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## Sanctification of a consummate liar — Hiss

A movement is gaining momentum for the sanctification of a consummate liar, Alger Hiss by name. Before the movement gets completely out of hand, a few words of caution, remonstrance and reminder are in order.

The judgment of "liar" is a jury's judgment, returned in January, 1950 after two long trials. Now Hiss, at 71, is seeking once more in the court of public opinion to overturn that verdict. A few days ago he obtained access to certain evidence never introduced against him. Before long, we will be awash in fresh charges that the FBI rigged, stacked and fabricated the case against Hiss, and such is the gullibility of a disenchanted public that some of these self-serving charges will gain credence.

Because a whole generation has grown up since the Hiss case began, a brief recapitulation may be useful. The case involved two men. One was Alger Hiss, who in 1948 was slim, elegant and urbane, a rising star in the nation's public life. He had every respectable credential: He was John Hopkins, Phi Beta Kappa, Harvard Law, a onetime clerk to Justice Holmes, secretary to the American delegation at Dumbarton Oaks, adviser to Roosevelt at Yalta, secretary-general of the UN Conference at San Francisco.

The other was Whittaker Chambers, who in 1948 was pudgy, passive and obscure, a senior editor for Time magazine. He had nothing going for him. Born in Philadelphia in 1901, Chambers was a student

radical, a runaway, a post-war leftist who in 1925 joined the Communist party as a paid functionary. He was a man with a disreputable history of false names, petty theft and atheism. In 1938, after four years of espionage and infiltration in Washington, he broke absolutely with the Communist party.

Seventeen years ago this month, Chambers was summoned to testify before the House Committee on Un-American Activities, which was then investigating Communist infiltration of government offices. Chambers identified Hiss as a member of a secret Communist cell. Hiss denied this absolutely.

One of the two men plainly was lying. Under the prodding of a young California congressman, Chambers patiently unfolded his story: As a party functionary, he had known Hiss intimately, had stayed in his home, had transmitted stolen documents. Testing his credibility, the young congressman asked rapid-fire questions of Chambers about Hiss and his wife and family, their hobbies, pets, cars, furnishings, nicknames, places of residence.

Hiss at last admitted having known Chambers, but not as a party functionary. Hiss's story was that he had known a deadbeat freelance writer by the name of "George Crosley," to whom he had briefly sublet his Georgetown house in 1934. He identified Chambers as "Crosley," but later, before a grand jury, he would deny ever having given Chambers government documents. The perjury conviction stemmed from that

denial. Hiss served 44 months of a five-year sentence.

An enterprising publishing house, interested in bringing out a work of high drama, might consider a documentary reprise of the House hearings and the New York trials. This was confrontation worthy of any Sophocles or Shakespeare. Chambers, the witness, had but one purpose — to testify to the evil of communism, and to warn complacent Americans that they must come to grips "with a secret, sinister and enormously powerful force whose tireless purpose is their enslavement."

Chambers sensed from the outset that he himself was doomed. He lost his job and his health. In the second trial he heard his sanity questioned. A target of vilification and scorn, he died in obscurity on his Maryland farm in 1961. The renewed effort to establish the innocence of Hiss necessarily must seek anew to prove the guilt of Chambers. And Chambers no longer is around to speak for himself.

Whittaker Chambers was America's Solzhenitsyn — an intellectual who knew communism closely, at first hand, and saw with terrible clarity the absolute evil of Communist ideology. A gentle man, he never sought to destroy Hiss as a person. For months Chambers resisted opportunities to speak of actual espionage. Chambers wanted only to bear witness for freedom, and against slavery. One day his greatness as writer, thinker and human being will be recognized.

On his new road to mar-

tyrdom, Hiss will get some mileage from Chambers' association with the California congressman of 1948. The reasoning is that because Richard Nixon lied 1972-74, therefore Whittaker Chambers lied 1948-50. The reasoning is phony, slippery and sly, which, coming from Hiss, is exactly what one would expect