

## Introduction

Joseph Raymond McCarthy was born outside Appleton, Wisconsin, on December 12, 1908; he died in Bethesda, Maryland, on May 2, 1957. McCarthy's fame came from his role in the Red Scare of the 1950s, with which his name has since become synonymous. The extent of his political reputation prior to the infamous McCarthy hearings came from his 1946 Republican primary upset victory over the incumbent senator, Robert LaFollette, Jr., scion of the LaFollette political dynasty. McCarthy then went on to win the Senate seat.

McCarthy's Senate career was undistinguished until February 1950, when the Republican Party sent him to Wheeling, West Virginia, to deliver the Lincoln Day address to the Ohio County Republican Women's Club, where McCarthy made his first national headline since the upset primary victory. Announcing that the federal government was rife with Communists and spies, he held up a clutch of papers that he claimed listed the names of 205 traitors working in the State Department. The Associated Press picked up the story, which made headlines around the country. When McCarthy reached the next stop on his speaking tour, Salt Lake City, he could not supply the clamoring press with the list, which he claimed was temporarily misplaced. The number of Communists in the State Department also had dropped to fifty-seven. When he returned to the Senate floor, the number was refined again, and the list still remained unavailable. It has never surfaced.

McCarthy's repeated failure to produce the list of names and the continuing inconsistency of the numbers did not hinder the surge of Red hysteria that became a national witch-hunt of unfathomable proportions. The early 1950s were ripe with unsubstantiated accusations regarding Communists, and those who doubted the veracity of McCarthy's statements wilted in the face of being charged with Communist sympathies. Thus, McCarthy was hailed rather than questioned. The undistinguished freshman senator from

Wisconsin became a national star and a feared and powerful politician. Communist infiltration of the government provided him with not only the attention and power that he craved but also—most important—the issue that he needed for reelection.

So successful was McCarthy in connecting himself with the fight against Communists that his name came to represent the Communist hysteria of the early 1950s. Given a Senate committee to investigate his charges, McCarthy and his aids used smears, slanders, rumors, and innuendos to destroy hundreds of people's careers and lives. Opposition to the senator's actions was most often career ruining. McCarthy fed off and fueled the Red Scare; however, just as his fame was his own creation so, too, was his downfall. Filled with his own sense of power, McCarthy turned on the enormously popular U.S. Army.

The Senate hearings on Communist infiltration into the U.S. Army attracted live television coverage, where McCarthy did not appear as the anti-Communist crusader that the public believed him to be but rather as a bully and a slanderer. The public's belief in a Red web of Communist conspiracy that supported McCarthy's reputation and career quickly unraveled. In December 1954 the Senate censored McCarthy. His reputation and political career in shambles, much like some of his many victims, he increased his already heavy drinking and died two years later.

The FBI took a great interest in McCarthy's charges and his committee's investigations. Director Herbert Hoover, a personal friend of the senator's, felt gratified that McCarthy had joined his lifelong battle against the Red menace. Hoover himself played a starring role in the nation's previous outbreak of Communist hysteria, the Red Scare of 1920. The future FBI director led Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's crackdown on suspected Communists and anarchists that Palmer feared were plotting to overthrow the national government on May 1, 1920. The revolution did not materialize, but the nation was whipped into a frenzy, and 7,000 "suspect persons" were jailed or deported. The publicity and attention that McCarthy's

charges generated rekindled the blaze that Hoover had long tended. His thousands of warnings and requests for additional funding that went unnoticed before now seemed farsighted as the director became the senior sage of anticommunism. McCarthy's hysteria bolstered Hoover and the bureau's position as the bulwark against the Soviet threat.

Throughout the McCarthy era, charges repeatedly surfaced that Hoover and the FBI were supplying McCarthy with confidential information. Despite these denials, it appears that the senator was secretly receiving information from the FBI at Hoover's behest. Clearly, Hoover personally and publicly supported McCarthy's actions, but the director emphatically denied aiding the senator's committee staff with any of its investigations. It is alleged that Hoover used McCarthy as a proxy, supplying him with information, speech writers, and training in the release of announcements just prior to the national press deadlines in order to avoid embarrassing and unanswerable questions until after the charges were already in print. It is also alleged that Hoover and the FBI debriefed witnesses and staffed McCarthy's office with former G-men. Both men clearly had much to gain from a close relationship. The tide of fear that McCarthy stirred up easily carried him to a second term. Hoover gained both a seemingly credible mouthpiece and a Senate investigating committee guaranteed to see things the bureau's way. McCarthy could generate the headlines that Hoover could not as a result of his years of crying wolf. The atmosphere that McCarthy created allowed the FBI to flourish, gaining the increased funding, power, and prestige desired by Hoover for years. McCarthy provided the catalyst for many of Hoover's dreams to come true.

McCarthy, however, reportedly strained the relationship with his patron by quoting from confidential FBI reports and by bragging publicly about his close personal relationship with Hoover. McCarthy overstepped the bounds when he showed an FBI-produced flowchart detailing the Communist spy ring in the State Department.

Hoover ordered an immediate end to relations with McCarthy and declared him a “nonperson,” thereby effectively severing even casual contact between G-men and McCarthy. Thus, the senator was cut off from one of his staunchest backers in the capital, and perhaps his best source of damaging material just prior to the fateful army hearings.

This file documents McCarthy’s witch-hunt, from the initial 1950 allegations of Communist Party members in the State Department to the Senate’s condemnation in 1954. It details the FBI’s observations and involvement in McCarthy’s accusations, and it includes much of the correspondence between Hoover and other senators, especially regarding Hoover’s repeated denials that the FBI provided McCarthy with information. This file should be of particular interest to scholars of the twentieth century, especially of the Red Scare of the 1950s.

The documents reproduced here were drawn from the Washington files of the FBI and have been released under the Freedom of Information Act; certain documents or portions of documents have been deleted by the FBI pursuant to provisions of that legislation. The material has been filmed in the exact order and condition in which it was released, and every effort has been made to publish the most legible copies available.

This file is in approximate chronological order, and the FBI did not index documents. The Roll Notes section is not a complete inventory of the file; however, it gives an indication of the types of material or specific documents that may be particularly worthwhile for research.

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