Quiet Americans: The CIA and Early Cold War Hollywood Cinema

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between the Central Intelligence Agency and the Hollywood film industry from 1947 to 1959. Surprisingly, the CIA was almost entirely absent from American cinema screens during this period, and their public profile in other popular media, including television and the press, was virtually nonexistent. This conspicuous lacuna of publicity coincided with what some scholars have termed the “Golden Age” of US covert action – an era of increasing CIA intervention in Italy, Iran and Guatemala, to name only the most prominent examples. How was it that the CIA managed to maintain such a low public profile and in the process evade popular scrutiny and questions of accountability during such an active period of its history? Utilizing extensive archival research in film production files and the records of the CIA themselves, this article suggests that Hollywood filmmakers adhered to the CIA's policy of blanket secrecy for three interrelated reasons. First, it suggests that the predominance of the so-called “semidocumentary” approach to the cinematic representation of US intelligence agencies during this period encouraged filmmakers to seek government endorsement and liaison in order to establish the authenticity of their portrayals. Thus the CIA's refusal to cooperate with Hollywood during this period thwarted a number of attempts by filmmakers to bring an authentic semidocumentary vision of their activities to the silver screen. Second, up until the liberalization of American defamation law in the mid-1960s, Hollywood studio legal departments advised producers to avoid unendorsed representations of US government departments and officials through fear of legal reprisal. Finally, this article suggests that the film-industry censor – the Production Code Administration – was instrumental in reinforcing Hollywood’s reliance upon government endorsement and cooperation. This latter point is exemplified by Joseph Mankiewicz's controversial adaptation of Graham Greene's The Quiet American. Overturing existing scholarship, which argues that CIA officer Edward Lansdale played a decisive role in transforming the screenplay of Greene's novel, this article suggests that Mankiewicz's alterations were made primarily to appease the Production Code Administration.

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It is difficult to conceive of a period when America's most publicly prominent espionage outfit was not at the forefront of the American public's scrutiny and imagination. Today newspaper headlines and television broadcasts are filled with reports of rendition programmes and secret prisons, waterboarding and unmanned spy drones, not to mention the conveyor belt of conspiracy theories which are now an unavoidably real component in the complexion of the CIA's public identity. Hollywood has played a large part in the frenzied media attention which the CIA now receives. From major new franchises such as the Bourne series or the recent success of Angelina Jolie's exploits in Salt (2010), to more docudrama-oriented representations in The Good Shepherd (2006) and Fair Game (2010), the immense popularity of the spy genre during the Cold War has been reigned in the twenty-first century by narratives of CIA intrigue. In short, the CIA today has assumed mythic proportions and inspired a veritable industry of media representations.

Surprisingly, however, the CIA has not always maintained such a high public profile. If we cast our attention back to the early history of the Agency, from their inception in the National Security Act of 1947 up until the Bay of Pigs debacle in 1961, it is striking how rarely their activities captivated public attention. Certainly this lack of interest was not a consequence of relative inactivity by the CIA. On the contrary, the 1950s is often described by intelligence historians as the “Golden Age” of CIA covert action, with clandestine coups instigated in Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954, to name only a few of the most prominent examples. Yet for all these defining moments in the history of covert action, the CIA's involvement went largely unreported by the American media. In a survey of Time magazine's extensive coverage of the ousting of Mossadiq, for example, John Foran reveals that the CIA received only one oblique reference, which itself was not an admission of the CIA's involvement in the coup.

Although the Rosenberg trial, the HUAC investigations and Senator McCarthy had propelled the topic of espionage and domestic subversion into the limelight of public discourse, rarely was the “enemy within” theme transferred by the American media to an engagement with American espionage abroad. The same could be said for the television industry. As Michael Kackman demonstrates in his analysis of Cold War spy television serials, producers were careful to avoid any implication that the US was conducting espionage operations on foreign soil. As one executive for Ziv Entertainment's espionage show The Man Called X indicated, “Officially, our government has no foreign espionage system in peacetime. Therefore, it is important in our stories that when X goes to a foreign country, it must not be for the purpose of official or unofficial espionage.” Hollywood too steered well clear of narratives of American espionage abroad. Instead, they preferred counterespionage plots, which often featured the FBI or a fictionalized version of it. The CIA, by contrast, was almost never directly mentioned in Hollywood spy features of the era and indeed reference to them was often deliberately removed from early shooting scripts and treatments to avoid any political or legal ramifications.

This article will seek to examine some of the reasons why American culture, and Hollywood specifically, offered almost no direct representation of the CIA during the early Cold War. In doing so, it provides three interrelated explanations. First, it argues that the CIA's refusal to cooperate with Hollywood filmmakers during this period acted as a form of de facto censorship on any direct cinematic representation of their institution. During the early Cold
War, filmmakers habitually sought government cooperation in their endeavours to produce realistic “semidocumentary” representations of American institutions. When this cooperation was denied, which it consistently was in the case of the CIA, Hollywood studios either invented fictional institutions, or more commonly, avoided the subject of American espionage on foreign soil altogether. Second, this article will focus on the legal constraints placed upon studio attempts to represent public officials up until the liberalization of defamation law in the US in the mid-1960s. Finally, it will turn to censorship within the film industry, specifically the influence of the Production Code Administration upon the representation of US government generally and the CIA specifically.

These explanations tend to suggest that the absence of the CIA from Hollywood features in the early Cold War was primarily a result of industry self-censorship rather than a product of any external interference by the CIA. The latter position has been argued by scholars such as Mathew Alford, Tricia Jenkins and Frances Stoner Saunders, who point to a few isolated incidents in order to suggest that the CIA maintained a systematic policy of engagement with filmmakers described by Saunders as the CIA’s “Hollywood Formula.” Saunders's conclusions drew heavily upon a series of “movie reports” written for the CIA and the Psychological Strategy Board, which she attributes to CIA officer Carleton Alsop, thereby demonstrating “just how far the CIA was able to extend its reach into the film industry.” Film historian David Eldridge, however, has convincingly demonstrated that Saunders misattributed these reports to Alsop. The actual author, according to Eldridge's thorough work of historical Cluedo, was Paramount's head of foreign and domestic censorship – Luigi Luraschi. By misattributing the letters to Alsop, Eldridge argues that Saunders seriously overstated the case for the CIA’s involvement with Hollywood. Luraschi was a Hollywood insider, not a CIA officer. His reports to the CIA originated from his own sense of patriotic devotion and continued at his behest through mutual cooperation between himself and the CIA. This contrasts markedly with Saunders's more sinister vision of a covert CIA plot initiated by the Agency at the highest levels of the Hollywood studio system.

Eldridge's article significantly shifted the parameters of the debate away from Saunders's notion of the CIA as the “puppet master” who pulled the strings of Cold War culture, towards a more consensual process of cultural creation involving what Scott Lucas termed “state–private networks.” Amidst an atmosphere of collaboration rather than coercion, rarely, if ever, did the CIA deem it necessary to hold a gun to the head of Hollywood producers. Supporting Eldridge's conclusions, Hugh Wilford's recent survey of the CIA's so-called “cultural Cold War” argued that unlike the CIA's sponsorship of elitist cultural outfits such as Encounter magazine, which relied upon external patronage, the highly profitable film industry provided no such point of access for the Agency.

Cold War film historians Tony Shaw and Daniel Leab provided more concrete documentation of the CIA's covert interference with motion pictures by revealing startling evidence of the CIA's patronage of the animated adaptation of George Orwell's Animal Farm. In order to support their broad narratives of government involvement with motion pictures, however, Leab, Shaw and Alford fail to point out the crucial distinction between the CIA's covert sponsorship of a foreign production company for the purposes of anti-Soviet propaganda, and the relationship which existed between the American film-industry and government departments such as the FBI and the Department of Defense for the purposes of public relations. In contrast to the FBI and the Pentagon, the CIA consistently refused to support Hollywood filmmakers and even actively discouraged Hollywood representations of American espionage.
Another frequently cited example of CIA attempts to influence the content of motion pictures in this period is the correspondence between CIA officer Edward Lansdale and Joseph Mankiewicz, who directed a politically adulterated film adaptation of Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*. Unlike the CIA's sponsorship of *Animal Farm*, *The Quiet American* was indeed produced by an American production company and Greene's novel offered a highly critical interpretation of the CIA's activities in Vietnam. Yet, as is later discussed in this article, although Lansdale did indeed contact Mankiewicz, the principal alterations to Greene's story were made long before this correspondence took place and were carried out in order to appease the industry censors in the Production Code Administration, not the CIA. Even in the rare instances when the CIA did engage with Hollywood productions during this period, their involvement was limited and their influence was preceded by cautious studio legal departments and industry censors.

This is not to say, however, that the CIA's aversion to liaising with Hollywood during this period had no effect. On the contrary, this article proposes that it was the CIA's very lack of involvement with the film industry that prevented their institution from entering the lexicon of public mythology until the mid- to late 1960s. In this sense, given the political, legal and stylistic constraints of the time, one might argue that there was as much agency in the CIA's inactivity in Hollywood as there was in the rare examples of their direct involvement with the film industry. Indeed, we could characterize the CIA's influence upon Hollywood during this period as an “absent presence” – curtailing the representations of their activities via a refusal to cooperate with filmmakers who were curious about such an elusive government institution. In consequence, by refusing to engage with the American media during the early Cold War, the CIA was able to elude public attention. This in turn allowed them to evade questions about accountability or excessively presidential aspects of foreign policy during a period in which they were frequently involved in controversial covert activities.

**STATE-SOURCED NARRATIVES: THE SEMIDOCUMENTARY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE**

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The renowned American film critic and auteur theorist Andrew Sarris described the semidocumentary as “a passing fancy of the American cinema.” Yet in terms of its impact upon the representation of political institutions, particularly the American intelligence agencies, the semidocumentary was a highly significant form of historical representation in the early Cold War. At its core, the semidocumentary predicated the accurate historical representation of America's recent past upon reliable government sources – whether it came in the form of official endorsement, documentary evidence from the National Archives or technical advice from current or former employees of state. Such reliance upon government-sourced story material required a mutually beneficial close bond of cooperation between Hollywood and the US government, a bond made concrete by the Second World War, in which Hollywood had been enlisted in support of the Allied war effort in exchange for the heightened realism granted through official cooperation and endorsement.
It was not until after the war, however, that the semidocumentary began to emerge as a defined format, with a number of films released from late 1945 onwards focusing on the wartime activities of America's intelligence services. Twentieth Century-Fox were the first to pioneer the technique with the release of *House on 92nd Street* in September 1945. Documenting the FBI's wartime counterespionage activities in maintaining the secrecy of the Manhattan Project, *House on 92nd Street* was made in close collaboration with the FBI and was overseen by J. Edgar Hoover himself. The film's producer, Louis De Rochemont, had made his name with his wartime newsreel service *The March of Time*, which pioneered the technique of staging dramatic reconstructions of contemporary news events. In many ways, this amalgamation of fact and fiction precipitated the semidocumentary format and afforded De Rochemont the self-styled title of “the father of the semidocumentary.” In April 1941 and September 1942, De Rochemont had produced two short films for *March of Time*, respectively titled *Men of the F.B.I* and *F.B.I Front*. The latter dramatized the Bureau's infiltration of Nazi Bund organizations on American soil – playing on the “enemies within” theme that would come to characterize many of his films as well as the more hyperbolic anticommunist tirades of the 1950s. J. Edgar Hoover wrote to De Rochemont in 1942 to inform him, “We of the FBI obviously are extremely proud of the manner in which you have portrayed our activities,” and in a handwritten postscript he signed off, “It is grand to have such a friend as you.” A month later, in November 1942, Hoover awarded De Rochemont the FBI's Distinguished Service Cross, explaining, “I hope it will always serve as a constant memento of our feelings toward you.”

Following the considerable success of *House on 92nd Street*, De Rochemont turned his attention to the CIA’s wartime predecessor, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) for his next film—*13 Rue Madeleine* (1946). His relationship with the now disbanded OSS and its former head, General William Donovan, would, however, prove far more temperamental than the cooperation afforded to him by J. Edgar Hoover. Although initially Donovan was keen to promote OSS history through film, his relationship with Hollywood, and with Twentieth Century-Fox in particular, would soon turn sour. Almost immediately after the war’s conclusion, Donovan set up a committee of former OSS officers to provide technical advice to Hollywood studios. The committee comprised such luminaries as the former head of the OSS Special Projects Office and past director of Republican Party publicity Colonel John M. Shaheen, former assistant director of OSS Edward Buxton, head of OSS operations in Europe Colonel Russell J. Forgan, the chief of OSS in London David Bruce, and the future Director of Central Intelligence Allen Dulles. In the spring of 1946, having worked extensively with Donovan's committee, Paramount released the first cinematic representation of the OSS, entitled simply *O.S. S.* Donovan's approval of the film was confirmed by a written foreword, signed by Donovan, which featured in the film's title sequence extolling the “brave, resourceful men and women, living and dead,” to whom the film pays tribute. At the outset, Donovan afforded Twentieth Century-Fox's *13 Rue Madeleine* the same courtesy of cooperation. Donovan, along with a number of other former OSS officers, had aided De Rochemont during the production of the film with technical advice, documents and even classified footage featuring OSS training and operations behind enemy lines. As production was drawing to a close, however, Donovan performed a dramatic reversal of his policy of engagement with the film industry. In a letter to De Rochemont in the summer of 1946, Donovan reprimanded De Rochemont’s attempt to provide an authentic representation of the OSS:

The picture is a phony. With all the excellent authentic material which we have sought to make available to you it seems absurd that your company would persist in making a picture
that not only lacks reality but plausibility. It is impossible for me to approve of the representations made in the script that this is authentic, or even a typical, story of OSS operations, and it would clearly be unfair to OSS agents who voluntarily jeopardized their lives to engage in valuable clandestine operations to couple their names and experiences with the events pictured in the script.\footnote{21}

The reasons for Donovan's dramatic withdrawal of support from Twentieth Century-Fox's picture are unclear. Fox's studio head Darryl F. Zanuck, however, suspected that the film's story of a German agent within the OSS may have offended Donovan's rose-tinted view of his impenetrable former spying organization.\footnote{22} Another potential source of concern for Donovan was the film's ending. Senior OSS officer and instructor Bob Sharkey, played by James Cagney, is forced to enter occupied France after one of his agents is killed. Sharkey is captured by the Germans and taken to their headquarters at 13 rue Madeleine, where they proceed to interrogate him in order to extract his intimate knowledge of the Allies' invasion plans. In response the OSS is forced to instruct the American air force to bomb rue Madeleine, and Sharkey along with it, in order to prevent the Germans discovering details of Operation Overlord. Not only was this a remarkably downbeat ending for a Hollywood melodrama, but it also dwelled upon the human cost of espionage. Furthermore, as Donovan's close friend and technical adviser to Louis De Rochemont, Russell J. Forgan, informed the producers, the OSS “would never have allowed any individual who knew all the plans for Overlord to have gone into France prior to D-Day.”\footnote{23} Although such technical flaws in the film may have provided Donovan with a pretext to withdraw support, it is unlikely that he would have turned down such an opportunity for publicizing the activities of the OSS, had he not already, in part at least, managed to secure the political and public support for his proposals for a peacetime foreign intelligence service.

In response to Donovan's condemnation of the film, De Rochemont and Zanuck, fearing legal and political repercussions, instructed director Henry Hathaway to reshoot all the scenes which directly referenced the OSS in order to deliberately obfuscate which intelligence agency they sought to represent.\footnote{24} In place of OSS, the thinly veiled “077” was used, inspiring a sardonic review from Bosley Crowther of the New York Times:

> it seems rather odd that any movie pretending to recount such derring-do should have to dissemble in naming the organization involved. Yet apparently the reckless producers of “13 Rue Madeleine” were compelled to the ultimate precaution by their own inventiveness. Thus it is, in this brisk and bristling picture … that an outfit called “Secret Intelligence,” not O.S. S., does the fancy stuff through a unit tagged “0–77” – a feeble and wistful disguise.\footnote{25}

What Crowther did not foresee was the manner in which Donovan's withdrawal of support from 13 Rue Madeleine and the subsequent removal of all specific references to the OSS would set a precedent for the film industry's representation of American espionage activities abroad. For almost two decades, Hollywood producers and directors would deliberately avoid making any direct reference to the CIA, who echoed Donovan's distrust of filmmakers for much of the Cold War.

Hollywood's inability to receive CIA technical support in this period was not through lack of trying. Filmmakers regularly approached the Agency with requests ranging from simple name-checks to ensure they had not inadvertently used the name of an actual field officer to more extensive requests for technical guidance. Such requests, however, were almost invariably met with incredulous refusal by the CIA. In January 1951, for example, Paramount
contacted the CIA with regard to their motion picture *My Favorite Spy*, in order to check the names used in the film. In a handwritten note at the bottom of the memorandum the film is described as “a lousy picture” that “makes no reference to CIA” and in consequence “no further action” was to be taken.\(^{26}\) The following year, when Warner Brothers requested technical assistance in their production of a contemporary spy picture, they were informed that the CIA “would not only be unable to afford such guidance but that we would take every step to discourage the production of a picture which purported to represent current US espionage.”\(^{27}\)

Occasionally the CIA were slightly more cooperative, but not without significant reservations. In June 1958, for example, Robert Denton from Paramount Pictures called the CIA with regard to *Counterfeit Traitor*, in an attempt to set up a meeting between scriptwriter George Seaton and a representative of the Agency. According to the memorandum, the appointment was “tentatively made,” but it was made clear that normally the CIA–employee “would not have done even this much except that Denton seemed importunate.”\(^{28}\) More tangible support was afforded in 1953 to MGM, who were offered access to an unclassified version of a film made about the American Flyers for a motion picture they were producing about returning prisoners of war. Yet when this rare instance of cooperation between the CIA and a major Hollywood studio was brought up by the deputy assistant to the Secretary of Defense (William Godel) in a meeting at the Pentagon it prompted an immediate clarification from Tracy Barnes, who was then working under Frank Wisner as the deputy director of plans:

> I was told yesterday that … you made a remark substantially as follows: “Tracy Barnes' outfit has MGM people making a movie out on the West Coast …” If the above is substantially what you said, it may have created an inaccurate impression … We are … not having MGM make a film. We have merely made available, for possible use, some material which might be included to advantage in MGM's own film … I hope that you do not think that I am being overly meticulous but in my opinion there is a very significant difference between the impression which might have been created at the meeting and what we in fact have done.\(^{29}\)

Both Tracy Barnes and Frank Wisner were highly influential figures in the CIA's covert sponsorship of cultural programmes and institutions during the Cold War.\(^{30}\) Ironically, given his lack of assistance to Hollywood filmmakers, Tracy Barnes was at the same time involved in the CIA's covertly funded animated adaptation of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Similarly, before becoming head of the Directorate of Plans at the CIA, Frank Wisner established “Operation Mockingbird” – a programme designed to influence both domestic and foreign media outlets. Given the instrumental role of both Barnes and Wisner in the CIA's so-called “Cultural Cold War,” it is all the more remarkable that they were so reluctant to work with the highly amenable Hollywood studios.

It seems relatively clear that even when limited support was provided to filmmakers, it stopped well short of the kind of extensive liaison efforts conducted by the FBI and the Department of Defense in this period.\(^ {31}\) By contrast, the CIA preferred to avoid altogether, and even discourage, the attention of Hollywood. The omission of the Agency from Hollywood spy films in this period cannot be attributed to simple ignorance or lack of interest on the part of the studios. On the contrary, the desire for greater realism through the format of the semidocumentary generated regular requests for technical guidance and consent from the CIA. Like De Rochemont's *13 Rue Madeleine*, however, with official approval proving unforthcoming, filmmakers chose to remove any direct references to the CIA, replacing it
with (often thinly veiled) invented institutions. Yet the importance of obtaining implicit or explicit government endorsement during this period was not merely a consequence of a commitment by Hollywood to a certain historical methodology which positioned the state as the arbiter of historical authenticity. The semidocumentary also provided the studios with a form of protection from legal, political and industry censorship.

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Today Hollywood filmmakers are afforded more or less carte blanche over their representation of public officials. In films such as Oliver Stone's *J.F.K.* (1991), and Robert De Niro's *The Good Shepherd* (2006), gross historical liberties, particularly with regard to the CIA, have been met with consternation from both the academic community and the CIA itself. Yet in spite of this, filmmakers are in a position to stretch creative license to the point of defamation without fear of legal recourse. This leeway now afforded to the American media in their representation of public officials owes much to the revolutionizing of American defamation law undergone in the 1960s. Perhaps the most famous example of this was the landmark 1964 Supreme Court decision in the *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan* case, which ruled that the First Amendment prohibited a public official from recovering damages for allegedly false statements relating to his official conduct unless the plaintiff could prove that the defendant acted with actual malice; that is, with actual knowledge that the statement was false or with reckless disregard as to its truth. Subsequent cases extended this rule to all “public figures,” not just public officials. This represented a monumental change in the law and resulted in far greater freedom to criticize public figures in the US than in virtually any other country in the world. Prior to these rulings, US defamation law was similar to English law, which is among the most favourable in the world to libel claimants.

The impact of these rulings upon Hollywood's representation of US institutions was profound. With legal constraints lifted, the onus was no longer on studios to seek official endorsement or support for their representation of American public officials and institutions. Indeed it is no coincidence that the first explicit representations of the CIA – in films like *Charade* (1963), *Operation C.I.A.* (1965) and *The President's Analyst* (1967) and in James Bond's CIA companion Felix Leiter – directly correlated with this liberalization of US defamation law. Up until the mid-1960s, however, studio legal departments were careful to avoid any direct mention of CIA officials in screenplays, and indeed any reference to the CIA at all. Studio files and the private collections of various filmmakers reveal the often overlooked, but highly influential, role of defamation law in Hollywood's representation of the US government prior to the 1960s. Even Louis De Rochemont, who had done so much to propagate positive cinematic depictions of America's intelligence agencies was frustrated in his attempts to represent the CIA through fear of legal repercussions. Following the release of his 1960 espionage melodrama *Man on a String*, he remarked,

We couldn't get permission from any government bureau to use in our picture, [*sic*] the fact that we were conducting espionage against the Soviets. So we had to form our own bureau in
the thing. We called it the CBI, the Central Bureau of Intelligence, instead of CIA. But we were not allowed to do it. It's against the law to impersonate an agency.\(^\text{36}\)

Given the level of caution taken by Hollywood legal departments during the early history of the CIA, the Agency's policy of non-cooperation with Hollywood amounted to the abeyance not merely of “official” CIA motion pictures but of all pictures featuring the CIA. With government approval required to satisfy the fears of legal departments, the ball remained firmly within the CIA's court, who knew that, unlike today, their refusal to engage with filmmakers would not result in a litany of unapproved films about their organization. Indeed, knowing that the law provided them with protection from unsolicited representations of their activities, the Agency even made requests to studio lawyers to ensure that all explicit references to the CIA were removed from scripts.\(^\text{37}\) Aware that the CIA were invariably uncooperative, Hollywood legal departments in turn often simply avoided the potential need to contact the Agency by instructing filmmakers to use fictional institutions. In this sense, the Hollywood legal departments acted as a form of industry self-censorship – filtering out potentially libellous material before films went into production.

A significant example of this form of industry censorship occurred during the production of Alfred Hitchcock's well-known spy film *North by Northwest* (1959). In early screenplay drafts of the film, the CIA is explicitly referenced in a number of scenes. Moreover, one of the early working titles for the film was “The C.I.A. Story.”\(^\text{38}\) In fact, a fleeting reference is made to the CIA in the final picture during the airport scene in an exchange between the central protagonist Roger Thornhill, and the CIA chief, who is referred to in the film as “The Professor”:\(^\text{39}\)

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THORNHILL: You're police, aren't you? Or is it F.B. I.?
PROFESSOR: “F.B.I., C.I.A., O.N.I. We're all in the same alphabet soup.”
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Remarkably, this was the first explicit mention of the CIA in a major Hollywood production, coming over a decade after the Agency's creation. Yet by burying the mention of the CIA amidst the alphabet soup of other intelligence agencies, the Professor's employers are deliberately obfuscated. This strategy of representation was no accident. Indeed, this line in the script was in part written for Hitchcock by MGM's legal department, who informed the director to change the dialogue to “add the initials of other federal agencies” as follows:

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The dialogue in the script now reads:

THORNHILL: “You're police, aren't you? Or is it F.B.I.?
PROFESSOR: “F.B.I., C.I.A. We're all in the same alphabet soup.”
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It is suggested it be changed to read:

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THORNHILL: “You're police, aren't you? Or is it F.B. I.?
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P.S. You don't have to use the initials of all six organizations mentioned above. If you were to use only four of them it would do, the idea being to avoid identifying our characters with any given one of those institutions.\(^\text{41}\)
In another such script alteration, Hitchcock reshot the conference-room scene in order to replace a sign reading “Central Intelligence Agency” with a partially concealed flat brass plate, half-in and-half out of the picture so that it read:

NITED STATES

TELLIGENCE AGENCY

As these alterations reveal, studio legal departments who preferred not to approach the CIA advised that filmmakers, through strategies of obfuscation, avoid any clear and direct representation of the CIA itself. In this manner, studio legal departments effectively functioned as a form of censorship upon the representation of the American government. Thus it was not until the liberalization of defamation law in the 1960s that the CIA began to appear onscreen as anything more than a pseudonym or composite of various American intelligence organisations. Prior to the 1964 Supreme Court ruling in *New York Times v. Sullivan*, defamation law empowered the state rather than the media. The significance of this case in effectively reversing this position cannot be overstated in any consideration of the changing political landscape in Hollywood during the 1960s and its ability to offer direct and controversial representations of the US government.

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The Production Code Administration (PCA) is typically regarded as an arbiter of social decency in the motion picture industry from 1934 to 1968 whose principle concern was the censorship of potentially offensive explicit content. However, the code also served a political function in its defence and preservation of a respectful image of the American government. Section X of the code dealt specifically with the protection of “National Feeling,” stating, “The just rights, history, and feelings of any nation are entitled to most careful consideration and respectful treatment.” Included in the PCA’s “Analysis of Content” form was a section dealing specifically with the “portrayal of professions,” which covered the portrayal of government employees, asking the person charged with completing the form whether the representations of such professionals was sympathetic or unsympathetic. Most films during this period offered sympathetic portrayals of government employees; however, a tick in the box marked “unsympathetic” often prompted a written response from the PCA urging caution on the part of the filmmakers. Furthermore, the PCA often advised on matters of what they referred to as “Industry Policy” with respect to the representation of the US government, which invariably was an effort by the code to avoid any unnecessary political repercussions which might damage the close relationship between the industry and the government.

The net effect of this was to underline the importance of seeking technical advice from the government for any desired representation of their activities. For example, in another of Hitchcock’s spy films, *Notorious* (1946), Hitchcock was advised by the PCA of the need to
seek guidance on his various representations of both foreign and American government departments:

you will have in mind, I think, the need for your taking some counsel about this story with representatives of the F.B. I., the Navy Department, and the Brazilian Government. I think you know that the industry has had a kind of “gentleman's agreement” with Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, wherein we have practically obligated ourselves to submit to him, for his consideration and approval, stories which involve the activities of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.\textsuperscript{46}

In the case of the CIA, however, where no such “gentleman's agreement” existed, the PCA's protection of government officials from negative or unsolicited depictions simply forced filmmakers to remove references to the CIA altogether. Thus the CIA's public reputation was protected from Hollywood license by a twofold process of industry censorship and legal constraint. Indeed, when depictions appeared particularly derogatory, the PCA would often implore filmmakers to pay heed to the potential legal repercussions of their actions. For example, Twentieth Century-Fox's comedy \textit{John Goldfarb, Please Come Home} (1965), inspired by the events of the U-2 spy affair, prompted a stark response from the PCA which informed the producers,

If the portrayal of ... the head of the C.I.A. should appear to be abusive or offensive in any way in the finished picture, this would be a clear cut Code violation and, in addition, an important matter of industry policy ... you will see to it that you are well advised in both the legal and non-legal aspects of the matter.\textsuperscript{47}

More often than not, however, studios were keen to avoid controversy and therefore eager to cooperate with the PCA. As such, negative depictions of government officials were routinely avoided and the explicit mention of institutions such as the CIA who refused technical support to filmmakers were removed or left out of scripts from the outset. In the case of original story material, controversial screenplays were unlikely to be written in the first place; however, adaptations of politically sensitive novels could lead to severe rewrites in order to adhere to the standards of the Production Code.

This was the case with Joseph Mankiewicz's 1958 adaptation of Graham Greene's controversial novel \textit{The Quiet American}. Mankiewicz's changes to the novel were manifold, entirely reversing Greene's stark condemnation of the violent consequences of America's naive idealism in the conduct of their foreign policy in Vietnam. To begin with, the American war hero Audie Murphy was cast as Alden Pyle – the eponymous quiet American – generating immediate audience sympathy for a character which Greene had used as a vehicle for his critique of American foreign policy. What is more, the implication in the novel that Pyle worked for the CIA was completely removed from the screenplay. In consequence, it is not Pyle and the American intelligence community who supply the plastic explosives used by General Thé to blow up Saigon's central square, but communist insurgents.

Recent scholarship on the film has identified it as an example of CIA interference with Hollywood.\textsuperscript{48} These claims are based upon correspondence unearthed between Mankiewicz and the famed CIA cold warrior and presumed model for Greene's quiet American Edward Lansdale. On 17 March 1956, Lansdale wrote a long letter to Mankiewicz offering his technical advice on the events depicted in the novel. In particular, he encouraged Mankiewicz to blame the Saigon square bombing on communist insurgents. Furthermore, according to the
research of Jonathan Nashel, the production company, Figaro Entertainment Inc., met with CIA chief Allen Dulles, who was so pleased with the screenplay's rebuttal of Greene's thesis that he offered US government assistance to help secure location shooting in Saigon.49 This body of evidence would tend to suggest that the CIA were instrumental in the drastic alterations to Greene's novel. However, an examination of the PCA file for The Quiet American suggests that Mankiewicz was far more concerned about industry censorship than about pleasing the CIA. Indeed, Mankiewicz contacted the PCA a full four months prior to making contact with Lansdale. Almost immediately after Figaro had bought the rights to Greene's novel, Mankiewicz contacted the PCA asking for their blessing before undertaking the project.50 In response, the PCA raised a number of concerns about the novel, including the potential problem of portraying Pyle as a government employee:

it would be necessary to portray the activities of the Young American diplomat in such a manner that the finished picture would not be open to the criticism that it represents unfairly a prominent institution such as the Foreign Service of the United States, or any branch of it …51

In response, Mankiewicz explained,

It is my purpose, for your information, to make Pyle a thoroughly attractive young man. I shall remove him, of course, from any branch of the United States government service; this will resolve any possible unfavorable portrayal of one of our governmental employees, and should remove your objection on that point.52

Mankiewicz's correspondence with the PCA also led to further alterations to Greene's original story. One of the most striking changes comes at the end of the film. In the novel, Pyle's antagonist Thomas Fowler is reunited with his Vietnamese lover – Phuong – whom Pyle had stolen away from him with the promise of marriage. In the screenplay, however, Fowler is left alone and destitute. Moreover, his jealousy over Pyle's relationship with Phuong is played up as an ulterior motive for his role in the assassination of Pyle.

It is clear from the PCA files that these changes were made by Mankiewicz primarily to appease the strong set of moral conventions imposed upon the film industry by the code. On several occasions Geoffrey Shurlock at the PCA raised concerns over the manner in which Fowler's “immoral relationship” with Phuong is presented “most attractively” in the novel. In consequence, Shurlock recommended the need to introduce “an adequate voice for morality, condemning Fowler's worthlessness. This voice could come, of course, from Pyle, possibly from Phuong and, to a minor degree, could be touched on in the letters that Fowler's wife writes.”53 In response, Mankiewicz assured the PCA that Fowler's marriage to his wife would have ceased to exist long before he meets Phuong and that his wife ended the relationship “because of his worthlessness as a human being – and her refusal to give him a divorce will be clearly indicated as a refusal to let him bring similar unhappiness to another woman.” Thus Mankiewicz clearly indicated his intention to have Fowler “represent the socially unacceptable concept of marriage as against Pyle's most worthy and acceptable one.” Informing Shurlock of these intended alterations, he wrote,

He [Fowler] will not succeed. In my film treatment, Phuong will reject Fowler at the finish. Pyle, even in death, will have accomplished his purpose, he will have awakened Phuong to the necessity, in life, for the unselfishness of love and the security of marriage. Fowler will remain a bitter, hopeless man – completely and utterly alone.54
Mankiewicz's liaison with the PCA began in December 1955 at the very earliest stage of the film's production, before a screen treatment had even been written and a full four months prior to the director's correspondence with Edward Lansdale. Mankiewicz remained in contact with the PCA throughout 1956 and 1957 during every stage of the film's production. What this series of correspondence with the PCA reveals is that Mankiewicz's alterations to Greene's novel came out of a desire to appease industry censors rather than from any external pressure from the CIA. Indeed, the timing of the correspondence indicates that almost all of the major changes to Greene's novel were instigated prior to his contact with Lansdale and Dulles. As such, their suggested amendments had a negligible impact upon an already drastically altered adaptation of Greene's work.

Furthermore, the impact of the PCA upon The Quiet American clearly demonstrates the role the code played in censoring depictions of American government officials. When considering attempts by studios to represent American espionage generally and the CIA specifically, this example is particularly pertinent in that Mankiewicz deliberately removed any implication that Pyle was an American intelligence officer in order to avoid complications which may have arisen with the PCA. In the case of the FBI or the Department of Defense, who regularly liaised with Hollywood during this period, the PCA simply served to reinforce the “Industry Policy” of cooperation with government, recommending that filmmakers seek either official consent or technical guidance before representing these government agencies. With the CIA, however, who refused such assistance to filmmakers, the PCA's protection of government officials from negative or unsolicited depictions simply forced filmmakers such as Mankiewicz to remove references to the CIA altogether.

CONCLUSION

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- STATE-SOURCED NARRATIVES: THE SEMIDOCUMENTARY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE
- NO REPRESENTATION WITHOUT DEFAMATION
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Recalling an era before Three Days of the Condor (1975) had catapulted the CIA into the conspiratorial framework of public mythology, the author of the original Condor novel, James Grady, wrote that “Before Condor – the average bookstore carried zero books about the Agency … Fictionally, the CIA was treated like a ghost everyone tiptoed around but no one touched.” Today, by contrast, we are bombarded with nefarious representations of CIA activities. In the past decade the CIA has been held accountable, in popular culture at least, for a litany of atrocities and failed foreign policies from the attacks on the World Trade Center to the intelligence failures that led up to America's military intervention in Iraq. In the early Cold War, CIA activities, particularly covert activities, were no less dramatic. In spite of this, Hollywood shied away from the kind of critical and often conspiratorial engagements with the Agency that now appear in cinemas on a regular basis. The contrast could not be starker. How is it that Hollywood's response to the CIA has shifted so dramatically since its creation in 1947?

When one considers the role of other government agencies such as the FBI and the Department of Defense in the shaping of their institutional narratives in Hollywood during this period, it may seem reasonable to deduce that the CIA maintained a similar relationship
with filmmakers during the early Cold War. Indeed, Frances Stoner Saunders and Mathew Alford have gone as far as to suggest that the CIA systematically interfered with Hollywood productions during this period, and Jonathon Nashel has claimed that Joseph Mankiewicz's infamous perversion of Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* was due to the influence of CIA officer Edward Lansdale upon the film's production.

However, an analysis of CIA records, combined with research into the PCA and studio legal files for various spy films during this period, tends to suggest that the CIA's absence from Hollywood cinema in the early Cold War was a consequence of industry censorship and constraint rather than a result of any direct interference from the CIA. Heeding the advice of the PCA and their legal departments, filmmakers sought official endorsement and technical advice from government agencies in order to present semidocumentary narratives about the American intelligence community. Without such endorsement, filmmakers were extremely reluctant to offer any direct representation of the American government. Following General William Donovan's refusal to endorse *13 Rue Madeleine*'s representation of the OSS in 1946, almost no direct references were made of American espionage abroad. The CIA, following Donovan's lead, consistently denied assistance to filmmakers, and, in so doing, effectively removed itself from the prying eyes of popular culture during this period.

To ask why the CIA was virtually absent from early Cold War culture also provides, by implication, an explanation of the conditions under which it began to emerge as a powerful symbol of American foreign policy in the mid-1960s and beyond. Hollywood in the 1960s witnessed not only the decline of the semidocumentary as the predominant mode of government representation, but also the liberalization of defamation law and the closure of the Production Code Administration. The so-called “New Hollywood” of the late 1960s may be credited with the political sea change in the American film industry during this period. Yet without the removal of these obstacles to the film industry's representation of the American government, it is unlikely that the most noteworthy onscreen critiques of US government and its foreign policy would have carried quite the same venom, if indeed such direct condemnations of American government had been possible at all.

**Notes**

1. “Charade First Draft Screenplay by Peter Stone and Marc Behm,” 12 July 1962, Cary Grant Papers, Folder 10, The Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (hereafter AMPAS), Beverly Hills, CA, 32.


4. Michael Kackman, *Citizen Spy: Television Espionage and Cold War Culture*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 17; Maurice Unger to Eddie Davis, 3 Nov. 1955, United Artists/Ziv Production Files, *Man Called X* Correspondence File, Wisconsin State Historical Society Special Collections, Madison, WI.

6 Saunders, 290.  


11 Animal Farm was produced by the British animated-films studio Halas and Batchelor.  


15 For more on the FBI's involvement in the making of House on 92nd Street see Shaw, 52–58.
Barnes and Wisner's role in the CIA’s covert sponsorship of cultural programmes is discussed at length in Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper*.


32 For example, the 1956 spy drama House of Secrets used the fig-leaf of the “Criminal Investigation Authority” in place of the actual CIA.


36 “Former CIA Agent Interviewed – radio broadcast transcript from Barry Gray show on WMCA,” 19 May 1960, CREST, CIA-RDP75-00001R000200350014-3, National Archives, College Park, MD.

37 “Forthcoming Movie by Paramount Apparently Involving the Name of CIA,” 3 Jan. 1951, CREST, CIA-RDP58-00597A000100070144-7, National Archives, College Park, MD.

38 North by Northwest original manuscript, Pt. 1, 22 Nov. 1957, Ernest Lehman Screenplays Collection, TC127, Box 1, Firestone Library Special Collections, Princeton, NJ.

39 The professorial depiction of the head of the CIA in North by Northwest was undoubtedly a reference to the long-standing and renowned CIA chief Allen Dulles, who carefully fostered his avuncular image. Leo Carroll, who played “The Professor,” would later reprise this role as Alexander Waverly in The Man from U.N.C.L.E.


41 R. Monta to Alfred Hitchcock, 1 Aug. 1958, Alfred Hitchcock Papers, North by Northwest Legal File, Folder 536, AMPAS, Beverly Hills, CA.

42 Peggy Robertson to Herbert Coleman, 23 Jan. 1959, Hitchcock Papers, North by Northwest Production File, Folder 542, AMPAS, Beverly Hills, CA.


The Production Code's response to Stanley Kubrick's groundbreaking satire of the Cold War, *Dr Strangelove*, stated that “one is always a little uncertain as to how a satire involving the president of the USA and the armed forces is going to be received by the public. This gets the PCA into the area of what we call ‘industry policy,’ which means that after reviewing the picture, if we have any serious doubt on this score, we reserve the right to get counsel and advice from our superiors in New York, Eric Johnston and the Board of Directors, as to whether the picture could conceivably give rise to any industry problem over and above what is set down in the Code.” Geoffrey Shurlock to Stanley Kubrick, 21 Jan. 1963, “Dr Strangelove” Motion Picture Association of America Production Code Administration File (hereafter PCA), AMPAS, Beverly Hills, CA.


Nashel, 166.


James Grady, “Rhyme,” preface to *idem, Six Days of the Condor*, repr. (Aylesbury: No Exit Press, 2007), 13–14, original emphasis.