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A Biography of Marguerite Dice: Daughter of Republicanism and Mother of Conservatism

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A Biography of Marguerite Dice:  
Daughter of Republicanism, Mother of Conservatism

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History 101

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## **Introduction**

If Marguerite Dice appears in a history book, it is for one of two reasons: her participation in an anti-ACLU protest in 1953, or, more likely, her role as the hostess of the inaugural meeting of the John Birch Society in 1958. The moments for which she has been remembered are such because they fit relatively neatly into conventional understandings of the American far right and the women within it. Those moments might indicate that she was an antifeminist defender of the home and nuclear family, in the style of Phyllis Schlafly and future members of her Eagle Forum, and they might indicate that she was a Joseph McCarthy-inspired convert to the anticommunist cause, motivated by his urgent warnings of “enemies from within.” These are the existing historiographical narratives of conservative women and of the far right more broadly, but these interpretations of Marguerite Dice’s life are wrong. She was no newcomer to anticommunism when McCarthy emerged on the scene, and despite operating in largely female circles, her political arguments never relied on specifically gendered justifications. This paper is the first time Marguerite Dice’s biography has been written. It tells the story of her life, and it argues for a wider lens to be used in the study of the American anticommunist and conservative movements, one that draws focus away from fever pitch moments of anticommunism and adds nuance to our understanding of who built the modern American far right and how they did so.

There were three major moments of Dice’s anticommunist career: her campaign to remove the Communist Party from the Indiana ballot in 1940, her protest against the ACLU in 1953, and her hosting of the John Birch Society’s inaugural meeting in 1958. These events happened, respectively, before, during, and after the Second Red Scare. Each of them, while representing positions and affiliations increasingly far from mainstream conservatism, should be

thought of as a single point on a continuous timeline of the history of the American anticommunist movement. The details of her anticommunism changed from one to the next, but not the character: her charge was always that people and the government were too friendly towards communism, and that this risked the corruption and overthrow of the strongholds of American government. Only one of these moments—her protest with the Minute Women—overlaps with a period considered highly important for the history of the anticommunist movement, and even then, the Minute Women are neglected in favor of a focus on the hearings and dogged, accusatory politics of McCarthy. These moments on the main stage of American politics matter, to be certain—a history of American anticommunism that did not emphasize the significance of the Second Red Scare would be an inaccurate history—but so too matter the more shadowy moments, the moments either obscured by existing historiography or obscured by the people who lived them. This thesis tells the story of Marguerite Dice's life, from her childhood as the daughter of a Republican Union Army veteran father and literarily-minded mother (1884-1905), to her years as general secretary of YWCAs in several cities across the Midwest (1906-1929), to her increasingly fringy activism as a member of the Minute Women of the USA (1951-1957), and finally, to her later life and role as the hostess of the inaugural meeting of the John Birch Society (1958-1969).

In addition to narrating Marguerite Dice's life, this paper makes two arguments: first, that the study of American anticommunism is enhanced by paying just as much attention to the movement's low points as to its fever pitches, and second, that not all successful female conservative activists fit the mold of the family-focused antifeminist popularized by much of the history surrounding them, and that much of their success lay in their ability to commandeer progressive women's networks for conservative goals. The existence of Marguerite Dice and her

forgotten but enduring influence on the American right wing helps us better tell the complicated origin story of modern conservatism. The next section will justify a biographical approach to the construction of these arguments.

Further, Dice's decades-long anticommunism, no product of reverence for traditional gender roles, was also compatible with an actively progressive view of women and their political potential.<sup>1</sup> She was an active member of many Progressive Era-style women's clubs, which, by and large, are thought of as completely distinct from places where politically active conservative women existed and organized. Clubwomen are remembered as suffragettes, as believers in a welfare state, as untiring advocates for environmental conservation, prohibition, and safer cities.<sup>2</sup> Their politics are hardly remembered for extending beyond the realm of "women's work" or antiradicalism in the name of defending the family, and in order to justify their existence, many clubs eschewed discussions of politics altogether.<sup>3</sup> This expectation of genteel apoliticality was not true for Dice, who, while polished and proper, used her clubs to achieve conservative, anticommunist ends, never couched in the language of maternal duty. Dice's gender mattered insofar as it determined who she associated with and what the bounds of her political activism and involvement could be, but it did not seem to matter to her beyond those reasons. She recognized women as voters with untapped political power, which mattered because that power

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1. For further reading on the history of American female conservatives, see Kristen Marie Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolshevik: The Origins of Female Conservatism in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Erin Kempker, *Big Sister: Feminism, Conservatism, and Conspiracy in the Heartland* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2018); Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

2. Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolshevik*, 2. Delegard's account provides an excellent history of clubwomen-turned-antiradicals in the wake of suffrage.

3. Erin Kelley, "'A Worthwhile Existence': The Conservatism and Consciousness of Indianapolis's Clubwomen, 1875-1920," (Indiana University Press, 2003), 46.

could be used to support the Republican Party, not because women possessed some innate and superior moral authority. She cared deeply about women's place in society—their ability to work and support themselves, their ability to participate in democracy, their ability to choose not to get married—but her arguments against communism never explicitly drew on these ideas. In her, students of American history can find a different—but not anomalous—model of a female conservative activist, a woman who was equally committed to progressive reformism and anticommunism, at the same time and in the same places.

Dice's turn to more radical conservative anticommunism was also not a disavowal of her progressive politics, at least as she understood them. Dice's anticommunism might be understood as a McCarthy-inspired change of heart, a turn against the enemy he identified for her. This interpretation of her rightward shift would be consistent with popular understandings of people's political evolutions—progressive in youth, conservative with age—as well as with the idea that Senator Joseph McCarthy and his declaration of “enemies from within” American government was *the* defining moment for anticommunism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>4</sup> But Dice's active anticommunism preceded McCarthyism by a decade, and her turn towards anticommunist activism did not mean an abandonment of her work for progressive causes. The history of American anticommunism tends to focus on its fever pitches—the Red Scares that followed both World Wars—but Dice's activism at the height of the Second Red Scare was, to her and her allies, merely an extension of work they had been doing for almost a decade and a half. Her successful anticommunist campaign in 1940 provides further evidence of what one book coined “little red scares” in the interwar period and arguably laid the groundwork for the fringier

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4. For a robust history of the Second Red Scare, pre- and post-McCarthy, see Landon Storrs, *The Second Red Scare and the Unmaking of the New Deal Left* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

conservative movements she would find herself in as the Second Red Scare came and went.<sup>5</sup> Relatedly, her role in the creation of the John Birch Society could be seen as a deliberate pivot away from mainstream Republican politics, towards the fringe that she thought was the future. The founder of the John Birch Society, though, lauded her as a middle-of-the-road patriot, and at the same time as the Birchers were (at least partially) alienated from the mainstream Republican Party, she forwarded a vision of the GOP that was decidedly conventional.

Marguerite Dice's life demonstrates the long prologue and longer epilogue of the Second Red Scare in a way that calls into question American history's focus on anticommunist flashpoints as the most illuminating moments for the history of the movement. Her life shows how modern anticommunism, and modern conservatism more broadly, were created and maintained in the years between and after fever pitches, by people who were not especially famous, and not especially radical, and were not even especially conservative in the ways history might expect them to be. There is limited room in current histories of American anticommunism for moments that cannot be classified as a part of either Red Scare or the Cold War, but this paper will argue that Marguerite Dice's life shows them with great clarity, and that they are worth studying because they demonstrate how each fever pitch morphed into the next, evolving ideologically and gaining unexpected followers along the way.

### **Methodology**

This paper does not argue that history should be rewritten to accommodate a single life, but rather that studying a single life can help us to better understand the historical moments in

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5. Robert Goldstein, *Little 'Red Scares': Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016).

which it unfolded. This is admittedly not the dominant view in history departments, where biographies tend to be viewed with a great deal of scholarly skepticism. In his book on biography and autobiography, the biographer Michael Holroyd disparaged his discipline as “the shallow end of history.”<sup>6</sup> In the introduction to the *American Historical Review*’s issue on biography, the historian David Nasaw describes biography as history’s “unloved stepchild, occasionally but grudgingly let in the door, more often shut out with the riffraff.”<sup>7</sup> This paper does not seek to argue for the inclusion of all forms of “Life Writing” into the study of history, but rather to justify the value of a scholarly biography to the discipline.

A scholarly biography should be understood as distinct from other forms such as literary biography, psychobiography, and autobiography. The introduction to Hans Renders and Binne De Haan’s collection of theoretical essays on biography provides useful framing: “In this book”—as in this paper—“biography will consistently designate the study of the life of an individual, based on the methods of historical scholarship, with the goal of illuminating what is public, explained and interpreted in part from the perspective of the personal. The personal is in this respect an important source, but not a determining one.”<sup>8</sup> A scholarly biography’s mission is not so much to understand the interior life of its subject, but rather to understand what that subject can teach us about their time—though, certainly, a subject’s interior life often helps to inform these historical conclusions.

This paper argues that centering an individual life allows for historical insight that merely situating the life in some broader context would not allow for. “Biography is useful because it

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6. Michael Holroyd, “The Case Against Biography” in *Works on Paper: The Craft of Biography and Autobiography*, (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2002), 6.

7. David Nasaw, “Introduction” *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 2009): 573.

8. Hans Renders and Binne De Haan, *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 2.



encompasses the universal in the particular,” wrote the historian Barbara Tuchman.<sup>9</sup> But, she says, not all particularities should be given equal weight. Giovanni Levi’s essay in Renders and De Haan’s collection outlines four distinct categories of the scholarly biography, each defined by its scope and its intended academic contribution. The types most relevant to this paper are “biography and context” and “biography and borderline cases.” The former, according to Levi, greatly emphasizes the broader cultural contexts that could shape the particularities of a singular life, and the latter seeks to illuminate the cultural context “in a negative sense,” where particularities stand out against what is “most frequent, statistically seen.”<sup>10</sup> This scholarly biography is informed by the historical context of the life it studies, but it also probes at that context: what can be learned from the facts of a life that go against what we are told to expect from it? Many things, Levi and this paper would argue. In focusing on a person who did not achieve major notoriety in life or death, this paper combines two popular approaches to biography, one treating its subject as representative and the other treating its subject as a particular case. In doing so, this paper makes a dual commitment to remaining grounded in sources and to telling a life as a narrative, both ultimately in pursuit of historical insight.

Of most importance to this paper is the question of periodization, and what an individual life’s incompatibility with conventional historical periods means for the broader historical context in which the individual lived. When writing his dissertation, a biography of Eugene V. Debs, the labor historian Nick Salvatore was warned by a stern reference librarian that “biography is not history because the question of periodisation is a given, as biography is framed

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9. Barbara Tuchman, “Biography as a Prism of History,” in *Telling Lives: The Biographer’s Art*, ed. Marc Pachter (Washington, DC: New Republic Books, 1979), 134.

10. Giovanni Levi, “The Uses of Biography,” in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing*, ed. Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 69-70.

by the birth and death of the subject.”<sup>11</sup> He disagreed, and so does this paper. A good biography does not merely recount the events of a life, but also tells us what those events mean and why they matter for people who are not the biography’s subject and for times that the subject did not live in. Marguerite Dice lived from 1884 until 1969, and thus the eras she lived through, as conventionally defined, were many. She was born during the Gilded Age, came of age during the Progressive Era, and lived through both World Wars, both Red Scares, the Great Depression and New Deal, and the Civil Rights Movement. A lifelong Republican, she saw the party go from the party of Lincoln to the party of Goldwater. She was both a dedicated advocate for progressive reformist causes and a fervent, vocal anticommunist. How, then, could she be classified? It is tempting to pin her to either pole of her life—the progressive reformer who turned her energies towards communism, the driven anticommunist who learned better of her youthful progressivism—but either of these readings would be incomplete, if not inaccurate. That a woman who died at age eighty-five lived through so much history is not unique, but her life’s implications for how we consider the development of modern American conservatism are. The rest of this thesis will discuss this in more detail as it analyzes the events of her life, but the reason her biography is worth writing is because it provides a new way of looking at events and ideas familiar to students of American history. Centering her life, singular in its details but representative in its general arc, allows for a richer understanding of the origins of a political movement that remains an active and influential part of American politics.

By hewing to the timeline of a single anticommunist’s life rather than accepting the conventional arc of American anticommunism as a given, this paper is better able to highlight the

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11. Nick Salvatore, “Biography and Social History: an Intimate Relationship,” *Labour History* 87 (November 2004): 187.

dynamism and impact of anticommunist activism outside of the movement's high points.

Biography grounds a study in the details and events of a subject's life, and through taking the events of Dice's life and studying them alongside those of the broader history of American anticommunism, this paper seeks to tell both the story of her life and its implications for how the history of American anticommunism should be told.

To conclude with the words of another scholar, Alice Kessler-Harris captured this paper's intentions in her article "Why Biography?", published in the *American Historical Review*:

"My object is less an examination of the internal tensions and contradictions (those are my 'facts') that produced the experiences of a relatively public person than it is an exploration of what those experiences can tell us about the American past. Rather than offering history as a background, or introducing it in order to locate an individual in time, I want to ask how the individual life helps us to make sense of a piece of the historical process. I want to see through the life. My claim is grandiose: I think an individual life might help us to see not only into particular events but into the larger cultural and social and even political processes of a moment in time."<sup>12</sup>

This paper argues that Marguerite Dice's life might help us to see not only into the particular events she participated in but into the larger cultural, social, and political processes of the years 1884-1969 and beyond.

### **"Modern girls lack a sense of values": Early Life and YWCA Work, 1884-1935**

Marguerite Dice's early years reveal her to be an active participant in community affairs, whether in Crawfordsville, Indiana, where she was born and raised, or Baltimore, where she went to college, or in any of the Midwestern cities she lived in during her career as the general secretary of many YWCAs. She was raised by loyal and active Republicans, but her youthful politics do not closely resemble those of her later years. The Republican Party of Dice's youth

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12. Alice Kessler-Harris, "Why Biography?" *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 2009): 626.

was a party of northern Protestants and professionals, and for the first half of her life, as she worked her way up the ranks of the YWCA and across the Midwest, the GOP dominated the national political scene. She followed international news and called for women to be serious about themselves and their work, and her life generally fit the mold of a Progressive Era clubwoman. The early years of Dice's life show her to be a committed community service worker whose beliefs sometimes reflected conservative predispositions, which would resurface in her later years as an anticommunist and come to define her approach to political activism.

Marguerite Dice was born in rural Crawfordsville, Indiana on June 29, 1884. She was Mary and Francis Dice's fifth child and fourth daughter but was only their third to survive childhood.<sup>13</sup> Mary and Francis Dice were well-respected throughout Indiana. A son of rural Fountain County and a Republican since the days of the party's founding, Francis spent a year in the Union Army before his regiment was mustered out, and then he went on to complete six years of legal and classics education in just four. He became a practicing lawyer and the publisher of a Republican newspaper, and in the early 1870s, he was credited with flipping Fountain County from Democratic to Republican control. He served as a state senator and Supreme Court reporter, and in 1884, he moved his family to a farm in Crawfordsville.<sup>14</sup> Marguerite Dice's mother, Mary Dice, formerly Mary Frances Thompson, came from a well-to-do family in Fountain County. She was a cousin of Enos Nebeker, the United States Treasury Secretary under Benjamin Harrison, and she was a graduate of Northwestern University, where

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13. Chapman Bros., *Portrait and Biographical Record of Montgomery, Parke, and Fountain Counties, Indiana* (Chicago, IL: Chapman Bros., 1893), 229. Two-year-old Francis Jr. and four-year-old Gertrude died within days of each other in 1879.

14. Chapman Bros., *Portrait and Biographical Record*, 229; "Who They Are: The Ten for Whom the Republicans of Indiana will be Called Upon to Vote," *Greencastle Banner*, June 24, 1880, 3.

she studied alongside May Wright Sewall, the Indiana women's rights activist and founder of several prominent Indianapolis women's clubs (of which Dice, many decades later, would become a leader).<sup>15</sup> In Crawfordsville, Mary was active in women's literary and religious organizations.<sup>16</sup> Towards the end of her life, Dice wrote that she was glad that her parents "believed in education for girls as well as boys"—surely at least in part a consequence of her mother's status as a highly educated woman.<sup>17</sup>

Dice and her older sisters Edna (born 1873) and Florence (born 1882) lived a comfortable childhood on their 165-acre Crawfordsville farm.<sup>18</sup> Only Edna was alive for the 1879 deaths of their brother and sister, and the rest of their childhoods seemed to be spared of any similar tragedies. The girls rode their family's horses, attended teatimes and book club meetings, and at least once, went to a revivalist camp meeting with their grandmother.<sup>19</sup> As a senior at Crawfordsville High School, Dice set into motion her first-ever movement. Following in the tradition of the Progressive Era women's organizations that her mother had been involved in, she founded the Sunshine Society, which expanded routine community service efforts to the elderly and the ill.<sup>20</sup> Many chapters still exist in Indiana.<sup>21</sup>

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15. Chapman Bros., *Portrait and Biographical Record*, 229.

16. "The Athenian Yearbook 1902-1903," *The Athenian* (Crawfordsville, IN: The Journal Printing Co., 1903).

17. Marguerite Dice, "Christmas 1965," (Downloaded from <https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/KZ4Y-MGY/marguerite-dice-1884-1969> on 11/16/2021).

18. Chapman Bros., *Portrait and Biographical Record*, 229.

19. "Serious Runaway," *Crawfordsville Daily Journal*, December 15, 1892, 4; "Miss Dice's Party," *Crawfordsville Daily Journal*, January 19, 1893, 3; "Personal Mentions," *Crawfordsville Weekly Journal*, July 29, 1898, 12.

20. Dusti Zarse, "Clubs light up the dance floors," *News and Review*, January 18, 2012, 8; Kenneth L. Turchi, "Ladies' Night: An Essay for the Indianapolis Literary Club," *Indianapolis Literary Club*, March 4, 2013, 7.

21. Bill Rethlake, "Winter Formal Was Well Received," *Daily News*, January 16, 2020. [https://www.greensburgdailynews.com/news/local\\_news/winter-formal-was-well-received/article\\_1986f4c2-3898-11ea-8812-3b10b0c3dc59.html](https://www.greensburgdailynews.com/news/local_news/winter-formal-was-well-received/article_1986f4c2-3898-11ea-8812-3b10b0c3dc59.html)

In 1901, Dice graduated from CHS with honors and enrolled at the Woman's College of Baltimore (later known as Goucher College). There, it seems as if she truly came into her own—over her four years, she served as junior class president and editor-in-chief of the college magazine and literary society, judged student debates and ushered at plays and musical performances, participated in field days, and was a member of various clubs and societies.<sup>22</sup> She led vesper services, published poems in the school magazine, and during her freshman year and alongside her older sister, Florence, was hazed by upperclassmen. She and Florence wrote home after the experience, and an account of their letter was published in the local Crawfordsville paper. Here, a bit of Dice's personality reveals itself.

“Miss Florence, by quietly submitting, got off easily,” reported the *Crawfordsville Weekly Journal*, “but her sister being less obedient, received rather severe treatment.”<sup>23</sup> Two years later, Dice and the other class presidents issued a statement condemning hazing.<sup>24</sup> She was seemingly never one to comply with things she disliked—she later said that the “great American disease” was “spectatoritis,” or, “playing the passive role of being the spectator” rather than actively engaging with activities.<sup>25</sup> This quote, though about leisure time, and her action against hazing prove that she seemingly never hesitated to take action against things she disliked or thought were wrong—even if resistance earned her “rather severe treatment.”<sup>26</sup>

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22. “College Days of the White House Bride,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 30, 1913, 2. In college, Dice was close friends with Woodrow Wilson's daughter, Jessie Woodrow Wilson. The two kept in touch via the social work they did after graduation, and in 1913, Dice was invited to Wilson's wedding.

23. “Misses Dice Were Hazed,” *Crawfordsville Weekly Journal*, October 25, 1901, 6.

24. “Hazing,” *Goucher Kalends* 15, no. 3 (January 1904): 96-97.

25. “New Methods of Recreation Are Advised: Social Worker Declares We Take Our Play Too Passively,” *Evansville Press*, October 25, 1925, 10.

26. Dice's classmates also recognized this about her. In a “grinds” (jokes) section of their yearbook, they wrote that she was “dressed in a little brief authority.” Her senior quote, which was from *The Canterbury Tales*, also implied her resolve: “But ther ben folks of such condicion /

After graduating from Goucher with an English degree in 1905, she returned home to Indiana, where she taught English in the small town of Lebanon.<sup>27</sup> Her father became severely ill in the summer of 1906 but rallied and remained active until the day of the 1906 midterm elections, after which he was bedridden until his death exactly two weeks later.<sup>28</sup>

Perversely, in the wake of her father's death, the rest of Dice's life began. It had always been her father's wish for her to be a teacher—apparently less so her own—and upon his death, she left teaching and pursued work with the YWCA, which she would continue for over thirty years.<sup>29</sup> After training in Chicago and Jersey City, working in Colorado Springs and Cincinnati, and traveling to Europe, she moved to Topeka and began work as the general secretary of its YWCA in 1912.<sup>30</sup> By February 1913, she was already praised for her efficient leadership in a local Topeka newspaper.<sup>31</sup>

Her years in Topeka are well documented in the pages of local papers, and they reveal her to be commanding and driven. As general secretary, Dice oversaw a \$20,000 budget (nearly \$600,000 today). She regularly spoke at soirees, luncheons, and vesper services, traveled to

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That when they have a certain purpose take / They can not stint of their intencion, / But right as they were bounden to a stake / They wol not of that firste purpose slake.”

27. Florence Walther, “Alumnae Notes,” *Goucher Kalends* 17, no. 1 (October 1905): 25.

28. “Francis Marion Dice,” *Indianapolis Star*, November 21, 1906, 5. The 1906 election remains the most recent time a two-term Republican president preserved control of both chambers of Congress after his second midterm.

29. Ann H. Farrell, “Miss Dice, of YWCA, Says City Needs Community Hall,” *Wheeling Intelligencer*, February 18, 1929, 2; “Pikes Peak Y Postpones Celebrating Birthday,” *Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegraph*, October 24, 1972, 2. Towards the end of her life, Dice wrote that her time as a teacher taught her that she could support herself and be proud of her work, but also that she did not want to do that work for her entire life.

30. “Personals of Society Folks,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, November 6, 1912, 6; Marguerite Dice, United States Passport Application, retrieved from “Marguerite Dice” on Ancestry Library website on December 12, 2021.

31. “Home Influences For City's Girls: The YWCA Is a Model Organization,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, February 9, 1913, 10B.

YWCA conferences to report on the happenings of the women in Topeka, taught classes for working women, mentored schoolgirls, expanded the YWCA's library, and she even found a home for a little orphan girl.<sup>32</sup>

The most well-documented part of Dice's time in Topeka came in 1915, when she used the authority of her position as general secretary to make sweeping—and unpopular—changes to the YWCA's operations and standards of decorum. “Topeka YWCA Girls in Revolt” read headlines across the city—and eventually, across the country.<sup>33</sup> The offense? The abolition of the so-called “Cupid Parlor,” where YWCA women could entertain their male suitors. Ever the serious businesswoman, she planned to make the space into an office. In the same order, she banned cold drinking water from the third floor of the house, college pennants, portraits and pictures from being hung on the walls, and bungalow aprons and boudoir caps from the breakfast table.<sup>34</sup> No longer could the women of the Y come to the breakfast table dressed in their nightclothes, which Dice described as “awful” and “terrible.”

One paper wrote that, “Dice, general secretary of the association, is in hot water. She is besieged constantly by girls, who demand and plead that their beau parlor be left alone. But Miss Dice's heart is hardened. She ignores the demands and smiles at the pleas, and the work of demolishing the little room and substituting desks and business furniture for its comfy chairs and

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32. “Little Esther M'Corkle Has Found Good Home,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 2, 1913, 4; “Notes and Personal Mention,” *Topeka State Journal*, April 26, 1915, 10; “Personals of Society Folks,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, July 16, 1913, 6; “Society,” *Topeka State Journal*, December 14, 1912, 12; “Society,” *Topeka State Journal*, March 4, 1913, 8; “Society,” *Topeka State Journal*, November 19, 1913, 17; “Society,” *Topeka State Journal*, September 29, 1913, 8.

33. “Topeka YWCA Girls In Revolt: Patrons Up in Arms Because Room for Beau Entertainment is Abolished,” *Leavenworth Weekly Times*, April 29, 1915, 3.

34. “Pennants and Pictures Tabooed by ‘Y’ Officers: Girls Will Gaze on White Walls Now,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, September 26, 1915, 14B.



settees goes forward.”<sup>35</sup> Many of the articles were accompanied by a cartoon of a stern-looking woman (presumably Dice) spanking a cherub and yelling “GIT!”

While not the same conservatism that she would advocate for later in life, Dice’s abolition of the “Cupid Parlor” can be read as significant for two reasons: first, it demonstrated her belief in the importance of women presenting themselves as serious and business-minded, which clearly informed her women-centric organizing campaigns later in life (she would later urge women to be rational, not emotional voters) and second, it showed her willingness to go against the grain in pursuit of a (rather conservative) goal. She was not one to give up on something because it was unpopular. These predispositions would resurface in her later life as an anticommunist activist, but this is the extent to which this paper will psychoanalyze Marguerite Dice. While she is most important as a representative of an era of conservative organizing misremembered by historical literature, the singularity of her personality is not unimportant. Understanding her as an individual with unique motivations and beliefs, and not just a person shaped by her time, is one step towards understanding the fuzziness of historical periodization and what that means for our understanding of the modern American conservative movement. Interestingly, the Cupid Parlor debacle was the closest Dice would ever come to more cultural forms of conservatism—as the rest of this paper will discuss, her conservatism was generally limited to anticommunism from a national security perspective, not a cultural one.

After leaving Topeka and spending several years as the general secretary of Cincinnati’s YWCA, a stint in Paris as an international YWCA representative, and a few months in Duluth, Minnesota and Evansville, Indiana, where she raised \$200,000 (about \$3.3 million today) for a new YWCA building, Dice left for Wheeling, West Virginia, where she worked from 1925 to

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35. “Topeka YWCA Girls In Revolt,” *Leavenworth Weekly Times*, 3.

1929.<sup>36</sup> Her activities in Wheeling were largely the same as they were in Colorado Springs, Topeka, Cincinnati, Duluth, and Evansville, but her visions were grander. An illuminating profile written before her sudden departure from the city in 1929 shows her to be driven, progressive, and hugely accomplished in her work.<sup>37</sup>

“The state of West Virginia is just awakening to its opportunities, social, industrial, and educational,” Dice said. “For one concerned with social work it is the best possible place in the United States to be at the present time.” She spoke of expanding the YWCA’s services to non-working women, the importance of women attaining an education no matter their age, her issues with the modern institution of marriage, and her “decided appreciation of the negro group of the city and its needs,” to which she “devoted a great deal of time, study, and attention.” She dreamt of expanding social work services to “foreign people” in Wheeling and building better facilities for Wheeling’s Black residents—not as radical as a call for integration of white YWCA facilities would have been, but notable for its relative progressiveness nonetheless. She imagined Wheeling as a city of the future, the crown jewel of Appalachia, a place where married and unmarried men and women of all ages, races, and national origins would have places to socialize, learn, and better themselves. The centerpiece of her proposal was a dancing hall and community center that she hoped to see built—and, if her fundraising track records with other YWCAs were any indication, she would have been well-equipped to raise the thousands of dollars necessary, had she not left Wheeling just months after this profile was written.

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36. “Y.W. Board to Change Plans: Despite Alterations, Food Service Will be Provided; To Reduce Cost \$70,000,” *Evansville Courier and Press*, July 26, 1924, 1. When Dice was in Colorado Springs, she was integral to the construction of a building for the YWCA there. She was credited with doubling membership, establishing robust educational programs for women, and improving the organization’s relationship with the local community.

37. Farrell, “Miss Dice, of YWCA,” 2.

In the profile, she shared her views on the status of modern young women:

“The young girl of the present day has more brains and is smarter than any previous generation of women. I believe, however, that modern girls lack a sense of values, rather than a sense of balance. They seem to be wandering aimlessly with no definite direction, and no specific standards. They will not accept the standards handed down from their elders and refuse to make their own. This condition cannot continue to exist for very long because no individual can accomplish much with his or her life without definite standard upon which to base their activities. Probably the older generation should volunteer to assist modern youth, or probably youth should seek information from their elders because there is much good in the standards of the past which should not be discarded.”

This quote, said between her remarkably progressive perspectives on social issues, is striking in its conservatism—conservatism here meaning reverence for the past and a desire to maintain parts of it. In it, the beginnings of her second life as a conservative activist are visible, and one can begin to make sense of her dual lives as a progressive reformer and anticommunist crusader. More broadly, since this paper is less interested in explaining her interior life and more interested in understanding her role in the creation of American conservatism, one can see how (mild) conservative beliefs could coexist with progressive ones. To other women, as to Dice, women having “more brains... than any previous generation” might have been tempered by the fact that the young women in question did not adhere to established standards and refused the guidance of tradition and history. Again, like the Cupid Parlor controversy, Dice veered closer to cultural conservatism than she would later in life, in an interesting reversal of what is thought of as a typical political trajectory: fiery and progressive in youth, reserved and conservative with age. Dice was somehow everything at once: progressive in her values, conservative in her politics, fiery in how she expressed herself, reserved in how she presented herself.

Dice’s time in Wheeling was, coincidentally or not, the end of the town’s golden age. Wheeling had been a powerhouse since the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it had been both an important pro-Union city and West Virginia’s industrial center. The 1920s were a time of

prosperity and potential, and 1930 marked the city's peak population. Dice left Wheeling not because she wanted to, but because her aunt died in Indianapolis, and her uncle was "so adrift" that he requested Dice and her mother return to Indiana to "make a home for him" in the summer of 1929.<sup>38</sup> They did, and Dice's mother died just three months later, leaving Dice to live with her uncle, an attorney and amateur historical researcher, for the next two decades. "As my uncle and I were each bereft of a lifelong comrade," Dice wrote, "we decided to remain together to pick up the threads as best we could. So I am making a home for him."<sup>39</sup> This was the first time she had lived with a man since she had lived in her childhood home, and her uncle was the only man she would ever "make a home" for. In her way, Dice did not allow the major change in the circumstances of her life to impede her activities.

She wrote to her college's alumnae magazine with updates, saying she had again taken up a position at a YWCA, this time working in the Indianapolis chapter's Family Welfare Association, which, if the work of identically named committees at other YWCAs is any indication, provided services to immigrant families.<sup>40</sup> Her activities remained varied in the first half of the 1930s: she went to YWCA luncheons, gave talks on international relations, arranged lectures for the Society of Indiana Pioneers, hosted speakers on subjects ranging from prisoners' rights to American literature, planned events for members of the Indiana Goucher College Alumnae Club, and was involved in the Propylaeum, a women's literary forum. All of these activities were in keeping with the tradition of Progressive Era clubwomen, who were known for their reformist politics and interest in literature.

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38. Marguerite Dice, "1905," *Goucher Alumnae Quarterly* (Volume 8, Number 3), April 1930, 72.

39. Dice, "1905," April 1930, 72.

40. International Institute of Los Angeles, "Our History," <https://www.iilosangeles.org/about/our-history/>, accessed March 25, 2022.

Marguerite Dice, the semi-political activist, was visible for the first time in 1933, when she penned a lengthy letter to the editor of the *Indianapolis Star* urging more and better coverage of international current events. She scorned the paper's "garbled account" of a recent speech by Neville Chamberlain, and she insisted that "a sufficient number of readers" would prefer coverage of international events to "every fresh out-burst of crime with the picture of the criminal occupying the front page."<sup>41</sup> She certainly paid more attention to international news than many—it is doubtful that the average Indianan would be able to criticize the *Star* for its omission of a particular sentence in a British politician's speech—but her letter was well received, and at least one other reader wrote to the *Star* in explicit agreement with her.<sup>42</sup>

Marguerite Dice's early life reveals her to be a shrewd, driven person, with her attention mostly directed towards her work through the YWCA and other similar women-centric, reform-minded groups. There are hints of her conservatism throughout her early years, expressed through views not always shared by her contemporaries, but it was not until the latter half of the 1930s, when she was in her 50s, that her anticommunism took shape. And she was far from the only dedicated anticommunist in progressive, reform-minded spaces: as the next section will show, the very clubs she had used to achieve progressive ends would help her achieve conservative ones. Taken together, these chapters of her life show not a progressive activist who abandoned her beliefs to fight communism, but a reformer who took fighting communism as her latest community service project, alongside legions of likeminded men and women, demonstrating the permeable lines between conventional and radical beliefs.

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41. Marguerite Dice, "Not Enough World News," *Indianapolis Star*, February 6, 1933, 6.

42. Albert Terstege, "Less Crime News For Him" *Indianapolis Star*, February 8, 1933, 8.

**“Women, arise—work and vote!”: The Making of an Anticommunist, 1936-1949**

The next years of Marguerite Dice’s life are a period in time often excluded from histories of American anticommunism. 1940 saw Dice launch and win an attack on the Communist Party’s ability to place candidates on the Indiana ballot, and in the same year, 17 other states adopted similar measures. 1940 also saw the passage of the Smith Act, which made it illegal to advocate for the overthrow of the United States government by force or violence, and which was used to prosecute over 100 people during the Second Red Scare a decade later. The Dies Committee was active, and Americans around the country signed anticommunist petitions and wrote letters to the editors of their local newspapers. But in most versions of the history of American anticommunism, the interwar years are hardly mentioned, despite their varied, vigorous anticommunist activity and uncanny resemblance to the Second Red Scare. The rhetorical flourishes and political strategies of activists during the Second Red Scare, including those of Dice herself, are far less novel than many histories of anticommunism would make them out to be; many of them appeared in the interwar period first. “...‘Little’ red scares in between [the two great red scares] have left behind a dearth of scholarly traces, perhaps because much of the material deals with events scattered in time and space which never reached the intensity of the two great red scares,” Robert Justin Goldstein wrote in the preface to an essay collection he edited on such “little red scares.”<sup>43</sup> These events may be “scattered in time and space,” but when told on the timeline of a single life, the continuities and direct linkages between the Red Scares become clear. Goldstein’s collection argues that the two “great red scares” could be better understood as one red scare that never really died, and that the intervening “little red scares”

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43. Robert Justin Goldstein, *Little ‘Red Scares’: Anti-Communism and Political Repression in the United States, 1921-1946* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), xiii.

helped the first transition to the second by establishing motivated, savvy anticommunist coalitions. Dice's 1940 campaign supports this argument and adds to it the consideration of gender: her campaign succeeded, in large part, because of her ability to mobilize her otherwise apolitical women's clubs.

By 1940, the formal start of her career as an anticommunist activist, Dice had been an active member of the Cornelia Cole Fairbanks unit of the Daughters of the American Revolution for several years. The late 1930s saw a shift in how she spent her time: where her days were once primarily occupied by Society of Indiana Pioneers events and YWCA teatimes, they were now often occupied by DAR lectures and leadership duties for the Propylaeum. 1940, usually considered by scholars to be a nadir for the anticommunist movement, saw more activity than conventional histories of the American right wing would indicate. Dice was but one of many clubwomen-turned-activists, and in 1940, the Daughters of the American Revolution had something of a monopoly on anticommunist and conservative female activism.

The DAR was formed in 1890 when the Sons of the American Revolution, another patriotic, heritage-based, history-focused organization, refused to allow women to join its ranks.<sup>44</sup> This was during the heyday of women's literary and social clubs, and women quickly moved to prove their descentance from American revolutionaries and join the DAR. Despite its pseudo-feminist roots and origins in the tradition of Progressive Era women's clubs, the DAR could hardly be considered progressive. It went through the motions of a women's club, like the others Dice had dedicated her life to, but where the women of the YWCA would meet to collect library books for working women, the women of the DAR would meet to study and strategize

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44. "DAR History," Daughters of the American Revolution, <https://www.dar.org/national-society/about-dar/dar-history>, accessed December 12, 2021.

against communism and socialism as a part of their “National Defense Through Education” program.<sup>45</sup> Of course, they were not exclusively a political or anticommunist club, but many of their more conventional women’s club activities were tinged by a distinct version of conservatism, one that Dice embraced.

A good deal has been written about the conservatism of the DAR, which was perhaps most visible through the Daughters’ attitudes about race, gender, and historic commemoration; in 1939, the Daughters became nationally infamous for their refusal to allow Marian Anderson, a Black opera singer, to perform at the DAR Constitution Hall in DC. Simon Wendt’s book on the DAR and patriotic memory captures this form of identity and historic conservatism most comprehensively.<sup>46</sup> Wendt analyzed how the Daughters sought to preserve and honor their American heritage to provide insights into their worldview. Their America, Wendt argues, was one of great men, of white men: revolutionaries, pioneers, soldiers, presidents, husbands and fathers to good American women. The Daughters saw it as their duty to honor the men—and, crucially, the women of those men—who had fought in the revolution and given them their country. They were fiercely protective of the legacy of the revolution, and they saw their defenses of it as a means of building national unity. But this unity only went so far: to be a Daughter was to be a certain kind of social and political elite; to be a Daughter was certainly to be white (the DAR did not admit its first Black member until 1977), and usually, upper class. Their reverence for revolutionary women was not feminism; their emphasis on the heroism of

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45. “Give Unique Party for YWCA Friends,” *Topeka Daily Capital*, December 17, 1912, 6; “Society,” *Indianapolis Times*, February 4, 1941, 14.

46. Simon Wendt, *The Daughters of the American Revolution and Patriotic Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020).



female revolutionaries only went as far as saying they had supported heroic men, usually as wives and mothers.

Western and midwestern Daughters were often more interested in commemorating westward expansion than the American Revolution. The pioneers were a more proximate group of founding fathers (and mothers), and Daughters from the American west paid homage to them in the same ways New England Daughters commemorated important revolutionaries. They erected monuments and marked trails; they (often literally) sang the praises of the pioneers who had so bravely defeated their “savage foes”; they paid tribute to the “Madonnas of the Trail” who, as one Daughter put it, were “brave in their sacrifice, loyal to their men, following them trustfully, carrying the coming race in their arms.”<sup>47</sup>

Dice was a very typical midwestern Daughter in that she was unyieldingly proud of her pioneer heritage. In college, she was the “Third Warrior” of the “Klosh Tilicum” society, which was an organization for girls from the western states (in 1905, when she graduated, Indiana evidently still counted as the west).<sup>48</sup> During her adult life in Indianapolis, she was involved in the Society of Indiana Pioneers, which hosted lectures, dinners, pilgrimages to important campsites and trails, and even trips to the World’s Fair for its members.<sup>49</sup> In 1931, she attended a Society of Indiana Pioneers-sponsored lecture by Claude Bowers, a historian, journalist, and future ambassador to Spain and Chile under FDR, on the importance of preserving democracy.

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47. Wendt, *DAR and Patriotic Memory*, 60, 85.

48. Woman’s College of Baltimore, *Donnybrook Fair Yearbook* 17 (1905): 98. The name was apparently derived from the Chinook words for “good” and “people.”

49. Dice also researched and co-wrote a book on her family’s pioneer heritage with her uncle, Charles N. Thompson. The book was titled *Sons of the Wilderness: John and William Conner* and was published by the Indiana Historical Society in 1937.

“That battle, for the preservation of democracy in America will be fought out in the life time of the present generation,” Bowers said to the crowd gathered at the Claypool Hotel, which housed the Indiana state headquarters of both the Democratic and Republican parties. Bowers continued, “You and I must choose under which flag we will serve... Democracy is here in the middle West. From the graves of our pioneers comes the call to action.”<sup>50</sup> It is impossible to know exactly how Dice responded to such a call, but it is likely that she saw DAR activities as a logical answer. To her, the opportunity to engage in political work through the DAR gave her the opportunity to combine two of her most enduring interests: community service, and the study and preservation of American history.

Wendt’s account of the DAR’s conservatism argues that by the eve of World War II, the group’s role in historic commemoration—and status in society more broadly—was waning. This is true: fewer monuments were erected, fewer celebratory ribbons were cut, and in the wake of the Depression, Americans were increasingly skeptical about the narrative of forward progress preached by groups like the DAR. But this misses an important shift in the DAR’s attitudes and activities during the same period, one that Dice’s shift in activities neatly tracks with. In the early 1940s, the DAR not only looked backwards at the American tradition of greatness it sought to preserve, but also forward, at what they saw as threats to it. This was consistent with the DAR’s active antiradicalism in the 1920s, which Wendt rightly characterizes as a part of their historical commemorative and nationalist projects. In the wake of the first World War, the Daughters rejected any questions of the significance of the American Revolution and the heroism of its participants, believing that any doubt was fuel for subversive groups.<sup>51</sup> As the second World War

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50. Kate Milner Rabe, “Says Democracy in Fight for Life: Bowers Tells Pioneers Preservation Depends on Present Generation,” *Indianapolis Star*, December 13, 1931, 1-2.

51. Wendt, *DAR and Patriotic Memory*, 17.

approached, many of their same concerns reemerged, and they quickly made it their mission to squash anything remotely “un-American.” Chief among these threats was the threat of communism, and the Daughters put up a fight. This defense looked less like commissioning statues and singing patriotic songs and more like challenging the Communist Party with the law.

1940 was an especially important year for the DAR for two reasons: it was the group’s golden jubilee, and it was an election year. For an organization committed to celebrating heritage and participating in American traditions, there was perhaps no more exciting time. The June edition of the DAR’s magazine recapped the events of its annual continental congress, which members of Dice’s unit had attended in April. The opening remarks of the magazine, written by Sarah Corbin Robert, national president, discussed topics very typical of a DAR publication. She wrote of baby dolls in antebellum-style hoop skirts sold by Daughters in Mississippi, of a poem by a schoolboy in Alabama that touched her heart, and of the inspiring beauty of witnessing physically disabled people sing in a choir.<sup>52</sup> But the lengthy middle portion of her letter was not written by her at all.

Robert included three editorials praising the DAR’s commitment to rooting out un-Americanism and defending the nation from the scourges of domestic communism. A D.C. paper characterized the Daughters as committed to a “progressive ideal” and said that its “patriotic education” initiatives were a demonstration of its “constructive liberalism.” A Massachusetts paper wrote of the “D.A.R. Triumph” and credited the Daughters with being aware of the “Red menace” before anyone else. “The position of the D.A.R. has been quite thoroughly vindicated by the facts brought to light by the Dies investigation,” it said, referencing the House Un-

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52. Sarah Corbin Robert, “If I Could Talk to You,” *National Historical Magazine*, June 1940, 2-3.

American Activities Committee's (known as the Dies Committee because of its chairman, Martin Dies) anticommunist investigations, which were a procedural foreshadowing of McCarthyism. The *Christian Science Monitor* wrote that the DAR's "patriotic education" was much better than it had been in previous years. Robert offered no commentary on the editorials; to her, they spoke for themselves. The Daughters were hard at work, and they had *been* hard at work, these editorials said. The rest of the nation was beginning to catch up to what they had set in motion, and in Indiana, the Daughters continued a project that Marguerite Dice had started.

The year prior, in October 1939, Dice had written to the editor of the *Indianapolis News* speaking out against communism for the first time, and in December, she first spoke to the ladies of her DAR unit about the importance of "national defense."<sup>53</sup> Her October 1939 letter purported to show the true nature of the American Communist Party by quoting its materials at length. The quotation she primarily referenced was from a pamphlet she had read at the Indianapolis Public Library, and it explained the international revolutionary goals of the party, which established the foundation for her primary argument against communism.

"I have nothing to add," she concluded her letter, letting the quotation speak for itself. "This seems to be a clear statement of the purpose and the 'connections' of the Communist party in the United States, made by one of its leaders. What more or better evidence is needed?"<sup>54</sup>

1940 saw Dice engage in politics like she never had before, all with a mind towards defeating communists at the ballot box and preventing them from subverting American institutions from within. In January, she was an assistant hostess of a meeting of her DAR unit

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53. "Miss Dice Talks to D.A.R. Tomorrow," *Indianapolis Times*, December 14, 1939, 26; Marguerite Dice, "The Communist Party," *Indianapolis News*, October 27, 1939, 6.

54. Dice, "The Communist Party," 6.

where they elected delegates to the continental congress and discussed “Americanism.”<sup>55</sup> In February, she was included on a list of delegates and alternates to the congress.<sup>56</sup> In March, she represented the DAR in her first official crusade against communism.<sup>57</sup>

On March 5, Dice was a guest of the Indianapolis Council of Women, and she was set to present on “changes in election laws” at one of their regular luncheons. Also on the agenda were a presentation by the president of the National Council of Women, a celebration of the winner of a “constitutional essay contest,” and reports from the municipal affairs and welfare committees.<sup>58</sup> The governor’s wife, the presidents of several prominent women’s groups, and the state superintendent of public instruction were all in attendance. The meeting was like any other, except for the fact that it set in motion a statewide, year-long (and previously unstudied) anticommunist campaign.

During Dice’s talk on “election laws,” she most likely focused on just one: Chapter 325 of the Acts of the Indiana General Assembly of 1935. Chapter 325 prohibited any party which “advocates the overthrow, by force or violence, of the local, state or national government, or which advocates or carries on a program of sedition or treason, by radio, speech or press” from appearing on any ballot in Indiana. This law was perfectly good, Dice contended, with one caveat: it had never been enforced. The Communist Party had appeared on ballots and collected votes in the 1936 presidential election and the 1938 midterms, and in her view, this violated Chapter 325. After she and the legislative chairman of the Indianapolis Council of Women spoke, they circulated a petition and asked the women of the Council to endorse a resolution

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55. “Club Calendar,” *Indianapolis Sunday Star*, January 28, 1940, 16.

56. “Society, Club and Personal Events,” *Indianapolis Star*, February 3, 1940, 6.

57. “Women’s Council to Hear Leader: National President Will Address Luncheon Meeting Tuesday,” *Indianapolis News*, March 4, 1940, 11.

58. “Council of Women Leader to Speak,” *Indianapolis Star*, March 3, 1940, 68.

calling for the Communist Party to be barred from appearing on any Indiana ballots. The women agreed, and the Indianapolis Council of Women officially committed to supporting the movement.

Chapter 325, and Dice's subsequent push for a ballot ban with similar language, are consistent with a long tradition of American antiradical and anticommunist policies. Chapter 325's primary link to previous policies is its particular use of "overthrow, by force or violence." One of the most comprehensive accounts of the history of American anticommunism is an article by the legal scholar William Wieck titled "The Legal Foundations of Domestic Anticommunism: The Background of *Dennis v United States*." Wieck argues that in order to understand later, more commonly known iterations of anticommunism (mostly, McCarthyism and the court cases of that era), one must first understand the much earlier origins of American anticommunism. He pinpoints the start as a wave of antiradicalism laws passed in response to the Haymarket Affair of 1886. He describes those laws as "class conflict allied with nativism."<sup>59</sup> This seems to be true of anticommunism through the decades and can be seen in the anti-Bolshevism of the first Red Scare, in the fact that the primary anticommunist committee was called the House Un-American Activities Committee, and in the fact that the American Legion and National Defense chairwomen of the DAR allied themselves in between the two Red Scares.

Wieck argues that while these antiradicalism laws were semi-prevalent, they went unenforced. Importantly, they created the blueprint for later antiradical and anticommunist statutes, which would see the recycling of the language of "overthrow of government by force or violence." From there, Wieck traces anticommunism to 1903, when Congress passed the

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59. William M. Wieck, "The Legal Foundations of Domestic Anticommunism: The Background of *Dennis v United States*," *Supreme Court Review* 2001 (2001): 382.

Immigration Act of 1903, which banned anarchists from entering the US, allowed for the deportation of those in the country, and prevented their naturalization.<sup>60</sup> Wieck says that the rise of the IWW (around 1919) reignited antiradical flames and caused a wave of antiradical laws at the state level, which he argues helped establish the infrastructure of both Red Scares; the first, though it faded out, provided the basis for the second.

Wieck describes that while anticommunism might have appeared dormant during the interwar years, “fringe antics” by “crackpots” actually helped to keep it alive, but this is only partially true. His contention is that the extreme right helped keep the movement alive, even if they also gave it an image of “looniness.”<sup>61</sup> This is true, and pays more attention to the existence of interwar anticommunist activism than much scholarship. But Wieck misses some of the more mainstream efforts, or at the very least, misses the fact that not every anticommunist campaign during the period was done, as he puts it, “clumsily.” This matters: to dismiss interwar anticommunism as the work of a bunch of “crackpots” is to downplay its efficacy and its lasting influence. Vigorously and effectively run anticommunist campaigns in 1940 do not neatly fit into the dominant narrative of American anticommunism—First Red Scare, Second Red Scare, Cold War—but their inconvenience for that periodization is a reason to pay attention to them, not to dismiss them.<sup>62</sup> In Wieck’s attempt to correct the dominant narrative of anticommunism’s interwar lull, he arguably feeds into a different, but also inaccurate, narrative about the nature of interwar anticommunism.

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60. Wieck, “Legal Foundations of Domestic Anticommunism,” 383.

61. Wieck, “Legal Foundations of Domestic Anticommunism,” 393.

62. Robert Goldstein’s *Little ‘Red Scares’* is a collection of essays on other moments of anticommunist activism in the interwar period; the ballot ban campaigns are briefly mentioned.

Usefully, though, Wieck argues that the character of anticommunism in the interwar period “shifted from class struggle to political party struggles,” thus setting the stage for the intensely political emphasis of the Second Red Scare, which was distinct from the anti-labor, anti-radical, anti-IWW flavor of the first.<sup>63</sup> It also gives credence to the argument that Dice’s ballot ban campaign in 1940 and others like it helped with some sort of transition to the anticommunism of McCarthy—where anticommunism had previously been about squashing literal rebellions and preventing labor from organizing, it now meant beating the communists at the ballot box and preventing them from subverting American democracy from the inside. Wieck, however, spends very little time discussing precisely how the interwar years so dramatically altered the fundamental character of American anticommunism. He discusses the Liberty League at some length, as well as some efforts within the Roman Catholic Church to clean communists from its ranks, and he also discusses the burgeoning hatred of the far-left by the more center-left.<sup>64</sup> The New Deal gave some of these groups material through which to attack the federal government, making anticommunism now just one “tactic in ordinary partisan competition,” and making the federal government a target for anticommunists for the first time. But it was not just that Americans were suddenly concerned that Democrats were actually secret communists; they were also concerned about actual, self-identifying communists finding their way into government and gaining legal and political legitimacy.

“Can private property be abolished and capitalism overthrown in this country by peaceful means?” Dice asked in an editorial. “I do not think so. And what peaceful means are they using?”

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63. Wieck, “Legal Foundations of Domestic Anticommunism,” 392.

64. The Liberty League was formed in opposition to the New Deal; for more, see Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: the Businessmen’s Crusade Against the New Deal* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010).



The ballot? No. For while they are attempting a place on the ballot of every state, no effort is being made to secure a large number of voters. In fact the Communist vote is decreasing, not increasing, but Communist activities are increasing because we have given members of this party the legal standing of the ballot and the policies of the present administration have allowed them to work themselves into positions of importance.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, government became not only a tool but a target.

And target the government Dice and her allies did. Their efforts could hardly be considered clumsy: once the various coalitions of Indianapolis women’s groups signed on to the effort and allied with the American Legion, it was full steam ahead. Dice traveled around Indiana and rallied her troops, speaking to hundreds of Daughters and anticommunist sympathizers in churches and auditoriums throughout the state. She skipped her usual months-long retreat to the summer cottage she shared with her uncle in Northern Michigan for the first time since they built it in 1936—evidently, the campaign demanded her full attention. In May, she claimed that 8,257 Indianans had signed onto the DAR’s petitions.<sup>66</sup> In June, she wrote a letter to the editor of the *Indianapolis Star* in which she argued that patriotism was not confined to explicitly patriotic groups and encouraged Indianans to organize against the “fifth column” at local levels. Indeed, she wrote of the need for citizens and low-level government officials to “cope with the enemy within our gates,” using McCarthy’s famous phrase a full decade before he would.<sup>67</sup>

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65. Marguerite Dice, “Today’s Guest Editorial,” *Muncie Evening Press*, August 12, 1940, 4.

66. “Must Oust Communists, D.A.R. Told,” *Palladium-Item*, May 23, 1940, 4. At the same meeting where she announced the signature counts, the Daughters planned their next monument to the pioneers.

67. Marguerite Dice, “Watch Fifth Column,” *Indianapolis Star*, June 22, 1940, 10.

By the end of the summer, Governor Clifford Townsend, a Democrat, had set a date for when the State Election Board would hear the petitions, and Dice claimed that the petitioners now numbered over 21,000.<sup>68</sup> This, it should be noted, was only a fraction of the number of people who would go on to vote in that year's election, perhaps giving credence to Wieck's argument that interwar anticommunism only existed on the fringes. The effort may not have had a significant number of on-paper supporters, but that does not negate the movement's success or its influence. The number of actual supporters is difficult to identify—I have not been able to locate the petitions themselves—but ultimately, Dice and her allies took their movement to the governor's desk, earned his approval, and by the hearing in October, had the backing of thousands more Indianans. Its supporters were not just the rightmost Republicans, not just “crackpots” or “loonies,” but relatively ordinary Americans—Democrats and Republicans alike—who functionally took anticommunism as their new community service project.

The October hearing came on the heels of several federations of women's clubs beginning their seasons with American loyalty pledges.<sup>69</sup> A Mrs. W.D. Keenan, second vice-president of the Indiana Federation of Clubs, spoke to 200 women from at least seven counties at a meeting of the Sixth District Federation of Women's Clubs in Rushville. She delivered a variation of a speech titled “Woman's Responsibility in the Future,” which she would give several more times at club meetings throughout the fall.<sup>70</sup>

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68. “Communist Ballot Ban to be Studied: Governor Calls Election Board; Will Consider Petitions to Deprive Party of Place on Ticket,” *Indianapolis Star*, July 30, 1940, 13; Marguerite Dice, “Today's Guest Editorial,” *Muncie Evening Press*, August 12, 1940, 4.

69. Susan M. Ostrom, “Clubwomen Give Loyalty Pledge: Study and Self Education Stressed by District Federation at Rushville,” *Indianapolis News*, September 28, 1940, 9. Club season typically ran from Labor Day until Memorial Day, with clubs adjourning for the summer.

70. “Better Basis for Home Life Urged: Club Federation Secretary Asserts Scientific Approach Needed,” *Indianapolis News*, October 4, 1940, 25; Susan M. Ostrom, “Club Women

“Everywhere clubwomen are serving their communities with heart and hand and mind, training themselves continually for more effective service to humanity. What the future holds of success or failure, not only for the federated club movement, but for America and the whole world depends largely upon individual willingness to assume responsibilities and to make the most of opportunities ‘to work for that which is good toward all men,’” she said. “Self-education to which clubwomen are subscribing is one of the best means of preserving democracy. We must be able to discern the truth, where it is all but lost in mere words.”<sup>71</sup>

Later in that meeting, the women unanimously adopted a resolution “urging immediate action to rid the nation of ‘destructive Communism, enemy aliens and other subversive groups; declaring ‘unswerving loyalty to democratic principles and the American representative form of government,’” among other things.<sup>72</sup> Here, again, are the tried-and-true principles of women’s organizations being applied to the cause of anticommunism and the “preservation of democracy.” Notable about this meeting is that it was not a meeting of explicitly patriotic organizations. One did not become a member of a club in the Sixth District Federation of Women’s Clubs because she wanted to serve her country—or at least, one did not do that before this resolution was passed. The federation was not the DAR; it was not the fringe. These women, like Dice once was, were more likely to spend their days discussing literature and progressive social welfare initiatives than scrutinizing national defense policies, but still, in communism, they found a motivator for education and action. This goes against how the women’s club movement is remembered.

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Hear Major Culleton: Officer Tells of Inducements for Youth in Flying Cadet Service,” *Indianapolis News*, October 11, 1940, 21.

71. Ostrom, “Clubwomen Give Loyalty Pledge,” 9.

72. Ostrom, “Clubwomen Give Loyalty Pledge,” 9.

In recent years, scholarship has paid more attention to the conservative underbelly of the women's club movement, but, as with Simon Wendt's account of the DAR's conservatism, much of it stops at clubwomen's conservative ideas of race and gender. This is an important conversation, to be certain, and this paper merely seeks to add dimension to it. In women's clubs, and in clubwomen like Dice, the makings of the modern American right are visible. Erin Kempker's *Big Sister* provides the best account of midwestern clubwomen's conservatism—even focusing specifically on women in Indiana—but focuses primarily on postwar activist efforts.<sup>73</sup> Her analysis is immensely helpful in considering how conservative women built such a formidable political coalition after World War 2 and in the lead-up to debates over the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s, and this paper seeks to add to, not refute, her work.

In the activities of Dice and the other ballot ban campaigners, one can see how progressive social clubs became early engines of modern conservatism: where they once provided social services that the government did not, they now demanded the government clean house, and prevent communists from joining its ranks. Dice would later write about her appreciation for the 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which says that any power not explicitly delegated to the federal government would be the responsibility of the states or the people, and in both her club work and her campaigns, one can see her appreciation for this principle. Clubs fulfilled responsibilities that the federal government did not, and ballot ban campaigns happened at the state and local levels—where election decisions were made. She would later become a leader of a group called “We, The People,” emphasizing that her Republicanism centered exactly that.

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73. Erin Kempker, *Big Sister: Feminism, Conservatism, and Conspiracy in the Heartland* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

Dice and her Indiana allies were not alone in their anticommunist crusade. Indeed, 1940 saw at least 17 other successful ballot ban efforts across the country.<sup>74</sup> In at least 15 other states, efforts failed—even efforts like the one in Iowa, which had all the same component parts as Dice’s. No secondary literature has contended with the existence of these campaigns, but they are evidence of a dynamic and active anticommunist movement during a time when anticommunism is typically remembered as being minimally interesting to Americans.

It is perhaps worth noting here that Dice never married; indeed, I have found no evidence that she ever had any sort of romantic relationship with a man (or a woman). Her inheritances allowed her to support herself and live independently for her entire adult life.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps consequently, she never employed many of the arguments one would expect a female conservative activist to make, even when she spoke to groups of women or represented women’s groups to men. Her focus was always on the greatness of American ideals, not America’s obligation to its women or children. She did not appeal to traditionally feminine characteristics in her arguments for the importance of women voting and being knowledgeable about politics and the world, nor did she appeal to women as wives and mothers. In her arguments, women were just women, just citizens with untapped political power. Her appeal to women voters was more about them as a significant portion of the voting public, not about some inherent moral superiority they possessed. If anything, sometimes her arguments arguably relied on sexist stereotypes.

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74. By election day, these were the states with anticommunist ballot bans: Arizona, Arkansas, California (though its ballot ban would not be officially in effect until 1941), Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

75. “Estate Goes to Niece,” *Terre Haute Star*, September 1, 1949, 3. She inherited most of her uncle’s \$700,000 estate upon his death in 1949, including his house, maid, and chauffeur.

In 1944, in one of a series of letters arguing against a fourth term for FDR, she asked “Is it not time for all women to put aside hysterical emotionalism and vote this time according to reason? Women, it is said in political circles in this state, will compose 90% of all political workers and will represent 65% of all voters in this state—easily a majority. If this is true, the woman vote may carry our country through the most critical period in the lifetime of most of us. It could save our free government from the pitfalls of Communism.”<sup>76</sup> Where many—most—prominent conservative female activists called for women to use their inherent maternal instincts to guide their political decision making, Dice entertained no such idea. She asked women to be *reasonable*, not *emotional* in their politics, confirming a sexist stereotype and asking women to *do better*. Motherhood and womanhood had nothing to do with any of it. In another anti-FDR letter, this one calling attention to his endorsement by former Communist presidential candidate Earl Browder, she—so humbly—wrote that, “I recall that a few years ago the patriotic women of Indiana united in a movement to enforce the law which denied the Communist party a place on the ballot... The issue in this campaign is free government versus a Socialized America. Women, arise—work and vote!”<sup>77</sup>

She cared about “the woman vote” not because it was in some way superior to the male one, but because it was a way to amass more support for what she believed in: the Republican Party. It is worth noting that this was not the norm: the most famous female conservative activists (Phyllis Schlafly, women of the Mothers’ Movement, etc.) called on women as sensitive, thoughtful wives and mothers, and even other female ballot ban activists relied more

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76. Marguerite Dice, “A Solemn Responsibility,” *Indianapolis Times*, September 19, 1944, 12.

77. Marguerite Dice, “Women to the Rescue,” *Indianapolis Star*, August 16, 1944, 10. Earl Browder was the Communist Party’s presidential candidate in 1940, and Dice had previously expressed her specific disdain for him in other, earlier letters to the editor.

heavily on visions of what the scourges of communism would mean for their children.<sup>78</sup> There is not really an argument that Dice represented a masculine form of conservatism—her activism was still in mostly female spaces or as the representative of all female groups—but her genderless pleas for women to engage with politics are still worth noting for their divergence from conventional articulations of female conservatism.

Dice's active anticommunism did not mark the end of her activities as a progressive reformer. Indeed, she remained on the board of the Indianapolis Free Kindergarten Society, which maintained cost-free kindergartens for children of all classes and races in Indianapolis (the kindergartens were not racially integrated), and she still regularly hosted and attended events at the Propylaeum.<sup>79</sup> Interestingly, the Free Kindergarten Society's headquarters were, for a time, located inside the DAR building in Indianapolis, demonstrating the total intermingling between the groups Dice was involved in.<sup>80</sup>

This continued involvement in progressive causes is significant for the periodization of her life, yes—it is not so easy as saying she was a progressive who became a conservative—but it is also more broadly significant for the history of American anticommunism. It is clear that anticommunism was never only a fringe belief, but the existence of such fervent anticommunism

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78. For more on the Mothers' Movement and post-war female conservatism, see Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) and Erin Kempker, *Big Sister: Feminism, Conservatism, and Conspiracy in the Heartland* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2018). Blanche Winters, a ballot ban activist from Michigan, was so extreme so as to support a female-only government, believing that women's moral superiority would prevent war and solve poverty.

79. Indianapolis Free Kindergarten and Children's Aid Society, "Indianapolis free kindergarten society, 1882-1942" (Indianapolis: Indianapolis Free Kindergarten Society, 1943), 27; "Propylaeum Day Program Announced; Alvin C. Hamer Will Be the Speaker," *Indianapolis Times*, January 17, 1946, 18. Dice was one of five unmarried board members (of 150+) for the first 60 years of the organization's history; another notable member was Mrs. Eli Lilly.

80. Indianapolis Free Kindergarten, "Free kindergarten society, 1882-1942," 13.

in non-fringe areas so many years before it once again is thought to have entered the mainstream is meaningful for how we should understand the pre-history of modern conservatism. Dice and her allies were neither pioneers nor were they narrow-minded followers; they sustained the American anticommunist movement during a critical low period, delivering it to ordinary Americans in places where they already lived, socialized, and worked, priming them for a time when anticommunism would be *the* conversation and *the* cause of the day. As the next sections will show, these forays into anticommunism were the precursors to later, more familiar, McCarthyist forms of anticommunism and conservatism, the forms that have arguably persisted in American politics through the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **“A woman situated as I am can do no less”: Activism Beyond Anticommunism, 1950-1957**

Marguerite Dice’s anticommunism continued into the Second Red Scare, where she—and thousands more Americans—built on interwar activism to bring anticommunism to the main stage of American politics. Senator Joseph McCarthy’s famous speech in Wheeling, the beloved city of Dice’s early 40s, catapulted him to fame and anticommunism to its most prominent position since the First Red Scare thirty years prior. In Wheeling, McCarthy spoke at a dinner hosted by the Ohio County Republican Women’s Club in honor of Lincoln’s birthday. He made his inflammatory declaration of there being “enemies from within” the federal government for the first time, claiming to have a list of card-carrying Communists employed by the State Department. Americans were incensed, and the Second Red Scare gained speed. Really, anticommunist sentiment had been widely stirred up in the years preceding his 1950 speech, but his declaration of “enemies from within” excited Americans and called them to action. Dice’s activism arguably became more radical in the 1950s, at least in terms of the groups she affiliated



with, but the arguments she made against communism were functionally identical to those she used in 1940, and in fact, she explicitly used her 1940 success to justify her 1950s activism. That her arguments against communism did not change significantly after McCarthyism became popular shows the continuity between the low and high points of the anticommunist movement.

In 1952, Dice wrote to the *Goucher Alumnae Quarterly* with an update on her anticommunist activism and a call to action for her former classmates, demonstrating the extent to which she had devoted herself to the cause. This letter was written with greater vigor than many of her previous ones, which typically discussed the various clubs she had joined and hobbies she had taken up since her last correspondence. The *Quarterly*'s editor prefaced Dice's letter: "I believe that we shall all find food for thought and for constructive action of one kind or another in the informative and challenging letter from *Marguerite Dice*." This letter sounded more like a letter to the editor than a letter to her former classmates.

The letter began, "On August 23, 1951, I became an active member of the non-partisan crusade of women known as The Minute Women of the United States of America, Inc.; and I have given up all my time to it and will do so until after the election next November."<sup>81</sup>

This was perhaps sudden, but not surprising. She had hosted the organization's founder at her summer cottage in Michigan on the day she later said that she became a member.<sup>82</sup> Her letter continued, "I feel that our country is faced with its greatest crisis in my life-time and that a woman situated as I am can do no less. I believe that the Minute Women is the kind of movement that women all over this country have been longing for." One could understand the urgency of McCarthyism as influencing Dice's feeling that the country was faced with its

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81. Marguerite Dice, "1905," *Goucher Alumnae Quarterly*, Winter 1952, 39.

82. Florence Goldrich, "In the World of Society and Women," *Petoskey Evening News*, August 24, 1951, 2.

“greatest crisis,” but her now decade-and-a-half long commitment to the anticommunist cause proves that this was not an entirely new feeling.

Her letter was sandwiched between letters from other class of 1905 alumnae, who, instead of proclaiming their commitments to political advocacy, wrote about their husbands’ retirement plans and their grandchildren. Dice detailed what the organization asked of its members (a commitment to vote in each election; the recruitment of five members who would in turn recruit five more members, and so on), and she explained that its goal was to build a large pool of women voters and get “the men to pay some attention to us.” She wrote that the Minute Women would have “something to say” about the “kind of men” both parties nominated for president, and “something decisive to say about who is elected.”

Her pitch notably did not mention any party by name, nor did she clarify what the “something to say” was. The Minute Women always took pains to maintain at least a thin veneer of nonpartisanship. Founded by Suzanne Silvercruys Stevenson in 1949, the Minute Women were a semi-covert group who made it their mission to root out communism wherever they saw it—and they saw it everywhere. Stevenson was a Yale-educated Belgian sculptor, the daughter of a diplomat and the wife of a colonel in the US Army Reserves. She dedicated her life to preventing the United States from “going down the same path Europe followed,” as Dice put it in her 1952 letter. Stevenson and the Minute Women saw communism in schools, in government, and in the home, and they did whatever they could to stop its spread. So committed to the cause were they that Senator Joseph McCarthy wrote Stevenson a letter, which she cherished and showed to hesitant new recruits to win them over.

Stevenson frequently said she was inspired by the success of the Women’s Citizens Committee and so-called “Operation Shoe Leather” enacted by several thousand women in Gary,

Indiana in 1949, which resulted in sweeping anti-gambling and anti-corruption reforms.<sup>83</sup> When Stevenson became aware of the women in Gary in 1949, they were arguably at the height of their power, but they were also only months from disbanding after feeling as if they had completed what they set out to do.

Stevenson was interested in creating a wide but quiet network of women throughout the country who were as committed to ridding the United States of communism as the women of Operation Shoe Leather had been to ridding Gary of gambling. The Minute Women emblem was an eagle surrounded by the words “Guarding the Land We Love,” and the top of each newsletter displayed the words “If we are to be the instrument of thy will, O Lord, please help us.”<sup>84</sup> The group stood for eleven principles: “God and country; The principles embodied in the Constitution of the USA; Patriotic teaching in our schools and colleges; A free press and the truth; A courageous and enlightened foreign policy; States’ rights; Clean politics; Free enterprise; Fairer taxes; A sound dollar; Economy and efficiency in Government.”<sup>85</sup>

Stevenson and her successors played into the tradition of women’s groups focused on education and proclaimed that their goal was to educate women about the eleven principles and teach them the ills of collectivism.

“Our task as Minute Women, is to penetrate the smoke screen that left wing groups have been throwing up for the past two decades, and to concentrate the sunlight of truth and reason on the principles that have made this country great,” wrote Dorothy B. Frankston, the group’s

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83. Ralph O’Leary, “The Minute Women—1: Militant Group Has Chain Phone System,” *Houston Post*, October 15, 1953, 1. Carton 1, Folder 39. George F. Malone Collection of Anti-Communist and Right-Wing Literature, 1940-1965, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA (hereafter cited as George F. Malone Collection).

84. Minute Women newsletters, Carton 1, Folder 39. George F. Malone Collection.

85. Dorothy B. Frankston, “Minute Women of the USA, Inc.,” no date, 2. Carton 1, Folder 39. George F. Malone Collection.

second National Chairman and who maintained the group's headquarters in Wheeling, West Virginia, Dice's former home, and the place where McCarthy gave his infamous "Enemies From Within" speech to a crowd of Republican women's club members in 1950.<sup>86</sup> To achieve their goals, though, the Minute Women established a smoke screen of their own.

In establishing the group, Stevenson adopted unusual practices to keep its profile low, likely inspired by the vigilantism in Gary (and, though she never said so, by communist cells): membership rolls were to be kept a secret, no formal hierarchy was to be established, no parliamentary procedure was to be followed, and Minute Women would never reveal themselves to be such, even when they acted on the organization's behalf. Minute Women wrote to their congressmen, lobbied their school boards, and pushed an aggressive anticommunist agenda, but they were never supposed to reveal that they were acting as a part of a group. Instead, they positioned themselves as a large group of independently concerned women, not members of a highly coordinated organization. This way, each letter they sent held more power, for it did not appear to be a generic letter mindlessly signed and sent by a casual member of some association, but an urgent message from a motivated constituent. An undated pamphlet published by the group said that "If you hear that the Minute Women of the USA, Inc., stand for a piece of legislation or an issue, you will know that it is not true. The organization stands only for its Principles."<sup>87</sup> These policies were successful until they were not.

In October 1953, Ralph O'Leary of the *Houston Post* published a series of articles about the Houston Minute Women and their tactics. A year earlier, several Minute Women supporters had been elected to the board of the Houston Independent School District, and over the course of

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86. Dorothy B. Frankston, "February Newsletter, 1953," *Minute Women of the USA, Inc. Newsletter*, no. 15 (February 1953), 1. Carton 1, Folder 39. George F. Malone Collection.

87. Frankston, "Minute Women," no date, 3, George F. Malone Collection.

their tenure, had wreaked havoc on the district, setting off a wave of firings, resignations, and curricular censorship. O'Leary described the group as "militant" and Stevenson as "shrewd." He explained that they were uniquely powerful because of their underground strategies, contending that Stevenson's "most remarkable innovation" of the acting-as-individuals strategy made the Minute Women "potentially a thousand times more effective than the usual civic, fraternal, patriotic, business or other organization."<sup>88</sup> He spent the better part of the paper's front two pages detailing "embarrassing moments for the budding organization," and refuting its claims of communist subversion in Houston. But as much as he ridiculed the Minute Women, he did not downplay the impact that they had had on Houston, particularly on educators.

"...University of Houston professors will tell you they have heard rumors of an equally-shadowy execution list containing the names of 10 professors," he wrote. "So fearful was the university of exciting controversy this fall that it omitted courses in history on its fall educational television program over KUHT-TV. It was feared history professors would be attacked for un-American history teaching."<sup>89</sup>

The eleventh article in the series concluded with O'Leary's account of an anonymous phone call received by a well-respected female school administrator the day after the Minute Women-dominated school board failed to renew the superintendent's contract after accusing him of communist affiliations.

"Little Miss Red?" the caller asked. "You're next!"<sup>90</sup>

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88. O'Leary, "The Minute Women—1," 1, George F. Malone Collection.

89. Ralph O'Leary, "The Minute Women—11: Atom Expert Perplexed by Query on UN," *Houston Post*, October 21, 1953, 5-6, George F. Malone Collection.

90. O'Leary, "The Minute Women—11," 5-6, George F. Malone Collection.

O’Leary’s exposé unsettled Houston. Never before had the public been made aware of the group’s tactics, and never before had the public been forced to confront how it had been hoodwinked by a group of cunning, radically anticommunist housewives. A reprint of the articles included a section entirely dedicated to the many letters sent from Houstonians to the *Post*’s editor in response to O’Leary’s work. “Minute Women Mail Uniform, Outspoken,” the section heading read, and nearly every letter began with some variation of “thank you” or “congratulations.” One letter likened the enormity of O’Leary’s discovery to that of Columbus (he had published around Columbus Day), and many more described the articles as a public service.<sup>91</sup>

Marguerite Dice, though, was unphased. A month after the *Post* went to press, she appeared on national television as a representative of the Minute Women (likely in violation of its rule that members must speak as individuals, but she did not seem to be too concerned). She appeared on Edward R. Murrow’s famous CBS documentary program *See It Now*, in an episode titled “An Argument in Indianapolis,” part of its series on McCarthyism. On one side of the argument was the Minute Women and the American Legion, and on the other was the ACLU, harkening back to Dice’s 1940 campaign and her strong connection to the Legion. The argument was simple: the Minute Women and the Legion believed the ACLU had no right to host its meetings in the War Memorial building in downtown Indianapolis because, they believed, the ACLU was a communist-friendly organization. Communist use of the War Memorial building—the centerpiece of the Indiana War Memorial Plaza, also home to the Legion’s national headquarters—would basically be akin to desecration, they contended.

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91. “Minute Women Mail Uniform, Outspoken,” Houston *Post*, October 16, 1953, 3. George F. Malone Collection.

Dice was featured partway through the program. She stood outside her house at 3650 Washington Boulevard, in front of the door that Robert Welch and the founders of the John Birch Society would walk through five years later, and she held a small stack of notes.

Looking at the camera, she said, “[The War Memorial building] was erected in memory of those men who gave their lives for the protection and preservation of the principles on which this country was founded. The inscriptions in it and outside of it bear witness to this. What a travesty it would be to open its doors for a meeting to which Communists are welcome, when we know the open and avowed purpose of such is to overthrow our government by force and violence, as well as by infiltration.”<sup>92</sup>

Her emphasis on the symbolic importance of the War Memorial building is very much in keeping with the DAR’s long tradition of coupling historic commemoration with forward-looking nationalism, and her close alliance with the Legion and the rhetoric of her short speech are reminiscent of her campaign thirteen years prior—recall the long history of the phrase “overthrow by force or violence.” Her defense of the building and attack on the ACLU were a continuation of her earlier, pre-McCarthy activism, not simply an adoption of ideas that were newly popular. In a letter to the editor of the *Indianapolis News* a month later, she forcefully defended herself and the Houston Minute Women and asked readers to recall her 1940 campaign.

“A law was passed in the Indiana legislature in 1935 denying the Communist Party a place on the ballot. The law was not enforced until the voters demanded in 1940 by petition and got it,” she wrote. She further justified her ACLU protest and the actions of the Houston Minute Women and concluded by saying, “I know personally the leaders of the Texas Minute Women

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92. *Indy in the 50's*. Directed by Dave Stoelk. Indianapolis: WISH-TV, 1998.

and finer, more conscientious, more patriotic women you will not find anywhere in the country. They are very far from being irresponsible or untrustworthy.”<sup>93</sup>

To Dice, it all went together; it had all *been going* together. Minute Women were the movement that women had been waiting for, and she knew this was true because women she knew (and women she did not) had been working towards the same goals for more than a decade already. They had a bigger platform now, and their movement had a name—McCarthyism—but it was not anything new. But to scholars, her *See It Now* appearance was her introduction to politics, her debut on the scene, much in the same way as McCarthyism was seen as introducing Americans to anticommunism for the very first time.

The most comprehensive biographical account of Dice’s life—an unpublished paper by Erin Kempker—fails to even mention her 1940 ballot ban campaign.<sup>94</sup> Kempker wrote, apparently quoting Dice herself, that she had only become interested in “the political situation” in “1950 or 51.” This, as the 1940 campaigns prove, is clearly incorrect. It gives the impression of a person primarily influenced by the turning political tides, by the popularity of McCarthyism, and not someone who had been dedicated to the cause long before it was in vogue. This is representative of a broader gap that exists in the literature of American anticommunism, and such a gap obscures the origins and the toolbox of McCarthyism. Just as it would be wrong to say that Dice’s anticommunism was a post-McCarthy phenomenon, it would also be wrong to say that McCarthyism was anything other than the latest articulation of American anticommunism. This form of conservatism, as well as its more specifically female

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93. Marguerite Dice, “Defends Minute Women’s Actions in Protesting ACLU Meeting,” *Indianapolis News*, December 3, 1954, 10.

94. Erin Kempker, “Saving the World from Eleanor Roosevelt: Marguerite Dice, the Minute Women of the USA, and the Countersubversive Midwest,” version referenced accessed February 1, 2021.



manifestations, was the culmination of years of activity, not just the beginning of a new form of anticommunism.

### **“So much about myself! Now for our country!”: Becoming a Bircher, 1958-1969**

The Second Red Scare is more often remembered as McCarthyism, after Senator Joseph McCarthy, the movement’s instigator and champion. After nearly four years of lobbying allegations of communist affiliations at academics, filmmakers, and government agencies, McCarthy was censured by the Senate in 1954, bringing at least a symbolic end to the Second Red Scare. With his censuring and then death three years later, the movement lost its icon and its cachet. But McCarthy’s death was not also the death of American anticommunism—far from it. The movement was forced to retreat back to the meeting halls and living rooms where it had first taken shape, but many Americans were just as enthusiastic as ever, harkening back to the fervor of Dice and her allies’ interwar anticommunism. McCarthy’s claims of “enemies from within” might not have panned out when he said they would, but that did not necessarily disprove them in the eyes of true believers like Marguerite Dice. The movement had existed before him, and it would thus outlive him; it did not need a senator’s backing to validate it. As the 1950s came to a close, new groups came to the fore, representing the movement’s most recent evolution. Most notable among these new torchbearers was the John Birch Society, which was founded in Dice’s Indianapolis living room in 1958.

“Why did the founders of the John Birch Society happen to hold their organization meeting in Indianapolis?” asked a journalist for the *Indianapolis News* in 1961. “During all the furor over the ultraconservative organization, that question has never been answered.”

Dice was interviewed. “It’s very simple,” she replied. “I invited them.”<sup>95</sup>

On December 8, 1958, Marguerite Dice hosted the event that would earn her a place in history books. She would later recall that she had been corresponding with Robert Welch, the child prodigy-turned-candy manufacturer-turned-founder of the John Birch Society “at least, since 1955.” She said he was “in every respect, a fine, honorable, intellectual, sincere gentleman,” and that she had learned of him and his views while speaking to a fellow attendee at a women’s club luncheon.<sup>96</sup> She recalled exchanging letters with Welch, and when he mentioned wanting to organize a group of men to fight communism, she offered her home as their meeting place. Welch’s choice of Indianapolis was likely a strategic one more than a personal one; Indianapolis was a relatively central location for him and the eleven businessmen he invited.<sup>97</sup>

In his invitation letters to each of these men, Welch wrote that “Miss Dice is herself activated by a fervent patriotism, guided by a sound sense of propriety unpierced by the ‘lunatic fringe.’”<sup>98</sup> One must of course take Welch’s word with a grain of salt—no one would readily identify themselves or their friend and ally as a member of “the lunatic fringe”—but it is telling that in his appeal to his prospective founding members, he emphasized Dice’s ordinariness, her status as a mainstream patriot. Her activities with the Minute Women certainly cast some doubt on this framing, but for much of her life, and probably in her vision of herself, this was entirely true. She was not a member of “the lunatic fringe,” nor did she seem to want to be. To Welch,

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95. Bill Wildhack, “Birch Group Invited Here for Founding,” *Indianapolis News*, April 29, 1961, 13.

96. Marguerite Dice, “Christmas 1965.”

97. The guests included entrepreneurs, a former IRS commissioner, attorneys, a classics professor, and Fred Koch, the father of Charles and David Koch.

98. Robert Welch, “Letter to Mr. T. Coleman Andrews,” November 12, 1958, [https://archive.org/stream/DocumentaryHistoryOfJBS/Documentary%20History%20of%20JBS\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/DocumentaryHistoryOfJBS/Documentary%20History%20of%20JBS_djvu.txt), accessed March 26, 2022.

this was an asset, and this was, in part, how he convinced the eleven businessmen to join his movement. In Welch's invitation to Marguerite Dice's home, one can see where the conventional becomes the radical.

A transcript of Welch's two-day, seventeen-hour-long Indianapolis oration became the manifesto of the John Birch Society. *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society* was given to all new members to explain the Society's structure and mission.

"GENTLEMEN," it begins. "Let me welcome you to Indianapolis."

*The Blue Book* methodically details the existence of a global communist conspiracy and argues that its tentacles are stretching ever closer to the strongholds of American institutions. Dice is mentioned once in *The Blue Book*, and not by name: "Our hostess has arranged for coffee breaks in the mid-morning and in the mid-afternoon."<sup>99</sup>

In the same article where she said she invited the soon-to-be Birchers to her home, Dice denied any involvement in the original meeting, apparently aside from the coffee breaks Welch credits her with organizing.

"I didn't even attend the meeting," she said. "It was originally a men's organization."<sup>100</sup> She added that she was very proud of her affiliation with the organization.

"We are not beginning any revolution," Welch declared in Dice's living room and the pages of *The Blue Book*, "nor even a counter-revolution, in any technical sense; because, while we are opposing a conspiracy, we are not ourselves making use of conspiratorial methods. Yet our determination to overthrow an entrenched tyranny is the very stuff out of which revolutions

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99. Robert Welch, *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society* (Belmont: Western Islands, 1961), 11.

100. Wildhack, "Birch Group Founding," 13.

are made.”<sup>101</sup> Most scholars of the John Birch Society and the American radical right would dispute this. In recent years, the John Birch Society has increasingly been pointed to as the starting point for a highly conspiratorial political style and school of thought that persists within the Republican Party.

The structure of the John Birch Society—aside, obviously, from its status as “originally a men’s organization”—immediately recalls that of the Minute Women. Welch declared that the group was not a *secret* group but an *anonymous* group, much in the same way as the Minute Women were low profile in their operations. Like the Minute Women, the John Birch Society refused to identify its membership lists to or share its materials with non-members (this remains true), though members were free to identify themselves. It operated “under completely authoritative control at all levels” without elections or any democratic protocols, and its chapter leaders were chosen by the Birch headquarters. If chapters exceeded twenty members, they were to split into multiple.<sup>102</sup> Where the Minute Women were cagey about the parallels between their intentionally shadowy structure and that of leftist groups, Welch openly praised the secrecy of his communist enemies and took their strategies for himself. In *The Blue Book*, he wrote that he was “willing to draw on all successful human experience in organizational matters, so long as it does not involve any sacrifice of morality in the means used to achieve an end.”<sup>103</sup> Welch never acknowledged a connection between the JBS and the Minute Women, and he never said they inspired the Society’s structure, but he was certainly aware of them; at the time of his meeting in Dice’s living room, she was national vice-chair of the Minute Women. Dice’s 1940 campaign

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101. Welch, *Blue Book*, 128.

102. D.J. Mulloy, *The World of the John Birch Society: Conspiracy, Conservatism, and the Cold War* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2014), 10.

103. Welch, *Blue Book of*, 126.

justified her actions with the Minute Women, and it seems that her activism with the Minute Women justified her role as the hostess of the Birchers' inaugural meeting.

It is tempting but misguided to look for Marguerite Dice's exact fingerprints in *The Blue Book*. One can imagine her weighing in on the men's conversations, telling them about her first anticommunist campaign that was now nearly two decades behind her, warning them of the fickle redness of politicians on both sides of the aisle, but because she says she did not attend the meeting, and because there is no concrete evidence otherwise, we must take her at her word. There is certainly an irony to this conclusion: Dice spent her entire life, save for those seventeen hours in December 1958, working independently and efficiently, but it is only for those seventeen hours that she has been remembered. And time and time again, she has been misremembered. In William F. Buckley's 2004 novel-slash-history of the American right, he describes Dice as a widow, and this claim has been repeated in works by serious scholars of conservatism.<sup>104</sup> In Erin Kempker's history of conservative female activists and conspiracy theorists in the Midwest, she neglects to mention any of Dice's pre-McCarthy activism even as she argues that the Minute Women were an important precursor to the Birchers.<sup>105</sup> On the John Birch Society's Wikipedia page—certainly not the determiner of historical truth, but worth noting for how it represents popular understandings of history—Dice does not appear at all.<sup>106</sup> She does not have a page of her own. These omissions and misrepresentations are about more than just one person. It is through Dice that these historical distortions are most clearly visible,

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104. William F. Buckley Jr., *Getting it Right* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2004), no page numbers; for repetition, see David Schulman, *Sons of America: How the Koch Brothers Became America's Most Powerful Private Dynasty* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2014), 40.

105. Kempker, *Big Sister*, 28, 31, 32, 36.

106. Wikipedia. 2003. "John Birch Society." Last modified March 24, 2022. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Birch\\_Society](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Birch_Society).

but she is not the only one whose legacy suffers because she was forgotten—the entire history of the American conservative movement suffers as well.

As the John Birch Society gained influence and earned nationwide ire and acclaim, Dice's image faded from the historical record. The last decade of her life is only barely better represented than the first—for which only several documents are available—but from the sources available, it is clear that she both continued her work for progressive causes and for anticommunist ones. In 1960, she was re-elected as vice regent of her DAR unit, and she had her list of "GOP Platform Suggestions" published in the *Indianapolis News*. Her ideal GOP sounded quite similar to the GOP in its most basic form: she asked for a reaffirmation of the principles of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution and the belief that people serve the government and not the inverse, a pledge to reduce the size of the federal government, an acknowledgement that "national solvency will be achieved by advocating fiscal prudence," a pledge to reduce wasteful military spending and reduce aid to the United Nations and foreign countries, and a pledge to reduce taxes and "take a second look at the 10<sup>th</sup> amendment."<sup>107</sup>

It should be noted that at the same time as she advocated for this decidedly conventional version of the Republican Party, the John Birch Society was already making outrageous claims about communism in America. In 1960, the Society had several thousand members (definite counts are difficult to determine, given the group's secrecy), and Welch claimed that Communists had near total control of the United States government. He became increasingly combative towards Republicans who denounced his radicalism. To Dice, though, Welch's most outlandish claims were not a reason for her to denounce her affiliation with the society. In the

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107. Marguerite Dice, "Marguerite Dice Lists Her GOP Platform Suggestions," *Indianapolis News*, June 14, 1960, 10.

same 1961 article where she explained how she came to know Welch and host his meeting in her home, she emphasized that she was proud to be affiliated with him and the group.

As the 1960s went on, the JBS got louder, and Dice lived a relatively quiet life at 3650 Washington Boulevard, spending her days between the same walls that had seen the birth of the Birchers. She continued her advocacy for the conservation of Indiana's northern sand dunes, won an award for her "outstanding dedication to the American way of life," and, when Robert Welch was in Indianapolis to speak against the United Nations and demand the impeachment of Chief Justice Earl Warren, lent him her chauffeur.<sup>108</sup>

The story of her later years is the story of all her earlier ones together: progressive service work coupled with anticommunist activism. She continued her advocacy for the decidedly progressive cause of environmental conservation, and so too did she embrace her role as the mother of the modern American far-right. She argued for a conventional version of the Republican Party even as she found herself almost exclusively affiliated with its more radical, conspiratorial wing. She never confessed any feelings of contradiction or incongruency between these moments and any others, nor did she seem to distinguish between the mainstream Republican Party she knew and loved and the group she supported that was fast becoming the "lunatic fringe" she had once distanced herself from.

In 1965, she wrote a letter to her extended family. In it, she recounted the events of her life, beginning with her education at Goucher and then detailing the events of her career. After more than a page of recollections, she wrote "So much about myself! Now for Our Country! As

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108. "Phillbrick Says U.S. Lacks Anti-Red Policy," *Indianapolis Star*, May 21, 1961, 20; Dale Burgess, "Birch Society Founder Applauded, Opposed at Indianapolis Speech," *Rushville Republican*, October 13, 1961, 1; United States Congress, "Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 89th Congress Second Session (Volume 112, Part 20, 166), 27364.

most of you know I have been fighting Communism for many years.”<sup>109</sup> She then recounted her correspondence with Robert Welch and praised his character. “OUR COUNTRY is beginning to wake up to the menace of Communism,” she continued. “Whether or not it is too late only time will tell. When will Americans realize that her greatest enemy in this hemisphere is COMMUNISM! Pray and fight in your own way. It will help and may GOD BLESS OUR COUNTRY.” She signed her memoir-slash-manifesto in swooping cursive letters. “With affectionate Christmas Greetings and my warm love to each of you, *Cousin Marguerite*” Thus is the life of Marguerite Dice as told by Marguerite Dice: a life of progressive reformism and YWCA work (“myself!”) and a life of anticommunist activism (“our country!”). Two halves of a letter, but united on the timeline of a single life.

Marguerite Dice died in Cincinnati on September 24, 1969. What she was doing there and how she died are unclear. Obituaries ran in papers across the Midwest, and in all of them that were not just notices of her death, the facts of her patriotism or JBS affiliation were mentioned before anything else (before, even, the date and location of her death). Her longest obituary, published in the *Indianapolis News* under the headline “Marguerite Dice, Former Teacher,” is the only one that mentions her ballot ban campaign, but even in mentioning it, gets it wrong.<sup>110</sup> “She prevailed upon Governor Henry F. Schricker and members of the General Assembly to take the Communist party off the ticket,” it said. In reality, the governor during the time of her campaign had been Clifford Townsend, and he had supported her efforts. Schricker served from 1941 to 1945 and again from 1949 to 1953, and so it is reasonable to conclude that this obituary

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109. Marguerite Dice, “Christmas 1965.”

110. Bess Watson, “Marguerite Dice, Former Teacher,” *Indianapolis News*, September 25, 1969, 9. Dice was indeed a former teacher, but she only taught for one year, in 1905, so the accuracy of this headline is questionable.



also saw her as a post-McCarthy anticommunist. It also states that “in 1958 she became interested in the works of Robert Welch” which her own writing disproves (in a letter to her family, she claimed to have been in contact with him since 1955). The obituary even got the dates of the JBS’s founding meeting wrong: the meeting was December 8 and 9, not December 9 and 10. When she was hailed as the “Mother of a Movement” in a 2008 *Indianapolis Monthly* article commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the JBS’s founding in Indianapolis, she is said to have “flirted with history years before the John Birch Society members met in her home.”<sup>111</sup> When were those years? “She enlisted in the Minute Women of Indiana in the early 1950s to thwart Communist plans to bring down the US government from within,” the article says—no mention of her ballot ban campaign in 1940. None of this is to say that minor errors in her obituary and a magazine article are great crimes against historical memory, but it is to say that it is very easy to get people wrong, and in doing so, it is very easy to get the times in which they lived wrong.

### **Conclusion**

Marguerite Dice’s life represents a parallel timeline to that of the American anticommunist movement. In it, we find three major moments of anticommunist activism—her ballot ban campaign in 1940, her anti-ACLU protest in 1953, her hosting of the soon-to-be John Birch Society in 1958—and through these events, we find a new way of looking at the history of anticommunism. These events, which happened before, during, and after the Second Red Scare, are evidence of ideological and strategic continuities in the movement’s history. The fact that she

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111. “Mother of a Movement: Behind the Founding Men of the JBS Stood One Revolutionary Woman,” *Indianapolis Monthly*, December 2008, 56.

has hardly been remembered—and if she has been remembered, that she has been misremembered—is representative of broader misrepresentations and erasures in how the movement’s history has been told.

In her 1965 letter, when she was 81, Dice wrote, “Dear Friends: During the last few months since I suddenly realized that I was really old, I find that I think less of the future which has become uncertain and more of the past which is real and tangible.”<sup>112</sup> In studying a single life—in studying Marguerite Dice’s life—this paper has sought to draw attention to that which is “real and tangible” about the people who created modern American anticommunism and the ideas they believed in. It has endeavored not solely to understand Dice as a person for her own sake but to understand her as a person of import for the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century American anticommunism and conservatism. The story of her life, as it has been told thus far, has been used to build a history of 20<sup>th</sup> century right-wing politics that is in many ways untrue to how she experienced those years. When mentioned in history books, her name is used as a prop in the staging of the John Birch Society’s origin story or as evidence of the fact that women can indeed be enthusiastic and effective conservatives. But by centering her life in this telling of the history of American anticommunism, rather than just situating her in the broader history of the movement, this thesis has argued that that broader history becomes clearer.

In Marguerite Dice’s life, the American anticommunist movement made its way from ladies’ luncheons to governors’ desks to senators’ speeches and back. There was not a single watershed moment where anticommunism became *the* cause, but decades of those moments. Dice and her allies—the men of the American Legion and the John Birch Society, the women of the DAR, women’s clubs, and the Minute Women—demonstrate the persistent, atmospheric

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112. Marguerite Dice, “Christmas 1965.”

nature of American anticommunism and the important fact that it did not suddenly win over ordinary Americans, or unexpectedly burst onto the scene with McCarthy. The height of the Second Red Scare was the middle point of Dice's anticommunist career, no higher or lower than its beginning or end. This is not to say that the Second Red Scare was not a distinct moment in the general history of American anticommunism—it undeniably was—but it is to say that there is much to learn that the years 1947-1957 do not teach us. The continuities of Dice's political career demonstrate that anticommunism is not an in-again-out-again political trend but an enduring feature of American politics, both within the far right and in more apolitical spaces. Her activism proves female conservatives were not all antifeminists or especially concerned with gendered arguments for political causes, and that progressive clubs gave conservative activists platforms and supporters.

Modern ballot box-focused anticommunism did not begin or end with Joseph McCarthy, and through studying the life of Marguerite Dice, how and why this is true becomes clearer. Her successful 1940 campaign to remove the Communist Party from the Indiana ballot shows the types of grassroots campaigns that sustained the anticommunist movement between the Red Scares. Her protest against the ACLU and membership in the Minute Women of the USA drew upon her earlier success and contributed to the energy and popularity of the Second Red Scare. Her role as the hostess of Robert Welch and the founders of the John Birch Society secured her a minor position in the history of American anticommunism as it has been told thus far, but those days in December of 1958 were only possible because of the events and commitment to anticommunist activism that preceded them.

In the life of Marguerite Dice, we find a woman equally committed to progressive reformism and anticommunist activism, a woman who warned of the “enemy within our gates”

ten years before Joseph McCarthy spoke of “enemies from within,” and a woman whose decades-long role in the history of American anticommunism has been reduced to seventeen hours in which she collected men’s coats, served them coffee, and did not say a word. To ignore Marguerite Dice, or to continue to only remember her for those two days in December of 1958, is to ignore an important pre-history of modern American conservatism and to misunderstand the origin story of an enduringly influential political movement.

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