

JOHN MCCAIN THE NARCISSISTIC CARPETBAGGER



Michael Leahy, in today's Washington Post, has an extended front

page article on the genesis of John McCain's political career and consuming lust for the Presidency of the United States. Previous reports here have delineated McCain's narcissistic and arrogant willingness to say or do anything that will benefit his interest of the moment. Leahy fleshes out the personal history behind McCain's craven thirst for power.

But McCain had the most audacious dream of all, and he shared his vision one day with a group of fellow POWs. "He was talking about his father to us and then he said: 'I want to be president of the United States. Someday I'm going to be president,' "

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Not at all dissuaded, McCain offered his view on the meaning of real command, shaped in part by his father's perspective on genuine power. He wanted to be the one who made the decisions, McCain said, and his father had taught him that even such impressive-sounding jobs as chief of naval operations, the service's highest uniformed position, didn't always provide that opportunity.

The only job that guaranteed it was that of president, McCain believed.

"Pursuit of command," as McCain often referred to it, was an ethos bordering on obsession in his family, and it was in Vietnam that he embraced it. But though McCain was the son and grandson of admirals, he decided his pursuit would be in another arena – politics, where he would come to define success not in terms of ideas or legislation but in fulfilling his family's ideals of leadership and character.

That has always been it with McCain; he craved the power, but didn't give a damn about actually knowing, working on or fulfilling the duties of an elected political servant. To John Sidney McCain III, he has always been the entitled master, never a dutiful public servant. It is his due as a McCain. And if you get in his way, he bullies, attacks and vilifies; it is his way, always has been.

Leahy's article paints a picture of McCain as a man both shallow and hollow, compulsively driven to measure up to both his father and grandfather, both four star command Navy Admirals. The problem was, John Sidney McCain III possessed neither the brains, dedication nor other "right stuff" of his forebears. They were men of distinction; he was a belligerent, self indulgent screw up from early childhood. He was never, never going to attain the command rank of Admiral, much less a four star one. Had McCain not recklessly gotten shot down over Hanoi and been a POW, for five and a half years as he relentlessly reminds us, he may well have been sent packing by the Navy.

So McCain set off to gain the political power and Presidency to which he laid gilded claim. He initially set his beady sights on a Florida district held by a firmly ensconced democrat, Charlie Bennett, but

Republican leaders, citing private polls, told McCain he needed to serve in another office and build his political profile before running for Congress. But McCain was insistent. ... "Well, if I can't beat him, then I'll find somebody else I can whip."

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McCain spent more time with Tower and Cohen, plotting strategy for a 1982 House race. But where should McCain run? "We discussed Florida, because he'd been a resident there," Cohen remembers. "But the thinking became that he should run in Arizona."

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Arizona also appeared attractive for reasons that had nothing to do with ideology: Its population was booming ... a whole new bloc of voters that McCain and his allies believed would be unmoved by charges that a political upstart from out of state was a carpetbagger.

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In early 1981, a recommendation from Cohen led to the first meeting between McCain and political strategist Jay Smith ... But Smith was skeptical about an outsider moving to Arizona and running for a congressional seat that didn't yet exist. "Where in Arizona are you going to do this?" Smith asked him, as the strategist recalls.

" 'We'll figure that out,' " McCain answered.

Of course; because he is John Sidney McCain III, and the angry boy is simply entitled to whatever he lays claim to, without the usual requisite work, knowledge and effort, and woe be anyone that gets in his way. But McCain was a carpetbagger, and the worst kind of narcissistic opportunistic carpetbagger at that.

Jay Smith and other friends remember that McCain's entry into politics

preceded his discovery of a complete set of policy positions, particularly on social and economic matters. While laying the groundwork for the 1982 congressional race, he told Smith that he didn't have a stance on abortion. When Smith responded that he needed to have one, McCain said he could see both sides. "He wasn't an issues guy," Smith recalls. "Abortion wasn't an issue that he cared about or had thought much about. . . . We went through that on a lot of different things."

Friends dating to his days as a midshipman at the Naval Academy can't remember McCain ever espousing a political philosophy, so it wasn't a surprise that ideology played almost no role in propelling him into politics.

Leahy's Post article describes how McCain was hoping to be able to run in a new Congressional district Arizona was gaining due to redistricting from population growth, but that was not to be.

In a blow to McCain's grand plan, Arizona's new congressional seat had been placed in the Tucson area rather than Phoenix. But McCain and Smith still entertained a last hope. For a year, Arizona political observers had speculated that John Rhodes, the dean of the state's House delegation, might be close to retiring from Congress. If Rhodes were to step aside, his solidly Republican 1st District seat in Maricopa County would be ideal turf for McCain.

As a native Arizonan around at that time and very familiar with the Rhodes family, I can tell you that is exactly what happened. But there is much more to this story that Leahy does not relate. Rhodes had been contemplating retirement, but had not made his mind up. In

fact, the word was that he was reconsidering and leaning toward one more term, which would have been a boon to the state as Rhodes was a 15 term living institution in Congress and had been minority leader for 3 or four terms; a great man, of incredible stature and accomplishment, still healthy and able to serve.

John J. Rhodes was everything to Arizona that the entitled John McCain has never been; a man who cared about his constituents, who cared about the health and future of the state, and who worked his butt off tirelessly to serve it. John Rhodes was a man, unlike John McCain, who had earned his place and the time and space to determine for himself whether he would continue on in his hometown seat. But that didn't work for John McCain; it wasn't convenient for his unbridled ambition. There was a deadline for establishing residency in a district so he could announce his candidacy and that was the one he wanted. But He had to know where he was going to run so he could hastily buy a house in that district to plop his carpetbag down in.

John Sidney McCain III wanted his district, and he wanted it now, and John Rhodes was in his way. As has been his lifelong method, McCain became infuriated and threw a belligerent tantrum. McCain started badgering Rhodes as to whether he was going to retire or not. It did not endear McCain to Rhodes in the least, nor the longtime Arizonans who knew of McCain's disrespectful antics. Rhodes got so pissed at him that he refused to tell McCain he was retiring and kept telling him he was thinking about running again, even though he had pretty much decided to retire.

Legend has it that it got so bad Barry Goldwater had a little chat with McCain about backing off and giving Rhodes his space and some respect. McCain, of course, ignored him too because he was in a hurry. McCain really wanted Rhodes' seat, but there was no way he could formally announce before Rhodes announced his retirement. McCain had at least one, maybe two, other lesser

options, for a place to make his carpetbag run from, that he was looking at; the new district formed in the more Democratic Tucson area, and at least one, if not more, outside of Arizona. But he needed to get residency wherever it was going to be, and he was not willing to wait for two more years if Rhodes decided to serve one last term. So John Sidney McCain III disrespected both John Rhodes and Barry Goldwater, the living legends of such character and stature that they were the ones called on by Congress to go up to the White House and tell Richard Nixon the gig was up in Watergate and that he had to resign. McCain just bulldozed his way into that which he felt he was entitled to, as he always has throughout his nepotistic, silver spoon, legacy bequeathed life.

Rhodes finally relented and announced his decision to retire. That still left the gilded McCain with one little problem. He didn't even live in the district he had just bullied Rhodes out of; he needed a house. Gilded though he was, McCain didn't have the money to buy a house on the spot, but the fortunate son had a beer heiress sugarmomma wife who did. As Leahy relates in the Post:

Smith was monitoring a Rhodes news conference while talking on the phone with McCain. Learning that Rhodes would not be seeking reelection, the two men shouted excitedly. Later that same day, during another phone conversation, Smith could hear McCain talking to his wife in the background. "Did you buy the house?" McCain asked her.

In the next instant, McCain told Smith, "Cindy just bought us a house in the 1st District."

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McCain ended up having three primary-election opponents, but he enjoyed the advantages that counted most in the race: the largest campaign war chest; support from his father-in-law's and

wife's well-heeled friends and associates, including a Phoenix real estate developer named Charles Keating, who would help to raise more than \$100,000; a skillful TV ad campaign from Jay Smith that featured a clip of a limping McCain taking his first steps on American soil after his release from Hanoi; glowing video testimonials from national figures such as Cohen and Tower, the latter of whom came into the 1st District to campaign for McCain; and flattering media attention.

And thus was born the illusory political legend of John Sidney McCain III. As shallow and hollow then as it is now. Natives and other longtime Arizonans remember the arrogant and shameful way McCain started his political career here. They know that John McCain doesn't give a damn about anything but himself; never has and never will. Barry Goldwater distrusted and disliked him from the moment of his tawdry bullrush of John Rhodes.

"Goldwater said privately that McCain was a carpetbagger," recalls Nixon White House counsel John Dean, a close family friend of the Goldwaters.

Go read the entire article by Michael Leahy, it is excellent. Then couple that with Tim Dickenson's Rolling Stone tome on McCain and the Los Angeles Times frightening history of McCain as a Naval pilot. John Sidney McCain III is not the man he holds himself out to be, and he never was. He is an angry, narcissistic curmudgeon who should never be given the privilege of unpacking his tattered carpetbag in the hallowed halls of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW.