



Joe McCarthy Attacked Again After Benghazi Hearings

Those on the Left seem to never miss an opportunity to castigate the memory of the late Republican Senator from Wisconsin Joseph McCarthy (shown standing). In the middle of the chorus of liberal praises of Hillary Clinton's performance before the House Select Committee on Benghazi, former *Washington Post* reporter Carl Bernstein chose to compare her grilling to that supposedly administered by McCarthy against accused communist spies who appeared before his Senate committee in the 1950s.



Bernstein achieved national fame by his reporting, along with fellow *Post* reporter Robert Woodward, about the infamous Watergate scandal. The story was glamorized in the movie *All the President's Men*.

In the book and movie, Bernstein and Woodward were portrayed as heroes against the corruption of the Nixon administration and excessive presidential power. Now, however, it is clear that Bernstein, at least, was more concerned with attacking a Republican president than in uncovering scandals in the executive branch, per se.

"I thought we got a great look at who President Hillary Clinton would be, for the first time really, a kind of competence, the kind of command over the whole scene that she was being asked to testify under. She knew the issues. There was nuance about her positions. It was very impressive, given what she was up against."

In Bernstein's mind, at least, what the former first lady, senator, and secretary of state was "up against" was a Republican-majority committee that reminded him of Joe McCarthy and the House Un-American Committee [sic]. "I think you have to go back to Joe McCarthy, to the House Un-American Committee [sic], to find a process as abusive in a congressional hearing as this one was.... This was a reckless and outrageous hearing."

But he was not done. He later went on CNN to praise Clinton and condemn the congressional Republicans once again: "She did great, because she was up against a group of demagogues."

Then, he brought up McCarthy a second time: "You have to go back to Joe McCarthy to see this kind of demagoguery in a congressional hearing."

If Bernstein thinks demagoguery in a congressional hearing is something new, he has not been paying attention over the past 60 years. Much of that demagoguery was directed at, not by, McCarthy, in the early 1950s.

One of the biggest myths about McCarthy was that he went after "innocent" people, who were falsely accused of being members of the Communist Party. The reality is that McCarthy's goals were always very narrow. He was not dragging any and all Communist Party members he could find before his Senate committee. McCarthy's limited focus was on ridding the U.S. government of communist spies, who had entrenched themselves into sensitive positions. Unless one thinks a person loyal to a foreign



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tyrant, Joseph Stalin, has some sort of “right” to a government job, this seems admirable.

The conflation of McCarthy with the House Committee on Un-American Activities is typical of the unrelenting propaganda effort against him. First of all, Bernstein’s designation of the committee as the House Un-American Committee is inaccurate, probably deliberately so. It was the House Committee on Un-American *Activities*. Despite repeated efforts to associate McCarthy with this committee, he was not even a member of this committee, much less its chairman, as is so often said by the ignorant or the duplicitous. Simply put, House committees do not make senators chairmen of their committees.

Another common charge made against McCarthy is that he created the Hollywood Blacklist, in which actors, directors, writers, and the like were “blacklisted,” or not hired to work in the motion picture industry. Whatever the merits of the Blacklist, McCarthy had absolutely nothing to do with it, since it was conceived in the 1940s. McCarthy did not even make communist subversion inside the U.S. government an issue until his famous February 1950 speech to the Ohio County, West Virginia, Republican Women’s Club.

The American Communist Party would not have cared had McCarthy been uncovering innocent non-communists. Their concern was that he was exposing the widespread communist infiltration of the U.S. government.

Which brings us back to Bernstein.

For Bernstein, the hatred of McCarthy is clearly personal, because his parents were card-carrying members of the Communist Party during the so-called McCarthy Era. The Left, and even some ignorant “conservatives” imagine that millions of patriotic Americans were quaking in fear that they were going to have their lives and careers ruined by “false” charges of being communists. Actually, the only Americans who had any reason to fear McCarthy were those communist spies who worked inside the government, especially those in sensitive positions.

In 1989, Bernstein wrote a book, *Loyalties*, in which he recalled how his communist father, Al Bernstein, a graduate of Columbia Law School, defended 500 public employees accused of disloyalty. After trying to unionize government workers, and supporting the principles of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, and supporting the Soviet-backed side in the Spanish Civil War, Bernstein’s mother and father finally joined the American Communist Party (which was totally loyal to perhaps the greatest mass-murderer in history, Joseph Stalin) in 1942. Later, his mother even organized to save atomic spies Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

This could explain Bernstein’s zeal in wanting to drive President Nixon from office in the Watergate scandal. Nixon was credited (although students of the case tend to give more credit to fellow Congressman Robert Stripling) in outing the notorious Alger Hiss as a Soviet spy. Despite Nixon’s support for much of the liberal agenda (such as the Environmental Protection Agency), the Left never really forgave him for “getting” Soviet spy Hiss.

When the Soviet spy scandals rocked the public standing of the Democrat Truman administration, the Democrats made McCarthy the issue, and circled the wagons. According to Bernstein, former Truman staffer Clark Clifford later told his father that Truman created the loyalty boards in 1947 not out of any genuine concern about communist subversion, but rather as a political move to counter Republican attacks that the Truman administration was “soft” on communism.

And Bernstein compared Hillary Clinton to those who, like his communist parents, supposedly suffered during the McCarthy Era. Most telling, he believes the hearings gave her a platform to demonstrate just



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“what kind of president of the United States she would be.”

One that the proud son of two American communists can be proud of.

Steve Byas is a professor of history at Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College in Moore, Oklahoma. In his recently published book, History's Greatest Libels, he devotes a chapter to the unfair libels perpetrated against the late Senator Joe McCarthy.



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