



Alger Hiss, Whittaker Chambers, and the Schism in the American Soul

Patrick Swan

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In 1952, Random House published Whittaker Chambers's *Witness*. Not only did it immediately become a bestseller; it was recognized by many as one of the great spiritual autobiographies of the twentieth century. In *Alger Hiss, Whittaker Chambers, and the Schism in the American Soul*, editor Patrick Swan marks the fiftieth anniversary of *Witness*'s publication by anthologizing 23 of the best essays ever written on Chambers, Hiss, or both. Essays by literary luminaries such as Leslie Fiedler, Arthur Koestler, Lionel Trilling, Rebecca West, Murray Kempton, and William F. Buckley Jr. tell the story of these two fascinating (and ultimately mysterious) men and of what they and their conflict represented. Sampling the entire spectrum of respectable thought on Hiss and Chambers, these pieces do not, as a rule, trouble themselves much with the facts of the case; Hiss's guilt was not so much in doubt then, and is certainly well documented by now. But the essayists' divergent opinions on the nature of communism (and anticommunism), liberalism, the proper relationship between religion and politics, and many other issues remain provocative -- perhaps even more so now than when they were written.

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