

Joe McCarthy

A nation often goes through severe changes in order to compensate for its inability to perform more thoroughly when dealing with post war era's as well as dealing with future threats. During the Second red scare the United States went through many severe changes in order to compensate for the silent threats made by the Soviets. Often times these changes bring about certain people into the spotlight. During the Second red scare senator Joe McCarthy took hold of the spotlight and severely attacked individuals whom he believed were threats and later taken out of the spotlight just as quickly as he took hold of it.

McCarthy grew up on his grandfather's farm where he was born on November 14, 1908. His grandfather came from Ireland in 1858 and established himself in Grand Chute, Wisconsin. Wisconsin was just one of many states that took in its share of immigrants from Europe some of which were Dutch, Irish, German, Poles, and also Czechs. Most of these incoming immigrants were devout Roman Catholics. McCarthy was the fifth of the seven children and was also the third brother (Herman, 21-22). McCarthy learned the meaning of hard work by planting vegetables and feeding the cows on the farm before getting in late at night. The McCarthy's were encouraged by their parents to achieve any goal to the best of their ability. With this Joe set out with his own chicken farm and started to sell eggs to the town near his farm, Appleton. Although Joe tried very hard to make his small business a success his chickens all died and Joe was forced to move in another direction.

Luckily for him he chooses to enroll in his local high school, Little Wolf High School, in 1929. At the time of enrollment Joe was reaching his twenty first birthday and he would join the freshman class who were six to seven years younger than him. Later he would talk to his school principal to let him take more courses in order to finish earlier. With working nights and going to school in the day time Joe worked very hard to earn a four year high school diploma in just nine months. By doing this he proved to everyone including him self that he could achieve anything. In the fall of 1930, McCarthy enrolled at Marquette University which was a traditional catholic school. While there he first focused his energy on becoming an engineer and later switched his major to law. While in law school Joe also worked full time at a gas station and also joined the school's boxing team where he became heavyweight champ. Finally in 1935 McCarthy receives his law degree and passes the bar exam (Herman, 22-24).

After this McCarthy made certain decisions that would catapult him into the American spotlight. Joe learned earlier on that he could use the media to gain advantage over his opponents. As Rovere put it, "... [He was a] skilled manipulator of public opinion [and a] genius at that essential American strategy: publicity" (10-11). Joe ran for district attorney against Louis Cattau and in his campaign he defamed Louis by saying that Louis had a side job as well as being district attorney. Unfortunately for Louis this was in violation of the city ordinance and it also cost him his position. McCarthy went on to win with 6,175 votes over Louis (Morgan, 328). McCarthy next set his eyes on the Shawano tenth district court judge. His opponent was Edgar V. Werner who was sixty six years old had changed his birth date to seem more up for the job. McCarthy used Werner's age in a local newspaper article with the title "What About This Age Question?" Obviously McCarthy won the election with about 15,164 votes and became Shawano's tenth district court judge (Morgan, 328). In

1942 McCarthy joined the marines after hearing from a friend that the reputation of the marines would help out his political career. It was here, in 1943, that he decided to run for Wisconsin state senate. This time he was going to run not as a democrat but as a republican against Alexander Wiley. Although he lost this race to Wiley, in next years election he won by 250,000 votes against Robert La Follette (Herman, 40).

McCarthy got to where he was by attacking anybody in his way. Every opponent he faced he attacked. He was frequently lying in order to make his opponent look insufficient to hold office such the case with Werner as well as Cattau. Joe was also looking to exaggerate; an example of this is when Joe broke his leg during the “shellback” ceremony he told newspapers that he was wounded in action. He also said that he flew with the dive bombers, hence the name “Tail Gunner Joe”. Although his story had some truth to it, the real reason was that Joe was complaining about the way pictures were being taken in the air so he was instructed to do it himself. He also was only up in the air roughly a dozen times while the dive bomber squad was on the frontline for seven months (Herman, 32-33) McCarthy got nationwide recognition when he gave a speech at Wheeling, West Virginia on February 9, 1950. In his speech he accused certain people in the state department for being or supporting communist. The media obviously took this and spun the story nationwide; McCarthy’s name was used in every house in America (Rovere, 6). After this McCarthy became chairman of the Committee on Government Operations and also of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. Through this Joe was able to organize a group of people through various government organizations ranging from the FBI to the State Department. These people would only answer to him and bring him information on any suspicious communist activity. They went so far as to call themselves “the loyal American Underground”. McCarthy justified receiving classified information by saying “ I would

like to notify two million federal employees that it is their duty to give us the information they have about graft, corruption, Communist, and treason, and that there is no loyalty to a superior officer that can tower above their loyalty to their country” (Rovere, 24-26). McCarthy was now ecstatic about finding out that Roy Cohn had found information regarding Fort Monmouth. Roy was McCarthy’s chief counsel. Roy notified Joe that there was a spy ring that was sending classified documents to the soviets regarding the development of guided missile systems as well as other classified documents (Herman, 238). At the center of this were Julius and Ethel Rosenberg; after Cohn was done with them they were sent to the electric chair for stealing classified documents (Rovere, 191). Later on the New York Times came out with a head line that said “Army Charges McCarthy and Cohn Threatened It in Trying To Obtain Preferred Treatment For Schine”. When the other senators from the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations found out they stopped the Monmouth hearings and then they pressured McCarthy to step down as chairman of the committee. The senators also decided that they were going to investigate the army’s claim (Herman, 254-255). The army’s chief counsel was Joseph N. Welch he was very skilled and clever on making McCarthy look foolish on the same medium that created him which was the media. The army McCarthy hearings were televised for the whole nation to see (Herman 258-260). At one point Welch says”...Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency?” The Gallup poll was released and it showed that the approval ratings for McCarthy were dropping drastically. Even those that still favored him were left with a doubt about his character (Herman, 273-276). On July 30th, 1954 Senator Flanders and a squad of anti-McCarthyites came together to offer a resolution of censorship against McCarthy. Later the next month the Senate held a debate on the resolution to censure McCarthy from his position as Wisconsin state senate. McCarthy

responded to this by saying “I assure the American people that the senators who have made these charges will either be indicted for perjury or they will prove what consummate liars they are”. But this was not like the past where the senate would get intimidated by McCarthy. They would go on to vote 72 to 12 to pass the resolution for consideration (Herman, 278). Lyndon Johnson organized a group of senators that would ensure the censure of McCarthy. The group was headed by Arthur V. Watkins; Lyndon would use him to push for the outing of McCarthy. On September 27th of that year the committee was able to come to a conclusion to move on base on two counts to censure Joe. The first was Joe’s reaction towards Senator Gillette’s Subcommittee on Privileges and Elections during the eighty-second Congress which illustrated contempt of congress. The second count was the treatment of General Zwicker by Joe (Herman, 280-283). The censure vote was held on December 2nd and obviously it turned out the McCarthy was censured from the senate. The vote was 67 in favor and 22 against (Herman,290-293).Herman put it the best when he said “If it was the liberals who provided the dagger for McCarthy’s destruction and Eisenhower White House who unsheathed and sharpened it, then it was the southern democrats who would plunge it into McCarthy’s heart”(Herman, 48).

McCarthy rose to the ranks from rags to riches; he went from being a little farm boy from Wisconsin to representing Wisconsin in the United States Senate. McCarthy got widespread attention when he started heading investigations on ousting alleged communists in the United States government. There was nothing wrong when Joe took charge of this task but then he used it to strong arm and intimidate anyone including his colleagues in the senate as well as president Eisenhower. When McCarthy started applying his gift of using the media for other political reasons instead of ousting communists he basically dug his own grave. Welch made him look look like a fool by

using Joe's love of the spotlight against him. He basically used McCarthy's gift for the media against him during the army McCarthy hearings. After this when they knew he no longer was a heavy threat the senate mainly Johnson and new deal democrats made sure to censure him. This undoubtedly marked McCarthy's fall from the spotlight where he struggled so hard to get. To this day people still use the term McCarthyism; A term that was coined by Herbert Block of the Washington post. In His book Rovere defines McCarthyism by saying " To the one whatever is liberal, repressive, reactionary, obscurantist, anti-intellectual, totalitarianism, or merely swinish all of some time to come be McCarthyism, while to the other it means nothing more or less than militant patriotism"(7).

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