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# Clio's Psyche

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## **The Intertwined Lives and Psyches of Richard Nixon and Alger Hiss**

**David Greenberg**  
Rutgers University

Richard Nixon and Alger Hiss barely knew each other. Yet they led intertwined and in some ways parallel lives. Both men were relatively unknown until 1948 when Nixon, as a young congressman from California, led the House Un-American Activities Committee's (HUAC) inquiry into Hiss's Communist past. That episode, as is well known, led Hiss—at the time a respected Washington foreign policy expert—down a corridor of darkness: exposure of his secret past; charges of espionage; a perjury conviction; prison time; and a lifelong war to salvage his reputation. For Nixon, in contrast, the encounter opened the door to a bright path: a Senate

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## **The Psychohistory of Atrocity in Guerilla and Civil Wars**

**Ken Fuchsman**  
University of Connecticut

In the midst of the carnage of World War I, Freud declared: "If you want to endure life, prepare yourself for death" (Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," *Standard Edition*, XIV [London: Hogarth Press, 1915], p. 300). The end of life comes in a variety of ways. Some expire asleep in their beds, others are dismembered in battle. The aspect of death this essay will explore is atrocity in war. Understanding combat in an extreme form may reveal something about the place of death in life. Atrocities are deadly violence inflicted in wartime on civilians, prisoners or others perceived as the enemy. As a Vietnam veteran and historian these are issues

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## **Jefferson Without Idealization**

**Paul H. Elovitz**  
The Psychohistory Forum

President John F. Kennedy welcomed the most famous American intellectuals to a White House dinner with the words, "I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered at the White House - with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone." JFK, perhaps the last American president to be able to get the leading American minds to break bread with him, reflecting the extraordinary esteem in which Jefferson (1743-1826) has been held. It is easy to put the builder of democracy, authorship of the "Declaration of Inde-

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## **James M. Glass: Listener, Teacher, and Scholar of Psychosis**

**C. Fred Alford**  
University of Maryland

*James M. Glass was born on May 1, 1940 in Los Angeles, California, where his father was in the jewelry business while his mother kept house. He has an older half-brother and half-sister, now deceased, from his mother's previous marriage. He was a*

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## Greenberg on Nixon and Hiss

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seat, the vice presidency, and eventually the presidency. But after Watergate he too lived out his days fighting to rehabilitate his name in the history books. That both men shared this final fate of battling in vain to shape history's judgment is telling, for they shared during their lives an overweening concern with image and reputation as well as a risky willingness to cover up past deeds, at great cost. These shared qualities help account for another feature common to both men: their enduring role as symbols of the Cold War era.

With Hiss and Nixon alike, the question of reputation is inescapable. Most historians these days agree that Hiss lied about his past in the Communist Party. But it is Nixon's name, not Hiss's, that is most closely associated with villainy throughout our political universe. That association existed, moreover, long before Watergate. Widespread hatred of Nixon—hatred that went beyond the typical dislike for a political opponent—predated his term as president. Even when he held what was then the inconsequential office of vice president, Nixon had, as the journalist Stewart Alsop wrote, “probably more enemies than any other American” (“The Mystery of Richard Nixon,” *Saturday Evening Post*, July 12, 1958, p. 29).

On the very first page of his first memoir, *Six Crises* (1962), Nixon wrote that after 1948 “my name, my reputation, and my career” became tied up with his aggressive pursuit of Hiss. He also insisted that the animus toward him stemmed from his lead role in the case. But this judgment was mistaken, and it reflects Nixon's tendency toward self-pitying self-justification. In fact, Nixon-hating didn't emerge as a national phenomenon until his smearing of Helen Gahagan Douglas as the “pink lady” in his 1950 Senate race—or even perhaps until his infamous slush fund scandal and “Checkers Speech” of 1952. As it turns out, during the Hiss case liberal opinion was divided. Many liberals were skeptical of Hiss's claims. Arthur Schlesinger, James Wechsler, and William Shannon, for example, all thought Hiss was guilty. Wechsler actually received a thank-you note from Nixon for defending Whittaker Chambers (Kevin Mattson, *When America Was Great: The Fighting Faith of Postwar Liberalism*, 2004, p. 54).

Shannon, in a 1955 profile of Nixon for the *New York Post* wrote, “The prestige of his participation in the unmasking of Alger Hiss for example is untarnished and not in dispute, but he cannot live on that forever” (“What Makes Nixon Run?” Article I, October 17, 1955, p. 1). Even periodicals such as *The Nation* and the *Washington Post* that had originally believed Hiss over Chambers, changed their tune after the disclosure of the Pumpkin Papers. “It is now apparent that this politics-ridden committee has broken one of the most sensational spy cases in American history,” wrote *The Nation* (in Sam Tanenhaus, *Whittaker Chambers: A Biography*, 1997, p. 325). But because Nixon chose to remember himself as unfairly maligned during the Hiss case—seeing it as an instance where he was right and his critics were wrong—he could tell himself that the liberals' dislike of him was groundless.

It's certainly true that the Hiss case crystallized a public image of Nixon as a fervent crusader against Communists. Once Nixon materialized as the liberals' bête noire in the 1950s, his critics went back and retrospectively traced a leitmotif of dishonest Red-baiting in his career. Then, in the years that followed, as McCarthy-style anti-Communism fell into increasing disrepute, Nixon's past conduct—such as in his 1946 congressional campaign against Jerry Voorhis, the Hiss case, the Douglas campaign, and other political episodes of the Red Scare years—came to be seen as forming a pattern of shameful behavior. By the end of the decade, Nixon's reputation for indiscriminately charging rivals with being red or pink had come to plague him. Indeed, this image of the immature demagogue became the foil for the so-called “New Nixon” that he sought to create for himself as he planned his presidential run in 1960. For the rest of his career, Nixon would be torn between wanting to project the persona of a dignified statesman and wanting to give in to his instinct for the jugular.

If Nixon's reputation evolved partly in response to how society viewed his anti-Communism, popular judgments of Hiss varied partly in response to views of Nixon. Hiss enjoyed his most favorable spells of attention precisely when Nixon's standing was plummeting. For example, after Nixon lost his race for governor of California in 1962, ABC News interviewed Hiss for its half-hour news special entitled, “The Political Obituary of Richard Nixon.” On the show, Hiss said, quite accurately, that Nixon was

“motivated by ambition, by personal self-serving” (in Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, 1978, p. 246). Later, during the time of Watergate and of the exposure of lawlessness at J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI, Hiss even became something of a hero to a younger, left-leaning generation that had come to view McCarthyite tactics as synonymous with anti-Communism. As Edward White has written, the scenario of Nixon having conspired with Chambers and the FBI to frame Hiss was “no more implausible, in post-Watergate America, than the Nixon White House enlisting the FBI in persecutions of its political opponents” (G. Edward White, *Alger Hiss’s Looking-Glass Wars: The Covert Life of a Soviet Spy*, 2004, p. 145). In short, Hiss was admired for having been victimized. He had chosen to seek vindication in what he called, in the title of his memoir, “the Court of Public Opinion” (Alger Hiss, *In the Court of Public Opinion*, 1957), and he benefited from the evolving views of the Red Scare, the Cold War, and of Nixon. “Mr. Nixon is sort of a press agent for me,” Alger told Tony Hiss. “I now have a chance to state my own position simply because of the fact that Nixon was one of my initial tormentors” (in White, *Looking-Glass Wars*, p. 152).

In addition to Hiss and Nixon’s shared concern with reputation was their common impulse to cover up. The life of a Communist spy is inherently a double life, divided between public and private personae. Nixon, likewise, was always covering up—his feelings, his secret diplomacy, and of course his illegal political activities. In addition, both men undertook their cover ups knowing the potential risks. Hiss’s concern with his image led him to seek to cover up his past Communist activities even to the point of committing perjury. As commentators have noted, this was a tragic mistake. If he had chosen a more truthful strategy of disclosure, he wouldn’t have gone to jail, since the statute of limitations on espionage had expired by the time Whittaker Chambers appeared before HUAC. It is fine for us to fault the millions of Americans who indulged in the anti-Communist mania of the early Cold War years for not appreciating the difference between being a Communist and compromising the nation’s security, but Hiss brought it on himself. Sending him to jail for perjury was hardly necessary, but his own initiation of the cover-up is what doomed him.

So, as fate would have it, it was from the Hiss case that Nixon learned the lesson, as he said often,

“It isn’t the crime, it’s the cover-up.” On his secret White House tapes—those wonderful documents that revealed the gulf between the public and the private Nixons—the president can often be heard making the following and similar statements: “If you cover up, you’re going to get caught” (as he told his aide John Ehrlichman just a month after the Watergate cover-up had itself begun, quoted in Stanley I. Kutler, *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes*, 1997, p. 93).

Nixon professed to have taken this lesson from the Hiss case to heart. As the Watergate scandal unraveled, he regularly instructed his aides to go back and read the chapter in his memoir, *Six Crises*, about the episode. He reveled in recounting his own devious leaking of information to the press to force the Truman Justice Department—which had been inclined not to prosecute Hiss—to pursue criminal charges. But during Watergate Nixon was unable to heed his own advice. As with Hiss, his cover up turned out to be far more damaging than even the impeachable offenses they were designed to conceal. Did he unconsciously identify with Hiss? In *Six Crises* Nixon had written of the “letdown” and the “shock and sadness” he felt on seeing Hiss exposed. “I imagined myself in his place.... It is not a pleasant picture to see a whole brilliant career destroyed before your eyes. I realized that Hiss stood before us completely unmasked” (p. 37). The term “unmasked” is especially revealing, since Nixon himself was accused his whole career of wearing a mask—to the point where the Nixon mask became a recurring trope in American popular culture. (On the Nixon mask, see my *Nixon’s Shadow: The History of an Image*, 2003, xv-xvii.)

In their concern with surface images and their concealment of personal secrets, Hiss and Nixon embody an anxiety that was central to American postwar politics. It was an almost existential worry that politics had changed from *representative* government to what might be called *representational* government: leadership by men who proffered not honest words and ideas to match the needs of their constituents but misleading and flickering images designed to hoodwink their constituents.

There were two main reasons for this anxiety. One was the Cold War. The ideology of an existential struggle against a fearsome ideology bent on global conquest taught Americans to accept and even welcome a degree of official deception as a necessary

tool in winning the war for hearts and minds around the world. The culture celebrated spies—our spies, at least—and demonized those for the other side. It encouraged deference to authority, a habit of not asking too many questions of leaders.

The second reason for this anxiety over surfaces and secrets, I think, was nothing less than the full flowering of mass society—a favorite subject of social critics in those years. Intellectuals from David Riesman to William Whyte to Erving Goffman to Daniel Boorstin noted the trends. Face-to-face interactions seemed to be receding in importance next to impressions gleaned from mass media. This shift induced a worry that traditional values were eroding and that the deep, solid, enduring set of human attributes known as character seemed to be yielding to a more superficial, manipulable, evanescent constellation of traits called personality. Public relations, television, and sophisticated methods of molding public opinion heightened the concern. In politics, it was feared, unprincipled operators could use new technologies to misrepresent themselves and hoodwink voters.

Nixon shared this concern. For him, Hiss embodied this new type of soulless man. In *RN*, he called Hiss “too clever by half.” Hiss was, he said, “too suave, too smooth, and too self-confident to be an entirely trustworthy witness” (p. 55). Nixon of course had ambivalent feelings toward such suavity. Part of him admired Hiss’s skill in presenting the false façade, and there was a perverse kind of integrity, as if among gangsters, in Hiss’s willingness not to crack. “The great thing about Hiss—I’ve got to say this for Hiss,” Nixon said, again on the tapes. “He never ratted on anybody else. Never. He never ratted” (in Kutler, *Abuse of Power*, p. 18). Yet there was also clearly a deep hatred for Hiss’s knowing, all-encompassing lies. “If the American people understood the real character of Alger Hiss,” Nixon said to Chambers in 1948, “they would boil him in oil” (Whittaker Chambers, *Witness*, 1952, p. 793n). Nixon was convinced that Hiss’s dapper, poised exterior concealed a furtive, shameful nature. He even believed and spread the baseless rumor that Hiss and Chambers had been lovers.

If to Nixon, Hiss was the soulless modern man, to liberals like Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., the epitome of this type was none other than Nixon himself. As Schlesinger wrote:

Nixon is in many respects a good example of midcentury man, obsessed with appearances rather than the reality of things, obsessed above all with his own appearance, his own image, seeking reassurance through winning, but never knowing why he is so mad to win or what he will do with his victory. Issues for him are secondary and subordinate, to be maneuvered and manipulated. What matters is stance, not substance; what matters is a felt righteousness of motive, a sentence of humility on the lips, a look of dedication on the face (*Kennedy or Nixon: Does It Make Any Difference?* [1960], p. 18).

Schlesinger’s description of Nixon shouldn’t be taken uncritically. It reflects as much on Schlesinger’s disdain for Nixon’s petty strivings as it does on Nixon’s character. It short changes certain commitments that Nixon held, such as his belief in diplomacy in pursuit of peace. But it does beautifully capture a lot about Nixon’s nature. Most importantly, it identifies the ease with which Nixon’s concern with image slid into political opportunism and then into amorality.

Most Americans are capable of holding their ground on that slippery slope. We can understand the obsession with image that moved Nixon and Hiss, even if we don’t possess it in quite the same measure. We recognize the necessity of opportunism in politics, which is the art of the possible, although we’re quick to pounce when opportunism seems to short-change principle, and we become indignant as soon as it bleeds into criminality.

So Nixon and Hiss are not us. Yet, in a culture that vaunts the elusive quality of authenticity, of being true to oneself, these men’s ready assumption of public guises reminds us of our own playing of roles, even perhaps of the mild deceptions of which we partake. (On Nixon and this phenomenon, see Leo Rangell, *The Mind of Watergate: An Exploration of the Compromise of Integrity*, 1980.) The seemingly vast gulfs between the public and private Nixon and the public and private Hiss continue to trouble and fascinate us not only because they imply that our political leaders aren’t who they claim, but also because they tap into the nagging, gnawing anxiety that our own public selves aren’t exactly the same as our private selves either.

**David Greenberg, PhD**, Assistant Professor of Media Studies, Journalism, and History at Rutgers

University, is best known as the author of *Nixon's Shadow: The History of an Image* (2003), which won two major book awards. Recently he published *Calvin Coolidge* (2006) and wrote the text and introduction for *Presidential Doodles: Two Centuries of Scribbles, Scratches, Squiggles & Scrawls from the Oval Office* (2006). Professor Greenberg has written for scholarly and popular publications including the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Journal of American History*, the *Political Science Quarterly*, and *Slate*, the online magazine. His work focuses primarily on American political culture in recent decades. □

## Alford Interview of Glass

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reformed Jew who grew up in Beverly Hills at a time when it was considered a middle class suburb. He "escaped" Los Angeles by attending the University of California, Berkeley and received his BA in 1961. After a year attending the London School of Economics and hitchhiking around Europe, and then an unenthusiastic year at Stanford Law School, he returned to Berkeley in 1963 where he wanted to study political philosophy in the Department of Political Science. In 1964 he earned his MA and in 1970 his PhD from the University of California at Berkeley. In 1970 after some teaching in Berkeley, Professor Glass moved to the East Coast where he has since taught at the University of Maryland, College Park. There he is a Distinguished Scholar-Teacher and was recently awarded its Kerwin Prize for Outstanding Teaching – granted yearly to only one faculty member. In 2004 Glass was named Outstanding Faculty Member of the Year by the State of Maryland.

As a scholar James Glass has been quite prolific, publishing nine book chapters, thirty-six articles, ten review essays, and eighteen book reviews. He is the author of six books, the first four stemming from his almost twenty-year-long research project at the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital, interviewing patients and then writing about their internal worlds. These are *Delusion: Internal Dimensions of Political Life* (University of Chicago Press, 1985), *Private Terror/Public Space: Psychosis and the Politics of Community* (Cornell University Press, 1989), *Shattered Selves: Multiple Personality in a Post-Modern World* (Cornell University Press, 1993), *Psychosis and Power: Threats to Democracy in the Self and the*

*Group* (Cornell University Press, 1995), *Life Unworthy of Life: Race Phobia and Mass Murder in Hitler's Germany* (Basic Books, 1997), and *Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust: Moral Uses of Violence and Will* (Palgrave/Macmillan, 2004).

C. Fred Alford (CFA) interviewed James Glass (JMG) in the spring. Together they edit the *Psychoanalysis and Social Theory* series of Cornell University Press, which thus far has published six books. Professor Glass may be contacted at [jglass@gvpt.umd.edu](mailto:jglass@gvpt.umd.edu). He lives in Maryland with his wife Cyndi, a social worker in private practice; they have two teenaged sons.

**CFA:** What brought you to political psychology?

**JMG:** I had a long-standing interest in the psychological dimensions of political and social theory. In 1977, I established a research relationship with the Sheppard and Enoch Pratt Hospital in Baltimore, interviewing patients and then writing about their internal worlds in relation to political and theoretical issues at the heart of the Western tradition of political philosophy. I studied madness, its languages and symbolizations, and wrote about the relation of madness in individuals to madness in political societies and groups. That work preoccupied me for well over a decade. I studied various psychotic and borderline conditions in patients and then interpreted the data (language) in the context of moral, political, and philosophical issues central to the canon of political philosophy.

**CFA:** Of which of your works are you most proud?

**JMG:** That's hard to say. I have been enormously influenced by my work at Sheppard Pratt, an experience that I wrote about in my books about the hospital and its patients. But I also was profoundly moved by my research into the Holocaust, and the interviews with survivors, including those in the resistance, whose stories and narratives affected me deeply.

**CFA:** What are you working on now; what is its importance; and when do you expect to have it published?

**JMG:** Now I'm looking at different ways of interpreting the civil society of mass murder, with particular reference to the Holocaust. I find the kind of research and values developed in civil society to be as critical in forging the state of mind behind the "final solution" as the Nazi party and apparatus of state. In fact, it seems to me that often civil society led the