

[McCarthy, According to Evans \(and Novak\)](#)

Blacklisted by History:

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

By M. Stanton Evans

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By John Earl Haynes

Eight years after Arthur Herman, here comes Stan Evans with another effort to pull off what most historians would regard as a Herculean (if not Sisyphean) task: the rehabilitation of Joe McCarthy.

As did his predecessor, Evans does an excellent job of correcting excesses in the historical record — the unthinking, near-hysterical, and far too common demonization of McCarthy. Indeed, Evans's book is more detailed, and he conducted more original and diligent research into primary documentation than did Herman in his account of "America's most hated senator."^[1]

So comprehensive is Evans's research that it will be a foolish historian who does not consult *Blacklisted by History* when a question arises over some person or event that comes into the McCarthy story. Unlike Herman, however, whose bottom-line appraisal was positive but qualified, Stan Evans's defense is more full-throated. While granting that McCarthy was "a flawed champion of the cause he served," Evans judges that the cause needed a "warrior" like McCarthy, and finds that McCarthy had a highly positive impact on public opinion, on America's Asian policy, and on government security policy.^[2]

The American Communist Party was a clear and present danger, as McCarthy and Evans would have it, in the early Cold War. But its chief threat was that of political subversion, not espionage, and therein lies the dividing line between a positive view of McCarthy and a negative appraisal. Had American Communists and their allies retained the influence they had achieved in the labor movement and the broad New Deal coalition, it is difficult to imagine that the United States would have undergone the political mobilization necessary in the crucial, early years of the Cold War. And the absolutely vital, perhaps irreplaceable, political elements in this mobilization were the leaders who would come to be derided in the 1960s as "Cold War liberals."

From 1946 to 1950, a civil war raged within labor and liberal institutions over the postwar direction of their movement. Initially, it looked as if Henry Wallace and the Progressive Party, with its secret Communist leadership, might wrest Roosevelt's mantle

from a faltering Harry Truman and the Democratic Party. But after an uncertain start, Truman reformulated the New Deal for the postwar era, and adopted a policy of confronting Moscow that transformed him into the greatest of the Cold War's liberal presidents. By the time the 1948 election was over, Wallace and his followers had ceased to be a viable alternative to Truman and the Democrats. Soon afterwards, the last bastions of Communist institutional strength were leveled when the CIO expelled its Communist-led unions.

In addition to ideological rejection of Communism, one must note a practical aspect of the Democratic Party's embrace of Cold War liberalism. From 1945 onward Republicans had been unrelenting in their criticism of the covert presence of Communists in the New Deal coalition. Many Democratic professionals realized that in the context of the developing Cold War, continued tolerance of the Communist presence opened the party to devastating Republican attack.

The heroes in this political marginalization of the extreme left were such figures as Reinhold Niebuhr, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Eleanor Roosevelt from Americans for Democratic Action; liberal Democratic politicians such as Hubert Humphrey and Paul Douglas; and labor leaders such as Walter Reuther and Philip Murray. Yet they were not McCarthy's allies — indeed, these were the kind of people against whom McCarthy railed.

By the time McCarthy's Wheeling, West Virginia speech in February 1950 launched what came to be labeled "McCarthyism," an anti-Communist consensus dominated the American landscape. The Democratic Party was firmly in the hands of Cold War liberals; the CIO free of Communist influence; and only remnants remained of the once-significant Communist role in mainstream politics, civic institutions, and the labor movement. Yet McCarthy threatened the anti-Communist consensus that liberals had helped create because he attempted to make anti-Communism a partisan cudgel.

His chief means to this end was the shockingly high level of Soviet infiltration of US government agencies that had existed during World War II. By the time McCarthy was making his allegations, however, the most significant Soviet espionage networks had been all but destroyed and/or neutralized thanks to defections, American counter-intelligence, the FBI's full-court press against the CPUSA, and President Truman's loyalty-security program for government employees. Still, McCarthy not only persisted, but sought to paint FDR's New Deal and Truman's Fair Deal as a disguised Communist plot, while depicting such prominent administration officials as Dean Acheson and George C. Marshall as participants in or dupes of a Communist conspiracy.

To be sure, though it is often alleged that Wisconsin's junior senator never uncovered a single Communist, McCarthy did identify a number of party members in the US government, including Annie Lee Moss, a civilian Army employee, who is discussed at some length in Evans's book (and for good reason, as Moss is frequently cited as an example of McCarthy at his worst). But McCarthy did not establish his national standing

by correctly identifying this low-level Army employee as a security risk. He made it, to quote McCarthy in a speech on George Marshall, by thundering in June 1951:

How can we account for our present situation unless we believe that men high in this government are concerting to deliver us to disaster? This must be the product of a great conspiracy, a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man. A conspiracy of infamy so black that, when it is finally exposed, its principals shall be forever deserving of the maledictions of all honest men. . . .[\[3\]](#)

Certainly, several US officials, including some very high ones in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations, displayed great naïveté toward Soviet espionage, and internal security policies until the late 1940s were notably weak. But there is no evidence to justify McCarthy's allegation of wholesale administration or Democratic complicity in this treachery. Officials (like Alger Hiss) who spied or attempted to influence US policy on behalf of the Soviet Union, also betrayed Roosevelt, Truman, their administrations, and their colleagues, in addition to violating the nation as a whole.

Normal democratic politics cannot proceed when one side regards and depicts the other as the enemy of fundamental values, and somehow illegitimate. Yet that is what McCarthy attempted to do, via demagoguery and malign partisan zeal. That he did not succeed, or even come close, hardly mitigates the fact that his role was an irretrievably negative one. It is true, and Stan Evans makes the case that McCarthy was not a satanic monster who terrorized the nation and seriously threatened its democratic values. But he was a hindrance, rather than an asset, to a rational anti-Communist consensus, and is not deserving of the vindication that Evans seeks to confer.

Reviewing the Reviewers

McCarthyism is such a freighted term that watching the reaction to Evans's long-awaited book promised to be as interesting, informative, and entertaining as the book itself.

So far, the chief arbiters of what might be called the left intelligentsia — *The New York Times* and *Times Book Review*, *New York Review of Books*, and *The Nation* — have chosen to slight Evans's book by ignoring it. The most significant reviews have appeared in the *National Review* online ("[The Enemy Within](#)," November 30, written by Ron Radosh) and *The Weekly Standard*. The latter was of particular interest to me, since I have subscribed to *TWS* since its early days and was, naturally, most curious about how one of my most intensely read journals would treat the book.

When I saw that syndicated columnist Robert D. Novak had been selected to write the November 26 review, headlined "[McCarthy = Bad, But the Truth is More Complicated](#)," I instantly felt some dismay. In 2003, *TWS* had published a [review/essay](#) by Novak on McCarthyism that included an unfair depiction of Harry Truman's dealings with Soviet espionage.[\[4\]](#) To make his case, Novak had drawn from historical evidence that had little

credibility and was, in fact, contradicted by more convincing documentation. Together with Harvey Klehr, my frequent collaborator, I had sent a firmly worded [disagreement](#) to *TWS*, which the editors printed in full.^[5]

But apart from this factual disagreement, what I had thought particularly odd then was that Novak's essay had the effect (if not the intent) of assaulting the reputation of a president whose Cold War foreign policies were the antecedents of the neoconservative policies now championed by *TWS*. (Indeed, in the process of assailing Truman, Novak's 2003 essay took a swipe at Daniel Moynihan, a neoconservative icon). Novak's antipathy to the neoconservative agenda was (and is) unconcealed; what struck me as puzzling, at the time, was the *Standard's* willingness to provide the platform for Novak to attack the historical reputation of neoconservatism's precursors.

My trepidation about this new review was swiftly justified, for Novak used the occasion to launch an attack on George Marshall. Indeed, Novak manages to match McCarthy in his condescending contempt for the man who served as both Secretary of State and Defense under Truman.

Marshall was reviled by the "Old Right" paleoconservative wing of the Republican Party. They loathed Marshall for a number of reasons, not least of which was the Marshall Plan. True, some paleoconservatives in Congress were adroitly maneuvered by the Truman administration into voting for the program. The White House made it into a Cold War test vote (vote "no" and you were inviting Stalin into Western Europe). But only someone tone-deaf to politics would fail to recognize that the Old Right votes for the Marshall Plan in Congress were entirely grudging. If it were left to them, the paleoconservatives would never have devised a Marshall Plan. It's worth remembering that after voting for the aid program, Joe McCarthy later expressed regret for having done so, labeling the Marshall Plan a "massive and unrewarding boondoggle" that made the United States into "the patsy of the modern world."^[6]

The Truman administration's Cold War policy had two main elements: the Marshall Plan for economic restoration of Western Europe, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which provided a military shield for Western Europe that allowed the Marshall Plan to work. What united Truman, Acheson, and Marshall was the judgment that the Cold War would be won or lost in Europe, specifically in Germany, the *schwerpunkt* of the Cold War, to use an appropriately German military term: the point of focus, the concentration point, the main axis where the attack will be won or lost. Win at the *schwerpunkt*, and the battle may be won, but lose there and no number of tactical victories elsewhere on the battlefield count.

Truman, Acheson, and Marshall understood that Germany and Europe were the keys. They set out to restore Western European prosperity and integrate a democratic and prosperous West Germany into the American-European NATO military alliance. With that, they judged, Soviet ambitions for world domination could be thwarted: fail that, and the game was over. However, to the paleoconservatives of the late 1940s and early 1950s — and Joe McCarthy was a major figure among them — the Truman administration's

Cold War policies were detested. Only reluctantly did some support the Marshall Plan and NATO. When not flat-out isolationists, they championed an “Asia first” strategy that would have left Western Europe to its own devices and swung the weight of Washington’s effort to the Pacific.

The Truman administration, on the other hand, regarded Asia as a side-show and gave the area minimal attention and expended as few resources as possible on it. The result was Communist advance in Asia and a retreat of American influence. While not a welcome result to the Truman administration, it was not one that changed its view that the key to the Cold War remained Europe, not Asia. Even after the Cold War turned hot in Korea, the Truman administration rationed American military assets flowing to Korea while directing much of the dramatic increase in American military mobilization in the early 1950s to what it regarded as the main theater: Europe and NATO.^[7]

Although it took nearly fifty years for the defeat of Soviet ambitions in Europe to lead to Soviet internal collapse, history has vindicated the Truman administration’s strategic decisions. Perhaps there were other paths possible that would have resulted in Western victory and the collapse of Soviet Communism, but by any reasonable standard, the Eurocentric Cold War policies established by Truman, Acheson, and Marshall (which were continued by Republican and Democratic administrations that followed) were successful. At least most people think so, but not Robert Novak.

In his review, Novak states that Evans listed a few instances of McCarthy at his worst, topped off by the Marshall speech — which was actually a journalist’s book manuscript handed to McCarthy and (in Novak’s words) “impulsively read into the record.” Yet even on this issue, Evans wrote (according to Novak) that McCarthy had a point. The senator never accused General Marshall of pro-Communist sentiments, only that he was unduly and unwittingly influenced by Soviet agents and Soviet sympathizers: “Marshall *everywhere* and *always* made wrong decisions or urged mistaken courses,” Novak writes, quoting Evans approvingly.

The first notable aspect of the preceding paragraph is that Novak does not accurately convey what Evans wrote. Evans noted that the speech was drafted by a journalist and given to McCarthy, who, Evans wrote, “found in it the *éclaircissement* he was seeking.”^[8] Yet in Evans’s account there was no suggestion that this was something “impulsively read into the record” by McCarthy; indeed, the opposite was hinted at since Evans stated McCarthy was given the manuscript sometime in early 1951. “Impulsively” is Novak’s excuse, not Evans’s. Inasmuch as McCarthy not only placed the 70,000-word indictment into the record of the Senate but also published it as a book, with himself as the author, it is impossible to see anything impulsive about the act. No one publishes a book in a moment of inattention. The book, moreover, was subsequently distributed in thousands of copies, often bought in bulk by enthusiastic McCarthy supporters and distributed at low or no cost. Nor did McCarthy ever withdraw anything he said about Marshall on the Senate floor or in the book.

When Novak goes on to suggest that McCarthy's speech was not really a vicious attack on Marshall's loyalty, he is more accurately presenting Evans's argument, save that both men strain to absolve McCarthy. The senator declared in June 1951 that "if Marshall were merely stupid, the laws of probability would dictate that part of his decisions would serve this country's interest," yet it was also McCarthy's view that *none* of Marshall's decisions were in America's interests, leaving a plain inference to be drawn.^[9] Then, of course, the senator went on to say "we believe that men high in this [Democratic] government are concerting to deliver us to disaster." Who were these men? It is difficult to believe that anyone who reads McCarthy's speech even now does not understand he meant Harry Truman, Dean Acheson and, above all, George Marshall.

As for Novak's quote that "Marshall *everywhere* and *always* made wrong decisions or urged mistaken courses," that was not Evans's judgment. Rather, it was Evans's description of *McCarthy's* view of Marshall. Evans's own estimate was that McCarthy made a "huge error of judgment" in the speech on Marshall; that there were "factual errors" in McCarthy's thesis; and finally, while there was an "immense conspiracy," McCarthy was mistaken "as to the role of Marshall."^[10] No such caveats in Novak's review: Marshall, one of the architects of America's successful Cold War policies, stands condemned without mitigation.

The mystery is why *The Weekly Standard* would give someone of Novak's views such a prominent forum.

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[1] Arthur Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator* (New York: Free Press, 1999).

[2] Evans, *Blacklisted by History*, 605.

[3] *Major Speeches and Debates of Senator Joe McCarthy Delivered in the US Senate, 1950-1951*, Reprint from the *Congressional Record* (New York: Gordon Press, 1975), 305.

[4] Robert D. Novak, "[The Origins of McCarthyism: What Did Harry Truman Know, and When Did He Know It?](#)" *TWS*, 30 June 2003.

[5] Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, "[Spy Games](#)," *TWS*, 21 July 2003.

[6] Niall Ferguson, "[Dollar Diplomacy: How Much Did the Marshall Plan Really Matter?](#)" *The New Yorker*, 27 August 2007.

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[7] On the Truman administration's Cold War strategy, see Robert L. Beisner, *Dean Acheson: A Life in the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[8] Evans, *Blacklisted by History*, 411.

[9] *Major Speeches and Debates of Senator Joe McCarthy Delivered in the US Senate, 1950-1951*, Reprint from the *Congressional Record* (New York: Gordon Press, 1975), 307.

[10] Evans, *Blacklisted by History*, 413-14, 601.