



Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America (Yale Nota Bene)

By John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr

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Only in 1995 did the United States government officially reveal the existence of the super-secret Venona Project. For nearly fifty years American intelligence agents had been decoding thousands of Soviet messages, uncovering an enormous range of espionage activities carried out against the United States during World War II by its own allies. So sensitive was the project in its early years that even President Truman was not informed of its existence. This extraordinary book is the first to examine the Venona messages—documents of unparalleled importance for our understanding of the history and politics of the Stalin era and the early Cold War years.

Hidden away in a former girls' school in the late 1940s, Venona Project cryptanalysts, linguists, and mathematicians attempted to decode more than twenty-five thousand intercepted Soviet intelligence telegrams. When they cracked the unbreakable Soviet code, a breakthrough leading eventually to the decryption of nearly three thousand of the messages, analysts uncovered information of powerful significance: the first indication of Julius Rosenberg's espionage efforts; references to the espionage activities of Alger Hiss; startling proof of Soviet infiltration of the Manhattan Project to build the atomic bomb; evidence that spies had reached the highest levels of the U.S. State and Treasury Departments; indications that more than three hundred Americans had assisted in the Soviet theft of American industrial, scientific, military, and diplomatic secrets; and confirmation that the Communist party of the United States was consciously and willingly involved in Soviet espionage against America. Drawing not only on the Venona papers but also on newly opened Russian and U. S. archives, John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr provide in this book the clearest, most rigorously documented analysis ever written on Soviet espionage and the Americans who abetted it in the early Cold War years.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

With this new volume, John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr build upon their groundbreaking work in *The Secret World of American Communism* and solidify their reputations as the foremost historians of Soviet espionage in America. In *Venona*, they provide a detailed study of how the United States decrypted top-secret Communist cables moving between Washington and Moscow. This account, based on information unavailable to researchers for decades, reveals the full extent of the Communist spy network in the 1940s. At least 349 citizens, immigrants, and permanent residents of the United States had a covert relationship with Soviet intelligence agencies, among them Harry White (assistant secretary of the treasury in FDR's administration and the Communists' highest-ranking asset) and State Department official Alger Hiss, whose association with the Soviets had been hotly debated since the moment he was first publicly accused in 1948.

"The Soviet assault was of the type a nation directs at an enemy state," write Haynes and Klehr. They go on to suggest that Venona's code-breaking "indicated that the Cold War was not a state of affairs that had begun after World War II but a guerilla action that Stalin had secretly started years earlier." Moreover, "espionage saved the USSR great expense and industrial investment and thereby enabled the Soviets to build a successful atomic bomb years before they otherwise would have." Haynes and Klehr deliver what is at once a real-life spy thriller and a vital piece of scholarship. A grand achievement. --*John J. Miller*

From Library Journal

Those who were convinced that the Soviets were spying on us during the 1930s and 1940s were right. Haynes and Klehr have provided the most extensive evidence to date that the KGB had operatives at all levels of American society and government. Where Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev's *The Haunted Wood* (LJ 11/15/98) provided a peek at Soviet spying, Haynes and Klehr throw open the door, revealing a level of espionage in this country that only the most paranoid had dreamed of. Building on the research for their earlier books, *The Secret World of American Communism* (LJ 6/1/95) and *The Soviet World of American Communism* (Yale Univ., 1998), Haynes and Klehr describe the astonishing dimensions of spying reflected in the cable traffic between the United States and Moscow. Venona is the name of the sophisticated National Security Agency project that in 1946 finally broke the Soviet code. This is better than anything John le Carr could produce, because in this case, truth is really stranger than fiction. Highly recommended. Edward Goedeken, Iowa State Univ. Lib., Ames

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From [Booklist](#)

The Venona Project, a U.S. secret revealed only in 1995, decrypted Soviet intelligence's wartime cable traffic. It purportedly not only exposed an astounding scale of Soviet espionage but also undermined the liberal critique of the postwar Red scare. *The Nation* irately denounced Venona as a government forgery. The authors systematically recount Venona's references to approximately 350 Soviet spies in U.S. government and industry--some of them highly placed, most notoriously Alger Hiss. The damage wrought by Hiss and others is not yet known, as Venona does not contain the actual documents they stole, but their espionage appears now irrefutable. Apparently U.S. intelligence was aware of that in the 1940s, raising the historical question of whether keeping Venona secret was worth it, given how liberal and conservative vitriol over causes celebres such as Hiss and the Rosenbergs poisoned U.S. politics at the time. *Venona* may open a fundamental revision of U.S. history and lend foundation to *The Haunted Wood* by Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev. *Gilbert Taylor*

Users Review

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Joshua Stickley:

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