



# Shooting Star: The Brief Arc of Joe McCarthy

*Tom Wicker*

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Joe McCarthy first became visible to the nation on February 9, 1950, when he delivered a Lincoln Day address to local Republicans in Wheeling, West Virginia. That night he declared, "I have here in my hand a list of 205 [members of the Communist Party] still working and shaping policy in the State Department." Anticommunism was already a cause embraced by the Republican Party as a whole; McCarthy tapped into this current and turned it into a flood. Little more than five years later, after countless hearings and stormy speeches and after incalculable damage to ordinary Americans and the nation itself, McCarthy's Senate colleagues voted sixty-seven to twenty-two to censure him for his reckless accusations and fabrications. We know today that not one prosecution resulted from McCarthy's investigations into communists in the U.S. government.

Journalist Tom Wicker examines McCarthy's ambition and record, attempting to discover the motivation for his demagoguery.

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