

Joe McCarthy's Oversight Abuses

For use with the Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy's [Oversight Snapshots](#)

Comprehension Questions

- 1) What is the role of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations? What acronym is used to identify this committee?

- 2) What groups of people did McCarthy target during his campaign and investigations?

- 3) What tactics did McCarthy use during his time as chair of PSI?

- 4) What factors contributed to McCarthy's loss of power?

- 5) What changes were made to Congressional Investigations because of McCarthy's actions? What protections for Congressional witnesses were put into place?

Discussion Questions

1. What else was happening in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s that allowed for the "Red Scare" to be so effective? Why do you think we hear less about the "Lavender Scare"?
2. What is the message of the political cartoon on page 2 titled "You Mean I'm Supposed to Stand on That?" and who is its intended audience?
3. Describe the process of oversight as it was used by McCarthy? Were these investigations in his jurisdiction?
4. Who really had the power to stop McCarthy?



Joe McCarthy's Oversight Abuses TEACHER FACING

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Comprehension Questions

1) What is the role of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations? What acronym is used to identify this committee?

Answer: This subcommittee was tasked with studying and investigating cooperation with the rules, regulations, and laws across many areas including Congress, individuals, and companies. This committee was commonly referred to as the PSI.

2) What groups of people did McCarthy target during his campaign and investigations?

Answer: McCarthy targeted suspected Communists, academics, people in the LGBTQ+ community, people in the entertainment business, and eventually his peers in the US government and US military.

3) What tactics did McCarthy use during his time as chair of PSI?

Answer: McCarthy denied other members of the PSI access to information, provided inadequate notice of hearings and meetings, and refused Democrats on the PSI to hire their own staff. He also publicly targeted academics, libraries, and radio stations. Following Eisenhower's Executive Order 10450 that reopened a closed investigation into a suspected spy ring, McCarthy held closed door meetings, questioned Army employees, and then released exaggerated information to the press and public about his findings.

4) What factors contributed to McCarthy's loss of power?

Answer: By allowing the public to see the hearings in their entirety, PSI members limited McCarthy's ability to manipulate the facts. The public was able to see McCarthy bully witnesses, use doctored evidence, and make baseless accusations about government and military employees. In 1954, Edward Murrow dedicated an entire evening program of the news to condemning McCarthyism.

5) What changes were made to Congressional Investigations because of McCarthy's actions? What protections for Congressional witnesses were put into place?

Answer:

- *PSI Chair and Ranking Member must agree to an investigation*
- *Minority members are allowed to hire their own staff*
- *All PSI members are allowed access to all information obtained*
- *All committee members are required to respect the Constitutional rights of all hearing witnesses*

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