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Historical Literacies:
McCarthyism, Edward R. Murrow, and the Television

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You had to live through the times to know how fearful—indeed, terrorized—people were about speaking their minds. The cold war with Russia, the threat of a hot war with China, security programs and loyalty oaths—all had cowed the citizens of the most powerful nation on earth into keeping their minds closed and their mouths shut. The Senate of the United States, in order not to appear Red, chose to be yellow. It was the Age of McCarthyism. Edward R. Murrow helped bring it to an end.

> —Joseph Wershba, CBS journalist and friend of Murrow (Wershba)

The emergence of "fake news" in the 2010s has challenged the way citizens perceive and use information literacy—especially in relation to the Internet and social media. However, the use of fake news, misinformation, or political propaganda is not new in itself but only in how people distribute it using new technologies. For example, Senator Joseph McCarthy, Edward R. Murrow, and the emergence of television during the 1950s signify a moment that provides historical context for our understanding of today's fake news. Additionally, the analysis of this historical moment may provide further insights in how to combat misinformation as well as stress the importance for critical literacy—especially as it pertains to navigating digital environments.

Even in its contemporary sense, the term "fake news" has existed for well over a decade. Since Robert Greenwald released his documentary *Outfoxed,* questioning the validity of Fox News' slogan "Fair and Balanced," conservative groups have called out liberals for bending facts to further their left-leaning agendas, and shows like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* have made a business out of satirizing the accuracy of news stories, journalists, news anchors, and others. However, people seemed to become more aware of fake news during the 2016 presidential election in the United States.[1] While polarizing ideologies among citizens during the 2016 presidential election may have motivated a small group of people to create and spread fake news, users on the Internet and social

media, in a sense, "weaponized" fake news in a manner that affected the outcomes and perceptions of the United States' political and social environment. But technology's role in the distribution of fake news is not a new development since technology has historically played a role in shaping the temperament of the US before, especially regarding the evolution of the television.

Paul Achter argues that television, and technology in general, elicits strong emotional responses from audiences and that "utopian visions [of television or technology] compete in a dynamic with dystopian narratives" (308). Ideally, technology can function as a tool promoting equity among people; however, that same technology may be used to create a new order of "haves" and "have-nots" among others. In the 1950s for example, people saw the television as a democratizing force. People would be able to access the new medium of television without "the tedious diligence of book learning" (Doherty 2). Not only would the television be able to communicate to a broader audience, but television could function within politics by removing the barriers between politicians and their constituents. However, similar to previous communication technologies, a select group of individuals were responsible for the content that aired on televisions. Television could remove barriers between politicians and their constituents, but there were new "gatekeepers" that affected how content was created and how it was consumed. As a result, different stakeholders controlled the television as a communication medium that allowed them to control what audiences were hearing and seeing, which in turn created new power dynamics.

Today, a similar situation is occurring with the Internet and social media rather than television. On one hand, the Internet has also been described as a utopian environment that would foster equity by allowing everyone to consume and produce content. While this may be true to the extent that everyone can publish content, shifting power dynamics affect what content is most likely to be seen and consumed, especially in terms of filters, algorithms, privacy, access, finances, and search engine optimization, among others. For example, companies that predate the Internet already have an established name, have the finances to market their content, have professional programmers to design their websites and host them on paid domains, and already have "followers" that came before their digital presence. Compare that situation to an individual who is the sole person working on the design and content, who can only host content on a free or low-cost platform, and who has little to no following before the creation of the digital content. The companies with all those extra resources have a higher likelihood of their content being seen and consumed compared to content that is created by one individual with considerably fewer resources.[2] Despite the differences between an established company and an individual with limited resources starting a blog, the Internet represents a new communication technology that has again contributed to new distributions of power compared to previous communication technologies like the television or radio.

The way the Internet works can make it difficult to discern who is communicating what messages, as well as the motivations behind those messages. In looking at fake news on the Internet, Katharina Borchert describes how "[m]isinformation is a complex problem with roots in technology, cognitive science, economics, and literacy." However, the idea of fake news is not novel in itself and has often appeared in conjunction with previous forms of communication technologies. In the remainder of this chapter, I describe how the use of the Internet and the rise of fake news relates to the emergence of television and McCarthyism and provides a detailed analysis of McCarthyism in relation to television. Finally, I offer one method for how rhetorical listening, as a means of critical analysis, can be used in conjunction with critical literacy to potentially combat fake news.

Historical Context

While the television was introduced in New York during the 1939 World's Fair, it took a number of years for it to enter into mainstream culture. Through 1960, Thomas Doherty describes the initial eras of television as "an embryonic term of gestation (1939 to 1945), infant steps (1946 to 1950), [and] adolescent growing pains (1951 to 1960)" (3). From 1939-1945, there was little growth in the market for televisions, predominantly because of World War II. By 1949, only one out of ten American homes owned a television. By 1959, however, nine out of every ten homes owned a television (4). The era of McCarthyism coincides with Doherty's description of television's "adolescent growing pains," and the television played a pivotal role in helping spread McCarthy's message to a national audience. On November 16, 1953, President Truman offered a definition of McCarthyism, describing it as

> the corruption of truth, the abandonment of our historical devotion to fair play. It is the abandonment of the due process of law. It is the use of the Big Lie and the unfounded accusation against any citizen in the name of Americanism and security. It is the rise to power of the demagogue who lives on untruth; it is the spread of fear and the destruction of faith in every level of our society. (Doherty 14-15)

It is important to note that there is no mention of television or technology in Truman's definition. Instead, television merely functioned as a vehicle to circulate propaganda tied to McCarthyism to a broader audience.

In addition to the time it took for televisions to become mainstream, television was so new that it took network owners, broadcasters, politicians, and others time to learn how to use it effectively. By the 1950s, various groups had learned how to use the television to their advantage. Television relied primarily on two things to become the most dominant form of communication. First, it reached a broad audience. Although media like newspapers, magazines, and books were prevalent, they required more education and time to consume the information within their pages. Second, television was affecting audiences in new ways; print media and the radio were readily accessible, but the combination of image, sound, and text induced new kinds of responses in terms of emotions and entertainment. However, while audiences perceived a new sense of "truth" in that they were watching events unfold before their eyes, "very subtly and unconsciously there was a compensating narrowing in scope, in adventurousness on the part of the network, in terms of what could, [or] would be said" (Halberstam 138). Ultimately, certain individuals were beginning to find ways to use television to control and dictate what was being said and perceived by audiences.

Censorship and Control of Television

The question of how or why television became a medium tainted with politics that limited free speech and targeted specific individuals is a difficult one to answer. Ultimately, the combination of government officials, network executives, and corporate sponsors formed a unique environment that made the control of communication via the television difficult to achieve and sustain. But one reason there were so many parties interested in controlling television was the fact that America was going through a culture war. Carol Stabile describes how

[it] took a culture war of unprecedented proportions—a war that brought together forces of industry, white supremacy, and government—to still the voices of protest and opposition to Cold War politics of gender, race, and class. By this war's end, images of interracial solidarity, working women, and even the presence of people of color in television programming became evidence of heresy. (123)

Hazel Scott and Jean Muir exemplify the contention of gender and race, and how television was positioned as a tool of power in the 1950s. Scott and Muir were actresses targeted by the anti-communist publication *Red Channels* for being communist sympathizers. Despite any evidence that Scott or Muir had communist ties, the inclusion of their names in *Red Channels* led to both of them being blacklisted by television executives. However, the real reason that Scott and Muir were blacklisted was because they were "politically active career women who had close ties to the NAACP, as well as husbands who were prominent liberal politicians" (Stabile 113). Scott and Muir were blocked from obtaining employment in Hollywood, which set an ominous precedent for anyone who veered too far left in their politics and ideologies. While entertainment programs faced a number of challenges, television journalists had to deal with another set of challenges uniquely targeted towards the control and distribution of "news."

In describing the state of televised journalism, David Halberstam argued that the majority of Americans did not have a foundation of knowledge through which to accurately critique the news content they were watching. Essentially, content, specifically as it dealt with politics or world news, was well beyond the purview of the average American, even as many individuals thought they understood everything that was going on. Doherty describes how in 1956, ABC's John Daly thought that television would be "the death of demagoguery, false prophets, and phonies" because viewers would be able to discern when politicians were speaking the truth (82). In this regard, "[j]ust as starry-eyed educators envisioned a prime-time lineup of Shakespearean drama and classical music to uplift the masses, the same optimists doted on the promise of a polis energized and enlightened by television" (Doherty 82). This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than with the emergence of Senator Joseph McCarthy. The rise of McCarthy was one of the moments that led to the many issues regarding the regulation of content on television because it was difficult to discern "the lines between properly political censorship—this is, restrictions on content and personnel attributable to the pressures of McCarthyism—and a broader kind of cultural censorship—restrictions based on considerations of commerce, morality, or taste" (Doherty 61).

McCarthy and McCarthyism

While Senator McCarthy may have been the public face of McCarthyism and the fight against communism, the original campaign against communism was organized by J. Edgar Hoover, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation between 1935 and 1972 (Zeiger). McCarthy only became a central figure in the 1950s after delivering a speech to the Republican Women's Club of Wheeling, West Virginia (Doherty; Halberstam; Zeiger). Within this speech, he claimed to have a list of 205 names affiliated with the US State Department that had some connection with communism. Despite claims to possession of these names, McCarthy never released the list to the public, and the

number of names on it varied depending on when and where McCarthy was speaking. Another event took place later that same year that spread additional fear among the public and further fueled McCarthyism: the publication on June 22, 1950, of *Red Channels: The Report of Communist Influence in Radio and Television*, which included a list of entertainers sympathetic to communism. What became known as "blacklisting" resulted in writers, directors, and on-air talent being removed from the television industry (Doherty; Halberstam; Stabile; Zeiger). While McCarthy was more interested in targeting government personnel, the individuals behind *Red Channels* focused on members of broadcasting within television. Between McCarthy's list and the *Red Channels* publication, the term McCarthyism became synonymous with "public leveling accusations of disloyalty, subversion, or treason with little regard for evidence, or for protection of civil liberties" (Alwood 135). The effects of McCarthyism were wide reaching and severe. Doherty notes that by giving so much airtime to McCarthy, television networks had bestowed him with "near presidential status" (94).

McCarthy's role as a senator would have limited his power and reach; however, his frequent appearances on television showed how this new medium provided significant power to the few individuals who were able to gain access to it. Rather than combat McCarthyism or the blacklisting phenomena, television networks and executives frequently chose to forfeit battles rather than risk financial consequences with their corporate sponsors. Dan Jenkins from the *Hollywood Reporter* commented on this point, stating, "It's getting so a man can't express an intelligently honest opinion these days without being accused of just about everything in the book, all of it bad and most of it utterly stupid" (qtd. in Doherty 63). While even McCarthy's own party and political allies were becoming aware that his claims were completely false and even dangerous, they failed to act because McCarthy's tactics worked—for a time, they functioned as a rhetorical strategy that silenced opposition and resulted in political success. However, the extent of McCarthy's success eventually began to fade, especially after his appearance on Edward R. Murrow's show *See It Now.*

A Counter to McCarthyism: Edward R. Murrow and See It Now

Edward R. Murrow was a talented journalist who became a prominent war correspondent during World War II and one of the first televised news broadcasters in the 1950s. Yet a lot of his success stemmed from his unique origin before television and his ability to adapt to new technologies. Murrow was born in North Carolina amongst a blue-collar community, and his big break into broadcasting occurred during World War II. Stationed in London and throughout Europe, Murrow was one of the first and most prominent news reporters to deliver up-to-date news about the war to the United States (Edwards). As Halberstam points out,

> the speed with which Murrow could report back to America had the same lightning force. Murrow's voice symbolized the shrinking of the world; what affected Europe now affected the United States, and intuitively the masses of Americans knew this, knew they were bound to events in Europe. (42)

In addition to reporting from a London rooftop during the Blitz, Murrow was also charting new territory on how radio technology could be used. Radio broadcasting, especially for news purposes, was so new that there were few rules, expectations, or norms put into place regarding how a radio

program should be structured. Consequently, Murrow had few restraints on his work and, to some extent, helped create the norms for radio broadcasting (Halberstam). After World War II, Murrow had gained such a prominent reputation that he had a unique sense of celebrity power, which he used as he began working in another new type of technology, television.

Beginning in 1951, Murrow, along with Fred W. Friendly, produced the television news show *See It Now*. During the course of its seven-year run, *See It Now* "set the standards of journalistic fairness and objectivity that initially defined the form, presenting reports based on evidence and facts without resorting to staged or reconstructed events, which had been common in newsreels and on radio programs" (Zeiger 83). However, it was a combination of multiple elements that made the show so successful. First, Murrow already had an established reputation as a trusted news reporter. This in combination with his professionalism and a talented production team was significant to the show's success (Zeiger). Second, Murrow had a unique relationship with William S. Paley, then the president of CBS. Murrow and Paley befriended each other during World War II, and, for a time, this friendship provided Murrow with a unique kind of freedom for controlling the content of his program. Third, Murrow also hosted the show *Person to Person*, which provided more mass appeal and ratings success for CBS. Asked why Murrow hosted a show he did not care for, a friend responded, "he did the show he hated in order to do the show he loved" (Halberstam 140). Finally, just like radio, television was new, and Murrow and his team were again helping create the norms for the genre, and they did this by relying on storytelling and narrative:

> The form *See It Now* pioneered transformed television newsgathering and reporting practices, simplifying and clarifying complex social and political issues by focusing on what Murrow called "small stories" and ordinary people. That's not to say Murrow ignored experts and official comments, but as Alexander Kendrick, one of "Murrow's Boys," said, *See It Now* emphasized "human beings affected by events, rather than [focusing] on the events themselves." (Zeiger 83-84)

All of the components that lead to Murrow's success were vital because they gave him the capital to pursue controversial topics, which included addressing Senator McCarthy and McCarthyism.

McCarthyism had created a national environment of fear, using censoring to limit free thought and expression (Doherty). While Murrow played a prominent role in combatting and ultimately ending McCarthyism, Murrow also noted that he should have done something sooner. Murrow and *See It Now* opposed McCarthyism on three separate occasions. First, Murrow hosted a show on October 20, 1953 about Milo Radulovich. While this show never directly addressed McCarthyism, it focused on Radulovich, who was a 26-year-old reserve officer who was asked to resign his commission because his family had been targeted as communist sympathizers (Zeiger).

The second show aired on March 9, 1954 and specifically targeted Senator Joseph McCarthy. This show was unique for a number of reasons. Up to this point, there were few individuals who had decided to or legitimately could take on McCarthy directly. Because of this, McCarthy was in a position in which

> [h]e made his charges and went on to his next charges, and objective journalists were considerate enough not to bother him with his record, with what he had said the week, or

month, or year before. What was most desperately needed was to report on McCarthy in context, to bring some perspective to a long course of events and charges. (Halberstam 141)

While few journalists chose to confront McCarthy, Murrow's combination of celebrity and close relationship with his boss, Paley, provided him with a unique level of capital.[3] Murrow and his team were able to produce the show without any of their superiors viewing it prior to being aired to the general public (Halberstam). By focusing the episode on McCarthy, Murrow was able to analyze McCarthy's own speeches and demonstrate how McCarthy's claims were often erroneous or how McCarthy had contradicted himself on multiple occasions.

After the episode focusing on McCarthyism, Murrow invited McCarthy to respond on an episode of *See It Now* airing on April 6, 1954. While McCarthy used this time to reiterate the need to fight communism and attacked Murrow for being a sympathizer, McCarthy's power in the nation and in his own political party were beginning to wane, and other reporters began attacking him and McCarthyism (Doherty).

Technology's Effects on How We Communicate

Three key differences stand out between how television and the Internet have been used to help spread fake news as a means to misinform people, bolster propaganda, and manipulate changes in politics or ideologies. Ultimately, television and the Internet function very differently in the dissemination of news, the amount of news that is available, and the control or "filters" put in place to dictate what people see.

Television in the 1950s differed significantly from what we think of as television today. In its infancy, television included only a few networks, which resulted in a small number of individuals who published or disseminated news. The small number of networks also limited the amount of access that non-network individuals like McCarthy had to speak to audiences. Consequently, this group of individuals who had access to appearing on television had a unique power in their ability to communicate with large audiences, but their visibility also made them bigger targets. Yet in today's environment, anyone can publish or disseminate news on the Internet. Because of the sheer amount of content on the Internet, most individuals who publish information online typically cannot amass a large audience unless their messages go viral. However, the lack of larger audiences also means that individuals who post content on the Web can potentially retain anonymity and are targeted less often. There are some exceptions to this, such as celebrities or politicians who have thousands of followers on social media. By posting or sharing content, celebrities and politicians have a direct line with a significant audience of followers. But similar to 1950s television, celebrities and politicians can quickly become subject to political targeting. There are several examples of celebrities or politicians being targeted immediately after posting content online (e.g., Roseanne Barr's tweet regarding Valerie Jarrett or grammatical errors in President Trump's tweets) to celebrities and politicians who have their digital histories scoured for problematic content (e.g., James Gunn's tweets from over a decade ago to Major League Baseball players Sean Newcomb and Josh Hader's racist/homophobic tweets). The consequences vary for these targeted attacks, including public ridicule or being fired,

forced to resign, or enrolled in mandatory sensitivity training programs.

An additional area in which 1950s television and today's Internet differ is in the amount of information people can produce using them. Although television (and radio) gave the 1950s the means to communicate information from across the world in a timely manner, there was still a finite amount of information available to the public. General audiences in the United States were limited to a few television networks in which news was only a part of each network's operation. Because of this, Americans viewed news that was often limited in regard to its breadth of coverage and most likely focused more on news that was seen as relevant to a mass audience. Today, the Internet includes new environments in which information seems infinite and a quick query on a search engine can provide thousands, if not millions, of search results. Likewise, the quality or quantity of information on a given topic can vary from having an entire website devoted to it (that could include text, audio, still images, or videos) to consisting of a single tweet limited to 280 characters. (In this collection, "From Product Review to Lack of Common Ground: How Mis- and Disinformation Shape our Wired World" illustrates the breadth of content on the Internet with a perfect example of writing about Microsoft in the 1980s versus the 2010s, especially in regard to how the number of writers, the level of skill among writers, and the variety of platforms has changed dramatically in contemporary times.)

Another difference between the amount of information available in 1950s television versus the Internet during the 2010s are the ways in which information is "filtered." The limited amount of news coverage in the 1950s was controlled by a small number of individuals. While rating systems existed for television in the 1950s, there was little consensus on which rating system to accept as a standard as well as the level of accuracy of any rating system. Television viewers' viewing habits had limited impact on what content appeared on television stations. In fact, letters mailed in by viewers were in some ways the best method for network executives to gauge how viewers rated a television network's content. Consequently, the most important factors in deciding what content to show was often limited to decisions made by corporate executives and advertisement sponsors—and how it related to monetary outcomes. In looking at today's culture of who controls content, one of the primary tools that affect what we see on the Internet are complex, proprietary algorithms rather than network executives. Algorithms and bots are employed to dictate what people see on search engines, social media platforms, advertisements, and tools like Google Now, among others (Laquintano and Vee).

However, while today's content on the Internet is affected by algorithms and bots (which in turn affect monetary outcomes), users still have more control in "filtering" the content they consume. Users can filter content by using tools that allow them to follow certain groups or products (e.g., RSS feeds, following content on social media, setting up alerts on websites, etc.), joining groups that only consist of like-minded people (e.g., following a group's Facebook or Instagram page or blocking/unfriending people that hold different views), or by filtering content on sites using tools like hashtags or advanced search functions. Today's technology has several tools that allow users to "control" what they view online, but users' level of control is determined by their knowledge of the Internet. Comparatively, a user who has a very limited understanding of how the Internet works will have an experience influenced by larger systemic controls (i.e., a user sees what Google,

Facebook, or other prominent internet companies want them to see). Ultimately, the differences in technology between the 1950s television and the 2010s Internet represent the most significant differences between McCarthyism and today's issue of fake news.

The Importance of New Literacies

A significant difference in combatting the fake news of McCarthyism versus today's fake news seems to be the actors/agents who are responsible for solving the problem. In the 1950s, prominent individuals like Edward R. Murrow seemed to have a significant responsibility for denouncing McCarthyism and showing mass audiences how McCarthy employed disinformation. In the 2010s, individual users seem expected to be responsible for discerning "fake" versus "real" news, despite the implementation of new tools and algorithms to do the work of detecting fake news for them. As Thomas P. Mackey and Trudi E. Jacobson point out,

> The information society has transformed into an interactive social network of collaborative developers, authors, editors, and consumers. This is a fundamental change from one-way modalities such as print, television, film, radio, and advertising to the multiple pathways available online and through mobile devices, such as Facebook, Wordpress, YouTube, Pinterest, and Google, in an expansive social network. (45)

Ultimately, the "collaborative" nature of the Internet comes with its own set of problems as well as possibilities. The collaborative environment attempts (and in some ways succeeds) to establish a more equitable balance of power, but it also necessitates that users become more reflective on how they use the Internet and how aspects of the Internet, like fake news and disinformation, affect their daily lives. This section examines the ways in which we as a society are already addressing the problem of fake news by promoting new literacies in a variety of environments. In addition to showing how we are already combatting fake news, I conclude by arguing for the need to highlight the potential for focusing on rhetorical listening in tandem with new literacies to combat fake news.

Perhaps the most prominent step in solving the issue of fake news is making people aware of it, and many individuals, groups, and corporations have already begun that process. Fake news has become a part of our cultural lexicon and with it has been a renewed focus on literacy as it relates to technology. However, terms related to technological literacies are somewhat slippery: digital literacy, cyber literacy, Web literacy, e-literacy, multimodal literacy, twenty-first-century literacy, as well as others. Despite the numerous types of literacy related to technology, scholars and organizations have frequently addressed the need to evaluate material on the Internet (Gurak; Reinhardt and Isbell). Writing from a broader perspective, Laura J. Gurak suggests that "[u]nless people become familiar with the social, rhetorical, and political features of digital communication, they will be led into cyberspace with only a limited understanding of both the power and the problems of this technology" (11). Gurak continues by describing how a critical technological literacy relies on "people's ability to understand, criticize, and make judgments about a technology's interactions with, and effects on, culture" (13). While Gurak was not addressing fake news, she was well aware of how technology, especially new technologies, could be abused for ulterior motives.

Stuart A. Selber adopts a similar point of view when critically examining technology. Selber

describes how students need to be taught to question technology by thinking about "What is lost as well as gained? Who profits? Who is left behind and for what reasons? What is privileged in terms of literacy and learning and cultural capital?" (81). As is the case with Gurak, Selber is not addressing fake news, but his ideas argue that technology does not automatically lead to more equity and positive change. Instead, the "virtues" of technology are limited by the individuals who create it as well as by how individuals choose to use it. Literacy then, as it relates to technology, should work to employ a critical means of analysis and judgment rather than function as a basic "skill" (Buckingham).

To a large extent, the idea of acquiring and practicing new types of literacies seems to place the onus on the individual, which is problematic at best. Literate individuals may be able to successfully navigate fake news, but this does little to address the problem on a larger scale. I would argue that developing a critical literacy and awareness to fake news is merely the first step in combatting fake news—albeit a long, slow step that leads to a greater societal response. For example, in spring 2018, a significant number of users banded together to create a #DeleteFacebook movement. While #DeleteFacebook movements are not new, the scale of this particular movement was unprecedented. Facebook announced that Cambridge Analytica had violated its privacy agreement and had collected protected information from approximately eighty-seven million Facebook users (also see in this collection "Making Software Visible in Rhetorical Approaches to Fake News" and how the authors discuss the Facebook and Cambridge Analytica privacy breach from the perspective of the "material and economic realities" of software). In response, a significant number of users deleted their accounts. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, a number of prominent businesses also deleted their Facebook pages, including Mozilla, Pep Boys, SpaceX and Tesla, Playboy, Sonos, and others.[4] This #DeleteFacebook movement was not only about Cambridge Analytica but also about all of the coverage regarding how Facebook has been entangled with the issue of fake news. Users and businesses choosing to abstain from using select websites and apps is the next step in combatting fake news. Several individuals and businesses banded together to demonstrate to Facebook that the company was not doing enough to combat fake news and protect its users' privacy. The #DeleteFacebook movement hurt Facebook's image and most likely cost them money through the loss of ad revenues.

While we are only in the beginning of the next phase of combatting fake news, I believe that literacy serves as an important first step in building awareness. From here, I predict that more individuals, groups, and businesses will band together to produce more dramatic action like the most recent #DeleteFacebook movement. And from that point, ideally, this societal action will force internet companies to do more to combat fake news or users will simply choose to "opt out" in such a way that companies like Facebook will have to reform or lose relevance in a competitive internet environment. To this effect, I think we can already see users becoming more aware and pushing companies to reexamine how they are dealing with fake news. With Facebook, various stakeholders are exerting greater scrutiny not only to the news that is present on Facebook's website but also to how the website functions. Government officials have investigated Facebook, scholars have researched and written about Facebook, and several users have moved away from Facebook or at least become more critical in how they understand and use it. Facebook may be the most prominent

example, but I would speculate that the pressure it has faced as a company has led other internet companies to rethink how they operate in today's environment so they do not become the next Facebook. While this situation may not serve as a solution to stop all fake news in the future, it does create an environment in which multiple agents now have a stake in stopping the spread of fake news. And although the motives for preventing the spread of fake news may differ, the responsibility has shifted solely from the user to also include the media, government entities, and internet companies among others.

We, as literacy scholars, should also continue to research how the emergence of fake news and misinformation came about. I would argue that the prominence of fake news is in part due to, as well as has contributed to, a growing polarization of political and ideological beliefs in our country, similar to the times of McCarthyism ("Civic Literacies, Despair, and Hope: Our Current Information Moment Unfolding" in this collection discusses a tangential point in how different groups are becoming more divided based on fear and "othering"). If this is the case, rhetorical listening may provide an additional step in working to combat fake news. Krista Ratcliffe describes rhetorical listening as a "stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture" (1); she details the many difficulties and challenges of listening rhetorically, but she also argues that "rhetorical listening has the potential to identify troubled identifications and to negotiate them, with the goal being to generate more productive discourses, whether these discourses be narratives or arguments, whether they be in academic journals or over the dinner table" (46).

Although Ratcliffe's idea of rhetorical listening seems to stand in opposition to critical literacy, I believe that rhetorical listening and critical literacy can and should work in tandem. Individuals should employ critical literacy as a first step when encountering news, stories, and ideas on the Internet. In this role, critical literacy's purpose is not to stop communication but primarily to separate the noise of fake news from attempts at genuine conversation. As the authors of "'Don't Give Me Bullshit': Constructing a Framework of Response to Fake News" state, "Fake news claims are uninterested in facilitating dialogic or debate." Consequently, I believe fake news limits the kind of rhetorical listening that Ratcliffe describes as the ability to "identify troubled identifications," and that critical literacy can help get us to the point in which we engage with a person or group's sincere thoughts, ideas, and feelings. The second step of meaningful communication then relies on rhetorical listening to extend us beyond an immediate reactionary mindset to one of listening and, hopefully, a better sense of understanding. Often, it seems that individuals communicate on the Internet through the use of broad claims without attention to the necessary evidence or context to support those claims. Part of these broad claims that lack evidence seems based on the infrastructure of internet platforms (e.g., it can be somewhat challenging to compose and/or read a detailed argument through the Facebook News Feed or impossible to post a detailed argument directly into a tweet on Twitter). If there are detailed posts, many users skim through the content or simply read article titles without taking the time to pay attention to the details or nuances of different arguments. In both of these cases, the structure and interfaces of internet environments may inhibit the act of rhetorical listening. But then the responsibility falls to individual users to take the time to engage in Ratcliffe's ideas of rhetorical listening—a process that could include responding to posts with questions rather than

counter-claims, taking the time to read content from various websites (i.e., websites with content that may differ from a user's traditional beliefs), or simply refusing to contribute to bullying or flaming behaviors online. In this way, individuals may get closer to discussing ideas and issues without falling prey to the oversimplification of arguments or viewpoints to conservative versus liberal or democratic versus republican. This kind of rhetorical listening and open communication, while a lofty goal, may be the best way to prevent events similar to 1950s McCarthyism or the 2010s issue of fake news.

Conclusions

In looking at McCarthyism and the emergence of the television as a case study, I hope I have offered some insights into how we perceive and handle fake news today. Perhaps the biggest takeaway is simply to know that the distribution of fake news for political purposes is not new. And while McCarthy's use of fake or exaggerated news had significant consequences, Edward R. Murrow and *See It Now*, among others, served as a kind of course correction. In 2016, the proliferation of fake news had significant effects on the 2016 presidential election; however, the discourse surrounding fake news for the past four years could ideally function as a similar course-correcting maneuver as the United States heads into the upcoming 2020 presidential election. At the same time, the differences between the television and the Internet may impact how we are able to combat fake news. First, McCarthyism occurred on a national scale while politics and the Internet in the 2010s take place on a global scale, a point that drastically increases the number of individuals and countries who can affect the amount, spread, and consumption of fake news. Second, the Internet is more complex as a communications tool compared to the television, especially television from the 1950s. While television from the 1950s had a finite number of channels with a predominantly one-way mode of communication, the Internet contains an infinite amount of content that contains an equally infinite number of nuances in how it is used to communicate with users.

As a university instructor, I appreciate how Edward R. Murrow and *See It Now* serve as a model for why liberal studies are so important. Mackey and Jacobson describe how "news travels quickly and is often unfiltered without the editorial review and analysis of traditional news organizations" (98). Murrow represented a kind of filter and arguably served as a "teacher" to help viewers understand the context surrounding issues rather than explicitly directing them to take a stance on the issue itself. Ultimately, I believe that Murrow achieved what Rachel Elizabeth Scott has described as a way to help the general public "ascertain the social and cultural frameworks in which . . . information was created and understand the implications of that context" (129). I believe that what Murrow was trying to achieve mirrors the goals of a liberal studies education and that it is imperative that teachers continue this type of work and champion the value of a liberal studies education not only to students, but ultimately to society.

In discussing the role of television and McCarthyism, Doherty has described the television as "[p]urveyor of sedative pabulum, facilitator of the blacklist, handmaiden to McCarthyism, the small screen abetted moral cowardice, retarded intellectual growth, and smothered resistance" (2). The Internet may play a similar role with today's issue of fake news; however, we have much more agency

today in how we read, produce, share, and respond to news—whether it be real or fake. And while McCarthyism, Murrow, and the television may differ in regard to the effects of technology and the distribution of power, they also provide historical context that helps articulate why the issue and consequences of fake news are so very important.

Notes

1. Looking at Google Trends, the term "fake news" saw a sharp increase as a search term between November 13-19, 2016. Since then, "fake news" has been much more prevalent than it had ever been from January 2004 through October 2016.

2. However, there are exceptions in which individuals or small groups can have profound effects in digital environments. Craig details how teenagers in Macedonia created fake news that went viral by understanding how the infrastructures between Google, WordPress, and Facebook could be manipulated for monetary gain.

3. While Murrow was allowed to do the show on McCarthy, Murrow and Friendly, his co-producer, had to purchase their own advertisement of the episode because CBS did not want to jeopardize any corporate sponsors.

4. As of June 2019, all of the listed companies have recreated their Facebook pages with the exception of Mozilla. Mozilla kept its Facebook page; however, Mozilla has a pause sign as its banner and has not posted since 3/22/18—a post that details why it is "taking a break from Facebook."

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