

Edward R. Murrow – McCarthy Era

The Broadcasts of
Edward R. Murrow:
An Appreciation of
The Man & His Words
A Resource for
Social Studies
teachers & students

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THE McCARTHY ERA (1954)



Sen. Joe McCarthy

[Background](#) on the McCarthy era Communist witch hunts

“To say that the Murrow broadcast of March 9, 1954 was the decisive blow against Senator McCarthy’s power is as inaccurate as it is to say that Joseph P. McCarthy, Republican, Wisconsin, single-handedly gave birth to McCarthyism. The disease was here long before he exploited it. Elmer Davis compared it to malaria and prescribed courage as the only antidote. What Murrow did was to administer

a strong dose of that medicine, then in short supply, and it was fitting that he did it on television, where the disease had reached epidemic proportions long before McCarthy became its chief carrier.” (Fred Friendly, from Chapter 2 “Due to Circumstances Beyond our Control..”)

Murrow’s most-celebrated piece was his 9 March 1954 (“See It Now”) telecast, in which he engaged Senator Joseph R. McCarthy in a program “told mainly in [McCarthy’s] own words and pictures.” In the aftermath of this episode, the descriptions of Edward R. Murrow and his tradition quickly began to transcend the more secular cast that appeared in response to his championing of democratic action and principles in Britain during World War II. In his review of the now legendary McCarthy program, for instance, New York Times’ TV critic Jack Gould reflected an ongoing canonization process when he wrote that “last week may be remembered as the week that broadcasting recaptured its soul.”

([Source](#))

[Transcript](#) of the broadcast “A Report on Senator Joseph R. McCarthy”

Listen: [Murrow on the McCarthy hearings](#)

See also the 2005 motion picture, [“Good Night, and Good Luck”](#) which portrays this period in American History.