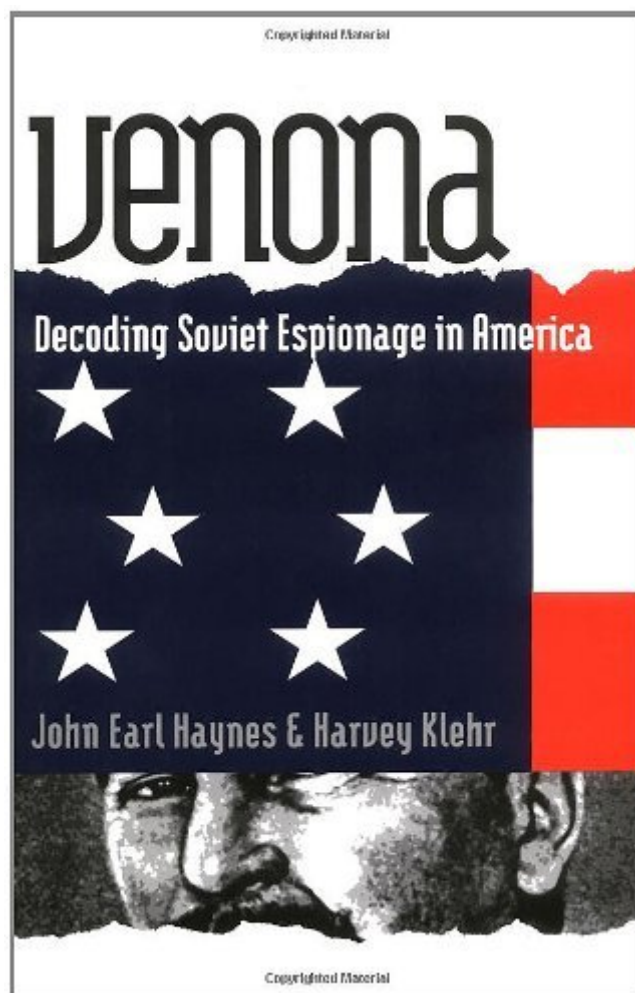


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Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage In America (Annals Of Communism)



Synopsis

For nearly 50 years American intelligence agents had been decoding thousands of Soviet messages, uncovering an enormous range of espionage activities carried out against the USA during World War II by its own allies. This is an analysis of the Venona Project and some of the messages.

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Customer Reviews

This book, jammed with information that's only come to light in recent years, tells a number of fascinating stories. For starters, there's the story of an intellectual adventure. Venona was a small group of government employees who, with fearsome gobs of skull-sweat and toil, decrypted thousands of secret communications sent between Soviet embassies and Moscow during and immediately after World War II. The messages used an encryption scheme so complex that it would be a challenge to crack even with today's technologies. But teams of Americans and Brits--mostly female, as it happens, although there were plenty of brilliant men--were able to decode them with little more than pencil, paper, and brainpower. Venona is also a story of terrible treachery.

Independently corroborated by data from the Soviet and Comintern archives, the Venona decryptions confirm things that were once controversial. For example: the American Communist Party was a puppet of Moscow that eagerly engaged in criminal activities. Julius Rosenberg and Alger Hiss were guilty. Literally hundreds of Communist agents deeply infiltrated American government at the highest levels. And the Soviets also had a substantial subversive presence within the American labor movement and in many elite segments of American society. Venona is also a story of Western bumbling. For years, naive American officials ignored or dismissed suggestions that there was any Communist threat. Several times this resulted in tragic losses now painfully visible in retrospect. Perhaps most damning of all, Venona is a story of how obsession with secrecy can be costly. The Soviets became aware of Venona shortly after the war ended.

BACKGROUND Venona was the cover name of a top secret US government project that from the 1940's to the 1980's intercepted and decoded Soviet government messages all over the world. Venona gave numerous facts about Soviet espionage from some 3000 messages. Venona was officially revealed in 1995. The Soviets got hints about Venona, but thought their codes were safe. **TIDBITS** Learning details about spies, the US government often did not prosecute, since it would alert the Soviets that their codes were being broken. Instead the FBI often maneuvered to keep spies away from sensitive positions by stopping promotions or having people fired. Often when a spy was brought to trial, the government still held back evidence. Therefore, many spies were never convicted, or got off easy. This gave ammunition to leftist public opinion who claimed "McCarthyism". The book details hundreds of spies/cases such as Alger Hiss, the Rosenbergs, the Manhattan Project, ... just to name a few. **OUTLINING** The authors tell how the book came about. The basics of Venona. What the codes looked like. In detail how they were constituted and broken. Then it's off to numerous "cases". Typically a person or "ring" is reported on a couple of pages. Some cases cover whole chapters. **FACTS / OPINIONS** Filled with facts of the Soviet operations. Such as birth names, KGB/GRU internal cover names and cover names used in the US. The book gives dates, cities, US Business', government offices and political organizations. We see the orders the KGB gave, who recommended who to sensitive posts, how much money changed hands... The authors stay with the facts and give almost no opinions, but some background. The book is not about telling stories, so often we get facts without "punch-lines".

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