

The Ghost: The Secret Life of CIA Spymaster James Jesus Angleton

Jefferson Morley (St. Martin's Press, 2017), 336 pp.

Reviewed by David S. Robarge

Readers who pick up *The Ghost: The Secret Life of CIA Spymaster James Jesus Angleton* by Jefferson Morley hoping finally to have a comprehensive and objective treatment of the Agency's shadowy and controversial chief of counterintelligence will be sorely disappointed. What they will find instead is an erratically organized account of most of the key events in Angleton's life along with an agglomeration of often badly sourced suppositions, inferences, allegations, and innuendos frequently cast in hyperbolic or categorical language. *The Ghost* displays the most prominent shortcomings of journalistic history: reportage substitutes for cohesive narrative, with vignettes and atmospherics stitched together with insufficient discernment among sources. One of Morley's more dubious ones—an anonymous blog post with no citations, from which he pulls an outlandish quote—has inadvertently provided an insight into what his ulterior motive in writing *The Ghost* appears to be: “This is not about who James Angleton was so much as *what he had to be*” [emphasis added].^a In pursuit of a story he seems to have already written in his mind, Morley manipulates historical facts, engages in long leaps of logic, and avoids inconvenient contradictory evidence and interpretations to produce yet another superficial caricature of a deeply complicated personality.

Questionable Logic

Perhaps the most problematic feature of *The Ghost* is Morley's penchant for reaching grandiose conclusions based on sketchy or no evidence, contorted reasoning, or unfamiliarity with intelligence processes and the history of the events in which he places Angleton. Among numerous instances, Morley overstates Angleton's part in the Italian election operation—he hardly was its “miracle

worker” (53)^b—and offers no persuasive evidence of his “supporting role” in the MKULTRA project that “help[ed] give birth” to it, or that he “pursued the use of psychoactive drugs for intelligence work” other than his brief relationship with a colleague who worked on the program. (59, 61) An Israeli diplomat “soon became Angleton's man in Havana,” but they met only a few times, and the diplomat declined Angleton's request to contact CIA agents in Cuba. (100)

Morley's highly questionable rendering of the Kennedy administration's policy toward Cuba and Angleton's involvement with it is more troublesome. For starters, the United States did not have “two divergent Cuba policies” represented by the Joint Chiefs of Staff's “engineered provocation” plan called NORTHWOODS and the White House's “autonomous operations” using Cuban exiles, possibly in conjunction with the assassination of Castro. (127) The administration's policy was what it did, not what was said in meetings or written about in plans and memoranda. NORTHWOODS was never carried out, and the CIA's integrated covert action program codenamed AMWORLD became the focus for the rest of Kennedy's presidency. Morley later asserts that Angleton stressed Lee Harvey Oswald's Cuban ties so the White House would activate NORTHWOODS, but he presents no evidence besides Castro's suspicions, which corroborate nothing.

Morley describes the CIA Counterintelligence Staff's paper “Cuban Control and Action Capabilities”—an assessment of the Castro regime's counterintelligence apparatus, issued in May 1963—as “one of the most important documents bearing Angleton's name to ever surface” because it “confirms his leading role in U.S.-Cuba policy in 1963.” The paper's analysis is, as Morley says, “lucid, historical, and comprehensive,” but he offers no indication that Angleton's “most important contribution to U.S.

a. “James Angleton: 7 Types of Ambiguity,” <http://brainsturbator.com/posts/225/james-angleton-7-types-of-ambiguity>, cited on p. 70.

b. Numbers in parentheses refer to the page numbers on which Morley's assertions appear.

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policy toward Cuba,” which he “intended . . . to serve as nothing less than the foundation of a new national policy,” had any influence on the Kennedy administration’s deliberations. Moreover, his insinuation that Angleton deliberately withheld the paper from the White House, the National Security Council, and Attorney General Robert Kennedy, the White House’s point man on Cuban affairs, because of “the alienation of the Kennedy White House and U.S. national security agencies in mid-1963” shows a misunderstanding of the paper’s purpose and intended audience. (126, 128) The Counterintelligence Staff prepared the assessment as part of its responsibilities under National Security Council Directive No. 5 for apprising members of the United States Intelligence Board and other interested agencies about important counterintelligence developments in foreign countries. The Directive states that the Counterintelligence Staff, “in consultation with the US Intelligence Board and other interested departments and agencies . . . shall develop appropriate policy recommendations for National Security Council consideration with respect to the overall U.S. counterintelligence effort conducted outside the U.S. and its possessions.”^a The recipients on the paper’s distribution list were the Board’s members and other US departments with equities in Cuban affairs. The White House, the NSC, and the attorney general would not have received it as a standard practice; Angleton did not leave them off as some devious tactic to influence policy behind the scenes or in a show of antagonism toward them.

One of the most fundamental applications of faulty logic underlays Morley’s overblown discussion of Angleton’s role in the JFK assassination and its aftermath. He asserts that “Objectively speaking, an epic counterintelligence failure culminated on Angleton’s watch,” and he even goes so far as to contend that Angleton’s “preassassination interest in Oswald” indicates his “culpability in the wrongful death of President Kennedy.” (138, 237) For those wholesale claims to be valid, Oswald’s CIA file would have had to contain actionable information that he posed a clear threat to the president that could have been preempted, but nothing in it suggests any plotting against Kennedy before the assassination. To read significance into the random items in Oswald’s file shows fallacious retrospective wisdom. Morley’s treatment of the infor-

mation about Oswald that was picked up in the HTLINGUAL mail intercept operation—key evidence in his argument about the “epic . . . failure”—also is logically contradictory. The CIA’s surveillance dragnet of letters going between the United States and the Soviet Union, started in 1952, had thousands of targets and created files on nearly all of them—a program that made Angleton “the founding father of U.S. mass-surveillance policies” (258)—yet Angleton and the Counterintelligence Staff supposedly were, or should have been, preoccupied with one person—Oswald—to the exclusion of all the others caught up in the sweep. Elsewhere in his discussion of Oswald and the assassination, Morley unskeptically draws on CIA station chief Winston Scott’s memoir for details about what the agency knew of Oswald’s doings in Mexico City without noting the errors in it that were pointed out in a publicly available CIA critique.

Morley’s credulous use of others’ allegations reaches a low point of ludicrousness when he quotes, without caveat, former State Department official Thomas Hughes’s purely speculative thought that Angleton had the US Navy SIGINT ship *Liberty* repositioned off the Egyptian coast during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war “as a hedge against Israeli battlefield reverses.” (178, Morley’s words) “The explanations for the *Liberty*’s presence in the area are so totally bizarre that you have to think Angleton was behind it. . . . Who ordered it to go there and why?” Hughes asked. “NSA didn’t seem to know. CIA didn’t seem to know. [The] State Department certainly never knew. The Pentagon couldn’t figure it out.” Morley then leaves hanging the preposterous idea that Angleton—who had no such authority—could order a Navy ship repositioned without NSA or the Navy knowing. Angleton later “cooperated” in quelling the outcry against Israel after it attacked the ship, but Morley does not say how or offer any proof that he did. (180)

Many other argumentative shortcomings of *The Ghost* can be mentioned. Morley asserts that “never was he [Angleton] more wrong than in the case of Yuri Nosenko,” but he never delves into the complexities of that tangled case and does not appear to have read the massive report by CIA counterintelligence officer Tennent Bagley arguing for Nosenko’s *male fides* although it has long been declassified. Former MI5 technical officer Peter Wright, whom critics routinely deride as semi-paranoid, is conveniently accurate and insightful when needed for negative comments about Angleton. White House Dep-

a. National Security Council Intelligence Directive No. 5, “U.S. Espionage and Counterintelligence Activities Abroad,” 18 January 1961 revision.

uty Chief of Staff Dick Cheney's memo arguing for a presidential commission as a ploy to contain the damage from the "Family Jewels" disclosures was not nearly as significant as Morley suggests; the Rockefeller Commission was quickly denounced as a blue-ribbon whitewash. Is Cheney hyped because of his later notoriety? Morley cites the analysis of the Church Committee's chief of staff, William Miller, that the political controversies in the mid-1970s over intelligence issues resulted from the clash of two factions, "the King's Party" and "the Constitutionalists." The polarity—evocative of the Cavaliers and the Roundheads of Cromwellian England—is simplistic and ahistorical, and, courtesy of Miller, comes complete with a *Star Wars* allusion, with Angleton as Darth Vader, of course; he "embodied the 'temptation of falling prey to a fascination with the workings of the dark side.'" (242) According to Angleton's former colleague John Hadden, Angleton was guilty of "either treason or incompetence" in his handling of a suspected Israeli theft of nuclear material from a US facility. (260) No alternatives exist? And is a former counterintelligence officer competent to opine on what constitutes treason, which has been defined in federal statute and Supreme Court cases?

Bad Sourcing

Throughout *The Ghost*, Morley uses a variety of dubious sources to substantiate key arguments while ignoring material that reaches different conclusions. He overuses books by Joseph Trento, Tim Weiner, and Michael Holzman, whose scholarship has been heavily criticized. Too much of his information about Angleton and the MKULTRA program comes mostly from H. P. Albarelli's aptly titled book *A Terrible Mistake* (Trine Day, 2009) and John Marks's *The Search for the "Manchurian Candidate"* (Times Books, 1979), which relies mostly on anonymous interviews. Morley uses reminiscences without apparently weighing such factors as accuracy, access, timing, or agenda, and he routinely quotes the most fault-finding passages. When facts are not available, Morley recurs to fiction to make his points. The story of Angleton's proposed exploitation of one of actress Greta Garbo's movies for intelligence purposes comes from a novel. Portions of an account of Angleton's relationship with a Shin Bet officer are taken from an imagined after-death conversation between the two men. A passage from Norman Mailer's *Harlot's Ghost* (Random House,

1991) indirectly supports the idea that Angleton had some role in John F. Kennedy's death.

Morley references some conspiracist blog postings, and other citations are bizarre; for example, a lecture by Beat poet Allen Ginsberg purportedly demonstrates Angleton's extensive involvement with the agency's covert action office, which was not the case. Lastly, Morley ignores other sources entirely, such as Frank Rafalko's book on MHCHAOS, Samuel Halpern's and Hayden Peake's article on who ordered Nosenko's detention (Angleton did not), and this writer's account of CIA and the JFK assassination, all of which describe the agency's role in those events quite differently from what appears in *The Ghost*.^a

Numerous Errors

Many easily avoidable, factual errors compound the other flaws of *The Ghost* and further call into question the reliability of Morley's narrative and conclusions. To mention only some of them:

- OSS Director William Donovan did not receive a Medal of Honor for "aerial heroics" in World War I; he led an infantry unit. (15)
- Bletchley Park was not an OSS spy school. (15, 17–18)
- Angleton arrived in London in March 1944 amid destruction from the German's V weapons, according to Morley, but the V-1 and V-2 were not used until June and September, respectively. (17–18)
- DCI Roscoe Hillenkoetter was not "brought on" to CIA when it was created; he already was there as head of the agency's predecessor. (36)

a. Frank J. Rafalko, *MH/CHAOS: The CIA's Campaign Against the Radical New Left and the Black Panthers* (Naval Institute Press, 2011); Samuel Halpern and Hayden Peake, "Did Angleton Jail Nosenko?," *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, 3:4 (Winter 1989), 451–64; David Robarge, *John McCone as Director of Central Intelligence, 1961–1965* (CIA History Staff, 2005; declassified in 2014), ch. 14, at <http://www.foia.cia.gov/col-lection/john-mccone-director-central-intelligence-1961-1965>.

- The CIA's early espionage component was the Office of Special (not Secret) Operations. (36)
- DCI Walter Bedell Smith, not Allen Dulles, merged OSO with the agency's covert action element, the Office of Policy Coordination, to create the Directorate of Plans. (54)
- Dulles resigned in September 1961, not November. (100)
- Angleton had no authority to allow NSA spy Sidney Joseph Petersen "to plead guilty and avoid a public trial," nor does Morley's source, an article by historian Cees Wiebes in *Intelligence and National Security*, suggest that. (104)
- The Soviet spy ring called the Rote Kapelle operated during World War II, not in the 1920s; Morley confuses it with the Trust deception operation. (108)
- The reporting of GRU Colonel Oleg Penkovskiy was not called the "Penkovskiy Papers" (112); his documentary material was named IRONBARK, and reports of his debriefings were labeled CHICKADEE.
- Operations director Richard Helms, not Angleton, got Harvey posted to Rome in 1963, according to Harvey's biographer (see *Flawed Patriot* by Bayard Stockton (Potomac Books, 2006)). (126)
- KGB officer Yuri Nosenko resurfaced in Geneva in February 1964, not January. (156)
- Public Law 110, which allows the CIA to admit up to 100 persons into the United States each year for national security reasons, is not "a secret arrangement"—it was part of the CIA Act of 1949 (specifically, section 7 of 50 US Code section 403h) that established the agency's special administrative authorities. (157)
- MHCHAOS did not—could not, because it had far too small a staff—"spy on and infiltrate the entire antiwar movement." (182)
- Nosenko was not given LSD during his detention. Administering it and truth serum was discussed, but DCI Helms refused to authorize using either. (183)
- KGB officer Yuri Loginov was not executed after Angleton arranged for his turnover to the Soviets; see Tom Mangold's interview with Oleg Gordievsky in *Cold Warrior* (Simon & Schuster, 1991). (186)
- Helms's cryptonym was Fletcher Knight, not Thomas Land or Lund. (187)
- John Tower was vice chairman of the Church Committee, not Howard Baker, who held that position on Sam Ervin's Watergate committee two years earlier. (241)
- "[T]he CI Staff was the nexus of the CIA's plans to get rid of Castro"—ignoring Task Force W and the Special Affairs Staff, which did all the operations. (262)

Sensationalist Style

Morley tells his Angleton tale in a succession of relatively short paragraphs and terse sentences with lots of brief, loaded segues or section endings, along with several irrelevant passages seemingly dropped in for some atmospheric or contextual effect (Hunter Thompson on Americans' political mood in the early 1960s on page 154, for example). *The Ghost* is chock with hit-and-run allegations (often couched with "probably," "might have," "possibly," and "perhaps"), overstatements, and profound-sounding but unsubstantiated observations. Here are just a handful of them:

- "Angleton had become a lethal man." (20)
- "Imbued with fascist sympathies and anti-Communist passion, Angleton channeled his convictions into Anglo-American hegemonic ambition." (27)
- "With this apparatus, Angleton would move the world." (73)

- “. . . Angleton and [American labor official Jay] Lovestone effectively controlled what American labor unions had to say about U.S. foreign policy.” (75)
- “Then his power became unparalleled.” (76)
- “By the mid-1960s, Angleton reigned as the Machiavelli of the new American national security state, a thinker and strategist of ruthless clarity.” (155)
- “Angleton was a man unbound. His empire now stretched from Mexico City to London to Rome to Jerusalem.” (167)
- “Angleton was a ghoul, a specter who showed up around the time of death.” (210)

And, in a closing farrago:

“He was an ingenious, vicious, mendacious, and foolish man who acted with impunity as he sought to expand the Anglo-American-Israeli sphere of influence after the end of World War II. Like his friend Ezra Pound, his master was sometimes indistinguishable from his madness. He was indeed a combination of Machiavelli, Svengali, and Iago. He was brilliant, charming, and sinister. In retirement, at last, he was harmless.” (263)

Still a Gap

As this writer has noted elsewhere,^a historians and journalists have produced what seems in overview to be a workable bibliography on Angleton, but, including after *The Ghost*, significant gaps remain. The literature on him still shows flaws in scholarship, distorted focus, and a propensity to either rationalize or, more often, demonize him without sufficiently understanding him as a historical actor who was shaped by and in turn shaped events. Morley’s use of the JFK assassination records at the National Archives and his interviews with Angleton’s family and associates add a small measure of insight, but the conundrum of Angleton’s life and career remain. As one scholar of Angleton has written with only mild exaggeration, “One could ask a hundred people about [him] and receive a hundred lightly shaded different replies that ranged from utter denunciation to unadulterated hero worship. That the positions could occupy these extremes spoke of the significance and the ambiguity of the role he had played.”^b Angleton is perhaps the CIA’s most compelling and misrepresented figure, and until still unrevealed information about him and the Counterintelligence Staff becomes available, he will continue to be to history the enigma he fancied himself to be in life.

a. “‘Cunning Passages, Contrived Corridors’: Wandering in the Angletonian Wilderness,” *Studies in Intelligence*, 53:4 (December 2009), 49–61, at <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol53no4/pdf/U-%20Article-Robarge-Passages-53-4-corrected-1Mar10.pdf>.

b. Robin W. Winks, *Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939–1961* (William Morrow, 1987), 437.



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