

Lawyer Hiss

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In deciding that Alger Hiss could be readmitted to the Massachusetts Bar, the state's Supreme Judicial Court acted on broad humane principles which do credit both to the court and to the law.

Though it found that Mr. Hiss "is presently of good and moral character and . . . would almost certainly not commit any serious crimes if admitted to the bar," the State Board of Bar Overseers had earlier insisted that readmission was inappropriate while he continued to assert his innocence of the perjury charge of which he was convicted twenty-five years ago.

The court rejected that view, holding that the board's "harsh, unforgiving position is foreign to our system of reasonable, merciful justice." This measured judgment stands in stark contrast to the atmosphere which permeated the country in the cold war period when Mr. Hiss was charged, tried and convicted. Then, positions of good and evil seemed frozen in certitude and the national debate countenanced little gray. But, as the Boston Bar Association argued in its brief supporting Mr. Hiss' application, there are times when it is impossible to ascertain questions of guilt or innocence with scientific certitude.

Whether all the doubts surrounding the case are ever satisfactorily resolved, it is at least clear that after so many years of decent behavior Mr. Hiss should be permitted to practice his profession.