DORSEN: What I’d first like to do is ask Bruce Craig and Tony Hiss whether they’d like to comment in any way before we move to the audience?

CRAIG: I’d just like to hear from Tony and then from the audience, very frankly.

DORSEN: Very good. Tony?

TONY HISS: Tim is not a hard act to follow, it’s impossible to follow it. I thank Tim for his courage in coming to share his story with us today, and I’m proud to be sitting here with him and Norman and Bruce and all of you.

DORSEN: Thank you. Now we have about twenty minutes. Will people who want to ask a question or make a brief comment please go to one of the microphones. I will go from one side to the other. Also please state your name and affiliation.

QUESTION: My name is Arnold Handler, NYU Law School, and one very quick comment and one very quick question. A couple of years ago, I was giving an informal speech on Alger Hiss about whom I knew nothing. I opened up WITNESS, the first few pages, and I thought the sexual tension Whittaker Chambers is expressing toward Alger Hiss, and no one else had ever commented on that until now. So I thank you.

HOBSON: That’s not quite true because Zeligs’ book comments on it and Moore’s book also comments on it. Moore says essentially the same things I do as far as motivation and vindictiveness being part of the collection of material at the end.

QUESTION: Yes, actually, no one really knew except for one person. I read later that Richard Nixon had said there was some kind of homosexual affair here, which isn’t quite you said or what I think --. President Nixon --

DORSEN: Your question?
QUESTION: I’m sorry, one question. Looking at the Venona Papers, the reference is to Alias and so on. It seemed to be hearsay. Someone in Army intelligence was referring to someone named Alias working for police intelligence. So it didn’t seem direct evidence at all to me. I wonder if anyone at the table would like to comment on that.

TONY HISS: Well, I think you have to wait for the next panel because there’s an entire presentation by Kai Bird called, “Who was ALES?” And he and Dr. Svetlana Chervonnaya from Moscow have gone into that question at great length.

DORSEN: Thank you very much.

QUESTION [HARVEY SPEAR]: Tim, my name is Harvey Spear. I was one of the speakers at the Memorial Service for your dad. I have -- first before I give you my question, I wanted to say, pay my respects to you and tell you that your remarks were awesome. Awesome today.

My question is one of the many questions that one has in reading WITNESS, and that is the details with which Chambers described the alleged drive from Washington, DC to New York in the Ford, presumably with you present, and with Prossy and Alger. The details are so voluminous that it’s hard to believe that they are fictional or that he made them up. Do you recall a drive in that car in the Ford with Whittaker Chambers and your parents?

HOBSON: A one word answer is no. The drive never took place. Physically it couldn’t have taken place in that car really. If there were four of us in a two-seat roadster in the front, and a rumble seat in the back and any luggage along the way on a trip to New York City in God knows what weather. It didn’t take place. I never remember seeing a man named Carl, Chambers, Crosley --
QUESTION [HARVEY SPEAR]: George Crosley --

HOBSON: -- whatever you want, in my life. So it didn’t take place.

QUESTION [HARVEY SPEAR]: Thank you. And the other part of the inquiry goes to the farm that is now a National Historic Site. The farm that your father had a contract to buy that presumably after he and Priscilla decided I think in Westminster, Maryland, decided they could not afford and would not buy ended up being purchased by Whittaker Chambers. Talking about fetishes, he ended up with the farm and now a national monument. Do you have any recollection about that farm?

HOBSON: I have no recollection of it whatsoever, and I don’t remember them ever discussing buying a farm down there. They may -- Alger may have mentioned something like that to somebody as being a desirable part of the country to live in, and knowing our friend, Mr. Chambers, he could have manufactured that into anything he wanted.

QUESTION: Thank you.

DORSEN: Thank you.

QUESTION [PAUL DECKER]: Yes, my name is Paul Decker, I’m a retired high school teacher and now doing freelance writing. I just want to make a comment if my memory serves me correctly, if I’m not right, please correct me, there were actually two trials of Alger Hiss.

TONY HISS: Right.

QUESTION: The first trial resulted in a hung jury and ended in a mistrial, whereupon Richard Nixon from the House Committee on Un-American Activities castigated the judge and said, threatened the judge and made some comments about the fact that the judge was too lenient and too -- and they removed the judge and the second trial occurred in that -- the trial that
eventually resulted in Hiss’s conviction occurred in that atmosphere that had been created by the
government, by the Un-American Activities Committee after the first trial had ended in a mistrial
and the judge had been criticized.

Would you like to comment on that?

DORSEN: Tony, do you want to say something?

TONY HISS: You’re right. The next judge was an elderly gentleman --

QUESTION [PAUL DECKER]: Samuel Kaufman.

HISS: Judge Goddard replaced Judge Kaufman after Nixon said that Judge Kaufman
should be impeached for letting this traitor not be convicted, and Judge Goddard conduct the
same sort of trial. In fact he regularly dozed on the bench during the second trial.

QUESTION [PAUL DECKER]: Thank you.

HOBSON: I’d like to add one bit of memorabilia about Alger and the legal case
histories. I never went to any of the trials except for I think two days. I was asked by the
lawyers not to go because I was a potential witness, but I did go down during the noon hours to
be with the defense team for lunches. They took a break at lunch. One day in particular, Mr.
Murphy, the prosecuting attorney, had pulled some very questionable legal shenanigans to
present some evidence that was questionable as to whether it should be presented or not, and the
lawyers for the Hiss defense were angry and adamant and shrieking about their complaint about
what had taken place that morning.

And I remember Alger looking up from lunch and saying, “You know in my day when I
was in the Justice Department, we never would have touched a case like this.” That was Alger
Hiss.
DORSEN: Mr. Craig?

CRAIG: I’ve just got one note on the comment about the level of detail that shows up in WITNESS. We all have to keep in mind, Whittaker Chambers was a journalist. I remember interviewing one lady and, frankly, I cannot remember her name, but she worked with Whittaker Chambers at TIME MAGAZINE, and when Chambers was at TIME, there was a rather difficult staff upheaval there as Chambers would fairly routinely change reports that would be coming in from abroad. I remember Chambers’s co-worker telling me one time that she went in to see Mr. Chambers as her report had been totally changed. Whittaker said to her ---“I know what they’re saying in the French cafes, and even though it might not be reflected in this report, my rewrite indeed is what they’re saying.” I think that gives a little bit of insight in terms of how this man thought. You can also look at the opening page of WITNESS as well and you see a very detailed description of his birth, for example, on April 1, in which he is talking about being born in a blinding snowstorm. In Philadelphia, in April.

Well, that’s not what the official weather report reflects. Chambers took an amazing amount of literary license, and that’s why I like to characterize WITNESS, as a very “novel” work.

DORSEN: Sir?

QUESTION [OLIVER LUNDQUIST]: My name’s is Oliver Lundquist, and I knew Alger for many years because I had the good luck to have been invited by Secretary of State Stettinius to attend and do some work at the 1945 conference establishing the United Nations, and I met Alger just after Yalta and considered him a friend ever since, because we did get together in Washington and then back in New York when he moved to New York and I moved to
New York. So I have a long history, and I’ll just cut it short now but I do want Tony and Tim to know my latest brief comments for this conference, and so I will give them these notes after.

Thank you.

TONY HISS: Thank you, Oliver. And I should point out that Oliver is still part of the world scene because he is responsible for the design of the U.N. logo, the World surrounded by two olive branches.

QUESTION [RICHARD PYLE]: My name is Richard Pyle, I work for the Associated Press. I’m a journalist, but I’m not Whittaker Chambers. I have one question for Dr. Hobson. You said that you thought that Whittaker Chambers was in love with Alger Hiss and that he was rebuffed. Are you saying that Whittaker Chambers was a homosexual?

HOBSON: Am I saying it? Yes. But more important, Whittaker Chambers said it. He said it in a letter to the FBI that he gave them during the Baltimore libel trials, and the FBI never revealed that information to anybody, particularly the defense.

It was never brought out in open. Chambers in the letter, which is in the records and available in the records, admitted to being an active homosexual, particularly during the years of this reported espionage, and I think that answers your question. Am I saying it? Yes. But more important, he said it.

QUESTION [RICHARD PYLE]: Thank you very much.

CRAIG: Sam Tanenhaus’s biography on Whittaker Chambers deals with this issue in a great detail.

QUESTION [RICHARD PYLE]: Thank you very much.
QUESTION [MARK LAFLAUR]: My name is Mark LaFlaur. I’m a senior editor at St. Martin’s Press, and I have the privilege of working with the late Mr. Bill Reuben and his manuscript when I was a freelance editor in New Orleans, around the year 2000, for a couple of years.

Dr. Hobson, your testimony is most admirable. Your courage. I just wanted to ask it’s understandable why your father and his attorneys would be uncomfortable with you testifying but why would the prosecution not have called you? Could they not have called you to testify?

HOBSON: I’m not a lawyer. I can’t answer that question, but I don’t think they could, and they certainly -- it would have been far more important to them to keep me quiet and not tell my story than it would be to try and discredit the Hiss side by having me there as a homosexual.

QUESTION [MARK LAFLAUR]: That makes sense. Okay.

DORSEN: There’s also the danger of inviting a witness for the prosecution who might be an unfriendly witness and therefore you can’t predict the way the testimony will develop.

QUESTION [MARK LAFLAUR]: Right, okay, thank you.

QUESTION: Hello. My name is Reynold Crenshaw(?). I’m merely a political activist. No other affiliations. But I’d just like to make a comment in reference to the case of Alger Hiss. I was very young at the time, so at the time I didn’t understand all the politics that were going on, but I knew about the Cold War, in effect, and what I want to say briefly is I think that what happened in this period was that it was necessary to start a witchhunt to root out people who had ever had an understanding of Marxism in the United States, that comes out of the Thirties, and the Thirties necessitated the Keynesian economic programs to save capital in the United States. So what to me seems to have happened is that it was necessary to seek out anyone that could
have been knowledgeable and would pass on information not about espionage but about the values of Marxism. So that had to be rooted out by fear, and therefore, that starts the persecution of all the people that were involved in the HUAC and Senate Internal Security Committee fear tactics, and I see that in light of today, with the new War on Terror is a similar thing, to direct the understanding of the American public not to understand the imperial aims of the United States currently today --

DORSEN: You have about thirty seconds more.

QUESTION: Okay, all right, I just wanted to say that I see a parallel between the War on Terror which is a war on the American public rather than any actual war on terror. Okay, because 9/11 was an inside job.

DORSEN: Thank you, any comment?

TONY HISS: Well, I think you have added perhaps an eleventh point to Victor Navasky’s ten points. I would just like to say for the record that Alger Hiss was more of an expert on Groucho Marx than on Karl Marx.

HOBSON: I’d like to add a twelfth point to Mr. Navasky’s. Why is it important for us as a nation, this case? It was the point of time of McCarthyism, and it’s my understanding that McCarthy was instrumental in having 23 or 27 Far Eastern experts in the State Department removed from the State Department, presumably because they were communists and/or homosexuals and/or both. This was the time that Alger Hiss was President of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He was being groomed to be a future Secretary of State, and it’s my little dream, as a “perhaps”-type dream that if those men had been in the State
Department and if Alger Hiss had been Secretary of State, we might have avoided the Korean War.

DORSEN: This will have to be the last question. Sir?

QUESTION [ERIC SEIFF]: My name’s Eric Seiff. I was Bill Reuben’s lawyer for many years, and I also provided some modest legal assistance in trying to free up some of the papers that were in the Justice Department through the Freedom of Information Act. Mr. Hiss, you mentioned how much your dad had changed as a result of his years in prison. I wonder if you would elaborate on that a little bit.

TONY HISS: It was the place I think that he really learned how to listen to people, in a deep way, to listen to what they weren’t saying as much as to what they were saying; and it was a place where he began to seek out young people who were trying to figure out what to do with their lives and offered his assistance just as a sounding board. I still meet people who have gone on to do very well, who say that three hours with Alger Hiss was a turning point in their lives. One of them is now a foundation president. One of them is now a college president.

I do think, as Tim was saying, that Alger had an odd kind of defect. He didn’t have a personal sense of danger, that he might be inadvertently making enemies as he walked through Washington, DC.

It’s hard to think of someone going to Washington, DC without a sense of danger, but he had almost Sense-of-Danger Deficit Disorder, which did get corrected in Lewisburg, where he was befriended, oddly enough, like all the odd parts of this, by some wise guys as they were called, New York and New Jersey mafiosi, who were in there, and who said to him, “What are
you doing here?” For them, being in jail was just an occupational hazard so they were the sanest people inside.

I think that Alger, as Tim said, is a hard man to understand because he was just so damned decent. Sometimes you wanted to shake him, he was so damned decent. He couldn’t understand how people could have more than one feeling at a time. I remember once he didn’t want me to come to some affair where he was being honored and I said to him, I was happy that he was being honored but I was mad that I couldn’t come, and I put my wife on the phone, and she tried to explain this. And Alger said, “But which is he? Is he happy or mad?” And she said, “Well, both.” And he said, “What? How could anyone have two emotions at the same time?” And my wife thought to herself — “And this man is supposed to have been the master spy of the twentieth century!”

DORSEN: I want to thank the panelists, thank Victor Navasky, and we’ll move onto the second panel.

QUESTION [OLIVER LUNDQUIST]: May I add one quick note? That is, the earlier speakers this morning talked about the Cold War beginning in 1948. But as Timothy says, I was there and the Cold War began when Roosevelt died in April, 1945. And I’m sure Victor Navasky would agree with that.