General Information

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Description

NBC's Tim Russert replays an excerpt from a 1948 radio episode of "Meet the Press," when Whittaker Chambers publicly accused Alger Hiss of being a Communist and risked charges of slander.

Keywords

Alger Hiss, Whittaker Chambers, Trials, Communism, House Committee on Un-American Activities, HUAC, Communist Party of the United States of America, Meet the Press, Radio, Slander, Traitor, Spies, Espionage, Atomic Bomb, Cold War, Soviet Union, Russia, Microfilms, Classified Documents, Treason, Perjury, Dr. Timothy Hobson

Transcript

The Debate Over Alger Hiss Continues

TIM RUSSERT: On August 3rd, 1948, Whittaker Chambers, a Time magazine editor and one-time Soviet
agent, appeared voluntarily before the House Un-American Activities Committee and testified that former State Department official Alger Hiss was a Communist. An outraged Hiss denied the charge.

Mr. ALGER HISS: I am not and never have been a member of the Communist Party.

RUSSERT: He challenged Chambers to repeat it outside the protection of the immunity granted witnesses before the congressional committees. Chambers did just that on the radio edition of MEET THE PRESS, Friday night, August 27th, 1948.

Mr. EDWARD FOLLIARD: Mr. Chambers, in the hearings on Capital Hill, you said over and over again that you served in the Communist Party with Alger Hiss. Your remarks down there were privileged. That is to say, you were protected from lawsuits. Hiss has now challenged you to make the same charge publicly. He says that if you do, he will test your veracity by filing a suit for slander or libel. Are you willing to say now that Alger Hiss is or ever was a Communist?

Mr. WHITTAKER CHAMBERS: Alger Hiss was a Communist and may be now.

Mr. FOLLIARD: Mr. Chambers, does that mean that you're now prepared to go into court and answer to a suit for slander or libel?

Mr. CHAMBERS: I do not think that Mr. Hiss will sue me for slander or libel.

RUSSERT: Alger Hiss did sue Whittaker Chambers for slander for what he said on MEET THE PRESS. In a deposition in the case, Mr. Chambers broadened his allegations and accused Alger Hiss of outright espionage, stealing state and navy documents. Chambers produced some microfilm documents after hiding them in a hollowed out pumpkin on his Maryland farm. Because the statute of limitations on espionage had expired, Alger Hiss was indicted on two charges of perjury, accusing him of lying under oath about meetings with Whittaker Chambers and stealing documents. A first trial ended in a hung jury, but on January 21st, 1950, Hiss was convicted and sentenced to five years in prison. He served three years and eight months at Lewisburg Penitentiary with time off for good behavior. Hiss continued to proclaim his innocence right up until his death in 1996 at the age of 92. His son, Tony Hiss, has made his father's vindication a focus of his life. And on Thursday at a New York University symposium about the Hiss case, his stepson, Timothy Hobson, spoke publicly about the case for the first time.

Mr. TIMOTHY HOBSO: This is the first chance that I've had to publicly share my side of the story. My version of what truth and reality really are. The bottom line of my story is that I lived with the Hisses from the age of three to the age of 14, when I went to high school. I was there during all of the years and moments that those alleged incidents of espionage were supposed to have taken place. I personally know that Chambers was lying in telling the story because he wasn't there.

RUSSERT: Almost 60 years later, and the debate over Alger Hiss continues.