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Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace: Conservative Women and the Crusade against Communism

Mary Brennan

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In *Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace*, Mary Brennan examines conservative women's anti-communist activism in the years immediately after World War II.

Brennan details the actions and experiences of prominent anti-communists Jean Kerr McCarthy, Margaret Chase Smith, Freda Utley, Doloris Thauwald Bridges, Elizabeth Churchill Brown, and Phyllis Stewart Schlafly. She describes the Cold War context in which these women functioned and the ways in which women saw communism as a very real danger to domestic security and American families. Millions of women, Brennan notes, expanded their notions of household responsibilities to include the crusade against communism. From writing letters and hosting teas to publishing books and running for political office, they campaigned against communism and, incidentally, discovered the power they had to effect change through activism.

Brennan reveals how the willingness of these deeply conservative women to leave the domestic sphere and engage publicly in politics evinces the depth of America's postwar fear of communism. She further argues that these conservative, anti-communist women pushed the boundaries of traditional gender roles and challenged assumptions about women as political players by entering political life to publicly promote their ideals.*Wives, Mothers, and the Red Menace* offers a fascinating analysis of gender and politics at a critical point in American history. Brennan's work will instigate discussions among historians, political scientists, and scholars of women's studies.

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