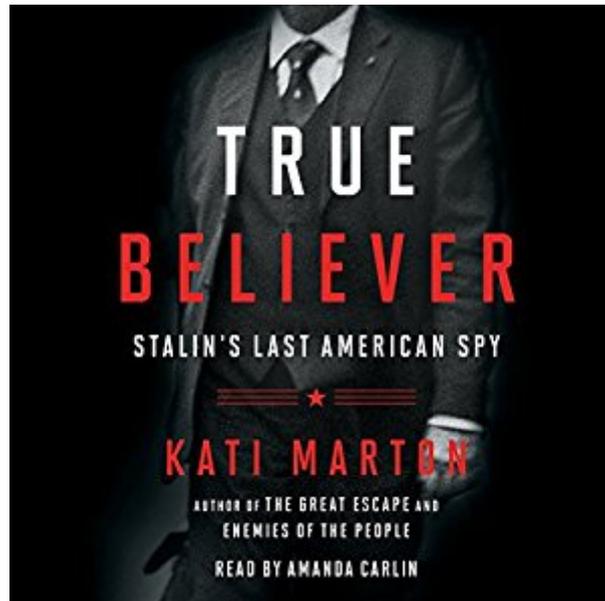


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True Believer: Stalin's Last American Spy



Synopsis

This astonishing real-life spy thriller, filled with danger, misplaced loyalties, betrayal, treachery, and pure evil, with a plot twist worthy of John le Carré, is relevant today as a tale of fanaticism and the lengths it takes us to. True Believer reveals the life of Noel Field, an American who betrayed his country and crushed his family. Field, once a well-meaning and privileged American, spied for Stalin during the 1930s and '40s. Then a pawn in Stalin's sinister master strategy, Field was kidnapped and tortured by the KGB and forced to testify against his own Communist comrades. How does an Ivy League-educated, US State Department employee deeply rooted in American culture and history become a hardcore Stalinist? The 1930s, when Noel Field joined the secret underground of the International Communist Movement, were a time of national collapse: 10 million Americans unemployed, rampant racism, retreat from the world just as fascism was gaining ground, and Washington - pre-FDR - parched of fresh ideas. Communism promised the righting of social and political wrongs, and many in Field's generation were seduced by its siren song. Few, however, went as far as Noel Field in betraying their own country. With a reporter's eye for detail and a historian's grasp of the cataclysmic events of the 20th century, Kati Marton captures Field's riveting quest for a life of meaning that went horribly wrong. True Believer is supported by unprecedented access to Field family correspondence, Soviet secret-police records, and reporting on key players from Alger Hiss, CIA Director Allen Dulles, and World War II spy master "Wild Bill" Donovan to the most sinister of all: Josef Stalin. A story of another time, this is a tale relevant for all times.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Not for some time have I read such an interesting presentation. I learned an awful lot about the machinations of the Soviet agents operating in America...certainly the presentation of Fields as a hopeless idealistic unforgettable. How does anyone live with such naivete? I find it very hard to understand how anyone can maintain the illusion of innocence for an entire lifetime. Incredible! It's a good read for one interested in history as I am.

After the succession of books about Noel Field that focus on the man's dogged loyalty to a doomed ideology (beginning with Lewis's "Red Pawn"), I was hoping for a treatment that showed more respect for the Fields' devoted service to helping Jewish refugees in Vichy France. Although the author herself is the child of people who thought it advantageous to hide their Jewish heritage, she doesn't seem to recognize that many of the Fields' "communist" refugees were in fact desperate people aware (like the Martons) that any label like Social Democrat, Communist, anti-Fascist, etc, was safer than the label "Jew." When Field started working for the Unitarian Service Committee on behalf of refugees in early 1941, he was replacing a guy named Waitstill Sharp who was posthumously recognized as a "righteous" gentile. Ironically, Noel Fields' service to Jewish refugees was more extensive than Waitstill Sharps', providing medical aid to many hundreds of refugees in hiding and in internment camps regardless of ideology (see Subak's book "Rescue and Flight"). Noel's wife, Herta, managed an extraordinary project to liberate Jewish children from French camps -- both openly and covertly (see Samuel's "Rescuing the Children"). They were able to stay in France as long as they did because of the sheer grit of their idealism and because Allen Dulles and the New York office of the OSS thought that their presence in France was important to US interests. The medical work that they managed was largely funded by American Jewish contributions because leaders at "The Joint" had such a high opinion of their projects.

Marton's book is an outstanding portrayal of one of history's most fanatical and delusional Stalinists. It is astonishing that Noel Field remained utterly devoted to the Stalinist ideal despite the fact that he, his wife, his brother, and his foster daughter all underwent years of torture and imprisonment on completely false charges by East European communist regimes directed by Stalin. While perhaps not "evil" to the same degree as Stalin's secret police officials, Field was truly a bad man, responsible for the deaths and suffering of dozens due to the utterly false testimony he cravenly gave to benefit the East European show trials of those communists Stalin did not trust. Marton pulls no punches in describing the person that Field truly was. I was also quite impressed with her

research. Marton's parents interviewed Field in the 1950s and she apparently had access to much of their materials. She also combed the secret police files in Hungary and was able to cite even the transcripts of secretly tape-recorded conversations between Field and his wife in their bedroom following their release. And though no further proof is needed, Marton confirms through the story of Field that Alger Hiss was indeed a Soviet agent. HIGHLY recommended.

I personally believe that reviews should be based off of the writing in this book rather than the reader's political views. Talented author!

Disappointing. As an historian of the cold war and show trials, I differ with many of the conclusions that Ms. Marton draws. She has taken liberties that others who have previously written about Noel Field were disciplined enough not to take (see Flora Lewis's "Red Pawn"). There is just way too much conflicting and quite frankly convoluted information about this subject to say whether or not he was a spy for Stalin. But living as we do in the age of hyperbole, perhaps the author figured it wasn't sexy enough to write about a man who is (and probably should remain) an enigma so she made him into a scandalous spy. I would recommend this book to anyone who likes sensationalized spy stories.

Re the book "True Believer" re a spy Noel Field by Ms Marton interviewed by John Donlan on NPR 9/5. Ms Martin does not deal with the shades of grey- thus her book seems glib and shallow. She actually comes across as right wing! Was Field's a "misspent" or "pathetic" life as she states? What has Ms Martin ever done to change the world? Does she realize that there are groups, like "Lutte Ouvriere" in France - a Trotskyist group- that are still trying to form workers' parties? Is she aware that the fact that communism has often been betrayed does not mean it is a wrong philosophy? If she covered heroes of the non violent Catholic Worker or left movement- like Fathers Phil and Dan Berrigan? but they are also "true believers" and "fanatics"? Let her read the book by Maria Joffe- a member of the left opposition to stalin who spent time in the Gulag and retired to Israel. What does Ms Martin think of the execution of the Rosenbergs? Is she voting for trump?

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