

COLD WAR POLICY COULD HAVE BEEN INTELLIGENCER

*Blacklisted by History: The Untold Story of Senator Joe McCarthy
and His Fight Against America's Enemies*

by M. Stanton Evans (New York: Crown Forum, 2007)

Washington used to be a nice town, the reminiscence goes. Before our own day, when “the personal is political,” time was when the partisan fighting was fierce at the Capitol, but everyone played by the rules and went out for drinks together after all the wrangling was done. This is one of the most intransigent clichés in American politics.

In February 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin made a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, in which he said he had a list of fifty-seven names of Communists working in the State Department. The next month, a Senate committee chaired by Maryland’s Millard Tydings convened to discuss the McCarthy list. The committee did not devote itself to investigating the accuracy of McCarthy’s list, much less to forming policy about what to do about the situation if it were true. Rather, its effective purpose was to frame McCarthy in a criminal act.

McCarthy was set in the dock before the Tydings committee and permitted to give his statement. In “his first 250 minutes on the stand [McCarthy] was allowed to read a statement for 17 minutes, and was interrupted 85 times,” as one historian counted it years later. After McCarthy had been badgered several times, Henry Cabot

Lodge, McCarthy’s Republican colleague in the Senate, said,

Mr. Chairman, this is the most unusual procedure I have seen in all the years I have been here. Why cannot the senator from Wisconsin [McCarthy] get the normal treatment and be allowed to make his statement in his own way, and not be cross-questioned before he has had a chance to present what he has?... I think the senator from Wisconsin ought to have the courtesy that every senator and every witness has, of making his own presentation in his own way and not be pulled to pieces before he has had the chance to offer one single consecutive sentence.... I do not understand what kind of game is being played here.

Indeed, Lodge did not. As the proceedings went on (and as other deponents were treated graciously), it became clear that the committee chairman, Tydings, was determined to hang a perjury charge on McCarthy.

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The idea was that McCarthy, under oath before Tydings, said falsely that he had used the number *fifty-seven* in Wheeling. The local paper (the *Wheeling Intelligencer*) had reported at the time that McCarthy had used the number 205. The reporter, but not his editor, was sticking by the story and had an audio recording. So if McCarthy, under oath before the Senate committee, said he had said fifty-seven at Wheeling, he was making a false statement to the Senate—a punishable offense.

The problem for the committee's argument was that all the evidence for the number 205 lay in the newspaper account and the reporter's vouching for it. The recording had been erased, and nobody outside the newsroom, including those who had heard McCarthy's speech, verified 205. Indeed, in various addresses made by McCarthy in the days after Wheeling, he by all accounts used the number fifty-seven.

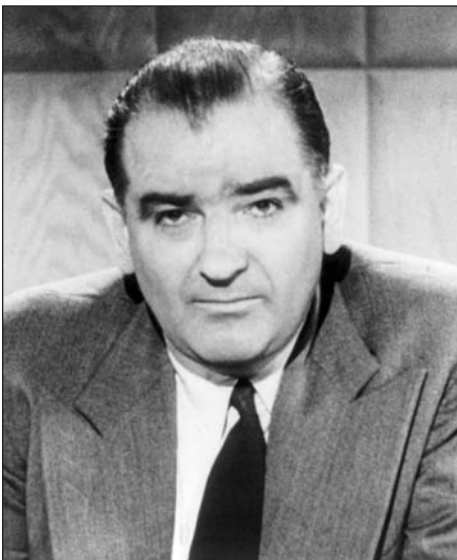
In the methodological canons of evidence use, sources are best when they are independent and verified. In this case, the only source of 205 was a messy draft that McCarthy had given to the *Intelligencer*

before the speech. Along with using the number 205, the draft used the number 80 billion to describe the number of people in the Soviet Union. Indeed, the draft was full of ridiculous errors such as these—errors, it was plain from all additional evidence, that McCarthy did not repeat in Wheeling. The reporter's vouching for the 205 in the speech was evidence dependent on the original independent source (the draft), which itself was non-contemporaneous with the event in question. In any event, the reporter conceded to the Tydings committee that the whole basis for his claim of 205 came from the draft, not the speech as delivered.

The case was a closed one—according to the canons of evidence, the 205 figure was poorly sourced, whereas the fifty-seven number was better sourced. No matter to Tydings. He said that he had an LP of the event and had photographers take pictures of him with the record, of which he claimed he had multiple copies. McCarthy would be proven a liar before the Senate once the thing was played—but that event never came to pass. A few years later, after McCarthy was disgraced, Tydings admitted that the record was a phony.

"It is noteworthy, indeed," writes M. Stanton Evans, "that the idea of censuring McCarthy, expelling him from the Senate, and destroying him as a political figure was voiced so vehemently and so often in this early going in the spring of 1950." This was "the note struck," Evans continues, not only during the Tydings proceedings, but in contemporaneous "comments of [President] Truman to his staffers...and [a] follow-up memo from State directed to the White House. Granted that McCarthy had made a lot of people angry, this over-the-top reaction seems quite strange."

Evans comes to this conclusion not only in the instance of the Tydings proceedings



Sen. Joe McCarthy

but at every juncture of McCarthy's career in the Senate as an anti-Communist crusader. For all we have heard about the blustery and bullying tactics of McCarthy himself, Evans has compiled a thick book's worth of examples of just this sort of behavior toward McCarthy by his colleagues and other high-placed mandarins. It is Evans' inescapable conclusion that others treated McCarthy worse than he treated others.

Evans' *Blacklisted by History* is destined to turn the freighter of hostile opinion about McCarthy more than a little in the direction of accuracy and sanity, because the book finally shines light not so much on what McCarthy was up to as on what everyone else was up to in going after him. We now know, thanks to Evans, that McCarthy's political opponents consistently treated him in a rude and dishonest fashion, examples of which are legion—e.g., a panel's unceasing inquiry into McCarthy's innocuous financial history, or McCarthy's inability to get a straight answer from anyone. One way McCarthy conceivably could have "gone away" would have been for the Senate, the president, whomever, to make transparent indications that places like State were well on the way to clearing out the "Reds," as was Truman's policy anyway. If there had not been such progress against Communism, McCarthy's point could have been taken, and the progress initiated.

Instead, McCarthy's charges met evasions. The standard one was that if the FBI had not taken action against a particular suspected individual, he must be clear. As Evans is at pains to illustrate, however, the FBI's responsibility was to pass information to places like State, not to take action. Action was to be taken by the agencies or their supervising authorities in elective government. The replies to McCarthy's charges were in essence a shell game.

Evans therefore strongly implies that McCarthy's opponents brought McCarthy down on their own heads. Perhaps it was a convenient *modus vivendi*; McCarthy was useful. Democrats unsure about fighting a Cold War could find a pretext in McCarthy to act tough on Communism in places like Korea. Establishmentarian Republicans like Eisenhower could distance themselves from McCarthy and thus appear broad-minded as well as "conservative." The Senate's 1954 vote of censure was perhaps an indication that by that point McCarthy-as-foil had been used up.

It is a sordid story, made the more sordid by the likelihood that McCarthy had people in his sights who really did malignly influence American policy because of their philo-Communism. For example, Owen Lattimore, one of McCarthy's more famous targets, wrote preposterous love letters about the Soviet Union and Mao, and to the extent that Lattimore influenced policy in China (which influence could not have been small), the United States was ill-served.

Yet Evans is correct to point out that the overriding policy objective of the United States in the Pacific from the 1920s was the guarantee of a stable, independent, and viable China; indeed, this objective had brought the United States to war with Japan in 1941. That China, after 1949, became the fiefdom of Chairman Mao cannot but be regarded as one of the most horrific outcomes that could have been contemplated as the United States pursued first diplomacy and then war in the service of China's future.

What to make of the mess that has become our culture's memory of Joseph McCarthy? To be sure, the man deserves a fairer hearing, and Evans has supplied it. Moreover, it appears to be the case that McCarthy's "names," or the equivalents

of them, were indeed active in number in the U.S. government through the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, perhaps still as Communist conspirators.

But here the lesson gets muddled. One thing we have learned about the Soviet Union, now that it has met its demise, is that it was an incompetent state. It was never able to deliver anything in terms of economic prosperity, political legitimacy, cultural sufficiency—anything. Indeed, the reason the Soviet empire finally had to go is that it became untenable. With prosperity again the norm under Reagan and spreading over the world in the 1980s, even the Chinese bolted in the direction of private property, and all Reagan (and Thatcher) ever intoned about the Soviet Union was that it belonged on the “ash heap” of history. In the 1980s it became ridiculous to side with the Soviet “experiment.”

It had always been ridiculous, but the policy of containment set in place by Truman had conceded that the Soviets rightly had their sphere. A great “contest” was on, that of the “spheres of influence,” a contest whose very greatness could confer a shred of legitimacy on a Soviet imperial regime that otherwise could count on none, save the residual honor of having been the ones to roust Hitler out of parts of Europe.

The odd thing about some of the Reds in the U.S. government is that they did not see how containment played into Soviet hands. For example, Treasury official Harry Dexter White was a reflexive philo-Communist and Soviet agent who did everything to ensure that the postwar international monetary system would provide

generously for the USSR, but the Soviets turned White down at Bretton Woods, and thereafter forbade their satellites from joining White’s creation, the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The Soviets realized that if they even began to manifest themselves in international institutions (outside of risible ones such as the United Nations), the fraudulence of their whole endeavor would quickly be ascertained. In the case of the IMF, they would have to maintain a convertible currency, something White thought would be great for them. They would have access to U.S. dollars and gold, but from the Soviet perspective, making the ruble convertible would violate Lenin’s rule of retaining the means of overprinting the currency. White sought to aggrandize the Soviets by giving them preferred access to the international order. The Soviets, for their part, realized the dangers that internationalism posed for their phony empire and put their hopes in containment.

That is to say, the uncommon efforts that Congress, the agencies, and the presidential administrations of the Truman-Eisenhower era took to keep McCarthy shouting and disreputable were themselves a substitute for a sounder Cold War policy. Perhaps the reason the United States had to fight a Cold War for decades until Ronald Reagan finally put his foot down was that Communist influence in State and other places played a role, at least early on. Then again, perhaps it was even more an intellectual failure on the part of those whose responsibility it was to see the nation into decades of peace and prosperity after the close of World War II.