

OPINION



21st Century McCarthyism:

Intimidation and character assassination

BY PETER MONTGOMERY

Fifty years ago, the U.S. Senate voted to censure Wisconsin Sen. Joe McCarthy, who achieved notoriety in his time for a ferocious campaign against supposed communist infiltration of the U.S. government.

The Wisconsin Republican played on the era's fears of global communism beginning with a speech in West Virginia, in which he falsely claimed to have a list of 205 people in the State Department known to be members of the Communist Party.

For nearly four years, he built power and a massive national following by exploiting the fear of communism, destroying the lives and careers of many along the way.

McCarthy's irresponsible campaign, boosted by conservative think tanks, media figures, and some clergy, brought down sitting senators and intimidated even President Dwight D. Eisenhower and his advisors.

McCarthy was only able to do as much damage as he did -- and ruin as many lives as he did -- because too many other public officials knew

what he was doing was wrong, but were unwilling to stand up to him.



Today, right-wing pundits, think tanks, activists, and some Republican Party officials are taking McCarthyism to new heights. Together, they engage in character assassination and challenge the loyalty and patriotism of their targets, with rhetoric aimed at President Barack Obama such as, "I don't know whose side he's on."

doesn't appear to love America." This outlandish claim is based on the fact that Chen expressed concern following the 9/11 attacks that many would place the blame on innocent Muslim Americans.

They use guilt by association to attack the patriotism and integrity of targets who opposes them or their political goals.

After engineering a public drubbing of ACORN, including Sen. John McCain accusing ACORN of "maybe destroying the fabric of

Some of their most egregious attacks were targeted to innocent Muslim interns on Capitol Hill, who four Republican members of Congress warned could be "spies."

Like McCarthy's attack on President Harry Truman's Secretary of Defense, Gen. George Marshall, who McCarthy accused of being part of a "great conspiracy" to "diminish the United States in world affairs" and "to weaken us militarily," right-wing leaders today are impugning the integrity and patriotism of military leaders they disagree with.

Recently, Pennsylvania state Rep. Daryl Metcalfe blasted veterans who disagree with his opposition to climate change legislation, calling them, "a traitor to the oath he or she took to defend the Constitution of our great nation!"

McCarthy was finally exposed in the televised Army-McCarthy hearings in 1954 as a reckless and vicious bully. The full Senate eventually voted overwhelmingly to condemn him.

Who will stand up to the Glenn Becks and Rush Limbaughs who are carrying on McCarthy's legacy of political intimidation and character assassination?

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Right-wing pundits, think tanks, activists, and some Republican Party officials are taking McCarthyism to new heights.

The right wing has seized on the "elites vs. real Americans" theme, charging that America is threatened from within by "elites" within the Obama administration and the media who are willing to subvert America's interests.

For example, a Washington Times editorial attacked Obama's nominee to a judicial seat on the Northern District of California, Judge Edward Chen, saying "Another day, another Obama nominee who

democracy" during a televised debate during the 2008 election season, the right wing has tried to use even the most marginal relationships to the organization as a means of disqualifying people for public service.

Conservatives attacked judicial nominee David Hamilton for canvassing for ACORN for one month while he was 22, as if it were a major portion of his career--never mind that it was 30 years ago.



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