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Reassessing the Army-McCarthy Hearings: Live Television's Impact on the Fate of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy

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by

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Abstract

Many broadcast historians customarily credit television with the public's eventual renunciation of Wisconsin Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and his Communist-hunting tactics. Normally cited are the ABC and Dumont networks' live coverage of the Army-McCarthy Hearings and Edward R. Murrow's *See It Now* broadcasts during the Spring of 1954. Utilizing literature review and secondary analysis of polling and census data from 1950 through 1954, this paper suggests the live broadcasts did not necessarily achieve the results credited them by many broadcast history textbooks.

Findings suggest it is doubtful that the ABC network reached a national audience, that the audience size was as large as reckoned, and that McCarthy's favorable and unfavorable ratings were permanently affected by the hearings. McCarthy appeared many times on television after his declaration in 1950 that Communists were employed within the U.S. State Department. After the F.C.C.-employed freeze ended in 1952, television provided McCarthy with many opportunities to appear via expanding networks to burgeoning audiences. It is appropriate to suggest that television did affect public opinion, but impressions were being molded quite some time before ABC offered the public daily coverage of the Hearings that pit the U.S. Army against its adversary, the junior Senator from Wisconsin.

Almost before the Army-McCarthy Hearings concluded, the conjecture arose that daily live television coverage induced the free-fall of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy's favorable public opinion and his power to influence legislative and executive policy (Straight, 1954). In little time, McCarthy biographers added to the assumption that when Americans finally saw McCarthy badgering witnesses and interrupting fellow senators, showing callous disregard for Senate rules or decorum, they turned on him (Rovere, 1959; Reeves, 1982). Historians (particularly those who have written broadcasting's history) likewise have credited the networks with hastening McCarthy's demise by influencing public opinion, even though only the two weakest networks provided complete live coverage (Barnouw, 1970; Doherty, 1998; Hilliard and Keith, 1997; Sterling and Kittross, 1990; also see Leab, 1983,). Although the eventual censure of McCarthy by the Senate and the senator's poor health also receive credit for disarming him in his crusade against Communist infiltration and influence within the government, the Army-McCarthy Hearings and their television coverage possess almost mythical status as the microscope that exposed the toxic virus.

How much of this record deserves readers' trust? Some have questioned the magnitude of the television variable (Schudson, 1997). Baughman (1992) downplayed television's role, questioning claims of a truly national television audience and high ratings for the two networks, ABC and Dumont, that carried the proceedings live. Halberstam (1993) marked McCarthy's political decline with the election of Dwight Eisenhower as president, a year and a half before the Army-McCarthy hearings. Lang and Lang (1968) observed that McCarthy's falling poll numbers were more likely the result of the Senate's censure vote after the hearings. Wiebe (1959) suggests that while the public was fascinated with the nationwide sensation of the Army-McCarthy

Hearings, public attitudes did not shift markedly after their conclusion. Darsey (1995) gives the Senate most of the credit: "The effect of the censure on the press and the public was immediate and unmistakable; it was no longer necessary to pay attention to Senator McCarthy (p. 80). Crowley and Heyer (1999) credit television with discouraging the press from covering McCarthy because television is a cool medium, which. "rejects hot figures and hot issues and people from the hot press media" (p. 252). Therefore, when McCarthy began appearing regularly on TV, he automatically became a casualty of the medium's bias against him.

Different accounts of the spectacle provide incorrect, incomplete and/or debatable details. Baughman (1992) and others characterize the hearings as "a Senate inquiry into Joseph McCarthy's charges that the Army had Communist sympathizers" (p. 52). In fact, the hearings resulted from and were called to investigate charges brought by the Secretary of the Army, Robert Stevens, on behalf of the Eisenhower Administration, against McCarthy and his chief aide Roy Cohn.[1] Stevens had accused them of trying to coerce army officers into giving an inductee, G. David Schine, special treatment. Schine was a co-worker and close friend of Cohn. In response, McCarthy counter-charged that the Army was attempting to blackmail the Senator by threatening to publish Cohn's activities on behalf of Schine, part of the Army's efforts to curtail the subcommittee's exposure of alleged Communists at Fort Monmouth (Congressional Quarterly, 1965). And while the Senate did vote to censure McCarthy in December, 1954, it was

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[1]The committee consisted of members of the Senate Committee on Government Operations' Permanent Investigations Subcommittee, whose chairman was Joseph R. McCarthy. For these hearings, a special committee chaired by Senator Karl Mundt, was appointed to adjudicate the charges.

not a result of the Army-McCarthy Hearings. In fact, the Senator was not censured for any speech or conduct from any Senate hearing.

The discrepancies involving the impact of the televised coverage of the Army-McCarthy Hearings motivate this paper. The conventional wisdom–that live television induced McCarthy's fall from power–emanated from the press, politicians, and public opinion. The supposition, based on polls, suggests that people had little exposure to McCarthy's recklessness prior to the hearings. According to Donovan and Scherer (1992), the Senate "condemnation probably would not have occurred if McCarthy had not embarrassed his party and if television had not exposed him to the nation" (p. 23). The assumption was that people did not really know the true McCarthy, and with the televised hearings "a whole nation watched him in murderous close-up–and recoiled" (Barnouw, 1970, p. 54). If that were so, why was the Congress disinclined to discipline McCarthy more severely?

As Dayan and Katz (1994) interpret it, the hearings meet several of the qualities of a true media event. Stipulated within their definition is the following qualities: the live broadcasting of an event which realizes the full potential of electronic media technology, its presentation to a huge audience that is prepared for it, generating excitement and serving to transform those involved. In political terms, such a "critical moment" creates a change that is visible, or a new process that evolves over time (Carmines and Stimson, 1989).

Those broadcast historians who suggest television made the difference in exposing McCarthy in 1954 add Edward R. Murrow to strengthen their case. The CBS program *See It Now*, hosted by Murrow, featured McCarthy on three separate occasions. The first installment, as introduced by Murrow, devoted "its entire half hour to a report on Senator Joseph R.

McCarthy, told mainly in his own words and pictures" (Murrow, March 9, 1954). That program was followed by an examination of McCarthy's treatment of a Pentagon clerical worker named Annie Lee Moss. At the conclusion of the first broadcast, Murrow gave McCarthy time to reply, and the senator responded on April 6 with a filmed speech (Reeves, 1982). Although broadcast history texts often bundle the *See It Now* program with the Army-McCarthy Hearings, Leab (1983) discovered that most professional historians mention only the hearings in association with McCarthy's political career.

This paper examines the timeline of Joseph McCarthy's appearances on network television from 1950 - 1954, television's growth during that span, and McCarthy's public opinion ratings. Using dates provided by McCarthy biographies (Rovere, 1959; Fried, 1976; Bayley, 1981; Reeves, 1982), sources relating television's history (Bogart, 1956; Barnouw, 1970), statistical data from 1950 through 1954 (Hansen, 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955; Yust, 1954; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975) and Gallup polls from 1950 through 1954, this paper attempts to verify conclusions about the years of Joseph McCarthy's power and influence. In particular, does the data support a strong connection between television and McCarthy's political demise?

McCARTHY ON TELEVISION

Wisconsin Senator Joseph R. McCarthy first made national headlines with a Lincoln Day speech he gave in Wheeling, West Virginia, February 9, 1950. In his remarks that evening, McCarthy claimed to have the names of as many as 205 (McCarthy later denied that number and eventually provided several other figures) active Communists in the State Department (McCarthy Insists, 1950, February 12). Within a month the term "McCarthyism" was coined by political

cartoonist Herbert Block (Washington Post, 1950, March 29; Block, 1952, p. 144), and Senator Millard Tydings of Maryland was appointed chairman of a subcommittee to investigate McCarthy's State Department charges. Bayley (1981) suggests that McCarthy's first national television appearances began during the Tydings inquiry. When the hearings were opened to the public, both television and newsreel photographers were on hand to record McCarthy's testimony (Reeves, 1982). In particular, testimony from and concerning Owen Lattimore was broadcast by NBC and CBS in April, 1950 (White, 1950, April 7; Lattimore, 1950). Lattimore, an authority on the Far East, was a professor at Johns Hopkins University and author of several books on Far Eastern affairs; he was also, according to McCarthy, the top Soviet espionage agent in the U.S. (Congress, 1951, October 22).

In 1951, McCarthy enjoyed few opportunities for national television exposure. The Subcommittee on Privileges and Elections of the Senate Rules and Administrative Committee investigated his involvement in the campaign to defeat Maryland Senator Tydings in 1950 (McCarthy did not testify), and he attacked President Harry Truman for relieving General Douglas MacArthur of his command (Reeves, 1982). In addition Connecticut Senator William Benton called for McCarthy's expulsion from the Senate. Such Senate chamber speeches did not allow for the presence of television cameras. Hearings into Benton's call for McCarthy's forced resignation lasted into spring, 1952, but they do not appear to have been televised (Congressional Quarterly, 1965).

The 1952 Republican National Convention offered the television networks their first real opportunity to broadcast the entire proceedings to the nation. McCarthy spoke to the delegates and to network television audiences the afternoon of July 9, during which he reiterated many of

his previously publicized charges against the State Department, Lattimore, Truman and others (Loftus, 1952). But during the fall campaign, his more notable speech came days before the election. With funds provided him by supporters, McCarthy purchased network television air time to broadcast a speech in Chicago on October 27. In it, he insisted that the background of Democratic presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson included many instances of Communist sympathizing (Johnston, 1952, October 28).

With his re-election to the Senate, Eisenhower's presidential victory and a Republican majority in the Senate in 1953, McCarthy ascended to the chair of the Senate's Committee on Government Operations Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. Now he could take advantage of invitations to appear on many television interview programs. And he promised that his committee would investigate any phase of Communist infiltration and influence within the government.(Reeves, 1982).

The subcommittees' first hearings to include network television coverage revolved around McCarthy's charges of subversion at the Voice of America (VOA), an external radio broadcasting service of the State Department. The hearings were opened to the public and to television soon after they began in February (Conklin, 1953; Trussell, 1953). Some days' proceedings were televised, others were not. Television writer Jack Gould (1953, March 8) took the networks to task for their inconsistency in coverage. Reed Harris, deputy director of the State Department's International Information Administration, was the principal figure in the investigation into VOA's radio services overseas. NBC, the first to offer coverage, discontinued its coverage one day before Harris presented much of his testimony answering McCarthy's

charges. On another morning, ABC, which also televised the hearings, ended its coverage in the middle of Harris's rebuttal.

Faced with less network coverage and a lower public profile, McCarthy fell back on press conferences and briefings. Rovere (1959, p. 164) suggests McCarthy invented the morning press conference whose sole purpose was to announce an afternoon press conference. Several times that spring he called news conferences that were televised. Journalist and author Ben Bagdikian (quoted in Bayley, 1981) remembers that "McCarthy used to bring his witnesses out of closed hearings each day in time for the noon news and the six o'clock news" (p. 184).

By July 1953, McCarthy was forced to begin justifying himself, his tactics, and his staff before the press, and often used television to defend and to counterattack. Roy Cohn and David Schine, McCarthy's associates, earned harsh criticism from both American and European leaders for their probes of Communist influences in State Department libraries overseas (Ewald, Jr., 1984). In July McCarthy took to television in response to criticism of his anti-Communist campaigns by Oklahoma Senator Mike Monroney, Eisenhower's brother Arthur and Arkansas Senator William Fullbright (the last during a televised public hearing of the Senate Appropriations Committee) (Reeves, 1982).

Within a month McCarthy had initiated (practically by himself--Subcommittee Democrats refused to associate themselves with McCarthy's investigations) public hearings on Communist infiltration of the United States Army[2]. High on his list for interrogation was Secretary of the Army Robert Stevens. His subcommittee of one was enjoying "the constant

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[2]There were other hearings, often open to the public and to television, including an interrogation of an employee at the Government Printing Office, Edward Rothschild, and a clerk employed by the Polish delegation to the United Nations, Julius Reiss (Reeves, 1982).

attention of the press and remaining a regular fixture on daytime television in Washington and wherever it traveled" (Reeves, 1982, p. 509). About the only thing that slowed him down was his wedding, although he even shortened the honeymoon because of new allegations from his staff back in Washington. They concerned the possibility of Communist infiltration at the Army Signal Corps Center at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey (Reeves, 1982). From the summer of 1953 into the spring of 1954, several televised public hearings kept the public's attention on McCarthy. They also served to galvanize the resistance of two adversaries: the White House and the U.S. Army.

The Administration's public opposition began not with Eisenhower but with his Attorney General, Herbert Brownell. He charged in a November 1953 speech to the Chicago Executives Club that former President Truman had, while in office, promoted a Russian spy, Harry Dexter White (who had died in 1948), to assistant secretary of the treasury in 1946 (Ewald, Jr., 1984). In a nationally televised response, Truman tied the Eisenhower Administration to McCarthyism. Since Truman defined McCarthyism, using terms like "corruption of truth," "the big lie" and "unfounded accusations," McCarthy demanded and received from the networks a half hour to respond (McCarthy Accuses Truman, 1953, November 25). Because he chose to criticize Eisenhower along with Truman, McCarthy's speech may have accelerated his fall (Bayley, (1984). A second nationally televised news conference on December 3, in which McCarthy attempted to mend fences with Eisenhower, did little to appease the President (White, 1953, December 3). The Administration began to publicly distance itself from any connection with McCarthy.

The second debilitating factor in McCarthy's anti-Communism crusade centered on the Army Secretary. Although several other public hearings opened during the fall of 1953 and continued well into 1954, such as an investigation of General Electric, the fallout from the Fort Monmouth probe became the focal point for critics and for the Army. Principal characters, each attacked by McCarthy on television, included Irving Peress, Brigadier General Ralph Zwicker, and Annie Lee Moss. McCarthy's anger at each witness's refusal (or in Moss's case, inability) to answer his questions and demands were broadcast for television network viewers to see. Peress was an Army dentist who McCarthy claimed had refused to answer the Army's questions concerning his political beliefs; he also declined to share his beliefs with McCarthy. Zwicker had been Peress's commandant when the dentist received an honorable and immediate discharge. McCarthy accused Zwicker of being unfit to wear the uniform.

Moss was accused by McCarthy of working for the Soviets as a spy while employed by the Army Signal Corps. On the day of her testimony, not only were television cameras on hand but the entire subcommittee was in attendance (Reeves, 1982). Edward R. Murrow's cameraman from *See It Now* also filmed the proceedings. During the televised hearing, several senators displayed sympathy for Moss and contempt for Subcommittee counsel Cohn (McCarthy left the hearing room during her testimony) (Cohn Scored, 1954, March 12). Murrow and his co-producer Fred Friendly decided to postpone their scheduled subject for March 16, 1954, and quickly produced a report on the Moss story (Friendly, 1967; Bliss, 1991). McCarthy appeared again on *See It Now* the first week of April. The program, a response to Murrow demanded by McCarthy, allowed the senator to repeat earlier insinuations about Murrow's past and a new allegation about delays in American research on the hydrogen bomb (Reeves, 1982).

In the midst of the Peress/Zwicker/Moss inquiries and the Murrow broadcasts, the Army leveled its charges against McCarthy and Cohn (Army Charges McCarthy, 1954, March 12), filing formal charges on April 15. The full Subcommittee voted to hold hearings on the Army's charges (separate from McCarthy's ongoing inquiry of the Army) and elected Senator Karl Mundt acting chairman. On April 22, when the Army-McCarthy Hearings began, it took McCarthy seventeen minutes to break in, raising a "point of order," a ploy he used often during the 35 days and 187 hours of television; it eventually led to derision from critics and comics (Reeves, 1982).

Even before the hearings concluded, some senators introduced attempts to curtail McCarthy's power. On December 2, 1954, the Senate voted to condemn McCarthy on two of 46 counts of alleged improper conduct. One addressed his failure to cooperate with a subcommittee that had investigated a 1952 resolution calling for his expulsion from the Senate. The second count originally charged McCarthy with abusing General Ralph Zwicker, but was replaced with a charge that McCarthy had "acted contrary to senatorial ethics and tended to bring the Senate into dishonor and disrepute, to obstruct the constitutional processes of the Senate, and to impair its dignity" (Text of Final Resolution, 1954, December 3).

The Army-McCarthy Hearings effectively ended McCarthy's presence on television, although he never stopped speaking out publicly on the dangers of Communism. Before the censure vote he appeared on several news talk programs, and was invited back on some of them afterward. In fact, the second charge against him resulted in part from his describing, during a television broadcast, the work of the Select Committee considering his censure as a "lynch bee" (Text, 1954, December 3). Although McCarthy remained a senator until he died May 2, 1957, he

found that his influence had evaporated. Almost as significantly for McCarthy, the press no longer considered him worthy of its air time or space, even though the hunt for Communists lived on.

TELEVISION AS A VARIABLE

How much of McCarthy's political fall can be attributed to television? Data from several sources contemporary with his political career may contribute to a clearer view of any correlation between McCarthy's fate and television's growth. On one side of the discussion, Barnouw's (1970, p. 54) feelings are typical of those who believe television played a considerable role in bringing down McCarthy: "A whole nation watched him in murderous close-up--and recoiled" (Matusow, 1983; Sameth, 1988; Sterling and Kittross, 1990; Hilliard and Keith, 1992; Streitmatter, 1997). Others add that the public's interest had been primed by the Murrow's *See It Now* reports a month before the hearings began (Leab, 1983; Donovan and Scherer, 1992). Most broadcast historians of this view suggest that the public's opinion of McCarthy served to inspire its legislative leaders to finally act.

On the other hand, television may have only confirmed what had been unfolding for over a year, that McCarthy was in decline long before the Army brought charges against him. Several McCarthy biographers record the opposition of influential newspapers, magazines, columnists and commentators to his crusade as early as 1950 (see Buckley and Bozell, 1954; Rovere, 1959; Bayley, 1981; Reeves, 1982). His critics included *Newsweek*, the *Washington Post*, Drew Pearson, Walter Lippmann , Joseph and Steward Alsop, and Jack Anderson. *Time*, while continuing its support for the anti-Communist effort, disowned McCarthy in 1951 (Congress,

1951, October 22). Even Murrow acknowledged his report came late in the day (Gates, 1978; Leab, 1983; Persico, 1988).

Much depends upon what variables are under consideration. Important media variables in the early years of television's growth include station growth, television ownership, and viewership, measured by ratings; in politics it is often public opinion (Wiebe, 1958-9; Streitmatter, 1997). The Gallup Organization and Elmo Roper and Associates combined for at least 19 separate surveys from 1950 through 1957, asking respondents their awareness of the senator and whether their impression of him could be described as favorable or unfavorable.

With any probe of changes in public opinion is the presupposition of a milestone that resonates with the public, the critical moment (Carmines and Stimson, 1989). A critical event or phenomenon alerts citizens to the need to alter their viewpoint of an issue, candidate or other subject/object. Television has occasionally provided a media event that, according to Dayan and Katz (1992) demands reflection, then action. If, as some broadcast historians maintain, the Army-McCarthy Hearings television coverage produced such a change, poll results should provide some evidence of correlation. Changes in McCarthy's public opinion ratings should correspond roughly with significant events in his anti-Communist crusade. While such an examination would benefit from quantitative analysis of the data, only the questions and the percentages representing sample responses from the surveys survive, leaving a small data set.. However, a breakdown of McCarthy's noteworthy television appearances, public opinion polls, and demographic data concerning the state of television broadcasting in the early 1950s, may suggest connections between specific events in McCarthy's career, their resonance with the public, and McCarthy's fate.

TELEVISION HOUSEHOLDS AND STATIONS, 1950-1954

Any data analysis of this time period must take into account the unique qualities of television in its early years. From September, 1948 through April, 1952, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) stopped granting new applications for television channels (Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook 1997). When McCarthy claimed in 1950 to have a list of Communists in the U.S. State Department, television stations numbered between 104 (U.S. Bureau of the Census) and 109 (Hansen, 1951). In May, 1950, on the heels of the Tydings Committee Hearings, some of which were televised and showed McCarthy present, 10 percent of the respondents to a Gallup poll said they had a television set in their home (See Figure 1). During this same polling period, 84 percent were aware of McCarthy's charges that there were Communists in the State Department. Presumably, most received their information from sources other than television. At the time 14 states had no cities with stations, including Oregon and Colorado (Hansen, 1951).

By the time McCarthy gave his afternoon speech to the delegates of the Republican National Convention in July, 1952, the national television audience had grown substantially, according to Gallup. Approximately 42 percent of the respondents said they had a television set in the home. About four months later, when McCarthy attacked Democratic presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson on national television, 47 percent of households had a television. In a study of voting behavior, Campbell et al. (1953) put the percentage at 40 percent.

Through most of 1953, during which McCarthy conducted public hearings (covered by the television networks) concerning the Voice of America and the U.S. Army, held many televised press conferences, debated with other senators during a televised public hearing of the

Senate Appropriations Committee, spoke on several network talk programs such as *Meet the Press* and *American Forum of the Air*, and attacked former President Truman in a televised speech, less than 60 percent of American households owned a television. By the time the Army-McCarthy Hearings began, the percentage of households with television was still below 70 percent. There was certainly a much larger potential audience for the televised Army-McCarthy Hearings than for some of his earlier appearances, but owning a television set and watching particular broadcasts are not one and the same.

Not surprisingly, as the number of stations grew, the percentage of homes with television grew at a similar rate. Between McCarthy's 1952 pre-election speech against Stevenson and his 1953 debate with senators on the Appropriations Committee (approximately eight months), the number of television stations able to cover these events increased from about 110 to almost 200[3]. By the time the Ft. Monmouth Hearings began, the number had jumped to about 290. Before the end of 1953 the total exceeded 320. During the Army-McCarthy Hearings, the number of television stations had swelled to over 400 (see Figure 2).

THE ARMY-McCARTHY COVERAGE

After the first two days of daytime coverage, only the two smaller television networks continued live telecasts. According to Gould (1954, June 13), ABC provided a daily feed to 79 ABC affiliates and for at least part of the time 15 NBC outlets. After the first weeks of coverage, however, ABC indicated that only about 39 stations had told the network they were continuing to carry the coverage (Hearing Coverage Set, 1954, May 20). Dumont had only ten affiliates airing

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[3]Numbers are approximate since data were gathered from several sources, which were often slightly different.

the hearings. NBC (after two days of live coverage) and CBS aired condensed versions from about 11:15 to midnight, in addition to their daily news programs.

What this means for actual viewership has been interpreted differently. Streitmatter (1997) estimates the number of viewers at 80 million. Rovere (1959) and Doherty (1998) put the number closer to 20 million at any one time. None provide primary sources nor calculations that arrive at their totals. Part of the discrepancy may be due to ratings data provided by *The New York Times* after the first few days of coverage (Baker, 1954, April 23; Adams, 1954, May 2; and TV Coverage, 1954, April 27). The C.E. Hooper firm polled New York City residents the first two days of the hearings and found that between nine and twelve percent of the potential audience tuned in sometime during the day. A week later, the figures had dropped to between five and seven percent. In Boston, Hooper estimated a rating of 20 for the first week and 30 for the second. And in Milwaukee, in McCarthy's home state, the ratings registered only a seven (Army-McCarthy Inquiry, 1954, May 1). If 20 million is divided by the annual total U.S. resident population estimates from 1954, 161 million, the result would constitute about 12 and a half percent (which is close to the average of the seven examples above).

Another study used only New York for its survey population. Advertest Research found that 51 percent of their respondents (who owned televisions) had seen at least one of the hearings' live proceedings (cited in Bogart, 1956). Another 26 percent, which had not seen the daytime sessions, tuned into the late evening condensed versions. Though Bogart concludes that "over three-fourths of the television public had watched the hearings at one time or another" (p. 212), his data appears to include only New York City.

It cannot be assumed that New York was representative of the nation. As early as 1950, six stations broadcast to the city; only Los Angeles had more (Hansen, 1951). Only 17 other television markets possessed two or more stations. According to Market Research Corporation reports (cited in Bogart, 1956) as late as July, 1954, television ownership had still not reached 50 percent of three geographic regions–the South, the Southwest and Mountain states. In addition, regardless of region, TV set penetration in cities of fewer than 50 thousand had not reached 42 percent. While the New York data could be representative of other cities of 500 thousand or more, for many the ratings would be invalid.

No authors offer national ratings data sources, or population figures or potential viewing audiences, though there is some information from which to extrapolate. For example, Boddy (1990) figures ABC could only regularly count on 34 percent of its affiliates to broadcast its network-supplied programming in the early 1950s. And how far did the coverage reach? Leab (1983) estimates the number of stations airing the hearings live at fewer than 75 and none west of Denver. Yet Heldenfels (1994) writes that in Los Angeles people showed up late for work because the telecasts began at 7:30 in the morning. Of course, viewers would still receive the late night versions, whether the daytime coverage reached them or not.

Furthermore, Barnouw (1970) suggests that ABC garnered impressive ratings. ABC president Robert Kintner is quoted as saying, "People all over the country stopped listening to their radios and watching their soaps and stayed glued to what we were showing on ABC" (cited in Wilk, 1976, p. 258). Baughman (1992), however, reports that those ABC stations experienced a dramatic ratings drop because of the hearings, and most viewers simply sampled a couple of the hearings' sessions.

A Gallup poll taken over half way through the hearings found that only 38 percent had watched any part of the hearings. Of those, 59 percent had seen the hearings on television only four times or fewer. While Donovan and Scherer (1954) cite *Congress and the Nation* (citing Gallup) to report that 89 percent of Americans followed the hearings, neither the Roper Center for Public Opinion nor *The Gallup Poll, Volume 2: 1949-1958* contain survey data after the hearings concluded regarding television viewership. However, during the course of the hearings, respondents were asked if they had "heard-read" about the investigation in general, to which 85 percent responded affirmatively. Of that group, 52 percent said they had watched some part of the congressional hearing.

In addition, Gallup conducted a special survey in selected cities, again asking if they had "followed" the Army-McCarthy Hearings, and 75 percent said yes[4]. One other survey in May asked if the respondents had "heard or read anything about the congressional investigation of the quarrel between Senator McCarthy and Secretary of the Army Stevens," and 87 percent said yes.

ANALYZING THE POLLS

Do such numbers imply a pivotal event resonating with the American public? Jack Gould, television writer for *The New York Times*, (cited in Bayley, 1981) felt it did, recalling that "people started to laugh at him. He became a joke, then a bore. He got tiresome" (p. 209). Streitmatter (1997) and Fried (1976) offer evidence that public opinion had changed. Both cite Gallup polls for January, 1954 and for June that same year. In January he enjoyed favorable standing with 50 percent of the respondents. After the hearings ended, McCarthy's favorable

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[4]The cities included Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Houston, St. Louis, Chicago, Minneapolis, and San Francisco.

ratings had dipped to 34 percent. But it is important to step back and observe his popularity over the span of his time in the Senate. Even those figures from early 1954 are not the whole story.

In December of 1953, Gallup conducted a poll in which several items included material relevant to McCarthy, and the results reveal some ambivalence toward the man and his methods. One question addressed people's opinion of McCarthy, and 50 percent cited "favorable." But respondents were also asked if they could identify Joseph McCarthy, and only 80 percent said they could (fewer than in May, 1950 and fewer than in January, 1953). Of those, only 38 percent approved of his methods, and 47 percent disapproved. When asked what it was they disapproved, the most frequently mentioned statement was "overly harsh, uses methods like the Gestapo, he goes too far" (The Gallup Poll, p. 1203). These feelings were present four months before the Army-McCarthy Hearings began.[5] Finally, when asked, only 24 percent of all respondents indicated McCarthy was helping the United States in its relations with American allies; 41 percent said he was doing harm.

In addition, respondents who expressed no opinion offer some insight into the public's thinking. Twice, the percentage having no opinion surged by at least 15 percent: right after McCarthy undertook his Subcommittee investigations in 1953, and just before the Army-McCarthy Hearings began. Both times McCarthy experienced sizeable declines in approval ratings. Shortly thereafter, the numbers returned to previous ranges, but coincided with increases in disapproval ratings. Although the percentage of those with no opinion rose during the Army-McCarthy Hearings, by the fall of 1954 the percentages indicate McCarthy's approval rating

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[5]Poll results were normally published several weeks after the respondents were surveyed. This study identifies the final day of polling.

remained where it had been through most of his career, at fewer than 40 percent. As the percentage of those with no opinion declined, the percentage of those who disapproved grew. See Table 1 for the results of all 19 surveys.

From the polls taken during the time of McCarthy's hunt for Communists, responses may shed more light on changes over the course of time. As mentioned, the first known polling of McCarthy's effect on public opinion was taken in May, 1950, and 84 percent of the sample knew who he was. Of those, 39 percent thought his charges were a good thing for the country. Later that summer, a similar question received comparable responses. Of the 78 percent who said they had read or heard about McCarthy's charges, 41 percent gave at least qualified approval of his charges. Only one other published survey before 1953 included questions of McCarthy. In the summer of 1951, 63 percent either could not identify him or had no opinion about him. Of those who did have an opinion, only 15 percent had a favorable opinion.

The next network television appearance by McCarthy came at the 1952 Republican National Convention. Although the FCC freeze had ended, the number of television stations still held to about 110. The four television networks, NBC, CBS, ABC and Dumont, pooled their coverage of the political conventions that summer, reaching an estimated 70 million viewers in 34 states (Hansen, 1953). By now, 42 percent of Americans had a television set in their home, according to Gallup. McCarthy's afternoon speech before the convention was televised before a national audience (Loftus, 1952, July 10). However, when asked by Gallup after the convention, only 46 percent of the respondents said they had seen any part of the Republican convention on television.

By the time the next Gallup poll included a question about McCarthy, he chaired his own subcommittee and a Republican was in the White House. In January Gallup asked people's opinion about the Senator ("What kind of job do you think he's doing?"). Almost half (48 percent) either did not know who he was or had no opinion. Favorable answers amounted to only 33 percent. Two months later only 43 percent said they had an opinion. Of those, only 19 percent indicated it was favorable. Concerning his methods, only 13 percent approved.

Three times in 1953 Gallup used a scale from plus 5 to negative 5, and asked respondents to choose a number representing their opinion of McCarthy. Twice, favorable totals reached about 35. But the negative sum jumped from 30 to 42 between April and July. In November the plus ratings totaled 52 percent of the respondents, 28 negative and 22 percent had no opinion.[6] These results were comparable to the results published in January, 1954.

Throughout 1954, Gallup included questions about McCarthy in nine surveys, sometimes twice a month. Although the *See It Now* broadcasts and the Army-McCarthy Hearings are usually cited for their television exposure of McCarthy, the subcommittee held several televised hearings before March, and included McCarthy's interrogation of the Army dentist, Irving Peress and General Zwicker. By the first of March McCarthy's favorable standing had already slipped to 46. When broken down by occupation, only farmers' favorable opinion exceeded 50 percent. In the midst of the Murrow-McCarthy clash, the Senator dropped another eight points. And right before the Army-McCarthy Hearings began, another poll asked with which side the respondents were more inclined to agree–McCarthy or Army Secretary Stevens. Only 23 percent sided with McCarthy, while 46 supported Stevens.

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[6]The total exceeds 100 percent due to rounding.

POLLING THE ARMY-McCARTHY VIEWERS

After the Hearings were a couple of weeks old, Gallup again asked people on which side they would put themselves. McCarthy's numbers went up two percentage points, and Stevens slid to 40 percent. In the same survey, 35 percent said they had a favorable opinion of McCarthy. Interestingly, in the eastern region of the United States, where there were more established television stations and greater penetration of television sets in households, the favorable percentage rose to 40; in the west, deprived of much of the televised coverage, McCarthy could only muster a 33 percent favorable rating.

Three more times that summer Gallup asked people to give their opinion of McCarthy, and once again in the fall. With each, the favorable opinion hovered between 34 and 36 percent. After McCarthy's censure from the Senate, only one other time did Gallup ask the public about McCarthy–shortly after his death. Only 16 percent gave him a favorable rating and 64 percent offered no opinion.

For those who propose television's coverage of the hearings disarmed McCarthy by showing his dark side, at least one variable lends some support to their claim. After the hearings began, unfavorable impressions of McCarthy reached their zenith. However, the more dramatic jump in unfavorable opinions came in the midst of the *See It Now* broadcasts. And that ten-point shift resembled an upswing from the previous summer when McCarthy argued with Senators during the Senate Appropriations hearing. By the Fall of 1953, the unfavorable opinion dropped back to where it had been in January of that year, about 30 percent. Following the Murrow programs, McCarthy's unfavorable standing rose and fell through the course of the summer, settling at 46 percent by October. For the proponents of television's influence, the culmination of

the hearings appeared to induce the highest percentage of unfavorable opinions, topping out at 51 percent. When, in November, people were asked if the United States Senate should vote its disapproval of McCarthy, 45 percent (of the 69 percent who were following the debate) felt it should, 36 said no, mirroring the approval ratings.

DISCUSSION

By no means is public opinion the only, or even the most important, variable in tracking the fortunes of a political or public figure. But it becomes an important factor when the variable under scrutiny is the power of television. Neither the poll numbers nor the growth of television stations and set ownership offer strong support for the conclusion that the Army-McCarthy Hearings, prefaced by *See It Now*'s "Report on Senator Joseph McCarthy," gave Americans their first real glimpse at the Senator, and upon seeing him "in murderous close-up," cringed, then deserted him. As for the positive ratings, at only one point did McCarthy enjoy favorable opinion ratings higher than the low 40s, and that period lasted only about three months, from November 1953 through February 1954. When the percentages fell, they only returned to their previous settings, in the mid-30s, where they stayed (at least through 1954).

Though McCarthy's unfavorable ratings began to climb just as Murrow was taking him on, reaching their peak later that summer, it is still uncertain how many people actually formed their opinion from the live television broadcasts. McCarthy had already experienced an unfavorable spike the previous summer. As for the televised hearings, almost certainly there were huge geographic regions through which the ABC network had not penetrated. The hearings were telecast during the work day, and Gallup pollsters found that a month into the hearings a sizeable percentage said they had not watched any part of the hearings. Newspapers also appear to have

provided many of the facts and much of the information to the Gallup respondents. These factors must mitigate against unqualified statements propounding the effects of televising the hearings live.

At the same time, another side of television's influence should not be overlooked. Over time, viewers had opportunity to witness McCarthy's methods. During the Army-McCarthy Hearings, both CBS and NBC provided nightly condensed versions of the hearings. And the daily broadcasts did seem to resonate with television's elites--the celebrities, comedians, hosts and commentators. Future research may analyze the content and sources that lampooned the Senator and his style. Just because individuals did not regularly view McCarthy's performance on television does not mean they did not form an opinion of his performance from others on television. Ultimately, television deserves some credit for focusing the public's attention on McCarthy. But television had been exposing McCarthy for many months, and his approval ratings in the television-experienced eastern U.S. exceeded those of the television-deprived west. The evidence does not support unequivocal conclusions. Judgments of television's influence should follow careful analysis of the data, with probing deliberation, forsaking the temptation to perpetuate the subjective conclusions of others, however pragmatic and parsimonious their thesis.

Table 1

Poll Results 1950 - 1957: Senator Joe McCarthy

Survey Dates	% Aware of McCarthy*	% Approve	% Disapprove	% No Opinion
May 6, 1950	84	39	29	16
June 9, 1950	78	41	20	11
July 13, 1951	70	15	22	33
Jan. 16, 1953	85	33	19	33
April 2, 1953		19	22	57
April 24, 1953		35	30	35
July 30, 1953		34	42	24
Nov. 5, 1953		52	28	22
Dec. 16, 1953	80	50	29	21
Mar. 2, 1954		46	36	18
Mar. 24, 1954		38	46	16
April 13, 1954	77	23	46	31
May 7, 1954		35	49	16
May 26, 1954		34	45	21
June 17, 1954		34	45	21
July 21, 1954		36	51	13
Oct. 20, 1954		35	46	19
June 1, 1957		16	20	64

*Some published survey results do not include a question asking respondents if they knew about McCarthy and his charges/tactics.

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