



## TECHNOLOGY

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By JAT

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"It seemed the moment to try and redress the balance," said Tony Hiss, a writer and visiting scholar specializing in urban policy at the Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service at New York University.

Most of the online audience, of course, is too young to have lived through the initial allegations, the Congressional hearings and the two perjury trials that his father faced. The background, in brief, is this: Alger Hiss, a former State Department official, was accused in 1948 of having been part of the Communist underground in the 1930's and of collecting documents to be passed to the Soviet

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Union. The accuser was Whittaker Chambers, a Time magazine editor who admitted having been a Communist.

So began one of the cold war's enduring debates, the first salvo in what Tony Hiss calls "a fiendishly complicated case, a La Brea tar pit that great minds can sink into and never emerge."

Indeed, historians have long struggled to establish the truth in the Hiss case, which culminated in his conviction in 1950 on perjury charges for having testified that he had not given State Department documents to Chambers. He served 44 months in prison. But even now, nearly five years after Alger Hiss's death at 92, Tony Hiss contends that the conclusion of history is still.

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be made public. A coalition of historians and archivists had been pressing for the release of the material, which is measured not in pages or bytes but in linear feet on government warehouse shelves -- 1,275 in all. Tony Hiss is looking forward to posting Hiss-related documents from that trove as they become available.

So far his site has recorded more than 10,000 visits. "It's the best defense mustered of Hiss by the dwindling band of those who believe in Hiss," said David Greenberg, a historian at Columbia University who is working on a book about Nixon and his place in American culture.

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"I don't think anyone is going to treat this site as the repository of truth, except for those who have already made up their minds that Hiss was innocent," Mr. Greenberg added.



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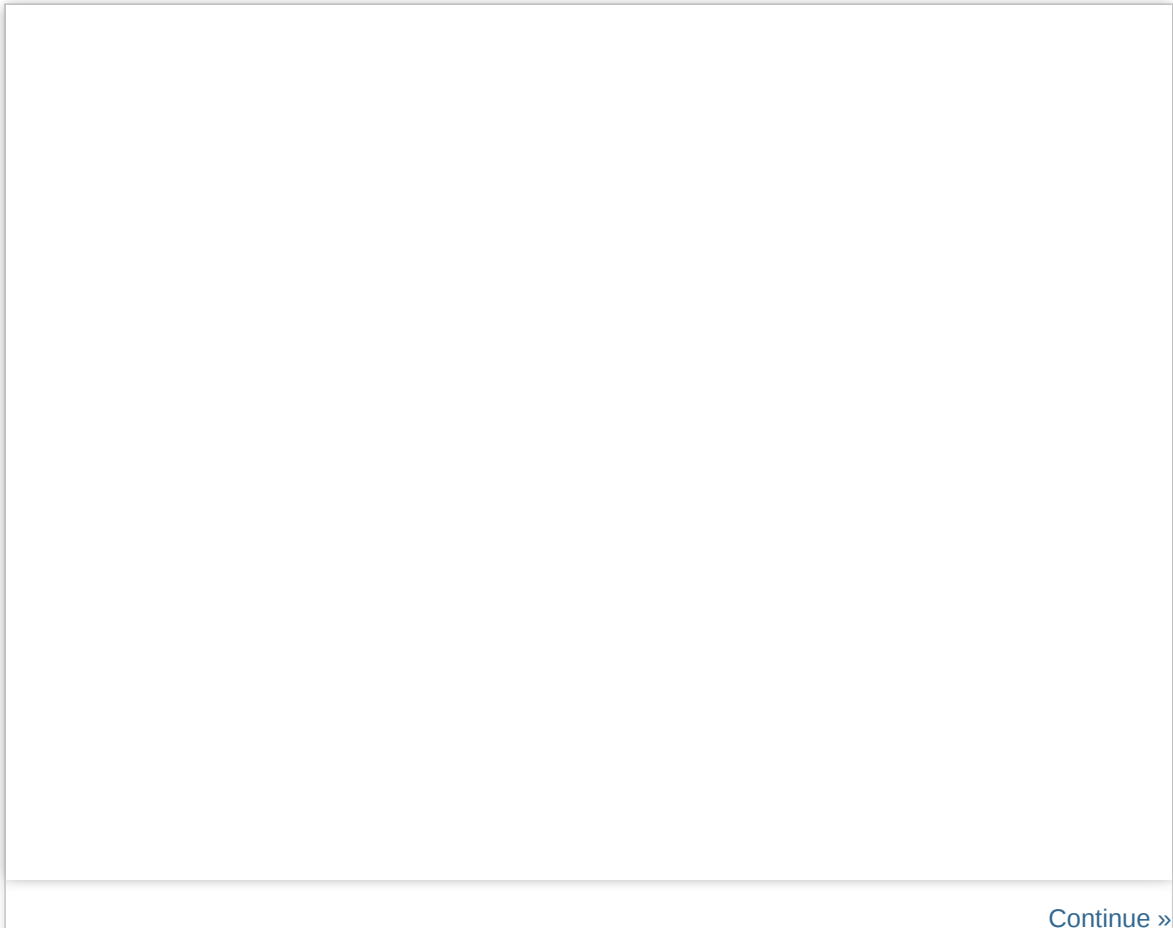
On the Web site, some documents have been scanned so visitors can download images of half-century-old F.B.I. reports in the PDF format.

"My dad was always confident that sooner or later people would be able to see his story and see that he was telling the truth," Tony Hiss said. "He always said he didn't think that would happen until everything was laid out in front of people and they sifted through the pros and the cons and the accusations and the counterarguments. I think he would have felt this goes a long way toward making that possible."

Even the site's address has not been without controversy. An N.Y.U. spokesman said that after the online magazine Slate published a column about the Hiss site in March, the university asked Tony Hiss to use a different Web address to designate it more clearly as a personal site rather than an academic one. The spokesman, John Beckman, said that the university felt that the old address, [www.nyu.edu/hiss](http://www.nyu.edu/hiss), suggested that the site was sponsored by the university.

"It wasn't a judgment about content," Mr. Beckman said. "The issue was whether it was official work of the university's." Because "my understanding is that he doesn't teach anything with regard to his father's case," the spokesman added, "this is a matter of personal scholarship, and it belongs on a personal home page."

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educational angle, might instead come into supposing this is a balanced, scholarly Web site."

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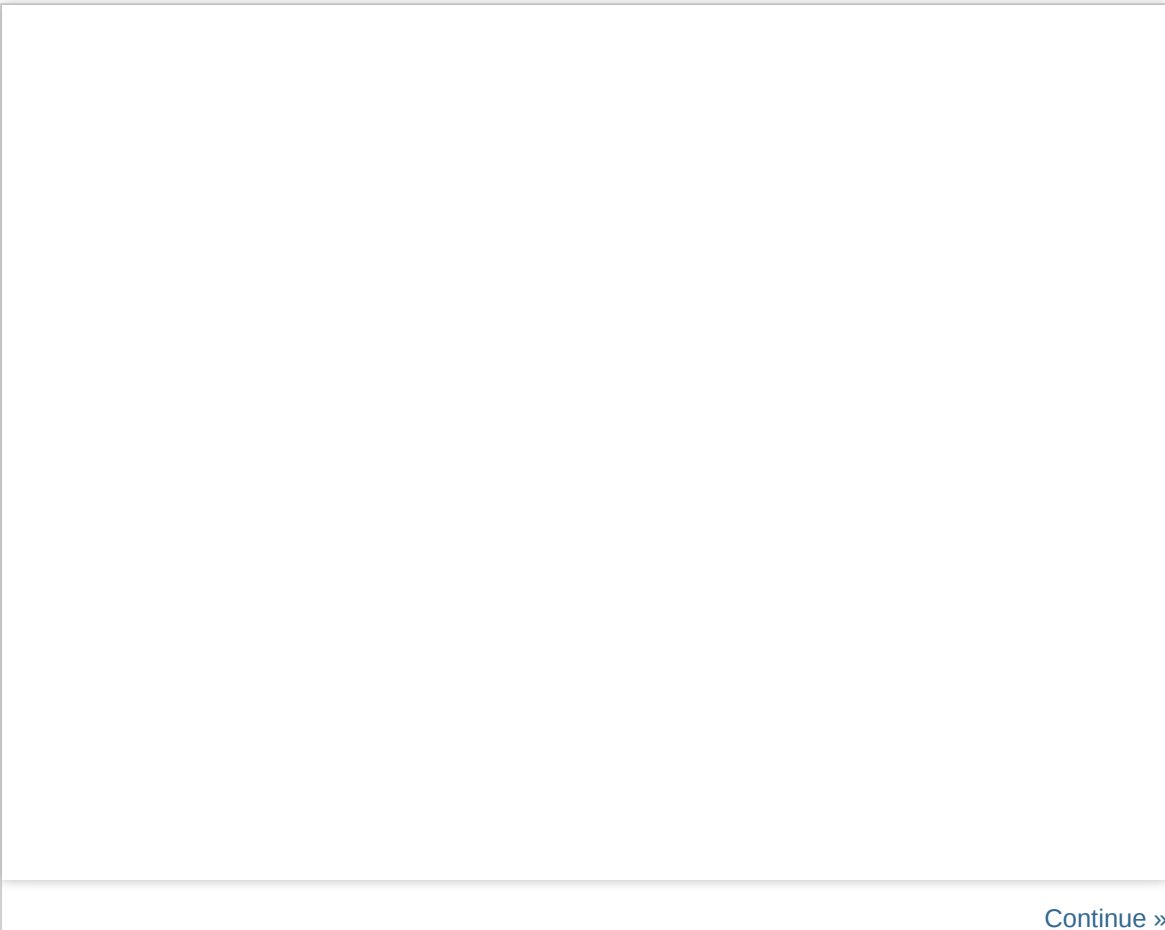
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