

BLACKLISTED BY HISTORY

The Untold Story of Senator Joe McCarthy and
His Fight Against America's Enemies

M. Stanton Evans



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For my mother

JOSEPHINE STANTON EVANS

who knew it all along

and for

TIERNEY McCARTHY

wherever she may be

PART I

THIRD RAIL

PROLOGUE

The Search for Joe McCarthy

IN THE peacetime summer of 1946, the first such summer in half a decade, a State Department official named Samuel Klaus drafted a long confidential memo about the grave security problems that were plaguing the department.

This 106-page report, dated August 3, contained some startling revelations. It discussed, among other things, the number of Soviet agents said to be on the payroll at State, alleged Communist Party members there, and others in the department described as “suspects” or “sympathizers.” In the cases of agents and CP members—some thirty-three people altogether—the names (one being Alger Hiss) had been compiled by State’s security screeners. As for the suspects and sympathizers, numbering more than ninety staffers, the names weren’t available yet as lists were still being assembled.¹

Information of this type, needless to say, was both ultrasecret and of sensational nature. During the crisis of World War II, when the Soviet Union was our ally against the Nazis, comparatively little attention had been paid to the matter of Communists in the federal workforce. But in the early postwar era, the alliance with Moscow had rapidly unraveled and was being replaced with a series of hostile confrontations that would be dubbed the Cold War. The presence of CP members or fellow travelers in official jobs, formerly viewed with indulgence or ignored, would look shockingly different in 1946 when Sam Klaus composed his memo.

Some four years later, at the height of the loyalty/security furor then raging around the State Department, Sen. Joe McCarthy (R-Wis.) learned about this memo and stirred up a major flap about it. Thanks to the McCarthy pressure, a Senate subcommittee chaired by Sen. Millard Tydings (D-Md.) requested a copy from the department and in due course received one. Thus, one of the most revealing documents ever put together about Red infiltration of the U.S. government was supplied to Congress. But thereafter, so far as the public record shows, the Klaus memo would mysteriously vanish.

In the National Archives of the United States there are at least two places where this report should be on offer. One is the legislative archive of the Tydings panel, which was weighing McCarthy’s charges of State Department security breakdown and which unquestionably got a copy. This is reflected in the department’s letter of transmittal,

which survives and is included in the subcommittee records. So the memo should also be in the files, but isn't.

The other place where this memo ought to be is in the papers of Sam Klaus, held in another section of the Archives. In the index to the Klaus papers, the document is listed, under its proper official heading. However, when the file was examined by this writer it turned out the report again was missing. In this case, at least, we know what happened to it. The file contained a notice where the memo had been, saying it was withdrawn from the Archives in March 1993—not quite half a century after it was written. So this important document is twice over absent from the nation's official records.

Unfortunately for researchers of such matters, this elusive memo is but one of many Cold War papers that have gone AWOL. Some two dozen other documents from the State Department relating to security issues were likewise supplied to Tydings and should be in the Archives also. In these cases handsomely embossed cover sheets, signed by Dean Acheson, Secretary of State in 1950, are still there in the folders. In every case as well, however, the material once enclosed has been stripped from the cover sheet, leaving small wads of paper beneath the staples that held the documents together.

Other historical data that ought to be in the subcommittee records are documents provided to the panel by McCarthy. These included a McCarthy-to-Tydings letter of March 18, 1950, listing the names of eighty loyalty/security suspects at State and elsewhere, some of whose anonymous cases McCarthy had earlier recited to the Senate. Enclosed with the McCarthy list was a letter from the head of the Central Intelligence Agency concerning one of the eighty suspects. In addition, McCarthy that same week gave Tydings a list of two dozen other names as potential subjects of inquiry. All told, a pretty sizable package of information on the most burning issue of that day, and many days thereafter.

As these papers were part of an official proceeding of the Senate—and as we know from other sources they were in fact provided—they should all be in the Tydings archive. Again, however, so far as diligent search reveals, all of them are missing, with no explanation of what happened to them, no hint that they were ever there, and no withdrawal notice. They are simply gone. Since they were documents central to any assessment of McCarthy's charges, their absence is a critical gap in the archival record.^{*1} That absence, it bears noting, affects more than our understanding of Joe McCarthy. It affects our knowledge of the issue he was addressing, and thus our comprehension of the Cold War era.

Such problems with McCarthy cases didn't cease with Millard Tydings but would occur also with the records of McCarthy's own committee, when he became himself the chairman of a Senate panel three years later. It's evident that a lot of records here are likewise missing. A notable instance involves the case of Annie Lee Moss, a security suspect in the Army who appeared before McCarthy at an historic committee

session. In the hearing record, reference is made to an “Exhibit 18,” an FBI report about Mrs. Moss that was obviously important in gauging the merits of the case and what McCarthy had to say about it. But there is no “Exhibit 18” to be found in the archive of the McCarthy panel pertaining to the Moss case.²

Nor are such troubles confined to official sources. They extend to private-sector data that should in theory be open to researchers. A significant case in point concerns the famous speech McCarthy delivered in February 1950 at Wheeling, West Virginia, kicking off the whole McCarthy epoch. As is well known, what McCarthy said in this speech became a hotly controverted issue. Much of the dispute revolved around a story in the local morning paper, the *Wheeling Intelligencer*, saying McCarthy claimed to have a “list” of 205 Communists working at the State Department. This quote appears in every book we have about McCarthy and many histories of the Cold War. McCarthy would, however, deny he said it, and whether he actually did so would become, and remain, the cause of vast confusion.³

The task of researching the Wheeling speech, and sifting collateral data on it, prompted the thought that, while all discussions of the subject fixate on this one story, there may have been other items in the local paper about such a major event in the life of Wheeling. And if so, these accounts might shed some light on what McCarthy did or didn’t say there. This hunch, as it turned out, was correct. However, a trip to Wheeling would reveal that these documents, too, were missing.

For one thing, the *Intelligencer* no longer had a morgue of stories from the 1950s. Instead, back issues of the paper were now on microfilm at the Wheeling public library. This seemed fair enough, and as the library was only a couple of blocks away, not an overwhelming problem. However, a visit there produced another disappointment. All issues of the paper, dating to the nineteenth century, were microfilmed and apparently in their appointed places—except the issues that were in question. Conspicuously absent were editions for January and February 1950—the sequence jumping, without explanation, from December 1949 to March 1950. Written inquiry to the librarian produced no reply as to what had happened to these records.

The further thought then occurred that the Library of Congress, which maintains back issues of numerous journals from across the country, might have *Intelligencers* in its holdings. And indeed, the Library does have such a collection—except, again, not these particular issues. According to the notice provided by the clerk who checked the records, the Library had no copies of the *Intelligencer* prior to August 1952. That made three trips to the well, and three times the bucket had come up empty.

This is perhaps enough for now about the subject of disappearing records, which will recur often in these pages. (It should be added that some of the items mentioned did survive in other, less predictable places and were recovered.) However, a couple of connected points need making about primary source material on such issues, and its availability—or lack thereof—to would-be researchers. Again, these problems concern not just the facts on Joe McCarthy but the entire clandestine history of the Cold War.

Among the more voluminous collections of such data are the once-secret records of the FBI. These files are a treasure house of information on Communist penetration of American life and institutions, suspects tracked down by the Bureau, countermeasures taken, and related topics. To its credit, the FBI was watching these matters pretty closely while others allegedly standing guard were dozing, or in the throes of deep denial. The material in the Bureau files is both revealing and extensive.

Thus, to pick some prominent cases, the Bureau knew as early as December 1942 that J. Robert Oppenheimer, the nuclear physicist then becoming a central figure in the atomic energy project, was identified by Communist leaders as a secret party member who had to be inactive because of the wartime work that he was doing. Likewise, in 1945, the FBI obtained credible information that high-ranking government figures Alger Hiss, Lauchlin Currie, and Harry Dexter White were Soviet agents. Also in 1945, the Bureau knew the espionage case of diplomat John Stewart Service and the pro-Red magazine *Amerasia* had been fixed, lied about, and covered up by a cabal of top officials.

Such are but a few of the revelations in the colossal trove of records housed in the J. Edgar Hoover Building, and while they concern some of the more notorious cases that would later come to view are by no means the most astounding. That said, there is still other information in the Bureau files that isn't open to researchers. In case after significant case, entries have been held back or heavily "redacted" (blacked out), sometimes for dozens of pages at a stretch. In nearly every instance, such redactions concern materials fifty years of age and counting. It's hard to imagine any national security interest of the present day that would be threatened by these ancient data.

Considering the stuff that's available in the Bureau records, one has to wonder about the stuff that isn't. *Vide* the memo reprinted overleaf, written in September 1946 by FBI Director Hoover to the Attorney General (at that time Tom Clark) concerning a shadowy Cold War figure named David Wahl. A former federal employee, Wahl had come to notice in one of the most intensive probes ever conducted by Hoover's agents. In this memo, Hoover says Wahl "as early as 1941...was reliably reported to be a 'master spy' for the Soviet government while employed by the United States government in Washington, D.C."⁴ After this jolting revelation, however, the next paragraph is blacked out entirely. The obvious question arises: If the Hoover comment that Wahl was "reliably reported" to be a Soviet "master spy" is *left in* the records, what must be in the part that's missing?

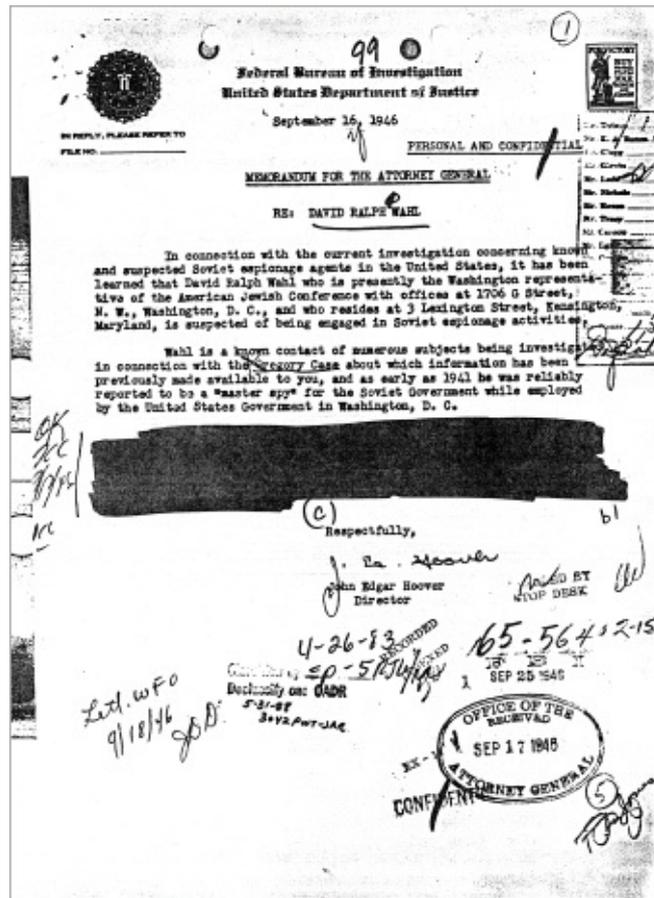
These matters are brought up, not to ask the reader's sympathy for the researcher (well, maybe a little), but to suggest the rather parlous state of the historical record concerning some important topics. Without the documents referred to, and without the items blacked out in the records, attempts to chronicle our domestic Cold War, while not entirely futile, are subject to the most serious limits. Lacking these materials, we are left in many cases with secondhand data of doubtful value that are nonetheless recycled from place to place as supposed truths of history.

It's not too much to say, indeed, that the loss of so many primary records has created a kind of black hole of antiknowledge in which strange factoids and curious fables circulate without resistance—spawning a whole other group of research problems. And while this thought again pertains to several aspects of the Cold War, nowhere is it more often true than in discussion of Joe McCarthy. The result has been to ply the public with many apocryphal tales about him and his alleged doings.

Some of these stories are simply fabrications—things McCarthy supposedly said, or did, that can't be confirmed from credible records. In particular, there seems to have been a cottage industry that cranked out purported statements by McCarthy that have no known valid basis. A leading example is an alleged McCarthy comment that welcomed the support of the Communist Party in the Wisconsin Republican primary of 1946 against Sen. Robert M. La Follette Jr. Nobody has ever been able to verify this quote, despite a considerable effort to do so, and it is almost certainly bogus. Yet it has been recycled many times in treatments of McCarthy.⁵

REVELATIONS REDACTED

FBI Director Hoover wrote this memorandum concerning an investigative suspect on September 16, 1946. Following an especially startling revelation, an entire paragraph is blacked out in the Bureau's records.



Source: FBI Silvermaster file

On top of such inventions, and more common, are episodes from McCarthy's hectic *vita* that did in fact occur but are presented in such a way as to be unrecognizable to anyone somewhat familiar with the record. (Most McCarthy factoids are of this nature, many resulting from the work of the Tydings panel, *fons et origo* of countless errors.) And there are just plain mistakes, some fairly obvious, some more subtle and harder to disentangle. These often stem from jaw-dropping ignorance of the subject matter—not only of McCarthy and his cases, but of other happenings in the Cold War or of American history and institutions. A few such miscues are of serious import, some merely goofy, but all add to the smog bank that veils the story.

We are informed, for instance, by two of the nation's leading dailies—the *Los Angeles Times* and *Washington Post*—that there was once a weird mutant entity of the U.S. government called “Senator Joseph R. McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee.”^{*2} It seems inconceivable, but is obviously so, that there are people writing for major papers who don't know we have a bicameral legislative system, so that a senator wouldn't head a House committee. And while such bloopers are amusing, they can have effects that historically speaking aren't so funny, pinning responsibility on McCarthy for things to which he had no connection (e.g., the House committee's investigation of Reds in Hollywood, often imputed to McCarthy).

One further instance in this vein is worth a bit of notice, as it illustrates not only the ignorance problem but the unwillingness or inability of some who write about such matters to get the simplest facts in order. In this case the offender was the *New York Times*, which in May 2000 published an obituary of a recently deceased New York professor with a domestic Cold War background. This ran on the *Times* obit page under a four-column headline reading, “Oscar Shaftel, Fired After Refusing McCarthy, Dies at 88.”⁶

This article said Shaftel, once a teacher at New York's Queens College, had lost his job back in the 1950s when he refused to answer “some questions” about alleged Red connections posed by the “investigations subcommittee of the Senate Internal Security subcommittee headed by Senator Joseph R. McCarthy.” The obit then went on to offer a lengthy tribute to Shaftel, describe his lonely years of exile, and suggest that, despite this ill treatment, his gallant spirit had remained unbroken.

The errors in this story were stunning, starting with the bedrock fact that Joe McCarthy had nothing to do with the late professor, the committee that brought him to book, or his alleged hardships. Indeed, there was no such thing as “the investigations subcommittee of the Senate Internal Security subcommittee.” The security unit, as the name clearly says, was itself a subcommittee (of the Judiciary Committee), its chairman at the time of the Shaftel hearing Sen. William Jenner of Indiana. McCarthy wasn't even a member of this panel, much less the chairman of it.⁷

Almost as odd as the obit itself were the events ensuing when, in my self-appointed role as part-time ombudsman on such matters, I wrote the *Times* about it, giving the facts above related, plus some pertinent data on the case the *Times* account omitted.^{*3}

Over the course of a month and a half, I sent the *Times* three different missives on the subject without having a letter printed or receiving an answer, made two references to it on C-SPAN talk shows, and enlisted the aid of the late media critic Reed Irvine, who wrote directly to *Times* publisher Arthur Sulzberger trying to get the thing corrected.

This apparently did the trick, as the *Times* at last provided on September 1 (the Friday of the Labor Day weekend) an obscure retraction, tucked into a corrections box between two numbingly soporific items (confusion of Mexican local politicians in a photo, misidentification of birds in Brooklyn). This confessed in bare-bones terms that the *Times* had erred as to the name and chairman of the committee that heard Shaftel. It thus took six weeks, half a dozen efforts, and the labors of two people to get a terse, nit-sized correction in no way comparable in scope or impact to the original mammoth error.

The point of this vignette isn't merely the slapdash and remarkably ignorant reporting of the *New York Times* in its casual slurring of Joe McCarthy, but the extreme difficulty of getting the mistake corrected. The experience has been repeated in other attempts to set the record straight on media treatment of McCarthy and his cases. Responses to these sporadic efforts have always been the same—reluctance to admit or fix the problem, or even to run a letter pointing out the miscue. The prevailing attitude seems to be: We will print any off-the-wall assertion about McCarthy that comes along, without bothering to check any facts whatever, and if we get called on it won't correct the record.

Why such a mind-set should exist, and what it says about the state of journalistic ethics, are intriguing questions, but less important than the effects of such slovenly reportage on our understanding of the Cold War and Joe McCarthy's involvement in it. Multiply such episodes many-fold, over a considerable span of years, and the cumulative impact in terms of spreading disinformation on McCarthy and his times is obviously enormous.

Finally, less glaring than these journalistic pratfalls, but more harmful, are misstatements that occur in standard biographies of McCarthy and political histories of the era. You might think scholarly looking, footnoted tomes by pipe-smoking academics with years of research to go on are more reliable than ephemeral stories banged out tonight only to be thrown away tomorrow. Such, however, is not the case. These studies, too, are often rife with error. To be sure, the authors know McCarthy wasn't a member of the House or chairman of the Jenner subcommittee, but feature other less easily recognized distortions that are more serious and enduring.

A last anecdote from this unhappy genre may suggest the nature of the academic problem, the more consequential as it involves another record of the federal government pertaining to McCarthy. In 2003, the U.S. Senate released for publication the long-secret transcripts of executive hearings conducted by McCarthy when he headed the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations in the early 1950s. This was an historical milestone of sorts, as the executive sessions provide detail about a

number of controverted cases, in many instances going beyond the public hearings run by McCarthy and his counsel, Roy Cohn.

This major publishing event, however, would be badly marred by the invidious comments and introductory notes of associate Senate historian Donald Ritchie, who edited the hearings for publication. In these notes and press statements of which he was prolific, Ritchie routinely stacked the deck against McCarthy, up to and including glosses that were demonstrably in error. One such episode I discussed with him was the above-noted case of Annie Lee Moss, called before the McCarthy panel in 1954 and portrayed in most histories of the era as a pathetic McCarthy victim. Ritchie's handling of the case, footnoted to three academic studies, reinforced the standard image of Moss as victim and McCarthy as browbeating tyrant.⁸

As will be discussed, this version of the Moss affair is quite false, a fact readily seen if one consults not the usual recycled histories but the voluminous official records on the case. When I got Ritchie on the phone I asked if he by any chance had reviewed these original sources, rather than simply repeating what he had picked up from other academics. When I further indicated that these records showed McCarthy was right about the case and offered to sum up the relevant data, the historian grew irate, said "I am growing very tired of this conversation," and abruptly ended our discussion. The rebuff wasn't all that different from the stonewalling responses of media outlets that have likewise distorted the Moss affair and other of McCarthy's cases.

To pursue other such items from a long syllabus of media/academic error would preempt the contents of this book, which is in large part an effort to redress the many misstatements that have been made in the usual write-ups of McCarthy. Suffice it to say encounters of this kind have made me forever wary of secondhand news that can't be traced to primary records. As an old newspaper adage has it, "If your mother says she loves you, check it out." Unfortunately, many who say and write things about McCarthy simply repeat what they have read somewhere, without the necessary checking. The net effect of such compounded error is an almost complete inversion of the empirical record on McCarthy and his cases.

While trying to unravel such confusions is a main object of this volume, I should stress that I haven't attempted to track down and answer every McCarthy-related error that's out there—which would be the work of a lengthy lifetime—or to quarrel in detail with every author who ever wrote something bad about McCarthy. While disagreements with such authors surface in several places, these passages are somewhat rare, and purely incidental to my purpose: to tell the story of McCarthy and the security problem he was addressing as clearly as I can do it, given my own limitations and the still-inchoate, but developing, condition of the record.

As these comments also suggest, a main emphasis of this study is the importance of finding primary sources on McCarthy, his cases, and the Cold War in general. However, no one person can possibly review all the primary data, which now run to literally millions of pages. Fortunately, there are some excellent scholars and Cold War

experts who have done yeoman service in such matters, having devoted endless hours to reviewing, for instance, the *Venona* decrypts (secret messages between Moscow and its U.S. agents), data from the Soviet archives, and details on certain intricate policy matters. Rather than trying to replicate such efforts, I have where appropriate availed myself of these heroic labors—the due bills for which are set forth in the acknowledgments and notes—and sought to combine them with my own researches.

A further aspect of the subject that needs stressing is that, by and large, all of us still know much less than we need to of the total story. In the vast moraine of documents and security data held by the FBI and reposing in the National Archives, there are scores or possibly hundreds of books still waiting to be written—about the rolling coup d'état that transformed the U.S. State Department in the 1940s, the wartime infiltration of the Office of War Information and Office of Strategic Services by Communists and Soviet agents, the conduct of our postwar occupation forces in Germany and Japan, and much else of similar nature. Likewise in need of examination, arguably most of all, is the linkage of such questions to policy outcomes in the early Cold War years affecting the fate of Eastern Europe and much of Asia.

In the present volume, such policy questions are briefly touched on to give some notion of the larger issues at stake in the McCarthy battles of the 1950s. McCarthy himself was but a single actor in an extended historical drama that stretched out for decades and involved a milling crowd of players who trod the stage before him. Only if that broader context is in some measure understood is there much likelihood of comprehending the McCarthy saga. As the matter currently stands, the real Joe McCarthy has vanished into the mists of fable and recycled error, so that it takes the equivalent of a dragnet search to find him. This book is my attempt to do so.

Hamilton, Virginia
April 2007

An Enemy of the People

THOUGH he's been dead and gone since 1957, Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wis.) lives on in American legend with remarkable staying power, unmatched by other notable figures of his day. Not that Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower, two eminent critics of McCarthy in the 1950s, are forgotten. It's just that they don't come up all the time in squabbles of the modern era. Joe McCarthy does, and then some.

Scarcely a week goes by, it seems, without some press reference to McCarthy and his anti-Communist crusading, the "ism" that he spawned, and the harm he supposedly inflicted on the nation. Books and media retrospectives in which he is featured have been many. Any obituary of anybody involved in the security battles of our domestic Cold War is bound to have some mention of McCarthy. He's invoked also when new civil liberties disputes arise—always in grave warnings that, unless we're careful, the dread McCarthy scourge will once more be upon us.

The reasons for all this McCarthyana are well known and don't need much explaining. McCarthy's alleged stock-in-trade was spreading hysteria about an ersatz internal Communist threat and smearing innocent people as subversives, without a shred of fact to go on. In particular, it's said, he launched wild unsupported charges against employees of the U.S. State Department, shattering the lives of hapless victims who never got a chance to answer. Lying and headline-grabbing accusations were the supposed essence of his method.

This fearsome image of McCarthy has been driven home through years of repetition, with little if any countervailing comment. Whole generations have come of age hearing nothing else about him, assume what they are told is true, and have no cause to doubt it. In this respect as well, the McCarthy case is somewhat distinctive. Other public figures have been savagely treated in their lifetimes but enjoyed a bit of historical comeback later. To look no further than officeholders with varying degrees of political kinship to McCarthy, such revaluations have occurred with Presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, and even with Sen. Barry Goldwater, the conservative champion of the 1960s whose media image in his prime most resembled treatment of McCarthy.

For the junior senator from Wisconsin, however, there has been no redemption. On the contrary, with the passing of the years and departure from the scene of people who knew anything about him, the negatives are more pronounced than ever. He had a pretty bad press when he was alive, but that press is infinitely worse today. Back then he had at least some supporters in book-writing and journalistic circles who set forth a different version of the story. But most of those people are gone as well, or their early work neglected, while defenders of McCarthy in the academic/media world today are so microscopically few as to be practically nonexistent.

So deeply etched is the malign image of McCarthy that the “ism” linked to his name is now a standard feature of the language, defined in all the dictionaries as a great evil and routinely used this way by people accusing others of low-down tactics. Nothing could better illustrate the point than that conservatives who think their opponents are making baseless charges are apt to complain about “McCarthyism of the left.” This is immortality of a sort, but not the sort anyone aspires to—that of utter and eternal demonization.

That one man should be so vilified for such a lengthy stretch of time would seem strange, except that issues are at stake much larger than the doings of a single politician, however wayward. If McCarthy had killed someone during a spree of drunken driving, or been caught in adultery with a student intern, he would have been denounced and gone into the history books as a scoundrel (or maybe not). But he wouldn't have been rhetorically embalmed, placed on exhibit as an “ism,” or have his effigy dragged around the public square forever after. All too obviously, such nonstop derogation has occurred, not just to blacken the memory of an individual, but to serve a broader purpose.

McCarthy's literary and journalistic foes, indeed, have made the point explicit. He is treated this way, they tell us, because he crystallized an impulse and a cause that far exceeded his personal failings. He stood for a much wider evil that swept the nation at midcentury—a “Red scare” allegedly fertile of many horrors. In a siege of mass paranoia, it's said, innocent people were hounded out of public life, fired from jobs, and otherwise made to suffer as agents of a fantastic plot that existed only in the fevered brains of know-nothings and vigilantes. As McCarthy was the main avatar of this delusion, continued harping on his crimes is essential to make sure nothing of this dreadful nature will ever again be allowed to happen.

The pervasiveness of this McCarthy image is its most conspicuous feature. Running a close second, however, is the fact that people who talk and write about him in this way, generally speaking, know little of McCarthy, and would be hard-pressed to back their view with plausible specifics, or indeed with anything whatever. The main exceptions to this rule are a relative handful of writers—perhaps a dozen—who do know something of McCarthy and have published harshly critical books about him, often used as sources by journalists and other authors. While there are occasional variations, all these treatments are pretty much the same in substance, and their aggregate impact in conveying the baleful image of McCarthy has been accordingly

immense.¹

In the established version of the story, as told by these writers, McCarthy began his ill-omened anti-Red crusade with a series of mendacious speeches in February 1950, then enlarged on these in Senate hearings conducted by Sen. Millard Tydings (D-Md.) that began the following month. The essence of the McCarthy charges was that the State Department (and other agencies of the U.S. government) had been infiltrated by Soviet agents, members of the Communist Party and their fellow travelers, and that officials supposedly guarding against this danger had first let it happen then covered up the facts about it.

In these early speeches, McCarthy recited what he said were lists of Communists and security suspects—mostly anonymous, some identified by name—as examples of the infiltration problem. These statements triggered fierce disputes before the Tydings panel, in the press, and in public forums throughout the country. McCarthy's charges were denounced as outrageous lies by President Truman, other prominent politicians, the State Department, media pundits, academics, civic leaders, and a vast array of other critics.

At the end of this initial go-round, we're told, McCarthy's charges proved to be completely baseless. The relevant data as conveyed by Tydings and since reprised by countless others showed not only that McCarthy's charges of subversion were false but that he lied about everything else from start to finish. He didn't have any "lists" of Communists or loyalty suspects, had constantly changed his numbers and other aspects of his story, didn't have inside information sources as he claimed, and otherwise deceived the Senate and the country. The whole thing was a "fraud and a hoax," and the American people could rest assured that charges of massive Communist penetration of the State Department were fearmongering nonsense.

In the conventional treatment, this opening McCarthy battle was the template for all that followed. Though discredited in this first encounter, he would simply forge ahead by making other, even wilder charges, smearing other victims, and spreading still more havoc. The rampage would continue unabated until the Army-McCarthy hearings of 1954 and censure proceedings in the Senate a few months later, when he would be condemned in an official action of his colleagues. In these final struggles, McCarthy was at last brought low, destroyed by his own excesses. Such was the mad career of Joe McCarthy, such was his dismal end, and good riddance to him.

Thus in brief compass the universally accepted version of the tale, set forth in all the usual biographies and histories of the era, and recited around the media campfires late at night as standard lore about McCarthy. Few episodes are limned more clearly in the chronicles of the Cold War, or more incessantly repeated. Yet despite its canonical status, as shall be seen, there are numerous problems with this telling of the story. For the moment, the main point to be noted is a further modulation of the ignorance factor, affecting not only members of the general public who admittedly don't know much about McCarthy but also the historians-biographers who have made him the object of

their study. As it turns out, despite the many certitudes they express about McCarthy and his cases, these learned gentry in some respects are as innocent of the facts of record as are their trusting readers.

Astonishing as it may seem, very little has been known, by historians or anyone else, about the vast majority of McCarthy's suspects, the security practices of the State Department in 1950, or Communist penetration of the government when he made his charges. This strange epistemological problem stemmed from several causes, the most obvious of which was that most of the McCarthy cases given to the Senate were presented in anonymous fashion and would remain that way for years thereafter. This made it impossible for outside observers to know who the suspects were, or whether they were even in the State Department, much less whether their hypothetical presence there posed any kind of danger.

Aggravating this knowledge gap were secrecy measures that affected virtually every other aspect of the struggle. Some of this was inherent in the super-confidential nature of the subject, but a great deal of it was merely willful. State Department security records were unavailable for public viewing, but also for the most part *terra incognita* to Congress. Efforts by congressional committees to obtain such records ran into countless roadblocks, foremost among them stringent secrecy orders handed down by President Truman. Less accessible yet were records of the FBI, whose investigations were the ultimate source of nearly all such data on State Department or other cases of like nature.

Given all these anonymity/secrecy issues, it's apparent that virtually no one other than the people physically controlling the secret records really knew much about security affairs at State or the facts about McCarthy's cases. How, then, was it possible to make categorical statements about the bogus nature of his charges? And on what basis was it decided that no problem of Communist penetration existed? These were daunting questions, for which a variety of complex responses would be invented. Generally speaking, however, there was one simple, overriding answer that for many in media/academic circles resolved all such knowledge issues: McCarthy's charges of a vast Soviet conspiracy and Communist infiltration were so far out, so alien to the experience of most people, as to defy all credence.

That being so, the denials of the Truman administration and findings of the Tydings panel seemed to carry decisive weight, though nobody could get the specifics on which these were founded. As this not-to-worry version matched what many observers thought to start with, a lack of definite information wasn't seen as a huge problem. The authorities who were supposed to know such things said all was well, few hard facts were available to disprove this, and the shards of data brought forward by McCarthy were dismissed as fictions. Thus the whole drill was premised, not on the availability of proof, but rather on its absence. This seems a strange method of proceeding, but so the matter was expounded at the time, and so it is expounded still.

Luckily, in recent years, the state of our knowledge about such topics has changed