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“McCarthyism” — A Term That Libels a Dead Patriot

While the term “McCarthyism” gets slung about as a damning label meaning, essentially, unjust persecution, Joseph McCarthy was correct in his claims and just in his actions.



The continued use of the term “McCarthyism” as a way to tar one’s political opponent 60 years after the death of Senator Joseph Raymond McCarthy (he died May 2, 1957) has descended into even deeper levels of absurdity. Defined by Webster’s Dictionary as “the use of indiscriminate, often unfounded, accusations, sensationalism, inquisitorial investigative methods, etc., as in the suppression of political opponents portrayed as subversive,” the term is now used as a weapon not only by the political Left, but also by far too many on the political Right. Whoever uses it, and however it is used, it is at best done out of ignorance, and at worst, by someone who is knowingly perpetrating a falsehood.

For, rather than being a person who made wild accusations “without proper regard for evidence,” McCarthy was a patriot — a man who was trying to protect his country from a totalitarian menace.

There are far too many current examples of people using the term “McCarthyism.” A recent opinion piece defending Attorney General Jeff Sessions noted, “Sessions is the victim of the type of McCarthyite character assassination that the Left used to condemn.... In fact, what Sessions faced may be worse than McCarthyism.” In the state newspaper of a large, conservative Christian denomination, an article about former NFL football coach Tony Dungy, who is also a well-respected Christian, reported that Dungy had been attacked for offering a view that did not coincide with the accepted liberal position, and the article was entitled, “Christian McCarthyism: Tony Dungy.” The article began, “There is a new McCarthyism sweeping across our cultural landscape,” asserting that those who hold to a biblical worldview are the victims of this “Christian McCarthyism.”

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Referencing the accusations from the Left that President Donald Trump conspired with the Russians to interfere in our recent presidential election to the detriment of Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, Fox News’ Chris Wallace invoked the term in Trump’s defense. On *Fox News Sunday*, host Wallace accused Senator Chris Coons (D-Del.) of charging Trump had indeed colluded with the Russians, based on some alleged FBI transcripts.

Speaking the week before the program, Coons had said, “There are transcripts that provide very helpful, very critical insights into whether or not Russian intelligence and senior Russian political leaders, including Vladimir Putin were cooperating with, colluding with the Trump campaign at the



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highest levels to influence the outcome of our election.”

After showing a video clip of Coons’ comments, Wallace responded, “Senator, we’re talking here about the president of the United States. *Isn’t there more than a whiff of McCarthyism* for you as a U.S. senator to say there were transcripts out there that provide insight into whether or not there was collusion, but you don’t even know whether they exist?” (Emphasis added.)

While Wallace expertly demonstrated the dishonesty of Senator Coons, he unfairly smeared the late Senator McCarthy in order to make his point.

Amazingly, President Trump did the same with one of his nocturnal Tweets: “Terrible! Just found out that Obama had my ‘wires tapped’ in Trump Tower just before the victory. Nothing found. *This is McCarthyism!*” (Emphasis added.)

The Left Continues to Conjure Up “McCarthyism”

Not to be outdone, commentators on the Left have injected the ghost of McCarthy into the current debate over Trump’s alleged collusion with the Russians. They, however, see McCarthyism as a practice that Trump himself is using! In *New York Magazine*, for example, a recent article tied Trump to McCarthy. “Trump was literally mentored by Roy Cohn, McCarthy’s right-hand man. Trump, like McCarthy, alleges the existence of a shadowy cabal of government bureaucrats to which he attributes near unlimited power.” Cohn, whom Trump has retained as an attorney in the past, worked for McCarthy back in the 1950s.

Of course, *New York Magazine* contends that Trump’s allegations are as spurious as they assume McCarthy’s were. “Trump, *like McCarthy*, uses reckless accusations to whip his supporters into a frenzy and disorient his foes,” the magazine argued, saying that “Trump’s most *McCarthyite* quality” was “his indifference to truth.” (Emphasis added).

Similarly, Tony Norman wrote in the *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*, “McCarthyism is afoot in the land, but the biggest exemplar of its odious politics is Roy Cohn’s mentee — Donald J. Trump.”

We are not surprised that those on the political Left stoop to besmirching the reputation of a patriot such as McCarthy to make their progressive arguments. But, sadly, this term — McCarthyism — has been used for so long, and with so little opposition, that it is not surprising to see those on the Right side of the political spectrum appropriate the term for their own purposes.

Ordinarily, the way those on the Right use the term assumes that McCarthy was wrong. Sean Hannity of Fox News, for example, has charged liberals of practicing “McCarthyism of the Left.” Some are even more ingenious in creating new “branches” of McCarthyism. A renowned theology professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Albert Mohler, once wrote a column about what he termed “Moral McCarthyism.”

Mohler is highly regarded as a brilliant and dedicated evangelical theologian. He used the term to describe those who are attacking the traditional standards of morality. “Instead of asking if people are members of the Communist Party, the question will be: ‘Are you now or have you ever been one who believes that homosexuality (or bisexuality, transsexualism and so on) is anything less than morally acceptable?’”

While Mohler has a legitimate concern, it is not fair to malign the reputation of a dead patriot in order to make his point, however legitimate. Again, as is the case with Trump, Wallace, Hannity, and others



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who are not regarded as liberals, Mohler probably has no idea what McCarthy did or did not do, six decades ago.

Writing in *Human Events*, the late M. Stanton Evans, author of the definitive book on McCarthy, *Blacklisted by History*, responded to the use of the term by conservatives. "How ironic, then, to have conservative spokesmen at talk radio shows, the blogosphere or Fox News robotically utter liberal falsehoods about McCarthy." Evans speculated that these conservative commentators gave no hint that they "know anything about the subject." Evans lamented that it "was painfully clear that the talkers knew nothing of McCarthy, but were simply reciting in half-remembered phrases the standard liberal line about him."

The Liberal Smear of McCarthy

The liberal line has certainly been unrelentingly negative.

I remember watching on my little black and white TV in my college dorm room a Sunday night TV movie, *Tail-Gunner Joe*, that was a hatchet-job on the late Senator Joseph McCarthy. My mostly apolitical roommate decided to watch the NBC broadcast with me. I was the history major, while he was the music major, so it is not surprising that I was much more aware of who McCarthy was, and what he had done, but I decided not to tell him my views on McCarthy, so as to see what his reaction would be to what I expected to be liberal propaganda.

The story line usually given about McCarthy in history books and the popular culture is that he terrorized the nation from 1950 to 1954, with Americans quaking in fear that they would be next to be falsely accused of being a communist, and sent to prison. The movie not only adopted this narrative, it went to rather absurd lengths to advance this false picture of McCarthy. "They conceded to him not one decent human quality," was the response of McCarthy's top aide, Roy Cohn, to the movie.

Cohn contended that the movie opened and closed with a lie. Not content to challenge his accusations concerning communist infiltration into the U.S. government, the movie even denigrated his war record in World War II. McCarthy, as a judge at the time, could have taken an exemption from service, but did not. Rather, he won a commendation from Admiral Chester Nimitz for his service. Nimitz said that McCarthy participated in a large number of combat missions, obtained vital photographs of enemy gun positions despite intense anti-aircraft fire, and continued to carry out his duties after suffering a severe leg injury, for which he refused to be hospitalized.

But NBC chose not to relate any of that, instead leaving the uninformed viewer with the impression that, as Cohn said, "all he did was shoot at coconuts."

The movie was unrelenting in its presentation of McCarthy as a uniformly despicable character. About an hour into the three-hour movie, my roommate started laughing. "Nobody could have been this bad," he said. NBC had gone overboard with my roommate, but unfortunately, most others who have watched such propaganda believed it. By the time the movie showed a totally fabricated scene of a hospitalized and supposedly psychotic McCarthy using a mop to defend himself from the doctors and nurses, whom he believed were communists, the movie was nothing but a comedy to my roommate.

But in a way, it is no laughing matter. It is as if the real-life Joseph McCarthy never existed, and in his place is a fictional arch-villain. The myth that McCarthy terrorized the country for almost five years, smearing the reputations of uniformly innocent individuals, falsely accusing scores of being in league



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with a global communist conspiracy, is firmly established in the minds of most Americans — and has been assigned the term “McCarthyism.”

McCarthy’s Limited Goals

The term appeared early in the pages of the *Daily Worker*, an official newspaper of the American Communist Party. While it would be odd that a communist newspaper would even care that McCarthy was destroying the reputations of folks who were *not* communists, it is not surprising that the *Daily Worker* would hate a U.S. senator who exhibited amazing zeal and energy in fighting actual communist infiltration of the U.S. government.

McCarthy’s goals were always much narrower than has generally been stated. His efforts were concentrated on getting communists out of sensitive positions inside the U.S. government. Unless one takes the position that a person somehow has a right to a government job while simultaneously spying for a hostile foreign power, this actually seems highly commendable. Furthermore, he was troubled that the Truman administration had not taken action to rid the government of communist spies. And yes, there were multitudes of such spies in sensitive positions inside the government — many more than the more infamous ones such as Alger Hiss and the atomic spies Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.

Conservative columnist John T. Flynn noted that it was clear what McCarthy wanted to do. “McCarthy was not persecuting radicals or even Communists. His aim was at only Communists and spies inside the government, including the Army.” In a 1987 article for *The New American*, James Drummey offered his definition of McCarthyism: “McCarthyism was a serious attempt to remove from positions of influence the advocates of communism.... Communist conspirators and their friends do not fear those who denounce communism in general terms; they do greatly fear those who would expose their conspiratorial activities. That is why they hated and fought Joe McCarthy more than any other public figure in this century.”

“If anything,” wrote historian Larry Schweikart in *A Patriot’s History of the United States*, “McCarthy’s investigations *underestimated* the number of active Soviet agents in the country.”

This is confirmed by Carl Bernstein, a contributing editor of *Vanity Fair*, who is best known for his role in breaking the Watergate story, which won him a Pulitzer Prize in 1973. In his *Loyalties: A Son’s Memoir*, Bernstein revealed that both his parents were secret members of the Communist Party, only two of the thousands sent by the Communist Party to Washington, D.C., during the New Deal Era of the 1930s.

Bernstein’s father tried to dissuade him from telling the truth about the extent of the communist infiltration of the government during those times. “You’re going to prove McCarthy was right because all he was saying is that the system was loaded with Communists. And he was right.... I’m worried about the kind of book you’re going to write and about cleaning up McCarthy. The problem is that everybody said he was a liar; you’re saying he was right.”

Some of the falsehoods often repeated about McCarthy border on the ridiculous. For example, it is said as a fact that McCarthy, in his position as chairman of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, created the Hollywood Blacklist in which certain actors, directors, producers, and writers lost their jobs in the movies, or could not find work, due to a “blacklist” that named them as communists. And it was supposedly all the work of McCarthy.



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First of all, since McCarthy was a U.S. senator, it should be obvious to a person of average intelligence that he was not going to be a member of a committee of the House of Representatives, much less its chairman. Furthermore, McCarthy said little about the issue of communist subversion as an issue before 1950, and the Hollywood Blacklist was already in existence. Finally, McCarthy did not address the issue of communists in Hollywood or in any other *private* industry, but rather expressed alarm at only those who held sensitive positions inside the U.S. government.

By the time McCarthy did address the issue of subversion in 1950, the number of persons under the heel of communist dictatorships around the world had grown from less than 200 million to 800 million. The Rosenbergs had contributed to the Soviet A-bomb. Alger Hiss, who had been in the U.S. State Department and was a central figure in the creation of the United Nations (even serving as its first secretary-general), had been a key aide to President Franklin Roosevelt, and was a respected pillar of the American establishment. He was eventually convicted for lying under oath about his espionage activities on behalf of Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union.

The McCarthy Era Is Launched

In February 1950, McCarthy flew to Wheeling, West Virginia, to deliver a speech as a guest of the Ohio County Republican Women's Club, on occasion of their Lincoln Day Dinner. Just under 300 Republican activists became witnesses to the opening of what is now called the McCarthy Era, as McCarthy would deliver a rousing salvo against the Truman administration for its failure to rid the U.S. government of Soviet spies.

According to McCarthy's aide, Roy Cohn, McCarthy's interest in the issue began just before Thanksgiving 1949, when three unidentified men, including an Army intelligence officer, visited him. They were concerned about a 100-page document prepared by the FBI that listed names of individuals "known to be active in the [Communist] Party" who were burrowed deep inside the agencies of the government. The men had failed to interest three other senators to take the lead on the issue, and decided to bring their concerns to the less well-known McCarthy instead.

After reading the document, McCarthy was alarmed, and decided to take on the issue.

And take it on he did, to the startled ladies in Wheeling, announcing that he had "in my hand" a list of people in the State Department who were "either card-carrying Communists or certainly loyal to the Communist Party." The number of these "card-carrying" communists, according to McCarthy, was 57. Oddly, very soon after the speech, the exact number of communists located inside the State Department became the point of contention. McCarthy's detractors argued that he had said 205, not 57, and when McCarthy later testified under oath, before a Senate committee about the number 57, he was actually threatened with perjury!

The larger number, 205, was, in McCarthy's words, not a list, but rather a statistic. According to M. Stanton Evans, it came from a letter that Secretary of State James Byrnes had written in 1946 to a U.S. congressman. It appears that Byrnes had said there were 284 State Department employees on whom security screeners had made adverse findings. As of the writing of Byrnes' letter, 79 had been removed, leaving 205.

It is indeed strange that the question of whether the number of communist spies in the State Department was 57 or 205 should become more important of an issue than the fact that there were spies in the first place. As Ann Coulter put it in an article in *Human Events*, "Having only 57



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Communists in the State Department was apparently considered a great success for a Democratic administration.”

While the speech had been broadcast over the radio, and even taped, it appears that the radio station erased the tape before the numbers controversy erupted (this being the standard practice then for radio stations to re-use tapes). The local newspaper, *The Wheeling Intelligencer*, ran an article by reporter Frank Desmond, in which he wrote that McCarthy had said 205. McCarthy had given Desmond a rough draft copy of his speech in which the higher number 205 appeared, and Desmond used that number in his article.

McCarthy had also given rough draft copies to two other individuals, but stressed to them that he would be revising it before delivery. Desmond later commented that the 205 quotation was taken from the rough draft of the speech, and not actually from what McCarthy had said in his talk. The two other men who had been given rough drafts also testified that McCarthy did not simply read his speech, but rather spoke extemporaneously. Had McCarthy actually read his speech verbatim, Evans noted, the audience would have heard outlandish statements such as the Soviet Union controlled 80 *billion* people, and no person there recalled any such thing.

Evans tracked down three attendees of the speech in 2000, shortly after the 50th anniversary of the Wheeling talk. All three agreed that McCarthy was clearly not reading his speech. The most detailed memory came from Eva Lou Ingersoll, who insisted that McCarthy’s 57 number was the correct number. According to Evans, after the numbers controversy erupted, Ingersoll consulted notes she had taken. She had indeed written 205, but she had also written “57 cc.” She explained to Evans that the first figure (205) referred to the number being investigated, while the 57 referred to “card-carrying” members of the Communist Party.

But instead of concern about 57 Communist Party members loyal to the Soviet Union working inside the U.S. Department of State, the Truman administration and its defenders circled the wagons, and made McCarthy the issue. Many insisted that McCarthy reveal the names of the communists on his list, but McCarthy refused. He explained that his goal was not to unfairly announce the names to the general public (and possibly smear truly innocent individuals), but rather to move the Truman administration to take action.

Exactly how many Soviet spies had permeated the U.S. government is, of course, unknown, but scholars examining the voluminous KGB files have concluded it was immense. Arthur Herman, writing in *Joseph McCarthy*, noted that Allan Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev went through the KGB files and compiled a list of classified materials taken by Soviet spies, and it “ran to over 150 single-spaced pages.” And that probably only represented a fraction of the total.

The Lie That McCarthy Terrorized the Country

Perhaps the biggest lie told about McCarthy is that he terrorized the country, with innocent Americans quaking in fear that they would be “next” to spend time in prison, falsely accused of being a communist. Writing in *The Web of Subversion*, James Burnham reviewed the statistics of the so-called terror of the McCarthy Era, and found the number of persons killed was zero; the number of persons wounded or injured was zero; the number of persons tortured was zero; the number of persons arrested without a warrant was zero; the number of persons held or imprisoned without trial was zero; the number of persons evicted, exiled, or deported was zero; and the number of persons deprived of due process was



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also zero.

In the midst of what was supposedly a McCarthy reign of terror, with the Wisconsin senator supposedly making wild accusations against innocent persons, the Communist Party functioned legally, publicly recruited new members, and published newspapers, books, and journals in the millions of copies.

In stark contrast, in the administration of President Woodrow Wilson, an icon of the progressive Left, almost 1,000 individuals went to prison under the terms of the Espionage Act. The Wilson administration even prosecuted a filmmaker who made the film *The Spirit of '76*, in which British Redcoats were, naturally, the "bad guys." But because the British were now our allies in the First World War, this was considered seditious, and the man received a 10-year prison sentence, later commuted to three years.

As former Secretary of War Elihu Root put it, as quoted by the *New York Times*, "We must have no criticism now." Root later hardened his position, arguing that "there are men walking about the streets of this city tonight who ought to be taken out at sunrise tomorrow and shot for treason."

Then, during the administration of President Franklin Roosevelt (perhaps an even greater icon of the Left), FDR signed Executive Order 9066 in February 1942, authorizing the arrest of American citizens and residents of Japanese ancestry, all without warrants, indictments, or hearings. Three-fourths were American citizens, and they were locked up for three years.

Yet, McCarthy conducted a reign of terror?

Of all the individuals supposedly unfairly smeared by McCarthy, perhaps none was more sympathetically cast than Annie Lee Moss, an Army Signal Corps employee. Moss had been listed as a member of the Communist Party until 1945, when she obtained a job in the Signal Corps cafeteria. Later, she was moved into what was clearly a much more sensitive position in the Pentagon coding room. An FBI informant, Mary Markward, alerted Roy Cohn about Moss. Markward had infiltrated the Communist Party, and swore to having seen Moss's name and address on a list of Communist Party members in the Washington, D.C., area.

Moss's job allowed her access to classified material, but the Army argued that she was merely a relay machine operator. She was called to appear before McCarthy's Senate committee in March 1954. It was known that she had been suspended from her job as a result of the charges against her, and she was now unemployed. While many who came before McCarthy's committee opted to "take the fifth," Moss did not, and denied her membership in the party, although simply being a member of the Communist Party was not a crime. She even answered, "Who's that?" when she was asked if she had ever heard of Karl Marx, effecting a look of puzzlement.

Moss offered that perhaps this could all be just a case of mistaken identity. "I know there are three Annie Lee Mosses living in the area," and she speculated that could be the reason that copies of the *Daily Worker* were delivered to her 72 R Street address. Moss said she would soon be reduced to welfare because of her job loss.

Democrat Senator Stuart Symington offered to get her a new job, to an explosion of applause from the sympathetic audience inside the committee room. After Edward R. Murrow's *See It Now* program aired, featuring Moss as an example of the tyranny of Senator McCarthy, phone calls and telegrams ran almost nine to one in her support.



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Evans contended that Moss was prepped by Symington before her appearance, citing the transcript for evidence. Symington asked her if she knew of anyone else in town named Moss — “Have you ever looked up a telephone number — are there any Mosses in Washington besides you?”

But in 1958, the Subversive Activities Control Board issued a report on the case. Without equivocation, it stated that the Annie Lee Moss who took the witness stand that day in 1954, and denied ever having been a Communist Party member, was indeed the same Annie Lee Moss who had been a member of the party.

There were not three Annie Lee Mosses in D.C., but only one: the one who had perjured herself before a Senate committee.

Of course, by the time this report was released, McCarthy had been dead for several months. This is just one example of how McCarthy was not smearing “innocent” people, but was rather trying to expose actual communists — loyal to a hostile foreign power — working in sensitive positions inside the U.S. - government.

Stanton Evans’ father, Medford, put it well: “The restoration of McCarthy ... is a necessary part of the restoration of America, for if we have not the national character to repent of the injustice we did him, nor in high places the intelligence to see that he was right, then it seems unlikely we can or ought to survive.”

Photo of Sen. Joseph McCarthy: AP Images



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