

# One City at a Time

## JOE MCCARTHY'S IMPACT ON STATE AND NATIONAL POLITICS

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### INTRODUCTION

The mid-twentieth century was a time of great success for the United States of America, but also a time of great anxiety. The country had come out of World War II victorious and began on a path to economic dominance but in that process developed a fear of a people who, as the government warned, would try and take this new life away. Those people of course were the communists, the complete ideological opposites of the everyday American, or so they thought. This fear affected everyone from elected officials to the rising middle class citizen. Children were brought up fearing nuclear attacks from the Soviet Union and practiced drills for such events in school, while adults went about their lives always looking over their shoulder for someone or something that might have been different. This is the climate that allowed a young man from Appleton to rise up and grip the nation.

The nation often remembers the infamous 205 communists in the State Department quote as being the words that propelled Joseph McCarthy, the junior senator from Wisconsin, into the national spotlight. Since winning his first national election in 1946, McCarthy had been a controversial figure in American national politics. He was the face of the anti-communist movement, and the man who pushed that movement to its social extremes. But the controversy that surrounded him extended to Wisconsin state politics, an aspect that is often overlooked.

### ABSTRACT

The goal of this project is to look at both the personal life and the early political career of Senator Joe McCarthy to show how a man that has been so villainized by his country had a lasting impact on his state's political culture. Most of the current research in this field has been focused on McCarthy's time in the Senate during the height of the anti-Communist movement. This ignores the valuable portion of McCarthy's political career which was spent in Wisconsin, not just winning elections, but changing the way elections were won. To do this I examined newspapers, campaign speeches and personal correspondences regarding his 1946 run for the Senate with the Republican Party. Through the study of McCarthy's elections and personal life, I conclude that he solidified the Republican Party base while also defeating a historically strong Progressive Party candidate in addition to changing the way elections are conducted in Wisconsin. To this day I can still see the McCarthy style campaign in my state when the candidates show up at my door asking for my support.

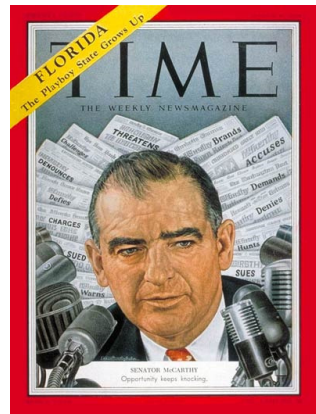


Figure 1.

### EARLY LIFE

Joseph Raymond McCarthy was born on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1908 in Grand Chute, Wisconsin. He grew up in the small town and attended grades one through eight in a one room schoolhouse while working on the family farm. After completing eighth grade, McCarthy went to try his hand at raising livestock. After a hard winter in which his coup of chickens was lost, he went on to attend high school in Manawa. McCarthy completed high school in an astonishing single year. He took his intellectual prowess to the post-secondary level at Marquette University. There he enrolled in law school graduating in just two years. He was part of the last class to be admitted to the state bar with only two years of undergraduate study.

McCarthy began his law career in Waupaca and then Shawno, working for small firms. He then ran for the Shawno County District Attorney as a Democrat. He lost and shifted to the Republican Party. His next run for office was in 1938 for the position of Tenth Circuit Court Judge. He attacked his opponent personally and made many voter contacts, setting the tone for future elections. He set up his base in Appleton where he stayed until he enlisted in the Marines. He was injured on a transport flight over the Pacific, a fact he used often in his campaigns. He returned home to Wisconsin as a war hero and had his eyes set on the next challenge of his career: the U.S. Senate.

1946 Primary (McCarthy-LaFollette)

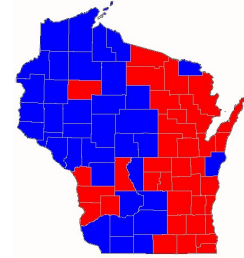


Figure 2

1946 General (McCarthy -McMurray)

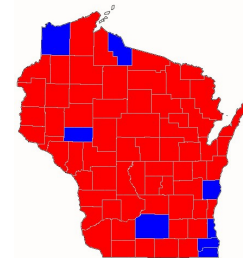


Figure 3

1957 Special (Kohler-Proxmire)

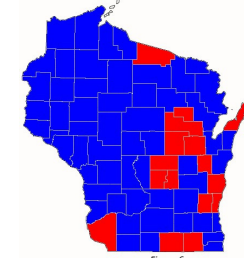


Figure 6

That type of conversation was held many times throughout the state with factory workers, shopkeepers, and businessmen alike.

1952 Primary (McCarthy-Schmitt)

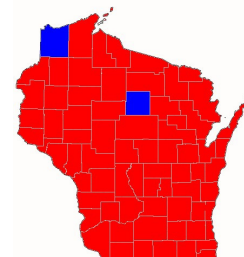


Figure 4

1952 General (McCarthy-Fairchild)

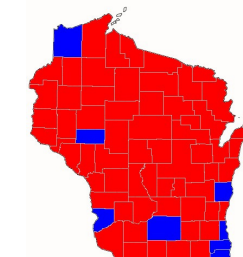


Figure 5

### 1946 PRIMARY ELECTION

In 1946 Joseph McCarthy declared his intention to run for the seat of United States Senator, which was currently being held by local legend Robert LaFollette Junior. Joe McCarthy was able to defeat Robert LaFollette Jr. in the primary election for the following reasons: First, LaFollette was spending considerably less and less time in the state since taking over his father's seat after a special election in 1926. Second, McCarthy was a very personal campaigner. He took the time to stop and talk to the people of the state while learning (and even remembering) something personal about them. Finally, McCarthy was able to give the Republican Party someone to unite behind, against a singular enemy (LaFollette) and his former Progressive Party.

The Republicans in the state expressed their dislike for their sitting Senator at their state convention. Delegates were recorded having said that they "want two Senators from Wisconsin again."

This is in reference to the fact that LaFollette spend so much time in Washington, which gave a feeling of disconnectedness to his constituents.

McCarthy had more going for him than just LaFollette's absence. His aggressive, personal campaign style, coupled with his frequent voter contacts endeared him to many voters. He attacked LaFollette on his Washington presence, possible war profiteering, and his ties to the Progressive Party. In regards to his voter contact, a small farmer recalls his first time meeting the Senator. McCarthy had approached the man's house and began petting his dog and talking with the children playing in the yard. He then surprised the farmer by knowing his name and spent time asking about his livestock and crops. He then asked if the man would let him milk a cow.

### Conclusion

When Joe McCarthy's future as an anti-communist is set aside, his political beginnings are nothing short of remarkable. However, by his career's end, his entire image had collapsed in an alcohol filled spiral out of the Senate. He will be forever linked with anti-Communism, but it is important to also remember that it was McCarthy that changed the way elections are handled both in Wisconsin and in the United States, by engaging and his constituents on a personal level. His actions as a Senator have had great impacts, both positive and negative, on the course of history in this country and deserve to be studied equally by scholars across the board.

### REFERENCES

Figure 1. Baker, E. H. (1954, March 8). Sen. Joseph McCarthy [Digital image]. Retrieved April 13, 2016, from <http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19540308,0,0.html>  
Figure 2-6. Wisconsin [County Map of Wisconsin-2012 Census Publications]. (2012). Retrieved April 13, 2016, from [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online\\_Resources/County\\_Profile/Wisconsin](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/County_Profile/Wisconsin)