

THE QUESTION OF
WHITEWASHING IN AMERICAN
HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

Chapter 13

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When one considers how insidious and overwhelming the language of conquest (i.e., cultural hegemony focused on anti-Indianism) has been in academic publications, school curriculum, media, and institutions, and how intensely it has dismissed or disparaged authentic Indigenous voices, perspectives, and contributions, one must consider the ways in which such hegemony stems from the consciousness of the dominant social classes, as well as the degree to which it is intentional. In this chapter, David Gibbs extends Devon Mihesuah's specific argument about the hegemony that exists within universities' Native Studies programs by revealing the close connections between the U.S. intelligence services and academia since 1945. This chapter will not focus on anti-Indigenous hegemony per se, but will instead serve as a case study in how academia has been and continues to be co-opted to serve the interests of the powerful. Consider, for instance, a report I received moments ago about a respected and popular professor at the University of California, Berkeley, who was fired after he published a scientific paper regarding the uncontrolled contamination of irreplaceable native Mexican corn varieties by genetically engineered corn. Dr. Ignacio Chapela, whose article was published in the science journal Nature, was denied tenure due to pressure from the biotech company Monsanto, in spite of almost unanimous approval (32 to 1) of his department members and tenure recommendations from his department chair and the dean of the College of Natural Resources.¹ This is only one of a growing number of such cases across the country where universities pressure faculty to tow the progovernment, procorporate, promilitary agenda, and Dr. Gibbs's illuminating piece helps us understand how this can be happening.

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They came to you under the guise and pretense of friendship and by the use of base flattery and hypocrisy gained your confidence, only to lead you into the crooked path of ruin and destruction.

—KEOKUK (SAUK), 1832

A major theme of this volume has been that the victors have been writing the history (and the social science as well) with regard to the experience of Indigenous People. There is a clear if often unstated bias in much of U.S. social science that implicitly celebrates and apologizes for the onward march of colonialism and neocolonialism, while it slights the perspective of its numerous victims in North America and elsewhere. The history of the American Indian is, obviously, a part of this history of colonial conquest, and the present volume's focus on presenting the Indian perspective is a most welcome corrective.

In this chapter, I will explore some of the causes for the unstated biases—the procolonial “hegemony” that forms a major theme of the book—and will argue that at least one cause has been the close connections between the U.S. intelligence services and academia since 1945. This chapter will not focus on the issue of American Indian politics, but will instead serve as a case study in how academia can be co-opted to serve the interests of the powerful.

The close collaboration between academia and U.S. foreign policy had its origins during the First World War, when numerous academics worked for the Committee on Public Information, which disseminated propaganda in favor of the war. Such ties also were established during World War II, with the creation of the Army's Office of Special Services, whose staff included some of the most distinguished academics and intellectuals of the era. With the coming of the Cold War and the creation of the CIA in 1947, the alliance between academics and U.S. expansionism became a permanent feature of university life. During the 1950s, the CIA and military intelligence were among the main sources of funding for the social sciences, having supported such institutions as Columbia's Russian Research Institute, Harvard's Russian Research Center, and MIT's Center for International Studies. Outside the campus setting, major research foundations, including the Ford Foundation and the Asia Foundation, were closely integrated with the Agency. The field of political communications was transformed during the early Cold War by large-scale U.S. government funding, in which leading academics helped intelligence agencies to develop modern techniques of propaganda and psychological warfare. Fields across the social sciences and humanities were affected by this collaboration.

Major figures in such fields as history, political science, communications, sociology, and anthropology were closely integrated into the struggle against communism.² Some of the resulting activities strained the limits of academic propriety. Noam Chomsky provides the following recollection of his experiences at MIT:

Around 1960, the Political Science Department separated off from the Economics Department. And at that time it was openly funded by the CIA; it was not even a secret . . . In the mid-1960s, it stopped being publicly funded by the Central Intelligence Agency, but it was still directly involved in activities that were scandalous. The Political Science Department was so far as I know the only department on campus which had closed, secret seminars. I was once invited to talk to one, which is how I learned about it. They had a villa in Saigon where students were working on pacification projects for their doctoral dissertations.³

In a carrot and stick strategy, these activities were combined with rigorous scrutiny of dissident professors and, in the words of historian Bruce Cumings, “It is only a bit of an exaggeration to say that for those scholars studying enemy countries, either they consulted with the government or they risked being investigated by the FBI.”⁴

The CIA also developed remarkably close ties to journalism and, during the period 1947–77, some four hundred American journalists “secretly carried out assignments” for the Agency, according to a classic investigative study by Carl Bernstein. Some two hundred of these journalists signed secrecy agreements or employment contracts with the CIA.⁵ The recruitment of journalists was directed by longtime CIA officer Frank Wisner, who managed “respected members of the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, CBS, and other communications vehicles, plus stringers.” Wisner often commented on how easy it is to buy a journalist, and for not more than a couple of hundred dollars a month.⁶ Overseas, U.S. intelligence officers funded academics and writers through a series of front organizations and publications, coordinated by the CIA-controlled Congress for Cultural Freedom.⁷

CIA influence extended to book publication, and a long series of books were Agency supported. According to a U.S. Senate report, “Well over a thousand books were produced, subsidized, or sponsored by the CIA before the end of 1967.” The Central Intelligence Agency sometimes simply provided financial support toward a book’s publication. In some cases, this was done without the author’s knowledge; in others, Agency

personnel worked directly with the author and influenced the actual content of the book. In the latter cases, the CIA sought to control the author to a considerable degree. According to one intelligence officer, the CIA wished to “make sure the actual manuscript will correspond with our operational and propagandistic intentions.”⁸ The CIA has never released a title list of the one thousand (or more) books it helped to publish in the course of its elaborate propaganda efforts. However, there can be no doubt that academics participated in some of these clandestine publishing activities. In addition, there is the problem of self-censorship: during the 1950s, a common practice at MIT’s Center for International Studies was for researchers to write a classified study on a specific topic and then to publish a “sanitized” version of the same study as a regular academic book for public use.⁹ To the best of my knowledge, the book publications that resulted from this process never acknowledged government support, nor did they acknowledge that the publication had omitted information.

Particularly troubling is the CIA’s use of “black” propaganda, a common intelligence practice in which deliberately false information is released, and the true origin of the disinformation is obscured. One example of black propaganda is *The Penkovsky Papers*, a 1965 book that purported to be the published diary of a Soviet military officer. The book portrayed the Soviet system in general and the Soviet intelligence services in particular in a most unflattering light. As it turns out, the CIA actually wrote the book. Former officer Victor Marchetti wrote: “*The Penkovsky Papers* was a phony story. We wrote the book in the CIA.”¹⁰ More recently, the Agency helped coordinate a massive black propaganda operation to influence U.S. and world opinion against Nicaragua’s Sandinista government and other adversaries in Central America.¹¹

During the 1970s, academic-intelligence ties suffered a blow in the context of the general atmosphere of skepticism toward establishment policy associated with the Vietnam War and the massive student-led opposition to that war. A special U.S. Senate committee, chaired by Senator Frank Church, also damaged the Agency’s image during its hearings in 1975. The “Church Committee,” as it was known, revealed extensive CIA misdeeds, including secret interventions against democratic regimes, attempted assassinations against foreign leaders, and surveillance of American citizens. For a brief period during the late 1960s and early 1970s, some U.S. academics adopted critical views of official policy and distanced themselves from the intelligence agencies.

This situation caused consternation among policy elites; these elites, in turn, contemplated ways to regain influence in the academy. To illustrate

this point, I attach below a discussion among Henry Kissinger, President Gerald Ford, and Shah Mohammad Pahlevi of Iran, which took place in 1975. The context of the conversation concerned a coup in Portugal in which a pro-U.S. dictator was deposed. The transcript, recently declassified, reads as follows:

Shah: . . . Portugal could be an eye opener. Are the intellectuals for democracy? [This is surely an ironic comment, coming from the Shah.]

Kissinger: Not really. They just can't have an enemy on the left . . .

Shah: The intellectuals will destroy the world without knowing how to replace it. They don't have a plan. They would be street cleaners in a communist regime.

Kissinger: *The West could buy off the intellectuals* [emphasis added]. Their pay is poor but they are expected to be upper middle class. But as it is, they resent the system rather than support it.

Shah: That is true. It would be easy have a professor on the board of directors.

President [Ford]: There is a trend here. The President of the University of Michigan is on several.

Kissinger: It has to reach the professors. Because it is the ones who write who put out the poison.¹²

It is clear from this transcript that official circles were concerned about the trends on U.S. campuses, where previously compliant faculty now were becoming too independent and too critical of established policy. And there is explicit discussion by Kissinger and others about the need to co-opt intellectuals and to undercut their independence.

Kissinger's proposal to influence academia was gradually implemented. In reality, academic collaboration with the intelligence services never really ceased, even during the 1960s and 1970s. It proceeded on a more discreet basis, gradually picking up in intensity after the election of Ronald Reagan, which led to the initiation of a new round of CIA interventions in the Third World through the "Reagan Doctrine." And with the end of the Cold War, academic-intelligence ties have increased still further. During the late 1990s (even before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon), the CIA made a special effort to augment its influence. A November 2000 article in *Lingua Franca* states that since 1996, the CIA has made public outreach a "top priority and targets academia in particular. According to experts on U.S. intelligence, the strategy has worked." The article notes that highly regarded

academics—including Columbia’s Robert Jervis, recent president of the American Political Science Association, and Harvard’s Joseph S. Nye—worked for the CIA. Yale’s H. Bradford Westerfield also states: “There’s a great deal of actually open consultation and there’s a lot more semi-open, broadly acknowledged consultation.”¹³ The pace of collaboration accelerated considerably after September 11, 2001. In a 2002 interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, CIA officer John Phillips openly discussed his efforts to recruit academics. His choice of words is revealing: “We don’t want to turn [academics] into spies . . . We want to capture them intellectually.”¹⁴ The possibility that academics have been intellectually captured by an espionage agency is disconcerting.

An obvious question: Why is the CIA (and U.S. government agencies more generally) so interested in collaborating with academia? One reason is that officials seek to benefit from the expertise that academics possess. Indeed, academics have been useful in perfecting overseas propaganda techniques and psychological operations which have been used by the CIA and military intelligence to influence foreign audiences.¹⁵ And there is a second and more disturbing motive: government officials have sought to influence the content of academia itself and to help ensure that perspectives critical of U.S. expansionism will be excluded from discussion, or at least minimized. We have already seen that some officials, notably Kissinger, have openly discussed the need to “buy off” potentially troublesome academics.

THE EFFECTS OF CO-OPTATION

It seems understandable that the U.S. government has sought to co-opt academics and to enlist their support in presenting a more sanitized version of external interventions, since the government has much to hide in this area. The simple fact is that U.S. policy has often used covert operations involving “dirty” methods which are inherently difficult to justify in public. Because of the widespread use of these methods, it seems natural that policy makers would seek to enlist the support of historians, social scientists, and journalists, who would be useful after the fact in whitewashing this history.

Let us briefly consider some of these covert operations. During the early 1960s, U.S. government agencies led by the CIA made extensive efforts to remove Fidel Castro from power. The CIA collaborated with elements of the Mafia and organized crime in repeated efforts to assassinate Castro. There were numerous attacks against economic targets in

Cuba. In 1962, the Joint Chiefs of Staff sought even more provocative actions and unanimously recommended an “Operations Northwoods,” which aimed to “justify” a U.S. invasion. The JCS document describing Northwoods, recently declassified, reads as follows:

The Joint Chiefs of Staff are to indicate brief but precise description of pretexts . . . for U.S. military intervention in Cuba . . . “Remember the Maine” incident could be arranged in several forms. We could blow up a U.S. ship in Guantanamo Bay and blame Cuba . . . We could develop a Communist Cuban terror campaign in the Miami area, in other Florida cities, and even in Washington . . . We could sink a boatload of [refugee] Cubans en route to Florida (real or simulated). We could foster attempts on the lives of Cuban refugees in the United States even to the extent of wounding in instances to be widely publicized. Exploding a few plastic bombs in carefully chosen spots, the arrest of Cuban agents, and the release of prepared documents substantiating Cuban involvement also would be helpful.¹⁶

Note that this operation was not in fact approved or implemented—President Kennedy rejected it. But the fact that it was recommended unanimously by the nation’s top military officers is surely noteworthy.

Some of the covert operations involved mass killings. One well-documented example was the 1965 coup in Indonesia, in which the CIA helped overthrow a left-leaning, neutralist government, led by Sukarno, a major figure in the nonaligned movement of Third World states. During and shortly after this coup, there was a reign of terror against the Indonesian Communist Party, left-wing organizations, and the families and friends of leftist figures. Estimates of the death toll have ranged from 250,000 to 1 million. In 1984, long after the events took place, former CIA officer Ralph McGehee stated:

The CIA prepared a study of the 1965 Indonesian operation that described what the Agency did there. I happened to have been custodian of that study for a time, and I know the specific steps the Agency took to create the conditions that led to the massacre of at least half a million Indonesians.¹⁷

More recent information, published in 1990, reveals that CIA and U.S. embassy officials in Jakarta helped draw up a “hit list” of Indonesians targeted for elimination, and passed on this information to the Indonesian military, a point that former U.S. officials have openly admitted. One U.S. diplomat associated with the covert program said the hit list was

necessary during the Cold War: “I probably have a lot of blood on my hands, but that’s not all bad.”¹⁸

Many other operations have been well documented. Indeed, the (now overthrown) regime of Saddam Hussein was the result of past U.S. covert operations which helped Hussein and his Baath party to gain power. Former National Security Council staffer Roger Morris also notes CIA complicity in the Baath Party’s earliest acts of violence in 1963: “Using lists of suspected Communists and other leftists provided by the CIA, the Baathists systematically murdered untold numbers.” In Afghanistan, the Taliban and Al Qaeda grew out of Islamic fundamentalist groups backed by the CIA during the war against the Soviets in the 1980s.¹⁹ While space will not permit a full account here, suffice it to say that covert operations have been undertaken in numerous countries, on every continent.²⁰

Now, let us look at how academics have analyzed covert operations. I will focus on the analyses from my own field of political science. By and large political scientists have ignored the issue and have acted as though U.S. covert operations simply do not exist. I surveyed the five top journals in political science that specialize in international relations during the period 1991–2000.²¹ I did not find a single article in any of these journals that focused on CIA covert operations. Mentions of these operations were very rare and, when they occurred at all, they were confined to a few sentences or a footnote. In effect, an entire category of international conduct has been expunged from the record, as if it never occurred.

Political science’s neglect of covert operations is also evident in many of the datasets that are used as the raw material for research. Consider for example the Militarized Interstate Disputes (MIDs) dataset, which compiles quantitative information on international conflicts throughout recent history and is one of the most widely used datasets in political science. The MIDs dataset contains an exhaustive catalogue of conventional wars and military conflicts (many of which were relatively minor). Yet there is virtually no mention of covert operations. True, the MIDs database defines conflict in a way that rules out most covert operations.²² This would not in itself be a problem, if there were some other standard dataset that did include a significant number of covert operations. The problem is that such a dataset does not exist (or if such a dataset does exist, it has elicited no notice in the top journals). The resulting scholarship can be summarized as an extended exercise in selection bias, because it omits covert operations, which constitute a major category of international conflict. This selection bias is far from innocuous; it virtually guarantees that U.S. actions will appear in a more favorable light.²³

There are of course counterarguments to be considered. One objection, offered by Robert Jervis, is that political science has avoided covert operations because there is so little public information on the topic.²⁴ This is not a valid objection. The Indonesia and Iraq operations have been admitted by former U.S. officials in public statements. Numerous operations have been documented by the most reliable sources of information, such as Senate hearings. Political science's neglect of this topic is certainly not the result of a lack of source material. The problem is that political scientists have ignored source material pertaining to covert operations.

It is amusing to note that, in recent years, politicians have criticized academics for being excessively left wing and critical of official policy.²⁵ This claim has little merit. In fact social scientists have often acted as apologists for U.S. expansionism, ignoring its most ugly features. The resulting scholarship involves a measure of official propaganda. Some have gone so far as to advocate openly that academics *should* act as propagandists. Consider the case of Professor Conyers Reed, who served as president of the American Historical Association. In his 1949 presidential address, Professor Reed made the following statements:

Discipline is the essential prerequisite of every effective army whether it marches under the Stars and Stripes or under the Hammer and Sickle . . . Total war, whether it be hot or cold, enlists everyone and calls upon everyone to assume his part. The historian is no freer from this obligation than the physicist . . . This sounds like the advocacy of one form of social control as against another. In short, it is.²⁶

Few academics have had the sense of self-confidence to make such frank statements. While Reed's comments were made over half a century ago, I believe that his views hold some relevance for contemporary academic life.

Some qualifications must be noted: the CIA is not always successful in its efforts to gain scholarly support for official policy. A number of academics with intelligence consulting backgrounds—Chalmers Johnson, for example—have become highly critical of U.S. foreign policy. Despite these exceptions, it seems reasonable to conclude that the intelligence community's efforts to influence academia have met with success. This was implicitly recognized by Dwight D. Eisenhower (who, it should be remembered, served as president of Columbia University). In his 1961 Farewell Address, Eisenhower noted: "The prospect of domination of the nation's scholars by Federal employment, project allocations, and the power of money is ever present—and is gravely to be regarded."²⁷ Unfortunately, Eisenhower's warning had little impact.

Overall, the history of academic involvement with U.S. government agencies, especially with the CIA, has not been a particularly happy one. The relationship has reduced the sense of objectivity and intellectual independence that should be at the core of social science. The story of academic involvement with the intelligence services is only one example of the various ways that powerful interests can influence scholarship. One could just as easily look at the role of other government services or large corporate interests, and the way that these organizations have affected scholarship in various areas. The role of military funding in the physical sciences, pharmaceutical companies in the biomedical sciences, and multinational investment firms in economics no doubt would constitute other examples of external influence on scholarship. The intelligence connections discussed here surely represent just the tip of the iceberg. In short, academic research often entails a measure of partisanship which celebrates the rich and powerful while it slights the grievances of the victims.

NOTES

The epigraph to this chapter is taken from Perry A. Armstrong and H. W. Rucker, *The Sauks and the Black Hawk War* (Springfield, Ill.: 1887), 48.

1. Organic Consumers Association, “Monsanto’s Dirty Tricks Campaign against Fired Berkeley Professor Ignacio Chapela,” <http://www.organicconsumers.org/monsanto/ignacio121604.cfm>. Accessed December 16, 2004.

2. Christopher Simpson, ed., *Universities and Empire* (New York: New Press, 1998); and Christopher Simpson, *Science of Coercion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

3. Noam Chomsky, “The Cold War and the University,” in *The Cold War and the University*, ed. David Montgomery (New York: New Press, 1997), 181. Note that Chomsky adds: “Certainly, nothing like that is true now [regarding the MIT Political Science Department]; it is a much more open department.”

4. Bruce Cumings, “Boundary Displacement: Area Studies and International Studies during and after the Cold War,” *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 29.1 (1997): 14.

5. Carl Bernstein, “The CIA and the Media,” *Rolling Stone* (October 20, 1977): 65–67.

6. Deborah Davis, *Katharine the Great: Katharine Graham and Her Washington Post Empire* (New York: Sheridan Square Press, 1991), 130–131.

7. Frances Stoner Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (New York: Granta, 1999).

8. Both quotes from U.S. Senate, *Foreign and Military Intelligence*, Book 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 193.

9. Simpson, *Science of Coercion*, 82.

10. Quoted from “An Ex-CIA Official Speaks Out: An Interview with Victor Marchetti by Greg Kaza,” 1986, www.skepticfiles.org/conspire/cia_jfk.html. I telephoned Marchetti and confirmed the authenticity of this interview. See also discussion in Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks, *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* (New York: Dell, 1980), 161–162.

11. Robert Parry and Peter Kornbluh, “Reagan’s Pro-Contra Propaganda Machine,” *Washington Post*, September 4, 1988.

12. White House, “Memorandum of Conversation,” May 15, 1975. From Declassified Documents Online, <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/government/declassified.html>.

13. Chris Mooney, “For Your Eyes Only: The CIA Will Let You See Classified Documents—But at What Price?” *Lingua Franca* (November 2000). The full text of this article and many of the other citations are available on my website: www.gened.arizona.edu/dgibbs/CIA.htm.

14. Quoted in Daniel Golden, “After Sept. 11 CIA Becomes a Growing Force on Campus,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 4, 2002, <http://www.mindfully.org/Reform/2002/CIA-Growing-On-Campus4oct02.htm>. Phillips’ comments referred to academics in the “hard” sciences, but there is no reason to assume that the Agency’s objectives are any different in the social sciences.

15. See Simpson, *Science of Coercion*.

16. “Justification for U.S. Military Intervention in Cuba,” March 13, 1962. Transmitted to the Secretary of Defense from General L. L. Lemnitzer, the JCS chairman. The document was marked “Top Secret Special Handling NoFORN [no foreign government dissemination].” It is available from the National Security Archive, www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/20010430/. The operation is also described in James Bamford, *Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 82–91.

17. Quoted in “Should the CIA Fight Secret Wars?” *Harper’s* (September 1984): 33.

18. Quoted in Christopher Reed, “U.S. Agents ‘Drew up Indonesian Hit List,’” *Guardian* (London), May 22, 1990.

19. On Iraq, see Roger Morris, “A Tyrant 40 Years in the Making,” *New York Times*, March 14, 2003. On Afghanistan, see David N. Gibbs, “Forgotten Coverage of Afghan ‘Freedom Fighters’: The Villains of Today’s News Were Heroes in the ’80s,” *Extra*, January/February 2002. Note that Hussein himself did not seize full power until 1979. The earlier CIA-supported coups in 1963 and 1968 did, however, aid Hussein’s gradual ascent.

20. Probably the best general account of covert operations is in William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1995).

21. The five journals are *World Politics*, *International Organization*, *International Security*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, and *International Studies Quarterly*.

22. Daniel Jones, Stuart Bremer, and J. David Singer, "Militarized Interstate Disputes, 1816–1992: Rationale, Coding Rules, and Empirical Patterns," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 15.2 (1996): 169–170.

23. For further discussion of this problem see David N. Gibbs, "Social Science as Propaganda? International Relations and the Question of Political Bias," *International Studies Perspectives* 2.4 (2001): 159–177. See also Peter Monaghan, "Does International Relations Scholarship Reflect a Bias toward the U.S.?" *Chronicle of Higher Education* (September 24, 1999).

24. This Jervis statement was made in a radio debate on the program *Democracy Now*, November 13, 2002. For audio see www.democracynow.org/article.pl?sid=03/04/07/0312250.

25. See Jerry L. Martin and Ann D. Neal, *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done about It* (Washington, D.C.: Defense of Civilization Fund, American Council of Trustees and Alumni, 2002), www.goacta.org/publications/Reports/defciv.pdf.

26. Conyers Reed, "The Social Obligations of the Historian," *American Historical Review* 55.2 (1950): 283–285. There is no specific evidence that Conyers actually consulted for the military or the CIA. However, the opinions expressed in the narrative do elucidate the general phenomenon of the "captured" intellectual.

27. Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Farewell Address," January 17, 1961, mcadams.posc.mu.edu/ike.htm.