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## PROLOGUE

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*It was a time of titanic battles between government agencies, including the Treasury, over security and intelligence empires, a time in which individuals became pawns in sweeping power plays.*

— Brian Johnson, *The Politics of Money*

For the last few years I have spent Halloween in the company of strangers. On that night, one hundred or so of the nation's most devout conservatives gather in one of the venerable hotels or private clubs in Washington, D.C. It is a gathering where aging Cold War warriors lament the sad state of world affairs since Ronald Reagan left office, and others express their dismay over the Democratic Party's "liberal" policies or swap assessments of the "left-wing bias" in the nation's press. Still others—mostly former FBI and CIA operatives—relish the chance to tell war stories or reminisce about the "good ol' days" when Dwight David Eisenhower was president, a time when the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the Senate Internal Security Committee had nearly free rein to ferret out commies, pinkos, perverts, progressives, and other perceived "subversive" elements. The rest of us, true devotees who remain loyal to the *original* intent of the gathering, are here to discover the most recent developments in the Alger Hiss case, better known, simply, as "The Case."

Cocktails begin at 6:00 P.M.; dinner is at 7:00 sharp. When chimes signal the appointed hour, the formally outfitted guests enter the cavernous ballroom, where, in the pitch darkness, flickering jack-o-lanterns adorn all the tables. At every place setting is a paperback copy of the cognoscenti's most sacred text: Whittaker Chambers's *Witness*.

Before taking our seats all eyes are on the head table, specifically, on the largest jack-o-lantern of all but one that is unlit. In reverent silence, all watch as a senior member of the group ceremoniously extracts three rolls of 35-mm film from the cavity of the jack-o-lantern, and, with deliberate flair,

waves them *unceremoniously* over his head. With this bizarre ritual, all of us are reminded of that fateful day in 1948 when Whittaker Chambers retrieved from the cavity of a hollowed-out pumpkin, cleverly hidden in a pumpkin patch at his Westminster, Maryland, farm, three rolls of undeveloped film—evidence of State Department official Alger Hiss’s complicity in espionage—and presented it to HUAC investigators. Chambers’s act set in motion a case that shaped Cold War domestic affairs, a case that Earl Jowitt, the eminent jurist and Lord Chancellor of Great Britain, characterized in his book by the same name as “the strange case of Alger Hiss.”<sup>1</sup>

With the strike of a match the face of the traitorous Hiss is outlined in the intricately carved jack-o-lantern, and so begins the annual meeting of the little known and at one time secret institution of the “Pumpkin Papers Irregulars.”

### The Hiss Case

In January 1950, following one of the most controversial and disturbing espionage trials of the twentieth century, Alger Hiss, a former high-ranking State Department official who served in the Roosevelt administration, was convicted of perjury. For many Americans, his conviction during the height of the early Cold War gave credence to dozens of other accusations made by Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy and others who cited as evidence the words of self-confessed Soviet agents Whittaker Chambers and Elizabeth Bentley that the Democratic administrations of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman were “infested” with Communists, traitors, and Red agents.<sup>2</sup>

In the mid-1920s Chambers had become interested in the Soviet experiment. He had joined the Communist Party and served as a courier for the NKVD<sup>3</sup> and the Soviet military police. Chambers claimed that, during the 1930s, Hiss turned over classified if not secret State Department documents to him to pass onto his Soviet handlers.<sup>4</sup> Further, in 1948, Chambers, appearing before the HUAC, stated that Hiss was associated with an underground espionage apparatus, which Hiss categorically denied. During the course of several sensational public hearings (the first congressional hearings ever broadcast on national television) each man’s interpretation of fact contradicted the other’s interpretation. Chambers could recall with amazing clarity details of his subversive activities with Hiss and Hiss’s wife, Priscilla. Hiss’s memory was fuzzy, but he, too, could remember certain

details of his brief encounter with Chambers, though Hiss claimed his activities were hardly subversive.

Chambers wove an incredible tale relating to his alleged activities in the Soviet underground network. He spun his own tangled web that today some claim was perjurious. But ultimately Hiss, not Chambers, was brought to trial on perjury charges, and Hiss's story failed to convince the jury. Hiss was unable to reconcile his testimony with persuasive circumstantial evidence—especially the famous Baltimore and so-called Pumpkin Papers (typewritten summaries and actual pictures of state and other government agency documents developed from Chambers's 35-mm film). The documents and other corroborating evidence strongly suggested the essential truth underlying Chambers's assertions. The evidence was persuasive enough to convince the jury that Hiss, not Chambers, was the greater liar.

For many, despite Hiss's conviction, the case against the former State Department official has never been fully proved. Indeed, it is a fascinating case as the evidence is voluminous, and often contradictory. In the words of Lord Jowitt, it remains difficult to ascertain just "who was the spider and who the fly."<sup>5</sup> But for those attending the annual meeting of the Pumpkin Papers Irregulars, no question of Hiss's guilt exists; it is dogma. What continues to bring them together each year is an interest in examining Hiss's explanations of his activities and, now that he is dead, his supporters' various, and, in the view of many attendees, sometimes comical attempts over the last fifty-plus years to assert his innocence. To this end, each year the Irregulars assemble to poke fun at the most recent efforts to clear his name.

Eventually in the conversation one of my tablemates inevitably turns to me to ask, just what is it that interests me about The Case? I frame my answer carefully. I explain that I am not so interested in the Hiss-Chambers controversy but rather in its relation to the Harry Dexter White case, about which I am writing a book. Again, inevitably, someone remarks: "Tell us, why would you want to write a book about that commie traitor?"

For those at the table who have never even heard of Harry Dexter White, I begin with an introduction. White, I explain, was proclaimed to be a Communist "spy" by two admitted Communist underground couriers—Whittaker Chambers and Elizabeth Bentley—and, in later years, by Attorney General Herbert Brownell.<sup>6</sup> I mention the existence of documentary evidence, including papers from the same batch that helped to put Alger Hiss in jail, evidence that suggests White may indeed have been part of the Communist conspiracy. In a slight digression, I explain that the White case first

captured my interest when Secretary Donald Hodel declared Chambers's home, Pipe Creek Farm, a National Historic Landmark. I then confess to my listeners that the catalyst for my almost decade-long obsession with the White case was a passing comment made by Alger Hiss, namely, that he believed it was White (and not he) who was the primary target of HUAC's investigation into internal subversion in the late 1940s.<sup>7</sup>

I go on to explain that, after I began my research, and as I learned more about the mysterious circumstances surrounding the White case, a host of questions began to emerge: What was the evidence that enabled Chambers and Bentley, in 1948, to declare Harry Dexter White a Soviet spy and a traitor to his country? Was White part of a massive Communist conspiracy designed to cripple American democracy, as President Eisenhower's attorney general, Herbert Brownell, contended in 1953? Was the "White Memorandum" that Whittaker Chambers passed on to federal authorities during the Hiss-Chambers pretrial depositions—a four-page memorandum in the neat, precise handwriting of Harry Dexter White—actually *prima facie* evidence of White's espionage? Did he actually place Communists in key Treasury positions and attempt to modify American foreign policy in favor of the Russians, as Bentley alleged? Did he arrange the transfer of glass negatives and plates for the German occupation-currency to the Russians, which reportedly cost American taxpayers more than \$100 million, as asserted by a Republican-controlled congressional investigatory committee? If these and other charges levied against White by Bentley and Chambers were true, then White is surely one of the most notorious spies in American history. But, if he was as innocent as he publicly declared under oath, then he joins the ranks of John Carter Vincent, Owen Lattimore, and a host of others, as yet another tragic victim of the McCarthyism of the Cold War era.

I tell my dinner companions that, innocent or guilty, a victim of government repression or a notorious Communist spy, the saga of Harry Dexter White transcends these basic questions. His story tells us much about politics and society of the New Deal and early Cold War eras. For example, assuming White was a typical New Dealer (as he professed to be), why were so many of those considered the finest of the New Deal generation interested in communism? How did they reconcile their political beliefs with their worldly ambitions? Why, years later (during the Cold War era) did congressional committees place so much emphasis on an individual's political past rather than on their present beliefs? And, perhaps most important, were former Communists, like Whittaker Chambers and Elizabeth Bentley, merely

opportunists, as some allege, or were they pawns in what some historians believe was every bit as massive a conspiracy as the one the Soviets posed but orchestrated, instead, by an anti-FDR coalition of southern Democrats and conservative Republicans?<sup>8</sup> The White story enables us to examine these and other questions, and serves as the basis for a case study on how the American political and judicial system functioned in a time of crisis.

My fervent hope in writing this book, I tell my dinner companions, is to set the record straight regarding White's role and complicity in a Communist conspiracy. The book, however, has its limitations: it is neither a full-fledged biography nor a comprehensive assessment of Harry Dexter White's philosophy or economic programs. Rather, it sketches White's early years, war record, and schooling, and then focuses on his responsibilities within the Treasury Department from 1935 through 1946. Most important, it assesses the allegations of Whittaker Chambers and Elizabeth Bentley, including their assertions that White was "an agent of influence" who prejudiced American policy to pro-Soviet positions. My goal, I tell my listeners, is to trace White's rise to power and influence in Secretary Henry Morgenthau's Treasury Department, and at the same time to assess his policy work and the allegations of espionage. To this end, I intend to examine an enormous amount of difficult, contradictory, and sometimes weird information about White and his times sifted out of dozens of archival collections and scores of often dubious and self-serving memoirs and oral interviews. And, yes, to the delight of those present, and I hope to my readers, the documentary evidence is sufficient to enable me to reach a definitive verdict.

### A Time of Titanic Battles

On 13 August 1948 reporters crowded into the all-too-familiar surroundings of the caucus room of the Old House Office Building where the House Un-American Activities Committee had scheduled yet another hearing on Soviet espionage and alleged internal subversion of government agencies. With a train of witnesses waiting to respond to the sensational story advanced a few days earlier by former Communist spy Elizabeth Bentley and expert ex-Communist witness Whittaker Chambers, it promised to be a long day.<sup>9</sup>

Over a period of weeks Bentley and Chambers—both self-confessed Communist couriers—had told HUAC investigators that a number of high-level government officials in the Roosevelt and Truman administrations had been,

and perhaps still were, Communists or Communist sympathizers. And they named names, although, except to a few Washington insiders, most of the names were unfamiliar: Nathan Gregory Silvermaster, Solomon Adler, Frank Coe, and Lee Pressman. A few names, however, including that of Lauchlin Currie, a former top presidential assistant, and Alger Hiss, a former State Department official who was the current president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, were indeed familiar to many.<sup>10</sup>

One individual whom Bentley and Chambers both mentioned was a relative unknown to most attending the hearing: Dr. Harry Dexter White. Yet, of all those characterized by Chambers and Bentley as being Communist sympathizers or subversives, it was this former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and co-author of the Bretton Woods agreements with famed British economist John Maynard Keynes who perhaps was the most powerful and influential of them all. For within Franklin D. Roosevelt's Treasury Department, it was Harry Dexter White, who, for over a decade, served as one of Secretary Henry Morgenthau's most trusted and influential advisers.

In 1948 White no longer served in government nor was he in very good health. Yet, when called to testify, the short, heavy-set man, with rimmed-glasses and mustache, strode up to the witness table, raised his hand, and swore to tell nothing but the truth. Basking in the bright newsreel camera lights, White confronted HUAC and boldly refuted the accusations made by Bentley and Chambers. When his inquisitors fired questions at him, White snapped back answers. He never hedged but adroitly and often humorously responded to every question addressed to him, and he put HUAC on the defensive. Then, after vigorously denouncing his accusers, he fished a scrap of paper from his coat pocket and fervently recited his "American Creed," one of the most eloquent statements of New Deal liberalism ever delivered:

I believe in freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of the press, freedom of criticism, and freedom of movement. I believe in the goal of equality of opportunity, and the right of each individual to follow the calling of his or her own choice, and the right of every individual to an opportunity to develop his or her capacity to the fullest. . . . I consider these principles sacred. I regard them as the basic fabric of our American way of life, and I believe in them as living realities, and not mere words on paper. That is my creed.<sup>11</sup>

When White finished speaking, the room erupted in spontaneous—and to the dismay of HUAC—prolonged applause.

After the hearing White boarded a train at Union Station and embarked on the first leg of his return trip to Blueberry Hill, his recently acquired house in Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire. Three days later, however, he was dead. White appeared to have died of natural causes, and consequently no autopsy was performed. Because White was a pious Jew, it was deemed unusual to some observers that he was cremated rather than buried. Given the deep suspicion of the Soviet Union and the near-universal belief that the threat posed by Red agents was real, the press, on hearing of White's untimely demise, did not hesitate to give credence to the rumors that Soviet agents had murdered White in order to silence him. A few thought he committed suicide, and others—including a number of partisan press reporters—concluded that the stress on his heart by his HUAC appearance made him yet another victim “of a special sort of tyranny” by the Committee on Un-American Activities.<sup>12</sup>

But White was not so much the victim that sultry day in 1948 as he was on a cold November day in 1953. Five years after his death, a former national chairman of the Republican Party and at that time attorney general of the United States, Herbert Brownell, delivered an impassioned speech before a sympathetic audience of conservative businessmen at the Chicago Executives Club. The time was right for Republicans to launch an attack against the Democrats, who, only months earlier, had lost their two-decade grip on the White House and Congress. In declaring the new Republican administration's vigilance on matters relating to national security, Brownell minced no words when he bluntly stated, “Harry Dexter White was a Russian spy. . . . He smuggled documents to Russian agents for transmission to Moscow.” Not only did the attorney general attack White, but he also broadened his charge and questioned the loyalty of former president Harry S. Truman by declaring, “Harry Dexter White was known to be a Communist spy by the very people who appointed him to the most sensitive and important position he ever held in government.”<sup>13</sup>

By questioning the patriotism of the former president, Brownell set off a whirlwind of controversy. He claimed that Truman appointed White to the executive board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), even though “conclusive” evidence existed in an FBI report presented to—but ignored by—the president that “documented” White's subversive activities as a Soviet spy. Within days of Brownell's speech, in a nationally televised address, Truman responded to the attorney general's accusations, but because he did not have access to official White House records, he inaccurately presented his side of the controversy to the American people. Shortly thereafter, FBI Director J.

Edgar Hoover entered the fray and made a rare appearance before HUAC. The director denounced the former president's story and, in attempting to set the record straight, advanced his own "documented" version of the train of events. Congressional investigations followed in short order.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately two Republican-controlled Senate committees—Government Operations and the Committee on the Judiciary—held investigatory hearings. The committees found White accountable for formulating everything from the "pro-Russian" Morgenthau Plan for postwar Germany to orchestrating the "loss" of mainland China to the Communists. Though the White case eventually faded from public memory, Congress continued to probe the accusations of Bentley, Chambers, and others relating to "interlocking subversion" in the U.S. government that allegedly occurred throughout the previous Democratic administrations.<sup>15</sup>

### Internal Subversion: The Historiographic Debate

Historians of the Popular Front, New Deal, and early Cold War eras have long been fascinated with the way Americans responded to the international Communist threat. Consequently the literature is voluminous.<sup>16</sup> The historiography reflects several prevailing themes. First, in foreign affairs, the more recent works that incorporate information gleaned from the Soviet archives generally contend that the United States and the Soviet Union both share partial responsibility for creating international conflict during the Cold War era.<sup>17</sup> Tensions arose, particularly when President Truman's administration shifted away from the Roosevelt administration's policy of "accommodation and cooperation" with the Soviets toward a new position of what historian Melvyn Leffler characterizes as "preponderant power." Thus, given Joseph Stalin's desire for security, Soviet expansionism, and ideological proselytism as against President Truman's "containment" strategy and American geopolitical designs, along with the Soviet and the American desire to dominate what each nation considered their legitimate "sphere of influence," the stage was set for international conflict.<sup>18</sup>

Second, in domestic affairs, the more recent historiography reflects a view that the Communist threat—especially the one posed by espionage in government agencies—was real, though perhaps somewhat exaggerated.<sup>19</sup> The more recent studies reflect three underlying assumptions: first, that the international Communist threat was real; second, that internal subversion did



indeed occur; and, third, that some New Dealers like Alger Hiss, Lauchlin Currie, Harry Dexter White, and others were Soviet sympathizers, if not agents and therefore outright “traitors.”<sup>20</sup>

To this end, the historiography has been enriched by several relatively recent biographies, which are among a growing body of literature that re-examines, through life stories, the assumptions that for years polarized both liberal and conservative observers into partisan camps.<sup>21</sup>

In general, the authors of some of these more recent works find it increasingly difficult to accept the portraits of principal characters drawn either by partisans of accused Communist agents or by their critics. Sam Tanenhaus, for example, in his biography of Whittaker Chambers, paints the darling of the Right sympathetically, yet unabashedly points to his flaws, leaving readers to conclude that, although he was a brilliant writer and an inscrutable and fatalistic informer, he was a perjurer who acted his various roles with consummate drama. Still Tanenhaus does not portray Chambers as many supporters of Hiss would like to see him, as a psychopathic liar. Similarly Gary May concludes that, in the William Remington case, Remington surely was not a political innocent “duped by the Communists” but neither was he a “pro-Soviet automaton, no slave to [Communist] Party or ideology.”<sup>22</sup>

In the Harry Dexter White case, historians also express varying views. Some, like Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky as well as Herbert Romerstein and Eric Breindel rehash the old historiography framed largely by the sometimes questionable testimony of Bentley and others who boldly declared White’s guilt.<sup>23</sup> Basing their conclusions on the testimony of Chambers and Bentley, and on a handful of references to White in the so-called Venona decrypts, several scholars have recently concluded that Harry Dexter White was no martyr but rather was among “the most important American officials to betray [his] country.”<sup>24</sup> But other historians, realizing that the evidence against White has never been critically examined, are more circumspect and reserve judgment, knowing full well that the totality of evidence in the White case has yet to go to the jury.<sup>25</sup> While White’s guilt has not been clearly established, neither has his innocence—his remains a case of “reasonable doubt.”

## The Search for Evidence

While the case against Alger Hiss had been the topic of many books, articles, and television movies,<sup>26</sup> the case against Harry Dexter White has never been

critically examined. Only two books, one a highly partisan defense of White by his brother, Nathan E. White, and one more recent article, focus on the life and times of White.<sup>27</sup> However, neither of the two books critically assessed the Treasury official's alleged espionage activities, nor did they attempt to place the White controversy in the context of the politics of the Cold War era: Nathan White fervently defended his brother's loyalty and personal integrity, and David Rees offered readers a general biographical survey of White's life and accomplishments. Neither Rees nor Nathan White incorporated scholarship since the early 1970s; they did not include information gleaned from Harry Dexter White's Treasury Department papers in the National Archives or from the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) documents that the FBI released to White's daughters. Nor did these authors have access to the federal grand jury records of the Hiss case, the executive session transcripts of Sen. Joseph McCarthy's committee, the recently released records of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, or the rich new source of Cold War historiography, namely, the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and Comintern records as well as CPUSA collections that in the mid-1990s were opened at the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History on a limited basis to Western researchers. And not until February 1996 did any researcher have access to the most significant source of primary documentation relating to Cold War espionage, that is, the Venona decrypts. The Venona traffic—hundreds of cable transmissions between U.S.-based Soviet agents and their Soviet superiors in Moscow that were intercepted by American counterintelligence officers and painstakingly decoded over a period of years and released by the National Security Agency are central to understanding the White case. This is because not only does White's name periodically appear in the traffic but because Venona provides the historical context for understanding the exact nature and extent of Soviet espionage in America during World War II and in the early Cold War era. Unquestionably there was a need for a new scholarly assessment of the case against Harry Dexter White. *Treasonable Doubt: The Harry Dexter White Spy Case* seeks to fill this void.

Although little has been written on the White case, I discovered voluminous quantities of untapped archival and oral history materials in the course of writing this book. Few lives of governmental officials have been so well documented as that of Harry Dexter White. Four institutional collections hold materials associated with White's life and career: Princeton University's Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library contains a twelve-box collection of

White's personal papers deposited by his wife in 1950; the National Archives retains a twenty-three linear-foot collection, "Treasury Department Records: Records of Harry Dexter White, Chronological Files, 1934–1947" (RG NC3–56–79–1); the so-called Morgenthau "Diary" at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library in Hyde Park, New York, contains more than a decade's worth of transcripts of meetings, telephone conversations, and key papers associated with White's activities in the Treasury Department. There is also the massive "Silvermaster" espionage file, as well as the Harry Dexter White investigatory file at the Federal Bureau of Investigation reading room, both of which are open and available to a researcher interested in pursuing the case.

White's FBI file contains some thirteen thousand pages of documents released under provisions of FOIA to White's daughters in the late 1970s; the collection, as well as the Silvermaster file, includes the results of years of "technical surveillance" on White (transcripts of phone taps and results of mail interception). The FBI materials, when combined with what can be culled from other archival collections, make it possible to reconstruct virtually every day (in some instances nearly every minute of every hour) of White's personal and professional life during critical periods of his Treasury Department career.

In addition to the FBI and Treasury Department records, there are records from congressional hearings and various archival collections at the Library of Congress that have relevance—the papers of Leo Pasvolosky, Averell Harriman, and John Bartlow Martin. The Truman and Eisenhower Presidential Libraries also contain records associated with key individuals and the era relevant to White's life. The National Archives holds the records associated with the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act (RG 46–77–008). The Treasury Department's rarely mined archive of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing, as well as testimony found in the previously secret McCarthy committee executive session transcripts deposited in the National Archive's Center for Legislative Archive (published in May 2003 by the U.S. Government Printing Office), both contain papers central to an understanding of the German occupation-currency issue. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank's Joint Bank-Fund Library also maintain a useful archival collection as well as newspaper clipping files that help to chronicle and fill in gaps relating to White's career. The Igor Gouzenko case file and the Mackenzie King "diary" at the Canadian Archives contain a wealth of materials relating to the Hiss-White connection with the famed and controversial Igor Gouzenko Canadian spy case.

In many respects, gaining a thorough understanding of the Hiss-Chambers controversy is central to deciphering the White case. Evidence, some of which was introduced during the Hiss perjury trials, helps to illuminate the case against White. The transcripts of record for both Hiss perjury trials, as well as collections relating to those proceedings, are accessible at the Harvard Law Library. Especially useful are the Meyer Zeligs collection and the Hiss defense files; both provide a wealth of information. In 1998 I donated to the Harvard Law Library the papers of lifelong espionage student George A. Eddy; it is a large, rich, and essentially unexplored collection not only relating to Hiss and White but to other members of the “Silvermaster Group.”

Inspired by the success of historian Gary May and the Public Citizen Litigation Group, who gained access to federal grand-jury records relating to the William Remington espionage case, in the course of writing this book an ultimately successful effort was launched to unseal the transcript of Harry Dexter White’s grand jury appearance. Though the first attempt failed, a second federal court case not only resulted in forcing open the White transcript of grand-jury testimony but also in unsealing nearly all the Hiss grand-jury materials (more than two thousand pages of testimony). It was a landmark legal decision that set a precedent for opening up other grand-jury records for their historical value alone.<sup>28</sup> The grand-jury records of the Southern District Court of New York are of particular relevance as they include not only information relating to the accusations lodged by Chambers and Bentley but also White’s statements in his own defense, which apparently were persuasive enough to sway the grand jurors not to return an indictment against him.

Finally, several of White’s co-workers and associates, as well as a few of his political enemies, were more than willing to talk about their not always fond memories of Harry Dexter White. Among those who agreed to be interviewed were Edward Bernstein, Herbert Brownell, George Eddy, John Kenneth Galbraith, Alger Hiss, Robert Nathan, Paul Nitze, Robert Lamphere, and Robert Stripling. Even former KGB officer General Vitalii G. Pavlov, who served as the assistant chief of the Military Section of the NKVD’s North American espionage network under Vassili Zublin (chief of that section), agreed to a series of telephone interviews from his Moscow apartment. These interviews helped to fill gaps in the written record and also proved useful in locating additional personal and organizational papers relating particularly to White’s activities conducted outside the work environment. Also to this end, one of White’s two surviving daughters (though suspicious of the researcher’s craft) nevertheless exchanged correspondence with the author.

## The Evidence Explored

Three independent witnesses specifically named White as a conspirator, as a member of a Communist “cell,” or at least fingered him as a fellow traveler. Years before Elizabeth Bentley or Whittaker Chambers publicly made their accusations against him, the wife of Victor Perlo, one of White’s acquaintances, specifically named him as being involved with her former husband’s “subversive” organization.<sup>29</sup> In 1948, in her sworn testimony before HUAC, as she had in her earlier statements to the FBI, Elizabeth Bentley also implicated White in espionage. Though she could not swear that he was a “card-carrying” member of the Communist Party, she did assert that information destined for Soviet agents was willingly provided by White and relayed to her through Nathan Gregory Silvermaster, the leader of what Bentley said was a notorious espionage group. And although Miss Bentley never knew or even met White and never produced any documentary evidence to substantiate her charges, in later years she expanded her accusations to assert that White, along with his friend and former Harvard University school chum, Lauchlin Currie, played active roles in the Silvermaster Group. In testimony before the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee in 1951, for example, Bentley stretched her original 1946 story to the extent that she considered White and Currie the “most important” members of her espionage apparatus.<sup>30</sup>

White’s third and perhaps most important accuser was Whittaker Chambers. According to some researchers, Chambers’s testimony is significant since, independent of Bentley, he accused White of being a willing collaborator with the Communist underground and produced written corroboration of the Treasury official’s alleged involvement in the Soviet conspiracy—the so-called White Memorandum.<sup>31</sup> Chambers produced this document, written in White’s own hand, during his Baltimore deposition of 17 November 1948. The White Memorandum, together with Chambers’s March 1945 statement to FBI agent Ray Murphy in which the former Communist courier claimed that White was “a member at large [of the Communist Party] but rather timid” constitute the key evidence suggestive of White’s alleged complicity in a Soviet-inspired conspiracy.<sup>32</sup> The testimony of the three witnesses, when combined with direct and circumstantial evidence, strongly suggest that White may have been far from truthful in his testimony before HUAC.<sup>33</sup> Based on the evidence now available, had Harry Dexter White not died in 1948, he could well have been prosecuted for perjury just as Alger Hiss was.<sup>34</sup>

But in addition to the accounts of White's three principal accusers and corroborating evidence, there is yet more documentation suggesting that White was an "agent of influence," if not a Soviet "agent."<sup>35</sup> The Venona decrypts—messages to and from Moscow and the Soviet consulates in New York and other major cities that were intercepted by the U.S. Army's Signal Intelligence Service (the forerunner of the National Security Agency) in the 1940s—serve as the single most important source of corroborative evidence of Soviet intelligence-gathering operations in the United States. The decrypts leave little doubt that White was involved in "a species of espionage" and that he passed information to NKVD contacts in 1944, if not earlier. But the decrypts also demonstrate that White was a voluble if nervous informant, an individual who "doesn't pass information or documents." This clear contradiction, namely, that White both did and did not pass information, leaves one to wonder just what kind of agent he was.<sup>36</sup> Both Chambers and Bentley stated that White never joined the Communist Party and that his principal function as a Communist agent was not actually to pass papers to Soviet agents but rather to use his position of authority to subvert U.S. foreign policy to pro-Soviet positions. Hiss was under a similar cloud, but neither his critics nor the press was ever able to demonstrate how he supposedly operated as an "agent of influence" or to subvert State Department policy to pro-Soviet positions.<sup>37</sup> Because of his 1950 conviction for perjury, this aspect of the Hiss case proved irrelevant to his trial and seemed unnecessary to prove.

Harry Dexter White, on the other hand, clearly and openly was a trusted friend of the Soviet Union. Consequently he stands accused of everything from placing Communists in high government positions to selling out American interests in China and thus precipitating the "loss" of China to the Communists. Indeed, subversion of American policy is the heart of the accusation against White. How was it possible that someone like Harry Dexter White, the co-founder of the Bretton Woods institutions, as capitalist an institution as ever devised, could have had sympathy for the Communist movement? It is my hope that this book will provide some answers.