**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 cultural extremes. But the controversy that surrounded him extended to Wisconsin state politics, an aspect that is often overlooked.

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**Figure 2**

Joseph Raymond McCarthy was born on November 8th, 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 coop 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 Shawano, working for small firms. He then ran for the Shawano 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 Ninth 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.

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 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 1936. Second, McCarthy was an 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.

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

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**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.

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**REFERENCES**


Figure 5: Wisconsin County Map of Wisconsin 2012 Census Population. (2012). Retrieved April 14, 2016, from http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/County_Profile/Wisconsin