August 1, 1953

Dear Judge Cohn:

I have been slow to answer your letter of July 21st. It is distressing for me to criticize a son to his father, even when his father's questions call for answers which must be either untrue or unpleasant. That distress is enhanced by the respect I have had for you, and by my sympathy with you and Mrs. Cohn for the pain caused by the condemnation which your son's activities have earned. However, matching the candor of your own letter, I shall try to reply first to the questions you asked and then to a question you might well have asked.

(1) You say that your son "did not seek the office as Chief Counsel to the McCarthy Investigating Committee". He certainly accepted an invitation from a man already notorious for unprincipled ambition, indifference to truth, and sweeping, indiscriminate denunciation. He who knowingly furthers such a man's designs and comes such a man's methods assumes a share of the responsibility.

(2) My statement that your son and his companion "turned all our embassies and foreign missions upside down, and ... presumed to sit in solemn judgment on the loyalty of our Ambassador to Great Britain" was based on press reports, which have not been denied; on letters I have received from reputable witnesses; and on statements made to me by persons who had visited abroad in the wake of your son's tour. These sources bear out the remark of one responsible American journalist on the spot, that the tour had done "more and firmer" harm to the prestige of the United States than anything else had in some time. As for the reported comment, after a brief interview with Winthrop Alarich, our Ambassador to Great Britain, that "for a man who has been on the job only a few months he seemed to have a very good grasp of the problems", the presumptuous solemnity of the phrase was a matter more for ridicule than for indignation.

(3) I remain certain that most American Jews are anything but proud of the two young men. I do not profess, and I never have professed, to speak for all Jews; no one person can do that. I have not, as you inquired, "interviewed most of the members of our religious faith". My certainty comes from the volume of the mail I have received on the subject from people of our faith, from the critical statements of Jewish organizations reported in the press, from reported statements of individual Jews, and from my faith in the good sense and patriotism of American Jewry.
I take no pleasure in having to write a letter like this. I wish I were able to write you in praise of your son, who I am told is a young man of exceptional ability and promise. Permit me to express the hope that he will begin to fulfill that promise by using his ability in the proper service of his country, instead of promoting a method and an attitude which, if left unchecked, would subvert America's tradition and undermine America's future.

And this suggests an answer to the question that you did not ask, namely, why I do not share the "great admiration and respect" which you say you and your son have for Senator McCarthy. My objections are not so much to the man -- a minor nuisance -- as to the ism, a major danger. Perhaps you condone or ignore the disregard for the standards of public office; the privileged, irresponsible tirades against General Marshall and other patriotic public servants; the seeds of mutual suspicion sown among the American people; the distraction of the executive, the legislature, and much of the country from its proper business. What you cannot condone or ignore, it seems to me, is the harm that the man and the ism have done to the prestige and moral authority of America, at home and abroad -- harm that surely surpasses the accomplishments, and probably outstrips the ambitions, of the Kremlin's most optimistic propagandists.

The greatness of our nation rests on spiritual, not material, foundations. If millions have left the homes of their ancestors to come here to live, and other millions have wished they could; if our every word and deed are watched the world over with eagerness and anxiety; if the very name "America" kindles the hearts of the humble and the oppressed in all lands -- it is not because we own bombs, or dollars, or skyscrapers. It is because we have cherished, and been known for cherishing, a noble ideal -- the ideal of freedom and the dignity of man. I have faith that, in spite of the twin attacks of Soviet Communism and McCarthyism, we are strong enough to hold to that ideal and keep our place in the forefront of the progress of man.

Sincerely yours,