Roy Cohn

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roy%20Cohn

Licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Text\_of\_Creative\_Commons\_Attribution-ShareAlike\_3.0\_Unported\_License

Roy Cohn

• Cohn was disbarred by the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court for unethical conduct in 1986, and died five weeks later from AIDS-related complications.

• As McCarthy's chief counsel, Cohn came to be closely associated with McCarthyism and its downfall.

• Roy Marcus Cohn (/koʊn/; February 20, 1927 – August 2, 1986) was an American lawyer best known for being Senator Joseph McCarthy's chief counsel during the Army–McCarthy hearings, in 1954, for assisting with McCarthy's investigations of suspected communists, as a top political fixer, and for being Donald Trump's mentor and personal lawyer.

Roy Marcus Cohn (/koʊn/; February 20, 1927 – August 2, 1986) was an American lawyer best known for being Senator Joseph McCarthy's chief counsel during the Army–McCarthy hearings, in 1954, for assisting with McCarthy's investigations of suspected communists, as a top political fixer, and for being Donald Trump's mentor and personal lawyer.

Born in New York City and educated at Columbia University, Cohn rose to prominence as a U.S. Department of Justice prosecutor at the espionage trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, which concluded with the Rosenbergs' executions in 1953. As McCarthy's chief counsel, Cohn came to be closely associated with McCarthyism and its downfall. He also represented and mentored Trump during his early business career.

Cohn was disbarred by the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court for unethical conduct in 1986, and died five weeks later from AIDS-related complications.

Early life and career

• Born to an observant Jewish family in the Bronx, New York City, Cohn was the only child of Dora (née Marcus; 1892–1967) and Judge Albert C. Cohn (1885–1959), who was influential in Democratic Party politics.

• Roy lived in his parents' home until his mother's death, after which he lived in New York, the District of Columbia, and Greenwich, Connecticut.

Born to an observant Jewish family in the Bronx, New York City, Cohn was the only child of Dora (née Marcus; 1892–1967) and Judge Albert C. Cohn (1885–1959), who was influential in Democratic Party politics. His great-uncle was Joshua Lionel Cowen, the founder and longtime owner of the Lionel Corporation, a manufacturer of toy trains. Roy lived in his parents' home until his mother's death, after which he lived in New York, the District of Columbia, and Greenwich, Connecticut.

After attending Horace Mann School and the Fieldston School, and completing studies at Columbia College in 1946, Cohn graduated from Columbia Law School at the age of 20. He had to wait until his 21st birthday to be admitted to the bar, and he used his family connections to obtain a position in the office of United States Attorney Irving Saypol in Manhattan the day he was admitted.

As an Assistant US Attorney in Saypol's Manhattan office, Cohn helped to secure convictions in a number of well-publicized trials of accused Soviet operatives. One of the first involved the prosecution of William Remington, a former Commerce Department employee who had been accused of espionage by KGB defector Elizabeth Bentley. Although an indictment for espionage could not be secured, Remington had denied his longtime membership in the Communist Party USA on two separate occasions and was convicted of perjury in two separate trials.

While working in Saypol's office, Cohn also helped prosecute 11 members of the American Communist Party for preaching the violent overthrow of the United States government, under the Smith Act.

Rosenberg trial

• Cohn's direct examination of Ethel's brother, David Greenglass, produced testimony that was central to the Rosenbergs' conviction and subsequent execution.

• Cohn played a prominent role in the 1951 espionage trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

• Cohn always took great pride in the Rosenberg verdict and claimed to have played an even greater part than his public role.

Cohn played a prominent role in the 1951 espionage trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. Cohn's direct examination of Ethel's brother, David Greenglass, produced testimony that was central to the Rosenbergs' conviction and subsequent execution. Greenglass testified that he had given the Rosenbergs classified documents from the Manhattan Project that had been stolen by Klaus Fuchs. Greenglass would later claim that he lied at the trial in order "to protect himself and his wife, Ruth, and that he was encouraged by the prosecution to do so." Cohn always took great pride in the Rosenberg verdict and claimed to have played an even greater part than his public role. He said in his autobiography that his own influence had led to both Chief Prosecutor Saypol and Judge Irving Kaufman being appointed to the case. He further said that Kaufman imposed the death penalty, based on his personal recommendation. If the ex parte discussions between a prosecutor and a judge outside the courtroom actually took place, they were improper.

In 2008, a co-conspirator in the case, Morton Sobell, who had served 18 years in prison, said that Julius had spied for the Soviets but that Ethel did not. However, in 2014, five historians who had published on the Rosenberg case wrote that Soviet documents show that "Ethel Rosenberg hid money and espionage paraphernalia for Julius, served as an intermediary for communications with his Soviet intelligence contacts, provided her personal evaluation of individuals Julius considered recruiting, and was present at meetings with his sources. They also demonstrate that Julius reported to the KGB that Ethel persuaded Ruth Greenglass to travel to New Mexico to recruit David as a spy."

There is a consensus among historians that Julius was guilty, and their trial was marred by clear judicial and legal improprieties— many on the part of Cohn —and that they should not have been executed. Distilling this consensus, Harvard Law School professor Alan Dershowitz wrote that the Rosenbergs were "guilty—and framed".

Senator Joseph McCarthy (left) chats with Cohn at the Army–McCarthy hearings

Work with Joseph McCarthy

• Cohn played a major role in McCarthy's crusade against Communism.

• That conflict, along with McCarthy's accusations of Communists in the defense department, led to the Army–McCarthy hearings of 1954, during which the Army charged Cohn and McCarthy with using improper pressure on Schine's behalf, and McCarthy and Cohn countercharged that the Army was holding Schine "hostage" in an attempt to squelch McCarthy's investigations into Communists in the Army.

• McCarthy hired Cohn as his chief counsel, choosing him over Robert Kennedy.

• After the Army–McCarthy hearings, Cohn resigned from McCarthy's staff and went into private practice.

The Rosenberg trial brought the 24-year-old Cohn to the attention of Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) director J. Edgar Hoover, who recommended him to Joseph McCarthy. McCarthy hired Cohn as his chief counsel, choosing him over Robert Kennedy. Cohn assisted McCarthy's work for the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, becoming known for his aggressive questioning of suspected Communists. Cohn preferred not to hold hearings in open forums, which went well with McCarthy's preference for holding "executive sessions" and "off-the-record" sessions away from the Capitol in order to minimize public scrutiny and to question witnesses with relative impunity. Cohn was given free rein in pursuit of many investigations, with McCarthy joining in only for the more publicized sessions.

Cohn played a major role in McCarthy's crusade against Communism. During the Lavender Scare, Cohn and McCarthy attempted to enhance anti-Communist fervor in the country by claiming that Communists overseas had convinced several closeted homosexuals employed by the US federal government to pass on important government secrets in exchange for keeping their sexuality secret. Convinced that the employment of homosexuals was now a threat to national security, President Dwight Eisenhower signed an executive order on April 29, 1953, to ban homosexuals from working in the federal government.

Cohn invited his friend G. David Schine, an anti-Communist propagandist, to join McCarthy's staff as a consultant. When Schine was drafted into the US Army in 1953, Cohn made repeated and extensive efforts to procure special treatment for Schine. He contacted military officials from the Secretary of the Army down to Schine's company commander and demanded that Schine be given light duties, extra leave, and exemption from an overseas assignment. At one point, Cohn is reported to have threatened to "wreck the Army" if his demands were not met. That conflict, along with McCarthy's accusations of Communists in the defense department, led to the Army–McCarthy hearings of 1954, during which the Army charged Cohn and McCarthy with using improper pressure on Schine's behalf, and McCarthy and Cohn countercharged that the Army was holding Schine "hostage" in an attempt to squelch McCarthy's investigations into Communists in the Army. During the hearings, a photograph of Schine was introduced, and Joseph N. Welch, the Army's attorney in the hearings, accused Cohn of doctoring the image to show Schine alone with Army Secretary Robert T. Stevens.

Although the findings of the hearings blamed Cohn, rather than McCarthy, they are widely considered an important element of McCarthy's disgrace. After the Army–McCarthy hearings, Cohn resigned from McCarthy's staff and went into private practice.

Legal career in New York

• After leaving McCarthy, Cohn had a 30-year career as an attorney in New York City.

• Although he was registered as a Democrat, Cohn supported most of the Republican presidents of his time and Republicans in major offices across New York.

• Cohn's other clients included retired Harvard Law School professor Alan Dershowitz who has referenced Cohn as "the quintessential fixer".

After leaving McCarthy, Cohn had a 30-year career as an attorney in New York City. His clients included Donald Trump; New York Yankees baseball club and New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner; Aristotle Onassis; Mafia figures Tony Salerno, Carmine Galante, and John Gotti; Studio 54 owners Steve Rubell and Ian Schrager; the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York, and Texas financier and philanthropist Shearn Moody, Jr. and Richard Dupont. Dupont, then 48, was convicted of aggravated harassment and attempted grand larceny for his extreme attempts at further representation by Cohn for a bogus claim to property ownership in a case against the actual owner of 644 Greenwich Street, Manhattan, where Dupont had operated Big Gym, and from where he had been evicted in January 1979.

He was known for his active social life, charitable giving, and combative personality. In the early 1960s he became a member of the John Birch Society and a principal figure in the Western Goals Foundation. Although he was registered as a Democrat, Cohn supported most of the Republican presidents of his time and Republicans in major offices across New York. He maintained close ties in conservative political circles, serving as an informal advisor to Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. Cohn's other clients included retired Harvard Law School professor Alan Dershowitz who has referenced Cohn as "the quintessential fixer".

Representation of Donald Trump and Rupert Murdoch

• Representing Trump, Cohn filed a countersuit against the government for $100 million, asserting that the charges were "irresponsible and baseless."

• In 1978, the Trump Organization was again in court for violating terms of the 1975 settlement; Cohn called the new charges "nothing more than a rehash of complaints by a couple of planted malcontents."

In 1971, businessman Donald Trump moved to Manhattan, where he became involved in large construction projects. In 1973, the Justice Department accused him of violating the Fair Housing Act in 39 of his properties. The government alleged that Trump's corporation quoted different rental terms and conditions and made false "no vacancy" statements to African Americans for apartments it managed in Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island.

Representing Trump, Cohn filed a countersuit against the government for $100 million, asserting that the charges were "irresponsible and baseless." The countersuit was unsuccessful. Trump settled the charges out of court in 1975, saying he was satisfied that the agreement did not "compel the Trump organization to accept persons on welfare as tenants unless as qualified as any other tenant." The corporation was required to send a bi-weekly list of vacancies to the New York Urban League, a civil rights group, and give the league priority for certain locations. In 1978, the Trump Organization was again in court for violating terms of the 1975 settlement; Cohn called the new charges "nothing more than a rehash of complaints by a couple of planted malcontents." Trump denied the charges.

Rupert Murdoch was a client, and Cohn repeatedly pressured President Ronald Reagan to further Murdoch's interests. He is credited with introducing Trump and Murdoch, in the mid-1970s, marking the beginning of what was to be a long, pivotal association between the two.

Lionel trains

• In 1963, Cohn was forced to resign from the company after losing a proxy fight.

• Cohn was the grandnephew of Joshua Lionel Cowen, founder of the Lionel model train company.

• In October 1959, Cohn and a group of investors stepped in and gained control of the company, having bought 200,000 of the firm's 700,000 shares, which were purchased by his syndicate from the Cowens and on the open market over a three-month period prior to the takeover.

• Under Cohn's leadership, Lionel was plagued by declining sales, quality-control problems, and huge financial losses.

Cohn was the grandnephew of Joshua Lionel Cowen, founder of the Lionel model train company. By 1959, Cowen and his son Lawrence had become involved in a family dispute over control of the company. In October 1959, Cohn and a group of investors stepped in and gained control of the company, having bought 200,000 of the firm's 700,000 shares, which were purchased by his syndicate from the Cowens and on the open market over a three-month period prior to the takeover. Under Cohn's leadership, Lionel was plagued by declining sales, quality-control problems, and huge financial losses. In 1963, Cohn was forced to resign from the company after losing a proxy fight.

Later career and disbarment

• Stone said Cohn gave him a suitcase that Stone avoided opening and, as instructed by Cohn, dropped it off at the office of a lawyer influential in Liberal Party circles.

• Federal investigations during the 1970s and 1980s charged Cohn three times with professional misconduct, including perjury and witness tampering.

Cohn aided Roger Stone in Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign in 1979–1980, helping Stone arrange for John B. Anderson to get the nomination of the Liberal Party of New York, a move that would help split the opposition to Reagan in the state. Stone said Cohn gave him a suitcase that Stone avoided opening and, as instructed by Cohn, dropped it off at the office of a lawyer influential in Liberal Party circles. Reagan carried the state with 46 percent of the vote. Speaking after the statute of limitations for bribery had expired, Stone said, "I paid his law firm. Legal fees. I don't know what he did for the money, but whatever it was, the Liberal party reached its right conclusion out of a matter of principle."

Federal investigations during the 1970s and 1980s charged Cohn three times with professional misconduct, including perjury and witness tampering. He was accused in New York of financial improprieties related to city contracts and private investments. He was acquitted of all charges. In 1986, a five-judge panel of the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court disbarred Cohn for unethical and unprofessional conduct, including misappropriation of clients' funds, lying on a bar application, and pressuring a client to amend his will. In this case in 1975, Cohn entered the hospital room of the dying, comatose Lewis Rosenstiel; the multi-millionaire founder of Schenley Industries, forced a pen to his hand and lifted it to the will in an attempt to make himself and Cathy Frank—Rosenstiel's granddaughter—beneficiaries. The resulting marks were determined in court to be indecipherable and in no way a valid signature.

Homosexuality

• Speculation about Cohn's sexuality intensified following his death from AIDS in 1986.

• Joseph Welch, the Army's attorney in the hearings, made an apparent reference to Cohn's homosexuality.

• When Cohn brought on G. David Schine as chief consultant to the McCarthy staff, speculation arose that Schine and Cohn had a sexual relationship.

When Cohn brought on G. David Schine as chief consultant to the McCarthy staff, speculation arose that Schine and Cohn had a sexual relationship. Speculation about Cohn's sexuality intensified following his death from AIDS in 1986. Although some historians have concluded the Schine–Cohn friendship was platonic, others state, based on the testimony of friends, that Cohn was gay. During the Army–McCarthy hearings, Cohn denied having any "special interest" in Schine or being bound to him "closer than to the ordinary friend." Joseph Welch, the Army's attorney in the hearings, made an apparent reference to Cohn's homosexuality. After asking a witness, at McCarthy's request, if a photo entered as evidence "came from a pixie", he defined "pixie" as "a close relative of a fairy". Though "pixie" was the name of a camera model name at the time, the comparison to "fairy", a derogatory term for a homosexual man, had clear implications. The people at the hearing recognized the slur and found it amusing; Cohn, however, later called the remark "malicious", "wicked", and "indecent."

In a 2008 article published in The New Yorker magazine, Jeffrey Toobin quotes Roger Stone: "Roy was not gay. He was a man who liked having sex with men. Gays were weak, effeminate. He always seemed to have these young blond boys around. It just wasn't discussed. He was interested in power and access." Stone worked with Cohn beginning with the Reagan campaign during the 1976 Republican Party presidential primaries.

Lavender scare

• McCarthy and Cohn were responsible for the firing of scores of gay men from government employment and strong-armed many opponents into silence using rumors of their homosexuality.

• Cohn and McCarthy targeted many government officials and cultural figures not only for suspected Communist sympathies, but also for alleged homosexuality.

Cohn and McCarthy targeted many government officials and cultural figures not only for suspected Communist sympathies, but also for alleged homosexuality. McCarthy and Cohn were responsible for the firing of scores of gay men from government employment and strong-armed many opponents into silence using rumors of their homosexuality. Former U.S. Senator Alan K. Simpson has written: "The so-called 'Red Scare' has been the main focus of most historians of that period of time. A lesser-known element … and one that harmed far more people was the witch-hunt McCarthy and others conducted against homosexuals."

Death

• He was buried in Union Field Cemetery in Queens, New York.

• In 1984, Cohn was diagnosed with AIDS and attempted to keep his condition secret while receiving experimental drug treatment.

• According to Roger Stone, Cohn's "absolute goal was to die completely broke and owing millions to the IRS.

In 1984, Cohn was diagnosed with AIDS and attempted to keep his condition secret while receiving experimental drug treatment. He participated in clinical trials of AZT, a drug initially synthesized to treat cancer but later developed as the first anti-HIV agent for AIDS patients. He insisted to his dying day that his disease was liver cancer. He died on August 2, 1986, in Bethesda, Maryland, of complications from AIDS, at the age of 59. According to Roger Stone, Cohn's "absolute goal was to die completely broke and owing millions to the IRS. He succeeded in that." He was buried in Union Field Cemetery in Queens, New York.

Media portrayals

• Cohn was the subject of Matt Tyrnauer's documentary Where's My Roy Cohn?

• In the early 1990s, Cohn was one of two subjects of Ron Vawter's one-man show Roy Cohn/Jack Smith; Cohn's part was written by Gary Indiana.

A dramatic and controversial man, Cohn inspired many dramatic fictional portrayals after his death. Probably the most famous is his fictionalized role in Tony Kushner's Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes, in which Cohn is portrayed as a closeted, power-hungry hypocrite who is haunted by the ghost of Ethel Rosenberg as he lies dying of AIDS, a disease the character insisted be called "liver cancer". In the initial Broadway production, the role was played by Ron Leibman; in the 2010 Off-Broadway revival by the Signature Theatre Company in Manhattan, the role was reprised by Frank Wood; in the HBO miniseries version of Kushner's play, Cohn is played by Al Pacino. Nathan Lane played Cohn in the 2017 Royal National Theatre production and the 2018 Broadway production.

Cohn is a character in Kushner's one-act play, G. David Schine in Hell.

Cohn is portrayed by James Woods in the 1992 biopic Citizen Cohn, by Joe Pantoliano in Robert Kennedy and His Times (1985), and by George Wyner in Tail Gunner Joe (1977). Cohn is portrayed by actor David Moreland in The X-Files episode "Travelers", in which an elderly former FBI agent speaks to Agent Fox Mulder about the early years of the McCarthy era and the beginning of the X-Files.

In the early 1990s, Cohn was one of two subjects of Ron Vawter's one-man show Roy Cohn/Jack Smith; Cohn's part was written by Gary Indiana.

Cohn was the subject of Matt Tyrnauer's documentary Where's My Roy Cohn? (2019).

Bibliography

• Cohn, Roy (1981).

• Roy Cohn on Divorce: Words to the Wise and Not So Wise.

• Cohn, Roy (1986).

• Cohn, Roy (1968).

• Cohn, Roy (1972).

• Cohn, Roy (1954).

Cohn, Roy (1954). Only a Miracle Can Save America From the Red Conspiracy. Wanderer Printing Co..mw-parser-output cite.citation{font-style:inherit}.mw-parser-output .citation q{quotes:"\"""\"""'""'"}.mw-parser-output .citation .cs1-lock-free a{background:url("//upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/6/65/Lock-green.svg/9px-Lock-green.svg.png")no-repeat;background-position:right .1em center}.mw-parser-output .citation .cs1-lock-limited a,.mw-parser-output .citation .cs1-lock-registration a{background:url("//upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/d/d6/Lock-gray-alt-2.svg/9px-Lock-gray-alt-2.svg.png")no-repeat;background-position:right .1em center}.mw-parser-output .citation .cs1-lock-subscription a{background:url("//upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/aa/Lock-red-alt-2.svg/9px-Lock-red-alt-2.svg.png")no-repeat;background-position:right .1em center}.mw-parser-output .cs1-subscription,.mw-parser-output .cs1-registration{color:#555}.mw-parser-output .cs1-subscription span,.mw-parser-output .cs1-registration span{border-bottom:1px dotted;cursor:help}.mw-parser-output .cs1-ws-icon a{background:url("//upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/4/4c/Wikisource-logo.svg/12px-Wikisource-logo.svg.png")no-repeat;background-position:right .1em center}.mw-parser-output code.cs1-code{color:inherit;background:inherit;border:inherit;padding:inherit}.mw-parser-output .cs1-hidden-error{display:none;font-size:100%}.mw-parser-output .cs1-visible-error{font-size:100%}.mw-parser-output .cs1-maint{display:none;color:#33aa33;margin-left:0.3em}.mw-parser-output .cs1-subscription,.mw-parser-output .cs1-registration,.mw-parser-output .cs1-format{font-size:95%}.mw-parser-output .cs1-kern-left,.mw-parser-output .cs1-kern-wl-left{padding-left:0.2em}.mw-parser-output .cs1-kern-right,.mw-parser-output .cs1-kern-wl-right{padding-right:0.2em}

Cohn, Roy (1968). McCarthy. New American Library.

Cohn, Roy (1972). A Fool for a Client: My Struggle Against the Power of a Public Prosecutor. Dell Publishing. ISBN 978-0-440-02667-9.

Cohn, Roy (1981). How to Stand up for Your Rights and Win!. Devin-Adair Publishers. ISBN 978-0-8159-5723-2.

Cohn, Roy (1986). Roy Cohn on Divorce: Words to the Wise and Not So Wise. Random House. ISBN 978-0-394-54383-3.

References

Further reading

• Citizen Cohn; The Life and Times of Roy Cohn.

• "Roy Cohn".

• The New York Times.

• The Autobiography of Roy Cohn.

• Zion, Sidney & Cohn, Roy (1988).

• Cohn, Roy Marcus (1969).

• Reminiscences of Roy Marcus Cohn: Oral History, 1969.

Cohn, Roy Marcus (1969). Interviewed by Herbert S. Parmet (ed.). Reminiscences of Roy Marcus Cohn: Oral History, 1969. New York, New York: Columbia University Libraries. p. 15.

Von Hoffman, Nicholas (1988). Citizen Cohn; The Life and Times of Roy Cohn. Doubleday. ISBN 978-0-385-23690-4.

Ward, Geoffrey C. (1988). "Roy Cohn". American Heritage Magazine. Archived from the original on November 15, 2007.

Wolfe, Tom (April 3, 1988). "Dangerous Obsessions". The New York Times.

Zion, Sidney & Cohn, Roy (1988). The Autobiography of Roy Cohn. St Martins. ISBN 978-0-312-91402-8.

External links

• Roy Cohn's square on the AIDS Memorial Quilt

• Roy Cohn on IMDb

• Roy Cohn at Find a Grave

Roy Cohn on IMDb

Roy Cohn at Find a Grave

Roy Cohn's square on the AIDS Memorial Quilt