

Review - The CIA on Campus

Written by David N. Gibbs

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

Review - The CIA on Campus

<https://www.e-ir.info/2013/06/18/review-the-cia-on-campus/>

DAVID N. GIBBS, JUN 18 2013

The CIA on Campus: Essays on Academic Freedom and the National Security State

By: Philip Zwerling

MacFarland and Company: Jefferson, North Carolina, 2011

Since the end of the Cold War, many writers have adopted a highly positive and even celebratory view of the US victory over the Soviet Union. At the same time, there has been a tendency to whitewash the more unsettling aspects of the American effort in the Cold War struggle, and also to downplay the enormous costs that this struggle imposed on US democracy. The multiple contributors to *The CIA on Campus* explore some of these costs, notably the way that the US intelligence services infiltrated and to some degree corrupted US universities.

The range of issues covered in this volume is impressive, and the writing is excellent. The volume begins with an introductory essay by English professor Philip Zwerling, the volume editor, who situates the issue of CIA-academic collaboration in the larger context of the history of US interventionism, with a special emphasis on the 1983 intervention in Grenada. The overall history of CIA collaboration with universities is covered by anthropologist David Price, a leading authority on the topic. Historian David Carlson examines CIA intervention in Latin America. Library Science graduate student Dierdre MacDonald assesses governmental efforts to influence public libraries and to coax

Review - The CIA on Campus

Written by David N. Gibbs

librarians to spy on their patrons. Psychoanalytic instructor Stephen Soldz discusses the American Psychological Association's role in sanctioning torture by the CIA and other agencies. Vernon Lyon, a retired engineer and the only nonacademic among the authors, provides a personal account of his role as a CIA operative during his years as a college student during the 1960s; Lyon recounts how he spied upon fellow students and reported back to the CIA as part of his secret contract with the agency. Anthropologist Roberto González analyzes CIA efforts to indoctrinate school-age children. Zwerling returns with suggestions on how faculty and students can effectively oppose the CIA presence on their campuses, and finally, David Anshen presents the concluding essay, which places the struggles against the CIA presence on college campuses in the larger context of the history of US political dissent.

The writers in this volume emphasize the vast scale of the academic collaboration. In 1977 alone, the CIA "was working with 5,000 academics," according to one estimate (p. 47). David Price presents evidence that the CIA secretly sponsored the publication of "thousands of books, from apparently mainstream American presses" (p. 45).

A central theme is the conflict of interest that emerges from academic collaboration with intelligence officers. The culture of secrecy that is pervasive in intelligence work is incompatible with academic standards, which is predicated on the idea of open discussion. Another problem is that CIA consulting can compromise academic objectivity and independence. Speaking in 1967, Senator J. William Fulbright succinctly stated the problem: "The universities might have formed an effective counter-weight to the military-industrial complex, by strengthening their emphasis on the traditional values of our democracy, but many of our leading institutions have joined the monolith, adding greatly to its power and influence" (p. 185).

This volume reminds us of many long forgotten events, such as academic involvement in MKULTRA, the Agency's program of bizarre psychiatric research conducted on unsuspecting victims. The idea behind this program was to develop new interrogation techniques and later, to "program" unwitting persons for special tasks. These experiments were undertaken without any informed consent. Top medical faculty were involved in this project. In Indonesia, faculty from MIT and Cornell worked with US officials to train Indonesian military personnel, some of whom later participated in a 1965 coup against the government of President Sukarno. The overthrow was accompanied by mass violence against leftists throughout Indonesia, which killed hundreds of thousands of people and produced one of the most vicious events of the Cold War. The general impression the reader carries away from this volume is that the CIA represents a small spot of totalitarianism in an otherwise democratic US polity. Certainly many of the practices described – MKULTRA for example – do indeed remind one of totalitarian states.

Some of the quotations that are reproduced in these chapters are priceless. In a slip of the tongue, CIA Director Porter Goss came very close to advocating lying: "If this were a graduating class of CIA case workers, my advice would be short and to the point: Admit nothing, deny everything, and make counter-accusations" (p. 27). The slip was made during a 2006 commencement address to students at Tiffin University. In 1998, anti-Castro operative Luis Posada Carriles stated: "The CIA taught us everything – everything... they taught us explosives, how to kill, bomb, trained us in acts of sabotage. When the Cubans were working for the CIA, they were called patriots... now they call it terrorism. The times have changed" (p. 61).

My principal criticism is that there is an excessive focus on the CIA's role during the Cold War, with somewhat less emphasis on the post-Cold War era. In reality, the era of the "war on terror" that attended the 2001 terrorist attacks has inaugurated a whole new era of academic collaboration with the CIA, as well as new intelligence and security agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security. The advent of drone warfare for both observation and targeted assassinations – a program that is largely directed by the CIA – is another important contemporary topic that should have been explored in greater detail. While several of the writers touch on these recent issues, they are sufficiently important to merit much closer scrutiny.

Despite this minor criticism, *The CIA on Campus* is an excellent addition to the literature on covert operations, and it deserves to be widely read.

—

Review - The CIA on Campus

Written by David N. Gibbs

David N. Gibbs is a Professor of History at the University of Arizona. His most recent book is *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*.

About the author:

David N. Gibbs is a Professor of History at the University of Arizona. His most recent book is *First Do No Harm: Humanitarian Intervention and the Destruction of Yugoslavia*.