

Cultural Daily

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Where's My Roy Cohn?

Allon Schoener · Wednesday, September 18th, 2019

For anyone who was on the scene in New York in the 1950s through the 1980s, Roy Cohn was an inescapable malevolent presence. He was juicy copy for all of the gossip columns and became a person of influence connected to virtually every New York City power base: civic government, banking, investment, law, politics, real estate, media, journalism, police and the mafia. These associations were never the result of good deeds done on behalf of a worthy person or cause; they were the consequence of his ability to transform the law into his personal agent rather than serving the public good.

That he was brilliant is inescapable. Cohn graduated from Columbia Law School at the age of twenty and is known to have argued a case in court for seven hours without notes. He first rose to prominence in 1953 as a [U.S. Department of Justice](#) prosecutor at the espionage trial of [Julius and Ethel Rosenberg](#), which concluded with the Rosenbergs' executions. He was proud of being a Jew who called for the death of the accused Rosenbergs, also Jewish, for their highly politicized and flimsily demonstrated espionage. In 1954, he became chief counsel to Senator Joseph McCarthy's US Senate anti-Communist witch hunting committee which sought to demonstrate that there was a monstrous American communist plot to undermine our government. No proof was found, but many professional lives were ruined as a consequence of false accusations. The vicious behavior of Cohn and McCarthy is brilliantly demonstrated in Emile de Antonio's *Point of Order*, a ten-hour distillation of the televised U.S. Senate McCarthy anti-communist hearings, which rests in the pantheon of great documents of American history.



Respect for The Law was not a Cohn family value. His maternal grandfather spent time in a New York State prison for fraudulent business practices. Cut from the same cloth, Roy Cohn learned to disregard virtue at the kitchen table. He created a vicious playbook that provided benefits for himself and his loyal clients. "Always attack, never admit blame, nor apologize, use favors and fear to support your objectives, expertly manipulate the media or gain advantage and destroy your opponents ... lie invalidating the idea of truth ... inflame prejudice of the crowd by shamelessly attacking defenseless people." Nor was he capable of personal truth. Known to be homosexual, he denied the possibility of his dying from AIDS.



On June 24, 1986, he was disbarred by the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court in Manhattan. The decision, part of a four-year battle between Cohn and the New York legal

establishment, upheld a judicial disciplinary panel's charges of "dishonesty, fraud, deceit and misrepresentation." It went beyond the panel's recommendation in finding that, in December 1975, Cohn had entered the Florida hospital room of dying multimillionaire Lewis Rosenstiel, founder of the Schenley Distillers empire. While Rosenstiel, 84, was senile, semi-comatose and drugged, Cohn held Rosenstiel's hand to sign a document naming Cohn a co-executor of Rosenstiel's will after falsely telling him that the document dealt with his divorce,

In addition to generating notoriety, his evil deeds created personal wealth. He owned two Rolls Royce limousines, one white, one black, and a yacht on which he entertained his friends and family. He had a five-bedroom home in Greenwich, Connecticut, designed to look like a stone cottage from the Cotswold area of England. It was the scene of annual summer parties in the 1970s and 1980s that drew hundreds of celebrities, politicians and power brokers north from Manhattan.



It is not unfair to ask why our society can germinate people of Cohn's repute, bestowing them with power and wealth. Hopefully, Matt Trynauer's brilliant *Where's My Roy Cohn?* will be recognized for its relevance in demonstrating Cohn's insidious influence on his young protege, Donald Trump, and the damage that this team of demons has inflicted on our society.



Distributed by Sony Classics, "Where's My Roy Cohn?" opens in the Los Angeles area at these theaters:

- 9/20 – Los Angeles – The Landmark
- 9/27 – Encino – Town Center 5
- 9/27 – Pasadena Laemmle's Playhouse 7
- 9/27 – Costa Mesa – Regency South Coast Village
- 10/11 – Burbank – Burbank 16

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