



Alger Hiss's Looking-Glass Wars: The Covert Life of a Soviet Spy

G. Edward White

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For decades, a great number of Americans saw Alger Hiss as an innocent victim of McCarthyism--a distinguished diplomat railroaded by an ambitious Richard Nixon. And even as the case against Hiss grew over time, his dignified demeanor helped create an aura of innocence that outshone the facts in many minds. Now G. Edward White deftly draws together the countless details of Hiss's life--from his upper middle-class childhood in Baltimore and his brilliant success at Harvard to his later career as a self-made martyr to McCarthyism--to paint a fascinating portrait of a man whose life was devoted to perpetuating a lie. White catalogs the evidence that proved Hiss's guilt, from Whittaker Chambers's famous testimony, to copies of State Department documents typed on Hiss's typewriter, to Allen Weinstein's groundbreaking investigation in the 1970s. The author then explores the central conundrums of Hiss's life: Why did this talented lawyer become a Communist and a Soviet spy? Why did he devote so much of his life to an extensive public campaign to deny his espionage? And how, without producing any new evidence, did he convince many people that he was innocent? White offers a compelling analysis of Hiss's behavior in the face of growing evidence of his guilt, revealing how this behavior fit into an ongoing pattern of denial and duplicity in his life.

The story of Alger Hiss is in part a reflection of Cold War America--a time of ideological passions, partisan battles, and secret lives. It is also a story that transcends a particular historical era--a story about individuals who choose to engage in espionage for foreign powers and the secret worlds they choose to conceal. In White's skilled hands, the life of Alger Hiss comes to illuminate both of those themes.

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