red scare dynamic came from the big cities and the white South. It was here that a range of interests exhibiting a fundamentalist fury with the changing times that the political order had fashioned during the New Deal years rested on fragile foundations. Defying the "consensus liberalism" of the 1950s, McCarthy and, more important, the many little McCarthys in the states kept alive a brand of right-wing politics, preparing the way for George Wallace in the 1960s and the revitalized conservatism of Richard Nixon in the 1970s and Ronald Reagan in the 1980s.

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