

## ***Rosenberg-Sobell Panel Discussion***

**Speakers: Miriam Schneir, Michael Meeropol, Robert Meeropol, and Dave Alman**

### ***[BACKGROUND NOISE]***

**Moderator:** Good afternoon, everybody. Just a couple announcements. One, this is the Rosenberg Panel. Second, if you have a cell phone, please turn it off. And third, and third, there is some literature here from the Rosenberg Fund for Children and for the National Committee to Reopen the Rosenberg Case. So after the session, please take an opportunity to, to gather it if you would like.

In one of the more than glorious moments, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover told the world that Ethel and Julius Rosenberg committed the crime of the century. What is clear to historians and others is that this together with the Sacco Vanzetti case, these trials and others, certainly were the trials of the century. The Rosenberg case was the centerpiece, the elaborate Cold War strategy of turning the United States away from the prevailing view that fascism was the main threat to humanity. The notion that the world was about to be engulfed by communism. It was also centerpiece of an effort to derail, if not destroy, the New Deal Coalition, and to stifle dissent and activism.

Crucial to this far-flung ideological effort was the necessity to equate communism and dissent in general with treason. That proof was supplied by the Rosenberg-Sobell case, who purportedly told how the secret of the atom bomb had been stolen and given to the Russians. Over the last few years, there have been new revelations concerning this case. And we have an amazing panel today that will be both responding to these revelations as well as making some of their own.

The speakers, in order of their speaking will be Miriam Schneir, Michael Meeropol, Robert Meeropol, and Dave Alman. And I will do an introduction for each of them as we go forward. So first, Miriam Schneir. She is the co-author with the late Walter Schneir of the iconic *Invitation to an Inquest*, which was first published by Doubleday in 1965 and had its fourth edition in 1983. Both wrote frequently on developments in the case for the nation and for other national publications. My apologies, I have a little cold, so I'm, my voice is not quite up to par. A book on the Rosenberg case by Walter, with a preface and afterward by Miriam, is scheduled for publication by Melville House Publishing in September of this year. It is titled, *Final Verdict: What Really Happened in the Rosenberg Case*. Miriam is also the editor of two anthologies: *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*, first published by Random House and Vintage in 1972, and the last edition by Vintage in 1994; and also, she is editor of *Feminism in Our Time: The Essential Writings, World War II to the Present*. She is presently working on a book that deals with the history of women. Miriam Schneir. ***[APPLAUSE]***

**Miriam Schneir:** Could we ask everybody to step over in their chairs to their left? And then chairs on the outside could be brought in, then we'll have more seating. ***[BACKGROUND NOISE]***

Well, I've been asked to keep this to 12 minutes and I think if I talk fast, I can actually do that. But please let me know if you can't hear me. Would you rather have me standing? Well, it's a little complicated because I'm wired here.

As many of you know, the media reported to me their new developments in the Rosenberg case in 2008. The first was that the government took the unusual step of releasing grand jury testimony and Robert and Michael Meeropol are going to speak more about that. The second was that Morton Sobell, after maintaining for decades his innocence, told a *New York Times* reporter that he had passed information to Soviet agents in the 1940s. When the reporter asked Morty if he was in fact a spy, Morty said, "Yeah, call it that. I never thought of it as that in that way."

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What I want to do today is to share with you some of my thoughts about Sobell's late-life confession. My perspective is rooted in my own long association with the case and my long association and friendship with Morty. It seems to me appropriate to talk about this here, in a gathering of leftists because some of you, I think, have felt uncertain – maybe even angry – about Sobell's long-term deception of supporters and political allies. But first, a little background for those who may not know it.

In 1950, Sobell, a 33-year-old engineer, was charged with conspiracy to commit espionage. He was tried jointly with his friends, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, and all three pleaded not guilty. The case against him was weak; only one witness connected him to the espionage conspiracy. There was no charge of atomic espionage connected with him at all. Nevertheless, he was an important figure in the government's case.

For one thing, the government couldn't put up a conspiracy trial that consisted of all chiefs – the Rosenbergs – and no Indians. And Morty was the stand-in for the missing spy ring. Also, he was apprehended in Mexico. He claimed the trip was a family vacation. The authorities said he was fleeing arrest. Anyway, the flight story gave the government's case a certain cloak and dagger panache that it didn't, that it was really lacking in every other respect.

The government tried its damndest to get Morty to cooperate and confess. J. Edgar Hoover secretly recommended that he be given a death sentence. Judge Irving R. Kaufman sentenced him to 30 years – the maximum prison term permitted by the statute. He was sent to Alcatraz, the nation's harshest prison – intended only for hardened criminals. And he was held there for five years. The government went to incredible lengths to try to break him, but failed entirely. And some of their dirty tricks are detailed in Morty's book, *On Doing Time*, which I recommend. It's very interesting reading.

It was the American left, essentially, that kept the Rosenberg case alive. Shortly after the trial ended, *The Progressive Weekly*, *The National Guardian* ran a series in which it asked, "Is this the Dreyfus case of Cold War America?" That year, too, supporters of the Rosenbergs and Sobell, the distinct, courageous minority of dissenters in Cold War America, formed a national committee to secure justice in the Rosenberg case. And this organization, amazingly enough, has been in existence every since – now called the National Committee to Reopen the Rosenberg Case. It was left-wing publishers who put out the first books defending the Rosenbergs. In 1955, William Ruben's *Atom Spy Hoax*; John Wesley's *Judgment of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg*. By the '60s, times had changed and Walter Schneir and I were able to obtain a mainstream publisher, Doubleday, for our, the book we co-authored, which is titled *Invitation to an Inquest*.

In 1975, the Meeropols, now young adults, reclaimed their public identity as the Rosenbergs' sons. They filed a *Freedom of Information* suit and succeeded in forcing the government to release tens of thousands of pages of secret government documents. And they also, that year, published their first book, *We Are Your Sons*. It was leading left lawyers including William Kunstler, Arthur Kinoy, Marshall Perlin, who filed legal appeals on Sobell's behalf. And the appeals highlighted many instances of government misconduct. Over the years, a number of now prominent left lawyers had approached me to tell me how important the case was to them, to their political and legal education.

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Then there was Morty's then-wife, Helen. Morty couldn't have had a more effective spokesperson in the outside world. She was an indefatigable organizer and speaker and mobilized many people to join in the fight for Morty's freedom. Finally, after 18 years, Sobell was released in 1969. And that was when Walter and I met him for the first time. Only 24 hours after his release, he held a press conference. Again, he publicly affirmed his innocence. But Morty, at that point, basically wanted to look ahead, not back. He was eager to be part of the movement during that period. And he did so by counseling political prisoners on how to survive a long prison term. He designed a low-tech hearing aid that could be produced cheaply in third world countries and he took it to Vietnam. He visited Cuba and made recommendations for improving science education there. And he traveled in the Soviet Union.

For 48 years, Walter and I, to some extent, campaigned for Sobell to tell his story – all to no avail. On one occasion in 1990, for example, Walter picked Morty up at Bedford prison, where he had been visiting Kathy Boudin and Judith Clark. Walter urged Sobell to tell his story for the sake of history and suggested he could put it on tape to release sometime in the future. But Sobell maintained he was completely innocent and had no story to tell. In 1995, when the government released the Venona decrypts, Sobell strongly denied their authenticity. He circulated a statement at a Venona conference in Washington reiterating his innocence. And at that time, Sobell was angry with Walter and me because we had accepted the validity of Venona. And there was a break in our relationship that lasted four years.

In 1999, Morty telephoned us to compliment us on a piece we had written for *The Nation*. And he later invited us to dinner at his home in San Francisco. I recall that he prepared excellent crab cakes – that was his specialty. And Walter and I were kind of tip-toeing around the whole subject of Venona. We didn't want to have another rupture in the relationship. Then in 2003, Morty and his wife, Nancy, visited the town in Mexico where Walter and I were then living and working. And we celebrated his 86<sup>th</sup> birthday with them. Walter interviewed him during that visit several times. During that time, Morty expressed his deep disappointment with the Soviet Union, and also with Castro's Cuba. And he said, "Politics is still very important to me, but I don't know what I am now politically."

On the Sobells' last day in Mexico, Walter interviewed Morty at a bench in the town's central plaza. And he reminded Morty that 60 years had passed since the events in question, and almost 40 since the publication of our book. And he said to Morty, "Your ideas on the Soviet Union and Castro have changed. Ours have changed on the Gold-Greenglass meeting." But Morty indicated that his position on the case had not changed. He denied that he ever gave any information to Julius or that he was ever asked for any by Julius. But then he added, somewhat enigmatically, "I understand that from your point of view, you want to know the truth. But my preference is for ambiguity." Walter said, "If you ever figure out a way you can tell your story, you should be in touch with me." And Morty said he would think about it.

Five years later, out of the blue, Morty dropped a bombshell. He called us on the telephone and said, "Maybe it's finally time to let it all hang out." We didn't waste any time. We, that day, went straight to his apartment. He talked to us and said that the charges against him at the trial were essentially true. We were amazed to learn that he had never before revealed this to anyone, not even to close family members. We interviewed him a number of times in the next month or two, filling in details. We wanted to understand why he had claimed for so many years that he was innocent, and why he had decided, at age 91, to retract that claim.

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Morty is not an introspective man. To understand what motivated him originally, and then his sudden about-face, one has to fill in between the lines. I'm very tempted to ask, what if? What if he had confessed at the time of his arrest and had implicated Julius and Ethel? But speculation is pointless, besides, Morty could never have done that. Besides, based on everything he told us, one thing to me seems clear. From the beginning, Julius and Ethel had set the terms of the fight. Since they insisted that they were completely innocent, he could not do otherwise. If he had, he would have been playing right into the government's hands. He would have, essentially, been an informer. He could not betray either the Rosenbergs or anyone else involved. Thought it certainly would have meant a lesser, conceivably even no, sentence for himself.

In addition, he refused to allow the government to use him to harm the left. To be true to his political principles, he had to deny any involvement in spying. Moreover, he believed he was morally innocent since the equipment about which he had supplied information to the Russians was, in his opinion, strictly defensive. However, that belief, of course, has no significance whatsoever in a conspiracy trial.

What had changed in 2008? Most important, Morty no longer felt the same allegiance to the Soviet Union. Also, those people that he had sought to protect – his friends, comrades, and college classmates who had been part of the spy network – and that would have included Julius and Ethel, Joel Barr, William Pearl – they had all, they had all died. Finally, scholars and historians, and people in general, including many leftists, had come to accept the idea that Julius had supplied information to the Soviet Union and had recruited others to help. Therefore, Morty concluded that admitting his own role at this time would not have a meaningful impact on public opinion.

He told us that he wanted us to write an article revealing his new position, but he did not want it to be a confession. He cautioned us several times that the article had to be a *je tuse* [UNINTELLIGIBLE] – in other words, he wanted us to stretch the government's misconduct. What he had done in the 1940s, he argued, was trifling, not earth-shaking. And he emphasized over and over that Ethel had never been a part of the information-passing network.

In closing, I want to refer again to the press conference that Morty held in 1969, the day after his release from prison. Reporters there asked him what advice he would give to defendants in the political trials of that day – in other words, in the late '60s. His answer, I think, reveals a great deal about the predicament in which he found himself. He told the reporters that all defendants have to make their own decisions, and it would be presumptuous, he thought, for him to advise them. But then he added, "I can tell them this: once they are embarked upon the path they've chosen, they're going to have to go further than they ever dreamed." And Sobell walked that path. [APPLAUSE]

***Moderator:*** Next speaker is Michael Meeropol. [BACKGROUND NOISE AND TALKING]

Ok, alright, can I have your attention, please? Our next speaker is Michael Meeropol. He is an economist and recent retired Professor of Economics at Western New England College and is currently Visiting Professor at John Jay College at the City University of New York. He is the author of numerous articles on economics and a wonderful book, *Surrender: How the Clinton Administration Completed the Regan Revolution*, and he is a regular commentator on economic issues for public radio WAMC. He is the elder son of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg and is co-author with Robert of *We Are Your Sons: The Legacy of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg*. Michael wants me to say that he has inherited

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his father's pedantry, and treats the Rosenberg-Sobell case as an exercise in historical investigation. And let me just add parenthetically, I've seen him in many classes over the years, and he is an incredible instructor in stimulating students to think about the issues that arise about this case as well as a variety of other issues.

**[APPLAUSE]**

**Michael Meeropol:** I take off right where Miriam left off. On September 11, 2008, Sam Roberts of the *New York Times* broke the story that Morty Sobell was reversing his decades-old long assertion of complete innocence of any espionage charges. And then Roberts added the following: "And he – Sobell – implicated his fellow defendant, Julius Rosenberg, in a conspiracy that delivered to the Soviets classified military and industrial information and what the American government described as the secret to the atomic bomb." Wondering about the last point, I called Morty. And he said my father had never told him anything about any of his other activities. In other words, Robert's statement was false. I suggested Morty try to clear that up. He subsequently wrote a letter, which thankfully, the *New York Times* published, in which he stated he knew nothing about any of my father's other activities. Here's a direct quote: "I want to make it clear that my only direct knowledge of Julius Rosenberg's activities on behalf of the Soviets during World War II, the activities I spoke with your reporter about, was what he and I did together. He never told me about anything else he was engaged in. Some readers of your article might assume I was corroborating the government's charge that the alleged espionage of David Greenglass was true; that I was implying that Julius had told me of his other activities. He never did."

On September 16, Roberts wrote an article about Robbie and me with the following headline: "Father Was a Spy, Sons Conclude with Regret." This headline is typical of the kind of treatment Rob and I have received since we went public in 1973. No matter how often we write what we think and believe, no matter how often we based our analysis on evidence and argument, everybody knows what we think 'cause we're our parents' children; because we love them, we cannot possibly be objective about them or what they did. And perhaps there are people in this room who believe that as well.

We actually assert the opposite. Because of the political nature of the charges against our parents, and the continuing political relevance of what happened to them, as a result of government, prosecutorial, and judicial criminal misconduct, and as a result of the nation-wide hysteria created around the case, we knew from the moment we stepped out of our anonymity, we had to force ourselves to deal as dispassionately and honestly with the evidence as we could. And contrary to the Roberts headline, we were not regretful. In many ways, we were pleased. We had long suspected that the evidence in the Venona decryptations was at least partially true. Rob said as much in his book, *An Execution in the Family*. I said as much in one of the extras on the DVD of my daughter, Ivy's film, *Heir to an Execution*. But since Rob and I were dealing with the CIA and the FBI, masters of deception and misinformation, it seemed absurd for us to be the ones to validate their assertions, unless we were so certain that it was beyond a shadow of a doubt. That was why, from the time of the Venona decryption releases in 1995, we were careful to acknowledge that they might be accurate, but also recognize that there were uncertainties about some of the releases that might point to them having been cooked.

We don't have that uncertainty anymore. I can speak for Rob when I say we are positive our father was engaged in military industrial espionage during World War II in order to help the Soviet Union. Which, despite efforts to hide that fact during the trial in the 1950s, was an important ally in the fight

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against Hitler. We also know that the government's case that he and our mother, through David Greenglass, had stolen the secret of the atom bomb, was a total fraud. More on this when Rob speaks.

Having shed our agnosticism, we can now speak directly to the issue of the crime committed by the U.S. government against our parents and the American left in general. And Rob will speak of the modern relevance of this. I would like to use the rest of my time to shift gears and ask a – hopefully not to pedantic – historian's question: why were communists spies for the Soviet Union during World War II – why were *some* communists spies?

Some of you may know that Bill Williams, in his book, *The Contours of American History*, noted in passing that during World War II, some communists decided that the failure of the U.S. to fully share information with their supposed ally, the Soviet Union, was actually impeding the common effort to defeat Hitler, and therefore, they gave information directly to the Soviets. In reviewing the book, Herbert Aptheker recoiled in horror from that assertion, suggesting it libeled the Rosenbergs and others. But Bill knew what he was talking about. He was talking about the exact same motivation that caused Jonathan Pollak to share information with Israel that he thought the U.S. was wrongfully withholding.

Now many of us probably disagree with Jonathan Pollak's conclusion about the *[UNINTELLIGIBLE]* of interests between the U.S. and Israel. And we could debate his actions strenuously in this room and elsewhere, but whatever our judgment of what he did, we must agree that his motivation was to help Israel, not to harm the United States. What would have been the motivation for dedicated American communists during World War II, if given the opportunity to help out the Soviet Union? Because the government carried out the death sentences, we will never know about my father's specific motivations, and what his self-reflection would have been had he been permitted to live into middle age and beyond. However, we do have the testimony of Theodore Alvin Hall, a man who, at the age of 19 was brought to Los Alamos to work on the development of the A-bomb and who, together with his roommate, Saville Saks, decided to share whatever information he learned about the science behind the bomb, with the Soviet Union. His motivation was very clearly laid out in the book, *Bombshell*. And Annie and I had the pleasure of meeting and speaking with him in his Cambridge, England home once before he died. Ted made very clear that he believed that after winning the war against Hitler, it would be essential that the United States not be the only power in the world in possession of the atomic bomb. Should a reactionary government come to power – and he himself feared a military-dominated polity such as Japan before World War II – he felt that the Soviet Union should have the ability to counter an expansionist America.

So those in this room who grew up learning about American imperialism from Bill Williams and Harry Magdorff and others, the concept of an expansionist America is not a surprising one, but imagine how it sounds – would sound to a randomly selected American citizen. Listen to this – a dangerously expansionist America. But that's the historical record. As Noam Chomsky has often said, "If the historians of the future are honest, they will show and conclude that the existence of the Soviet Union as a military superpower was a major check on an America, which seemed hell-bent on achieving world dominance." And I'm going to flesh this out with a full rhetorical question. What prevented Truman from agreeing with McArthur about the use of atomic weapons against the Chinese during the Korean War? What prevented Eisenhower from endorsing the use of nuclear weapons to keep the French from being defeated at Dien Bien Phu? What prevented Kennedy from invading Cuba in 1962? What prevented Johnson and later Nixon from killing virtually every person in Vietnam in order to win

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between 1965 and '73? We don't have to like Stalinism or what the Soviet Union turned out to be to agree with this Chomsky view that the Soviet Union was a major deterrence to American expansionism and nuclear warfare throughout the post-World War II period. **[APPLAUSE]**

Well, it's nice that you're applauding, but I can't find where I was. **[LAUGHTER]** Alright. Let's see. Alright. I have the testimony. I am sorry, Rob; this is not as much fun as it should be. Alright. So we now have the right-wing in the person of my least favorite historian, Ronald Radosh, who says, "You see? Venona and Morty's statement proves I'm right." Well, he was right the way a broken clock is right two times everyday. His book remains a travesty of historical research as anyone who has carefully read my chapter in the second edition of *We Are Your Sons* and its footnotes can clearly see. But his current argument, and the arguments of Claire and Haines must be confronted head-on because they are using the Cold War prism to look at 1940s activities. The, the leftists who helped the Soviet Union during World War II were doing it because they wanted to protect what they thought at that time was the hope for the future. And once the Cold War had started, all people who supported the Soviet Union in that period, suddenly their actions were redefined in Cold War terms as anti-Americanism. And that is, I think, the major failing of the right-wing approach to this new evidence. And that's what I think we ought to be fighting about.

Communists who spied for the Soviet Union were motivated by international solidarity with a country they believed – wrongly, we now know – represented the hope for a new world. The emergence of what Marx believed would be true civilization. After all, they had destroyed capitalism in old Russia, they were building socialism, and if they survived, they would hopefully show the world a beautiful future. The fact that that American communist in the 1940s were wrong should not, therefore, immediately lead us to the conclusion that they were traitors who wished harm upon the United States. Resisting that conclusion is a good battle that we as left historians and students of history should welcome and join. Thank you. **[APPLAUSE]**

**Moderator:** Why don't you hold onto that? Our next speaker is Robert Meeropol, who is the younger son of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. In the 1970s, he and his brother successfully sued the FBI and CIA to force the release of 300,000 previously secret documents about their parents. In 1990, after leaving law practice, Robert founded The Rosenberg Fund for Children and now serves as its Executive Director. The Rosenberg Fund for Children provides for the educational and emotional needs of both targeted activist youth and children in this country whose parents have been harassed, injured, jailed, lost jobs, or died in the course of their progressive activities. In the, in the 20 year history, the fund has awarded more than \$3.5 million in grants to benefit hundreds of children. Robert's memoir, *An Execution in the Family*, was published by St. Martin's Press in 2003. He is also a member of the Board of Directors of the National Committee to Reopen the Rosenberg Case. **[APPLAUSE]**

**Robert Meeropol:** Well, it's a great, great crowd here. Perhaps we need a bigger room. Hello to all new friends and old friends, friends from far away as Issleberg, Germany. Anyway, in the mid-1970s, when I first said in public that we, through the reopening effort, were going to blow the lid off the Rosenberg case, Mort said to me, he responded, we already had blown the lid off the Rosenberg case with the release of Exhibit A.

The release of Exhibit A, which the government said gave away the secret of the atomic bomb, showed that the core of the government's case was a fraud. This – by the way, one good thing about a small room is you can all see it – this is Exhibit A. This is the secret of the atomic bomb. **[LAUGHTER]**

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Now whether David Greenglass gave this sketch to the U.S.S.R. or was forced to draw it by government prosecutors prior to the trial, it is not the secret of the atomic bomb. And that is what Mort and my parents felt the case against them was all about. They were right. That's why there was a death sentence and that's why we're still talking about the case today. This fraud was why they could deny their guilt. They didn't do it. This is why they could write to me and my brother – my parents could write, "Always remember that we were innocent and could not wrong our conscience." They were innocent of stealing the secret of the atomic bomb.

And I agree that the secret of the atomic bomb is the key fraud in the government's case. And Sobell's admission does nothing to lessen that fraud. And as my brother said, if you read my book, you know I've consider this, this real possibility since the 1980s. So what Mort said was not a big, traumatic revelation for me, but the grand jury transcripts revealed quite a bit. Now I've read all thousand-plus pages – and by the way, if anybody wants to follow along and read those pages themselves, there's some yellow cards up here that you can pick up and they give you web addresses. I've read those thousand pages. And when they were released, the newspapers focused on the fact that Ruth Greenglass, in her grand jury testimony, said absolutely nothing about my mother being present and typing up the notes that accompanied Exhibit A that I showed you before. Now, since that was practically the only evidence against my mother, that was a big deal. But the reality is, is having worked through the *Freedom of Information Act* for many years and forcing the release of a lot of material, we really already knew that. This just proved what we already knew. But now even the mainstream media began to admit that perhaps there really was no case against Ethel Rosenberg.

Now that's a big deal, but other – I think even more important – stuff about the grand jury proceedings were not talked about by the press. And one of them is the fact that not only does Ruth Greenglass not mention my mother's presence at this supposed meeting where the secret of the atomic bomb was transmitted, she doesn't mention Exhibit A at all. It's like Exhibit A didn't exist. And that's why getting David Greenglass' testimony released as well – because it's still secret – is very important. Because if it turns out that neither of them talk about Exhibit A, it raises the possibility that this whole secret of the atomic bomb was tacked on by the government after the grand jury proceedings, or was concocted by the Greenglasses to save their necks.

But the reality is, these developments reinforce the key lessons about the Rosenberg case that we already knew. The U.S. government abused its power in truly dangerous ways that are still very relevant today. Those in power who were involved in my parents' case helped to fuel anti-Communist hysteria and then capitalized on that political climate by targeting my parents and making them the focus of the Cold War, Cold War era fear and anger. They manufactured testimony and evidence, they arrested Ethel as leverage to get Julius to cooperate with the prosecution, and then used their ultimate weapon – the threat of death – to try to extort a confession from my parents, and then forced them to name others and testify against them. And then they created the myth of a key secret of the atomic bomb, then devised a strategy to make it appear that Julius had sought out and passed that secret, and then executed Julius when he refused to cooperate, despite knowing that the secret used to justify the death penalty was a prosecution-created fallacy. And then they executed my mother when she refused to cooperate, despite knowing that she wasn't guilty of the charges and was not an active participant in any espionage activity.

All of this is true, even if every word of Venona is true, and despite anything that Mort said in 2008. And it is past time for the government to admit it and to make amends. But I want to focus on the



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grand jury transcripts. One of the most striking things about this hundred pages, or thousand pages of testimony is how little evidence of espionage is presented in them. In fact, the vast majority of the transcript covers the grilling of uncooperative witnesses. There's probably quite a bit of perjury. People denying they were members of the communist party when they were. People denying that they knew each other when they did. But that's not evidence of espionage. And there's an awful lot of shredding of the Constitution. Badgering people for taking the 5<sup>th</sup> Amendment. I want to – let me read to you just a couple of pages from the transcript.

This is an interview with a guy named Mark Page, a communist party member who rented a room to Julius and Ethel when they first got married. He's being grilled by the prosecutor.

*“Did you meet Rosenberg's parents?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“And his family? Does he have some brothers and sisters?”*

*“I think I met his parents. And I met his sister at one time. I vaguely remember. That's about all I remember. I met his brother, yes, his brother, too.”*

*“Did you know at the time that Julius Rosenberg was interested in the Communist Party?”*

*“On this question, sir, I am afraid I will not be able to answer.”*

*Question: “On what grounds?”*

*“On the grounds that I am an American citizen, I love my country, and I have a Constitutional right not to answer a question that might incriminate me in any way.”*

*“I asked you if you knew today. Did you ever hear him say he was?”*

*“Sir, I respectfully – and I am very respectful about it – I am loathe to answer for the simple reason that I do not wish to incriminate myself in any way. That's my Constitutional right.”*

*Question: “Well now, didn't I understand you to preface your remarks by saying you're a loyal American and that you love your country?”*

*“I do not know whether I said that, but I certainly do.”*

*Question: “Is this your idea of being a loyal American?”*

*“Yes, sir.”*

*“Your refusal to cooperate in a case as serious as you know this one to be?”*

*“You are saying I refuse to cooperate. I did not say that.”*

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*“What do you call that? You do not want to give any answers. I want to find out whether Rosenberg admitted he was a communist.”*

*“Don’t you want to protect my Constitutional rights?”*

*“I do. I’m trying to. I’m thinking in terms of Rosenberg, not of you.”*

*“I am thinking in terms of my country and myself.”*

*“Thinking in terms of your country, you do not want to tell me about Rosenberg?”*

*“In thinking about my country, I have to think about myself, too.”*

*“You may give this kind of doubletalk outside in the circles that you travel, but here there are people who understand English the same as I do.”*

*“I am quite respectful, sir, but I rest on my answer.”*

*“You say that ‘would tend to incriminate you’?”*

*“I say that as my Constitutional right.”*

*“In other words, it might be a Constitutional right for me to ask the grand jury to indict you along with Rosenberg? Is that what you’re trying to tell us?”*

*“No, I am not telling you that at all.”*

*“You are, in effect, saying that if you say you testify, it is liable to incriminate you.”*

*“I am trying to make a living. For a few years, I have been hounded from job to job. I’ve been working in toy factories. I did a good job in the Navy. I don’t see why you have to hound me like this. I have a family and a responsibility to them. I can’t answer a question on the grounds that it might incriminate me.”*

*Grand jury foreman: “Why would it incriminate you?”*

*“Because the question concerning those things and the whole situation – it is something I read in the papers. I can read just as well as the gentlemen of the jury and the ladies of the jury.”*

*Foreman: “But you had nothing to do with it. Why do you refuse to help?”*

*“I do not wish to answer any questions which will tend to incriminate me and I believe it is a Constitutional right. There is no question about it.”*

*Prosecutor: “You learned that long before you came in this room.”*

*Witness: “I am trying to lead a simple life. I have been trying.”*

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*Grand jury foreman: "Let's stop all this business. We are all trying to lead a simple life. As a matter of fact, we all wish to, but we have been called from our businesses. It is our patriotic duty. We are loyal Americans. We assume you are. Let's forget about being a poor boy. I was a poor boy, too."*

And it goes on and on like this, page after page after page after page. This person is only guilty of associating with Julius Rosenberg. He was never indicted for anything. I don't even know what happened to him. And when you read the transcript, you can't tell whether most of those interviewed are guilty of anything more than associating with Julius Rosenberg and Morton Sobell. And perhaps that's why only a very few of those called to the grand jury – almost four dozen of them – end up testifying at my parents' trial. But these transcripts do reveal, when you look at the totality of the people who were being interviewed, a vibrant young activist community of people working, coming out of the Depression, coming out of poverty, and doing what they can to make an impact on the world.

So this grand jury, in doing this work, was not only seeking out the illegal activity. What they were doing was actively trying to destroy activist community. And grand juries have a history of this. They did this with SDS in the '60s, they did it with the Black Panther Parties in the '70s, they did it to the Puerto Rico nationalists, and they're doing it to the green scare defendants to this day. Now, perhaps some of you in this room, with all the urgent civil liberties and human rights cases to attend to today, wonder why we should spend time on a case that's now over 60 years old. Well, the new developments have valuable lessons to teach us about today – or the understanding of this case do.

There are several important parallels between my parents' case and the anti-terrorism cases of today even though politically, my parents, who were secular Jewish communists, couldn't be further apart from those who are targeted as Islamic fundamentalists. But if you take a step back for a minute and you look at the parallels in a more general terms, in my parents' case, the government linked the thing the public feared the most – the atomic bomb – to the people who the public feared the most at that time – communists. And it happened during war. Thousands were dying in Korea. And now the government has taken the thing the public fears the most – weapons of mass destruction – and are linking it to the people the public fears the most – Islamic fundamentalists. And since our aggression in Iraq and Afghanistan, the U.S. is in a perpetual state of war. And the politically charged atmosphere of the 1950s made it impossible to save my parents' lives. Similarly, the atmosphere during the Bush administration years made it a daunting challenge to meet, to protect the human rights of those who faced terror charges. And by now, we all know that the Obama administration seems to be following much the same course.

So the lessons of my parents' case haven't really been learned. But we've got a mountain of proof about the Rosenberg case, and that's very valuable for convincing people. And with that proof, we can provide a powerful object lesson to demonstrate that we are going down the wrong path in this country. We have an uphill battle to restore civil liberties and respect for human rights in our nation. We need every ounce of ammunition we can lay our hands on, and exploring what happened in my parents' case will give us plenty. Thank you. **[APPLAUSE]**

**Moderator:** Thanks. Kay, our final speaker today is Dave Alman. And he, along with Emily Alman and Bill Ruben, formed the National Committee to Secure Justice in the Rosenberg Case in the fall of 1951. He was its Executive Director and he is currently President of the National Committee to Reopen the Rosenberg Case. A book on the case and on the clemency movement titled, *Exoneration*,

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was written by Emily and Dave. It was begun about 1995 and was finished by Dave after Emily died in 2004. Emily was chair of the Sociology Department at Douglas College at Rutgers and a lawyer for the poor in New Jersey. He worked at a half dozen different jobs, had his own business for about eight years, but he says the best job he ever had was when he became Emily's paralegal in 1990.

**[LAUGHTER]** Dave Alman.

**Dave Alman:** In March 1951 in downtown New York, a few minutes walk from the Lower East Side Jewish ghetto, in a U.S. courtroom that was adorned by a red, white, and blue 48-star flag, justice officials, prosecutors, and a pliant judge handed the world's anti-Semitic forces a gift beyond their wildest dreams. Sitting in a dock, an old Jewish cast of defendants accused of espionage and treason.

The trial evoked the central thesis of the protocols of the elders of Zion, a late 19<sup>th</sup> century forgery involving Russia's char-, char-, **[UNINTELLIGIBLE]** police, which declared that the Jews lacked loyalty to the nations among whom they lived. The aberration in the New York 1951 trial was *not* that there were Jews in the dock; the aberration was that there were no non-Jews in the dock. Was that simply due to some random accident? Our law enforcement leaders answered this question in the negative in December 1951, nine months after the trial. After an investigation at one of the development sites for the atom bomb, federal law enforcement officials told the media that disloyal persons would rarely be found among persons of "pure Anglo-Saxon stock." In short, the old Jewish cast of defendants in New York was not an accident or an aberration. It reflected what law enforcement officials said was reality. That's Jews for ya.

The most influential law enforcement official in the United States for half a century was J. Edgar Hoover. First, he was head of the Justice Department's Bureau of Investigation in 1920, and four years later, he was made Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, a title he kept until his death in 1972. He was, one might say, America's first grand inquisitor. His mentors and models were like-minded colleagues who shared his outlook. Also, the heads of the great universities of his time with strict quotas for the number of American Jews they would accept as students and as teachers. The academic eugenics, which explained how the non-Anglo-Saxon immigrant populations lacked the traits and the values of true Americans. The directors of the great real estate enclaves in which American Jews were not permitted to live or vacation. And the great CEOs who were the few notable exceptions declined to hire American Jewish engineers, chemists, actuaries, and inventors.

The best known of these was Henry Ford, auto pioneer and later, distributor of the protocols of Zion for millions of Americans. Hoover turned out to be a quick learner. Among his first acts in 1920 was to send for 12 copies of the protocols. One for himself, the other 11 for distribution to the personnel in his agency. In that same year, Hoover enabled the deportation of 1,119 foreign-born so-called radicals, none of them charged with indictable offenses, almost all of whom were Jewish. He followed that up with other similarly ethically skewed deportations. Hoover's understanding of his responsibility as America's top cop was clear to him. To shield the nation from those who challenge the status quo by dissent, or by socialist or by communist propaganda, or by enflaming hatred of whites by blacks by claiming discrimination, or by enflaming labor against employers by organizing unions, or in other ways causing feelings of dissatisfaction with conditions that were, he believed, perfectly natural and tolerable. The hostile behaviors by dissenters, he believed, were predictive of outright crimes such as sabotage, espionage, and treason.

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In his first few years as an official, Hoover compiled several hundred thousand files of persons who exhibited these behaviors. Before long, the files numbered in the millions. Jews found their way into the suspect population files from the very beginning because of attempts to organize sweatshop and garment workers, painters and carpenters, and other semi-skilled and skilled workers in New York. These files in their entirety comprised a vast suspect population. An enormous compendium of what became the usual suspects.

There are *[UNINTELLIGIBLE]* reasons for believing that Hoover thought that the suspect populations were far more dangerous to American life than Nazi Germany was, even during World War II. At the start of World War II, 12 million tons of American war-time shipping was sunk, some of it within site of our shores. The spies who provided the information needed by the German submarines were never discovered. In addition, there were 20,000 acts of sabotage. Harbors, arsenals, seaports burnt to the ground. Here is the FBI report on the sabotage.

*“Between January 1940 and May 1945, the Bureau investigated 19,299 alleged cases of sabotage. Sabotage, in some form, was found in 2,282 incidents, primarily acts of spite, carelessness, malicious mischief, and the like. During World War II, not a single act of enemy direct sabotage was discovered in the United States.”*

Do you believe that? An interesting apology for finding those spies who sabotaged was given by William Sullivan, a Hoover aid for 30 years. In a memoir of his life as an FBI official, Sullivan wrote, “When it came to the realities of espionage, J. Edgar Hoover was a head-in-the-clouds amateur.”

A deeper exploration of Hoover’s incompetence in finding spies, however, reveals his amateurism to be highly selective. He chooses not to look among the powerful and the overly privileged, and *[UNINTELLIGIBLE]* that among Anglo-Saxons. He had an intractable belief that the true enemies of the United States were not those with toxic dreams of being a super race, or who sabotaged our arsenals and harbors, sank our ships, and created a million American casualties in World War II. America’s true enemies, he believed, were in the suspect populations in which liberals, dissenters, communists, socialists, other deviants, and Jews especially, were found.

Thirty-eight years after reading and distributing the protocols of Zion, Hoover, unable to control his unrelenting suspicion of Jews, publicly called on the Jews to abandon what he perceived to be their attraction to Communism. In *Masters of Deceit*, a book by him, subtitled, *The Story of Communism in America and How to Fight it*, he included a special chapter on American Jews. That chapter contained a warning from Hoover: “Where communist infiltration tactics have succeeded in Jewish organizations, it has been because of a failure on the part of leaders and members alike to be vigilant and thwart the communist tactic of infiltration into the Jewish community.”

What Hoover did not do is cite events that lead him to his perception of the Jews’ weakness for communism. At the very time Hoover was condemning Jews for their failure to combat communism, Dr. J.B. Matthews, the House on American Activities expert on religion, was arguing, “the largest single group supporting the communist apparatus in the United States today is composed of Protestant clergymen.” There was no other ethnic group to which Hoover addressed the same warning that he addressed to the Jews.

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Under Hoover's instructions, the FBI became a conduit for providing lists of the names of enemies of the United States, in quotes, to various government agencies and lists in which Jewish names predominated, that he disseminated among other groups. An example: September 1950, in a letter to the Immigration and Naturalization Service, a justice official forwarded the names of 34 suspects provided by the FBI who were connected with the Soviet espionage group who might seek passports. Of the 34 names, 18 – 53% – were identifiably Jewish. The letter did not request that the suspects be detained. A quarter of a century after Hoover's death, the FBI was still distributing lists in which Jewish names predominated.

When the famous Venona decoders tried to fit real names to the cover names that were found in the decoded messages, 50% of the first batch of real names provided by the FBI were Jewish. As a result, genuinely real names were never found for more than 90% of the cover names. Previous speakers alluded to tainted evidence at the Rosenberg-Sobell trial. Actually, what they have told you is, in some respects, verified by a former president. President Richard Nixon agreed in the 1990s, in respect to Ethel Rosenberg, that her, that her, that the guilty verdict given against her was in part due to suspect evidence – tainted evidence. And the source of that tainted evidence, he said, among the sources was Hoover.

I return to the question asked at the beginning. Why were there no non-Jews among the defendants? One thing is certain: the answer given by law enforcement officials in December 1951 was false. I would like to conclude with a little rhyme that you may already know that illuminates the selectivity with which treason cases are prosecuted. I quote, "Treason doth never prosper. What's the reason? If it prosper, none dare call it treason." **[LAUGHTER AND APPLAUSE]**

**Moderator:** Ok, let me just, we have a crowded room. A lot of people want to say something, so we are going to impose a strict one minute rule. If you have a question, fabulous. If you have a statement to make, keep it to one minute. And I will be enforcing that.

**Audience Member #1:** Ok, I would like to make a statement. I think Robbie said that –

**Moderator:** Speak up.

**Audience Member #1:** Ok. Robbie, I believe, I believe it was Robbie who said that –

**Unknown:** Can't hear you.

**Audience Member #1:** I believe Robbie said that the important piece of evidence was the document 8, Exhibit 8, which was this Greenglass sketch done in the Tombs. Well, I believe that the most important piece of evidence that was unearthed by Mike Carlin and you guys was a CIA document which, if I recall properly, said, "What is required of the Rosenbergs should they decide to cooperate is to enter into the psychological warfare campaign against the Soviet Union, primarily on the Jewish issue. That Julius—"

**Moderator:** Ten Seconds.

**Audience Member #1:** "Julius Rosenberg is perfectly situated to lead such a movement." I think that's a really telling document.

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**Moderator:** Thank you. Another question, please.

**Audience Member #2:** Do you accept the [UNINTELLIBLE] by Alexander [UNINTELLIBLE] of the KGB that he was the control for your father and that your father gave him a, you know, a complete version of U.S. anti-aircraft shell, and that [UNINTELLIBLE] journey to your parents' graveside and put earth from his home in Russia on their graves?

**Moderator:** Ok. I will take one more question and then you can go. Yes?

**Audience Member #3:** For Bob or Michael, how do you reconcile the fact that while your parents were idealistic and wanted peace and justice, all the values we hold dear, their foreign policy was terrible. That they signed petitions, and went on marches to support Stalin's Soviet Union, which was a total abrogation of everything they believed- everything we believe in now. How do you reconcile the fact that that's a bad, bad mark in their, in your parents' careers?

**Michael Meeropol:** Ok, we've got three questions; let's take them seriatim. I think Richard Tory's comment about the CIA memo, which I think is published in an anthology. For some of you who don't know it, it's very long and detailed. It's in 1953 when the international clemency is hard at work, and some CIA analyst said, you know, if we could finally get them to confess, let's get them to join the psychological warfare fight, which was being orchestrated by a man named C.D. Jackson, a good friend of Eisenhower's. Has been very much developed by one of Jerry and my colleagues at John Jay, Blanche Cook. To have my parents come out and lead a public campaign telling Jews that the Soviet Union is anti-Semitic. That was going to be the way that they would earn their way back to the good graces of the U.S. Rob, you want to respond to either of the other two?

**Rob Meeropol:** Well, I just want to say it's a terrific document that you're talking about.

**Michael Meeropol:** Ok, well, the last question –

**Rob Meeropol:** I'll do the last question.

**Michael Meeropol:** You're going to do the last one, alright. The Faklisov, you know, some of the things Faklisov said I don't think are true. The proximity fuse – what he's referring to is the story that allegedly my father assembled a proximity fuse and then gave it to Faklisov in a [UNINTELLIBLE]. Faklisov has like three different versions of that meeting. He, the, the, my father went out of his way in a letter to Manny Bloch describing how they could prove that the proximity fuse story was a phony. It's hard to believe he would have gone out of his way to make that the next phase of an attempt to get a hearing if he knew that all it would do was blow up in his face. So I'm very skeptical. This is one of those things where I think Faklisov has read the record and decided to improve his bona fides. Now, is Faklisov my father's control? I believe he probably was my father's control. So those details I don't necessarily believe, but I do believe he was my father's control. And Rob's going to talk about Stalin.

**Rob Meeropol:** In terms of, of their support of Stalin's policies –

**Moderator:** Why don't you stand rather than sitting.

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**Unknown:** A little louder.

**Rob Meeropol:** Ok. In terms of my parents' support of Stalin's policies, being a small child then, I can't really testify that much about what the people felt politically. But I've had an awful lot of conversations with people of my parents' generation over the years – yeah, and my belief is, you know, Ethel and Julius looked out their window and what they saw was poverty everywhere. And they saw that families were being thrown out of their houses for being unable to pay their rent. And then the night would come and teams of Communist Party workers would help them move back in. And then they go to a demonstration and the cops would come through, riding on their horses, beating people, and the next day, the papers would read, “The Communists had a rally and rioted and the New York City Police restored order.”

So they looked out their window and they knew the communists were the heroes, from their experience. And they looked out their window and they read their newspaper and they knew that the capitalist press lied; they knew that from their own experience. And then they extrapolated that to the Soviet Union. And that was their error. They thought, capitalist press is spreading all these lies about Stalin. We know the capitalist press lies, so Stalin must probably really be a good guy. The Soviet Union is creating a workers' paradise.

So they made – based upon their personal experience – they made a logical leap and transferred their support of the activities of Native American communists that were laudatory to supporting the policies of the Soviet Union. Now, I think that was wrong. I think that was a mistake, but I think that in view of the times and their policies, it was not an unreasonable mistake. **[APPLAUSE]**

**Audience Member #4:** My name is **[UNINTELLIGIBLE]** Glasser and I am the daughter of Carol Glasser, who met you. I wanted to say that I think Walter – Sobell's comment is very important, about the difference between the times and why people got involved with the movement as they did. It's crucial to understanding what the government then did to history today. Had any of you gone to see Hoover's grave? Big surprise. No one has but I recommend it. It's in Washington. And you will be delighted by what has happened to it. **[LAUGHTER]**

**Unknown:** Why? What happened?

**Unknown:** A lot of uric acid?

**Audience Member #4:** Well, almost. **[UNINTELLIGIBLE]** it's in a graveyard right outside of Washington. I happen to like graveyards, so I went to visit. And they'll point it to you, and it's just so overgrown and so horrible looking, that you'll just be very happy. **[LAUGHTER]**

**Moderator:** 15 seconds.

**Audience Member #4:** I wanted to say that the Venona files, I've done some work on **[UNINTELLIGIBLE]** what they wrote about my father. It's really a masterfully deceptive document and I'd be happy to do more work **[APPLAUSE]** **[UNINTELLIGIBLE]**.

**Moderator:** Other questions?



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**Audience Member #5:** My question is to Miriam. I'm just wondering why do you think Morton went to the *New York Times* because [UNINTELLIGBLE] that going, speaking with you predated going to the *New York Times*, so if you could just shed some light on what led him to the *New York Times*.

**Miriam Schneir:** Sure. Well, Morty didn't go to the *New York Times*; the *New York Times* came to him and it was a unfortunate circumstance where, on the day that the grand jury testimony was released, the *New York Times* reporter called Morty and asked him some questions which Morty then answered and the *New York Times* guy went right into print with it. And printed, as the Meeropols have mentioned, several stories one after another. And at that point, he kind of broke the story and there was no longer an opportunity to write anything else about the case. Couldn't save the case without Morty's –

**Audience Member #5:** I'd like to clarify. They went to him?

**Miriam Schneir:** They went to him. And I wanted to just say one word also about Ted Glesov. That when Ted Glesov was brought to the United States, he was brought here by Discovery Channel, who wanted to do a documentary about him. He was kind of down at the heels, ex-KGB person living on a pension at a time when Russia was in very bad straights, economically. And he had had access to several books on the case and had obviously studied them. Now, like Michael, I believe he probably was, at a time, for a while, Julius' handler in the United States. However a lot of the details that he mentioned are just beyond belief and if there, some of them are so detailed – I remember that during that interview, at one point, one of the people from the channel said to him, "Well after this meeting" – I think it was at Child's Restaurant, where they –

**Unknown:** Horton Harder.

**Miriam Schneir:** Where? Horton Harder. Yeah. Where he handed over the – Julius allegedly handed over the proximity fuse. He said to the person from Discovery Channel said to him, "Well, when you came out of the restaurant, did you turn left or right?" And he said, "Uh, right." I mean, nonsensical things like that. He was willing to say anything.

**Moderator:** Yes.

**Audience Member #6:** Hi. To me, it had always been someone that was, you know, involved in the student movement and [UNINTELLIGBLE]. It was always plausible to me that people who'd had been members of the Communist Party and also sympathetic to the Soviet Union might have considered trying to be involved in getting involved some way in some form of espionage with the idea that maybe it would be a good thing if the Soviet Union – if the United States weren't the only government that had nuclear weapons. I can remember bringing this up when Robbie and Michael, I think, were really first becoming public figures and getting shouted down for even suggesting that this might be a possibility. And when Morton Sobell was released, I brought it up again and I couched it in terms of – I used the word, I have a little problem. Something like that. And his answer was, "I can't help you with your problem." And this was quite a few years ago. So I just want to mention this and sort of say, not you, not you guys, 'cause you've always been really good in my mind, but I think there's some amends that need to be made somehow, in some way, maybe to people on the left who entertained the notion that this might, in fact, have been possible. Some of this. And, you know, there was some plaus-, there was some plausibility to it.

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**Moderator:** Ten more seconds.

**Audience Member #6:** And I wonder if you have, anybody might have a response to that. Thank you.

**Rob Meeropol:** This is just very brief. I don't know when you came in, but I have a feeling from where you're standing that you missed Miriam's talk and Miriam actually detailed the kind of history of that and went through all that. I perhaps, you know, so not going to – no it's no problem – but I think that that was one of the main questions that she really addressed in her talk.

**Audience Member #7:** I was wondering if you could flesh out for me and everybody else who your parents were as human beings without all the salient characteristics to help us really understand who they were beyond just, you know, these icons. And for me, of course, footage and newsreels of the past, and contextualize it.

**Michael Meeropol:** Ok, well this is. I'll pay you later because this is like an advertisement. **[LAUGHTER]** Monday night at 6pm in Room 630 at John Jay College, my daughter Ivy's film, *Heir to an Execution* – at six o'clock, 6pm, 6pm in Room 630 in John Jay College on 899 Tenth Avenue, you get to see my daughter's film, *Heir to an Execution*. I think that she, with a documentarian's eye, with a creative person's eye, interviewing family members and friends, many of whom have passed away, and using archival footage, I think she came as close as possible to getting a sense of who they were. The only other source is, you gotta read their letters.

**Unknown:** Will your daughter be there Monday night? Will you be there?

**Michael Meeropol:** We will both be there.

**Unknown:** Say again the location.

**Michael Meeropol:** 899 Tenth Avenue between 57<sup>th</sup> and 58<sup>th</sup> Street. John Jay College. 58<sup>th</sup> and 59<sup>th</sup>, John Jay College –

**Unknown:** What room?

**Michael Meeropol:** -- room 630. But more importantly, read their letter. The book, *The Rosenberg Letters*, which is the full length – our book, *We Are Your Sons*, has some of the letters in it. And you get some sense, but let's remember, a lot of those letters were written in prison, with prison censors reading it, so you have to read a lot between the lines. I mean, we've tried, in both of our writings to make sense of what we think we know about them as people and it wasn't just a joke when I told Jerry that I've inherited my father's pedantry because the first day I met Morty, that was what Morty said. Julie was not an organizer, he was like a Talmudic type, you know. And, you know, that's the way it is. But who knew, right? Last time I saw them, I was ten years old.

**Rob Meeropol:** There is – one of the things that was amazing to me about the grand jury – the transcripts. One of the things that was amazing to me about the grand jury transcripts is there's, there's a testimony of a woman named Helene Elletcher. Max Elletcher was one of the people who turned

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state's evidence and got a lighter sentence for it. Actually, I don't know that he ever got anything at all.

**Unknown:** Never got anything.

**Rob Meeropol:** And so she was testifying as a cooperating witness with the grand jury. And there's all this discussion in which she describes an evening when they're going out together, and they're going to Ethel and Julius' house, but Julius is, Ethel's in the country with the kids, and Julius is batching it, and the place is missing a woman's touch, to quote her. And then they decide to go to the Upper West Side to a Chinese restaurant and they meet someone else there and then they bop across town to meet someone, Al Serrant, who's – Phil Barr, the musician who plays the Spanish guitar and he lives in a six floor walk-up, walkup and, midnight, and he's in his pajamas and, and you get this sense of these young and energetic people who remind me, sort of, except a more impoverished version of me and my SDS buddies in the late 1960s and early '70s. And that, that kind of, that kind of sense of who these people were is actually reading the grand jury transcripts for. So I recommend that. And it's not hard and that's also why we put this web address out.

**Audience Member #1:** Can you just talk for a moment about the 36 –

**Michael Meeropol:** Why don't you let somebody else speak.

**Audience Member #1:** No, to, about the subject.

**Audience Member #8:** I was just gong to say that Miriam Moskowitz has a book coming out this spring. There's a chapter on Ethel that's the best thing I've ever read about Ethel as a woman, and not just as a symbol. And it's, it's –

**Michael Meeropol:** Why don't you say the title?

**Audience Member #8:** The title is *Phantom Spies, Phantom Justice* by Miriam Moskowitz, who's sitting right here. [APPLAUSE]

**Audience Member #9:** I wonder, I was very interested with Dave was talking about the Jewish, one of the Jewish blessings. And it strikes me that there's a difference between typical American Jews and "secular American Jews" and I wonder if you could comment on that in relation to the previous president who was Mr. Religion to the point of psychosis where he was hearing things from god and sort of made an attempt to really inject more religiousness – and if you're not totally religious, you're not a good person, or whatever – and how that, that's an interesting kind of, I guess an analogy because maybe they were trying to flesh out the non-believers – non-religious – I mean, that's a separate group than the Jewish god-fearing whomever. I'm wondering if you could make a comment on that.

**Dave Alman:** Alright. We, we had obviously campaigned for clemency. We did have support of a great many religious groups. We had 3,000 American Protestant ministers, we had Pope Pius XII, we had a number of Catholic priests openly espousing clemency. With respect to the Jews, we had problems. Because the defendants were Jews and that became a problem.

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We discovered the following. That the reconstructionist, the reform, and the conservative Jews were the most difficult to reach on the case. Notwithstanding one of the great outstanding advocates of clemency, who finally went with a group of other religious people to see the president. It was Abraham Cromebeck. But he was an unusual person; a wonderful person. But it was very difficult to get support from them. On the orthodox, we had the largest group of support in terms of rabbis. And we talked about this with one of them, especially Rabbi Sharpton, a Brooklyn Rabbi, and he said, well, it doesn't surprise him. He said, "We are the true Jews." **[LAUGHTER]** So we had the true Jews.

I'll tell you one more thing. The Jewish newspapers, *The Forward*, *the Day*, *The Jewish Examiner*, *The California Sentinel*, they were pro-clemency and they were very, very helpful. The leaders of the Jewish mass organizations – ADL, American Jewish Congress, American Jewish Committee – they were totally opposed to it, opposed to clemency. They met with the FBI and we have letters between them and the FBI in a book that's forthcoming. They were afraid, but we must remember something. In the thousand-year history of anti-Semitism, Jews were very frequently – Jewish leaders – were very frequently confronted with a very practical problem. And they sometimes did decide not to defend two or three if defending them meant a death of 50 or a hundred. I'm not arguing that they are right or wrong; I'm telling you that this is one of the conditions of life in Europe, in **[UNINTELLIGIBLE]**, and we have to respect that fear that Jewish leaders had even in the United States. And one of them expressed it to me. He said, you go ahead and you call Hoover an anti-Semite and you will have organized all of the officials in the United States against you because when one official is charged with being an anti-Semite, all of the officials will jump down your throat. And everything becomes hopeless in terms of trying to reach these officials.

We did not raise, but I spoke about it during the campaign. Even our Jewish leaders like Rabbi Sharpton thought that to raise the question of anti-Semitism under those circumstances would distract what we knew we could prove. We could prove, for example, perjury in respect to the photographer who, who posed, and we could prove that the witness list was a terrible one because it asked, among other questions, did you ever sign a petition for that black communist, David – Benjamin Davis. This ordinarily would have thrown out the jury on appeal to the higher courts. But the higher courts, in those days, had read the handwriting on the wall and they did nothing.

**Michael Meeropol:** I can't resist urging everyone in this room, when Dave and Emily's book comes out, please, please get it and read it. It'll make you proud to be an American. In the height of the Cold War, when everybody in the country thought my parents and Morty were guilty, and the 99% of them thought they were dangerous traitors and had stolen the secret of the atom bomb, when Americans were being killed in Korea, this rag-tag group of people who said, "let's face it; we're everybody's second choice, but there ain't no first choice." It's a beautiful line. They, without the support of the organized left for at least a whole year and a half, they virtually single-handedly came, in the words of the United States senator, this close. They had to fix the Supreme Court to kill my parents because these people got ordinary Americans to stand up in the middle of the Cold War to do it. And if they could do it then, then we sure as hell can do it now. **[APPLAUSE]**

**Dave Alman:** What is extraordinary about that story is that it really was a mass movement. It was not a few people. It was an incredible mass movement. Very inspiring. Oops, sorry. One and then two.

**Audience Member #10:** I'd like to ask all the panelists if they're convinced that David Greenglass was an atomic spy, both Stalinist and confessed at trial that Harry –

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**Moderator:** Speak up, please.

**Audience Member #10:** -- Goldman was the courier that he paid?

**Moderator:** Why don't we have a second question and then we'll come back.

**Audience Member #11:** Well, mine was really a comment. *[UNINTELLIGIBLE]*.

**Moderator:** Well, no, go ahead. Go ahead. Sure, absolutely. You have a minute.

**Audience Member #11:** Hello Dave. I'm *[UNINTELLIGIBLE]*. The backdrop – one little piece of backdrop to Dave's story about the climate was that it was, it was less than ten years since the end of the war.

**Moderator:** Speak up, please.

**Audience Member #11:** It was less than ten years since the end of the war. '45. And the DP camps in Europe were exploding with Jews and the allies refused to let many of them go back to their homes and have their property. They were trying to push them to Israel because there was a plan to make Israel a Jewish state and give all the reparations to Israel. And the INS was trying to keep anybody with a socialist background out of this country. And there were Jewish aid societies who were trying to help Jews get out of those camps and come here because they didn't want to go to Israel. They were socialists. And any Jew in his right mind who wasn't *[UNINTELLIGIBLE]* fascist in Europe was, you know. So there was that problem. And that, that added to people not speaking out. And I speak – my father was a social worker working with Jewish refugees trying to come in and trying to negotiate getting them here and all these political *[UNINTELLIGIBLE]*. So that was part of the backdrop of the Rosenberg case. I'm finished.

**Moderator:** Why don't we have – do you have a question or a comment?

**Audience Member #11:** A question. It'll take five seconds.

**Moderator:** Go ahead.

**Audience Member #11:** I teach history at Queens College and I'd like to, like, did you film this? Could we get just this? This? I need like an hour to show to my class. I'd love to do it. And especially your speech – is it gonna be available?

**Dave Alman:** Contact the National Committee to Reopen the Rosenberg Case.

**Audience Member #11:** To get the paper?

**Dave Alman:** Yes, we will be –

**Unknown:** *[UNINTELLIGIBLE]*

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**Moderator:** Well, I think we're not sure yet.

**Michael Meeropol:** This is being –  
[OVERTALK]

**Dave Alman:** We're working on something. We'll work it out.

**Rob Meeropol:** Check the brochure. There's contact information.

**Moderator:** Ok, why don't we have an answer to the question.

**Michael Meeropol:** Miriam, want to answer Andy?

**Miriam Schneir:** Yeah. I'm responding to the question about David Greenglass. The questioner wanted to know whether Greenglass, whether our current belief is whether Greenglass gave information from Los Alamos. Greenglass was a machinist. He had never been to college. He was working in a machine lab tooling material to going to explosive part of the bomb. And I believe that he did give that information. And there's a book by Walter that's coming out in September. It's kind of an incredible thing. In 2010, there are three books that are going to be coming out by various people who have the defense of the Rosenbergs on their minds. And Walter's book deals a lot with the Greenglasses, who we now know were not poor schnooks who were, you know, young people and just went along with David's older sister and her husband wanted them to do, but were actually themselves very committed communists. So does that answer your question?

**Michael Meeropol:** The Gold – the Gold-Greenglass meeting.

**Miriam Schneir:** Oh, and the Gold-Greenglass meeting, yes. I do believe that took place. However, the thing is that, you know, you can have a trial where you're convicting people, but so your basic thing is true. I mean, the Gold-Greenglass meeting did take place and Greenglass did turn over whatever minor information he might have to Harry Gold, who then passed it to Russians. However, you can have a meeting like that and still have the evidence be completely corrupt and doctored. And I believe that that was the case, also.

**Rob Meeropol:** Yeah, I wanted to just, because this kind of highlights – and one thing that we haven't really brought up – and there again, the National Committee to Reopen the Rosenberg Case material here includes a discussion of – there's been some talk – David Alman's book, the first word is “Exoneration” *the Rosenberg-Sobell Case in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Did I get that right? And the question is how can you exonerate people who actually did something? And the question is, if they were killed for one thing and did something entirely different, then you can exonerate people even though they might be, not be totally and completely pure. And I don't think this just applies to the Rosenberg case; I think this applies to our understanding of politics in general, and is a very important lesson for all of us to learn and abide by.

**Audience Member #12:** I want to share a conversation I had with a man [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

**Moderator:** Speak up, please.

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**Audience Member #12:** I want to share a conversation that I had with a [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. He said, he told me that when he tried to get scientific witnesses to testify on his behalf, it was impossible because the government had subpoenaed all the scientific witnesses that could be of any help. And he was afraid that had he attempted to get these witnesses that he would be considered tampering with government witnesses and be liable himself for government prosecution. Thought I'd share that.

**Moderator:** Thank you.

**Audience Member #13:** My name is Olga [UNINTELLIGIBLE] and I was born and raised in the Soviet Union and we [UNINTELLIGIBLE] because it's there and the United States and Soviet Union behave exactly the same way. And what Robert said about his feeling that when you think of lying, life is awful around you; you believe that everything would, American newspaper will say about the Soviet Union is lies. I've been in exactly the same situation. Even in the Soviet Union when life is awful. There's people that are lying and everything they're saying about the Soviet – the United States is, of course, lies. I came here [UNINTELLIGIBLE] and I understand your parents in a way, you know, a lot. Even most of the people who came from the Soviet Union [UNINTELLIGIBLE] that they came not to the country of their dreams, but [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. So I think extremely important –

**Moderator:** Ten seconds.

**Audience Member #13:** Ok. Ten more seconds. I just think it's extremely important to make it as public as possible and...thank you.

**Moderator:** Yes?

**Audience Member #14:** I worked at the [UNINTELLIGIBLE] laboratory in 1942 between college and medical school. At that time, we were working very closely with the British and [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. With the war going on, [UNINTELLIGIBLE], and also there was a tremendous amount of [UNINTELLIGIBLE], subterranean [UNINTELLIGIBLE], against cooperation with the Russians. The America Firsters were very strong. So I tried to contact a friend of mine to see whether we could get some information to the Russians – never did anything, but damnit, they were our allies in fighting the Nazis and we should have been working completely in cooperation, which we weren't.

**Moderator:** Any comments any of the panelists would like to make on those three comments? I'm sorry; you're first, and then you're second. Could you stand?

**Michael Meeropol:** No, it's ok. Why don't you just yell?

**Audience Member #15:** [UNINTELLIGIBLE] Russia, the United States did not know Russia had an atom bomb, we might have bombed [UNINTELLIGIBLE], I suppose. [UNINTELLIGIBLE] we can have the atom bomb so that we have [UNINTELLIGIBLE] and power against Israel or the United States. And I think one of the issues where, relating to this question [UNINTELLIGIBLE] whether or not [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

**Moderator:** They should have the bomb, yes.

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**Michael Meeropol:** Ok, you're next.

**Audience Member #16:** First, I just want to say –

**Audience:** Louder! Louder!

**Audience Member #16:** First, I just want to say to *[UNINTELLIGIBLE]* and Michael, thank you for your books. Especially thank you for the one, *We Are Your Sons* because that book had a profound impact on me and my political identity. Secondly, I want to say that to me, one of the enduring lessons of this case is the continuing need to campaign against the death penalty is going to *[APPLAUSE]* that includes individuals who were on death row for years until they could be exonerated. They were only on death row because of the history of racism in the United States. I think the comment by David Alman indicate that anti-Semitism played a role in the issuance of the death penalty in the Rosenberg cases as well.

**Moderator:** Ten more seconds.

**Audience Member #16:** Ok. Also, the, I think it's very important, I completely agree that the *[UNINTELLIGIBLE]* mistakes about the nature of the Soviet Union were very understandable. Nevertheless, I also think it's important to put out a left critique of that Soviet paradigm because I still encounter leftists who defend it. And I think it's problematic.

**Audience Member #17:** I want to go back to the first, to the first question.

**Audience:** Can't hear.

**Audience Member #17:** I want to go back to the first question. And that is about, I mean, the fact of the matter is that we, when we start talking about Iran wanting to bombs to counter Israel, or Soviets getting the bombs so they can counter the United States, there's only, there's, no one should have the bomb. *[APPLUASE]* That's the error. No one should have the bomb, but it's wrong for one country to say "we should have it, and you can't." That's also true. No one should have the bomb, and the same is true with their being one superpower. The real solution is there should be no superpowers, but if there is just one superpower, that turns out, as we've watched throughout the world since the demise of the Soviet Union, to be a very bad thing. *[APPLAUSE]*

**Michael Meeropol:** And I have to, I have to add that the only way to do this – the weight is on everybody in this room. The only way to deal with the one superpower is for the people within it to get up on their high horse and make some noise. *[APPLAUSE]* Yeah, we are very low on time.

**Audience Member #17:** Just adding a statement. I think that most of the audience here is supportive on the NCR *[UNINTELLIGIBLE]* and we don't have addresses to issue additional publicity, so I'm prepared, and there isn't a sign up sheet, but if we use the back of one of those sheets for people to leave their contact information, we will be able to contact them in the future.

**Audience Member #18:** Or if someone would donate a legal pad? A yellow legal pad and pen around this room?



## ***Rosenberg-Sobell Panel Discussion***

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***Audience Member #19:*** And I just want to make an announcement that there will be a memorial meeting on June 17<sup>th</sup> in Manhattan at the Local 803. Musician [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. June 17<sup>th</sup>, it's a Thursday night.

***Audience Member #20:*** Michael, will you put on the board when your – the place and time and location of Ivy's film?

***Michael Meeropol:*** Yeah.

***Moderator:*** But there's no place to write. Wait, we're not done. Morton Sobell is here and we thought we would give him an opportunity to say a few words. [APPLAUSE]

***Morton Sobell:*** When I was in prison in Alcatraz –

***Audience Member:*** Stand up.

***Unidentifiable Panelist:*** No, he's not going to stand up.

***Morton Sobell:*** -- I never dreamed that this meeting now taking place would ever take place because, at that time, everybody was so down on the Communists that it was just an impossibility. [PAUSE] Sorry, I'm not functioning as well as I did when I was younger. Excuse me. It's interesting to see that this case has survived all these years. And I have nothing to do with it. Outsiders have taken it and, an example of course, of what happens in a time like we experienced then – because people today don't understand that period. And to understand that period, you have to take this case as an example. And when I helped the Soviet Union, remember, Germany was really the enemy. And the United States miscalculated. They thought Germany was going to attack the Soviet Union first. And the bet was that if Germany survived, then it was safe for capitalism. So the United States, in a sense, was guilty of providing Germany with I don't know what information, but they were treating Germany as a friend, when we – on the left at that time, knew that Germany really was the enemy. So you have to examine what sort of relationship of the United States to Germany at that time, when it was fascist already, and what was the relationship of the United States with the Soviet Union, which was socialist at that time. And this is very important because then you sense why the United States felt betrayed by people helping the Soviet Union. I'm sure if somebody had done the same thing to help Germany, the government would not have been so aggressive in prosecuting them. This may sound difficult –

***Michael Meeropol:*** No, it's true. I mean, Axis, Axis Sally only got 12 years.

***Unknown:*** IBM got nothing.

***Morton Sobell:*** So you have to take the period into account when you want to know why I acted as I did. I did not feel I was betraying the United States. Truly.

***Michael Meeropol:*** Thank you, Morty. [APPLAUSE]

***Moderator:*** We have time for maybe two more questions.

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**Audience Member #21:** I think one thing that I found was the trial itself [UNINTELLIGIBLE] how unconstitutionally it was conducted. I remember, I was a Democratic Committee [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. And my co-committeeman said to me, “You know, Al? When I was in the FBI,” he says, “I arrested Harry Gold.” And I said, “What?” And I say to myself, here I just got into the Bar after difficulty, and my co-committeeman arrested Harry Gold. So he proceeded to tell me Harry Gold was the smallest man he ever met. He could tell you who played first base, shortstop, in 1898, let alone the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But then he said [UNINTELLIGIBLE], if I recall correctly, that Harry Gold gave many, many statements before he arrived at putting the Rosenbergs into the case. And at that time, the state of the law was that the defendant was not entitled to the prior statements of a witness. As a result, Gold took the stand, probably nobody knew his background, he was very effective ‘cause he was very smart and then it came out that he never mentioned the Rosenbergs and up until a dozen [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. My dearest friend in high school came over to me and said to me, “Al, you’d be proud of me; I just signed the Rosenberg petition.” And I said, “Larry, I’m very proud of you.” He says, “Yes, but I signed your name.” [LAUGHTER]

**Moderator:** Last question and then we’ll give the panelists a chance to respond.

**Audience Member #22:** I have a comment, actually. I’m Michael [UNINTELLIGIBLE] from Germany and I have just finished teaching a course on Sacco and Vanzetti, the Rosenberg case, and [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. So when I’m saying, referring to the death penalty, we don’t, Sacco and Vanzetti were executed, the Rosenbergs were executed. Innocent political prisoners. [UNINTELLIGIBLE] and the one whose life is now on the line is [UNINTELLIGIBLE] Dumont. There is, there has been a campaign going on and couldn’t be anymore important moment than now because his life is in danger as never before. And one thing everybody in the room can do, there are two petitions out. One goes to President Obama, that’s the general petition. And then there is a very complete petition going to General Eric Holder. Sign this petition and make it known. That’s my comment.

**Moderator:** Thank you. Any last comments from our panelists?

**Unknown Panelist:** Thank you all very much.

**Michael Meeropol:** Thank you all very much. [APPLAUSE]

[END OF RECORDING]