

The Modern Legacy of Operation Mockingbird

The CIA's Secret Campaign to Control the Media



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In the early 1950s, at the height of the Cold War, the Central Intelligence Agency launched a covert operation to manipulate and control the media in order to promote pro-American propaganda and spread misinformation. This classified large-scale secret program was known as Operation Mockingbird.

For nearly three decades, the CIA worked closely with journalists and media organizations to shape public opinion by planting stories, providing classified information, and influencing coverage. Though the full extent of Operation Mockingbird may never be known due to the clandestine nature of the agency and the program, declassified documents and investigative reporting have revealed how the CIA infiltrated newsrooms, established front organizations, and recruited top journalists to push their agenda.

Operation Mockingbird represented the pinnacle of the CIA's efforts to covertly infiltrate and manipulate the media to control information flows and serve government interests. At its height in the 1950s-70s, the CIA had cultivated relationships with hundreds of journalists, news executives, media organizations, and front groups that it utilized to disseminate propaganda, plant stories, influence coverage, and shape public opinion in

its favor. This expansive apparatus enabled the CIA to dictate narratives, distort facts, influence foreign perceptions, and obfuscate misdeeds - all cloaked behind a guise of objectivity.

Though officially coming to an end in 1976 after being exposed in Congressional hearings, many argue Mockingbird has shaped the landscape of modern media. Techniques for garnering influence that were developed as a part of Operation Mockingbird are still employed to this day. The legacy offshoots of this program continue to promote pro-establishment narratives and undermine threats to the status quo.

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The Origins of Operation Mockingbird

The origins of Operation Mockingbird can be traced back to the late 1940s when the CIA first began actively recruiting journalists to act as spies and disseminators of propaganda. The onset of the Cold War had created an air

of paranoia and suspicion in the United States as the threat of communism and the Soviet Union loomed. The CIA was established officially in 1947 after its predecessor, World War II intelligence agency the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). The CIA was tasked with gathering foreign intelligence and bolstering America's national security, mainly through covert operations. CIA director Allen Dulles was focused on expanding the agency's reach, declaring that when it came to the Cold War, "There are no rules."

In 1948, famed journalist and former OSS agent Frank Wisner was appointed Director of the Office of Special Projects – renamed the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC) the following year. With the Cold War heating up, the OPC was created with a mandate to conduct psychological warfare operations against the Soviet Union and communism abroad. Media manipulation became a key function. According to Deborah Davis' biography of Washington Post publisher Katherine Graham, Wisner recruited fellow OSS veteran and Washington Post publisher Philip Graham to run the project within the industry. It became known as Operation Mockingbird.

The objective of Project Mockingbird was to manipulate the press and control public opinion by covertly influencing journalists, producing clandestine propaganda, and inserting propaganda and false information into the news cycle. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, who had an extensive network of contacts and informers across media, political, and law enforcement circles, was brought on board to help influence and recruit journalists. The operation was run through the OPC, allowing for plausible deniability. By the early 1950s, Operation Mockingbird was in full swing.

Wisner focused specifically on recruiting elite, educated, and well-connected individuals including journalists, academics, and thinkers. His network included over two dozen media assets that he utilized to shape public opinion. According to Wisner, a key strategy was to control perceptions through irony and secrecy. If the public thought everything they heard was CIA propaganda, then actual CIA propaganda would be dismissed as hearsay. Effective propaganda had to seem independent while

secretly being influenced by the CIA. This tactic enabled Operation Mockingbird to thrive in plain sight.

Wisner reportedly received input from elite figures like Henry Kissinger on which foreign and domestic media outlets were priorities for infiltration. Contracts were then farmed out to CIA agents within the chosen organizations. In *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America*, author Hugh Wilford compares these journalists to the famous orchestras that covertly promoted American values. At its peak, it is estimated the CIA had significant influence over 25 newspapers and wire agencies which were used for propaganda placement. Owners, editors, and reporters at outlets including the New York Times, CBS, and Time were involved. As Davis wrote in her Graham biography: "By the early 1950s, Wisner 'owned' respected members of The New York Times, Newsweek, CBS and other communications vehicles."

CIA operative Cord Meyer became the head of the covert action division of the CIA in 1954. He was described by author Deborah Davis as "one of the most powerful unelected officials in the United States." Meyer had vast connections across the media world that he utilized to plant pro-CIA stories and propaganda. He recruited numerous reporters, editors, publishers, and wire service owners to act as spies and conduits of information. His office at CIA headquarters was the epicenter of Operation Mockingbird.

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Key Media Assets and Recruits

The CIA cultivated relationships with top journalists, editors, publishers, wire services, and media executives to function as assets and spies under Operation Mockingbird. These assets allowed the CIA to directly place and influence stories in major news publications. Some of the most influential media assets included:

- The New York Times - The CIA considered the New York Times to be its most valuable media asset. After 1953, the CIA had influence over at

least ten senior editors and correspondents at the paper.

- CBS - William Paley, founder of CBS, cooperated closely with the CIA and set the tone for CBS news with his loyalty to the agency.
- Time/Life - Henry Luce, founder of Time and Life magazines, helped the CIA with propaganda campaigns and allowed CIA operatives to work as editors at Time.
- Associated Press (AP) - The CIA ran infiltration and wiretap programs to influence the Associated Press and its worldwide news coverage.
- ABC - ABC was formed in 1943 with the cooperation of the CIA to influence the development of commercial broadcasting and promote pro-American viewpoints.

In addition to cultivated media assets, the CIA directly employed or contracted with hundreds of American journalists. These journalists signed secrecy agreements with the CIA but continued their normal jobs. Pulitzer Prize winner Carl Bernstein put the number of journalists affiliated with the CIA in 1977 at over 400. Some of the most notable recruited journalists include Joseph Alsop, Ben Bradlee, Walter Pincus, and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Their dual roles allowed the CIA to influence both the information media received and how it was reported.

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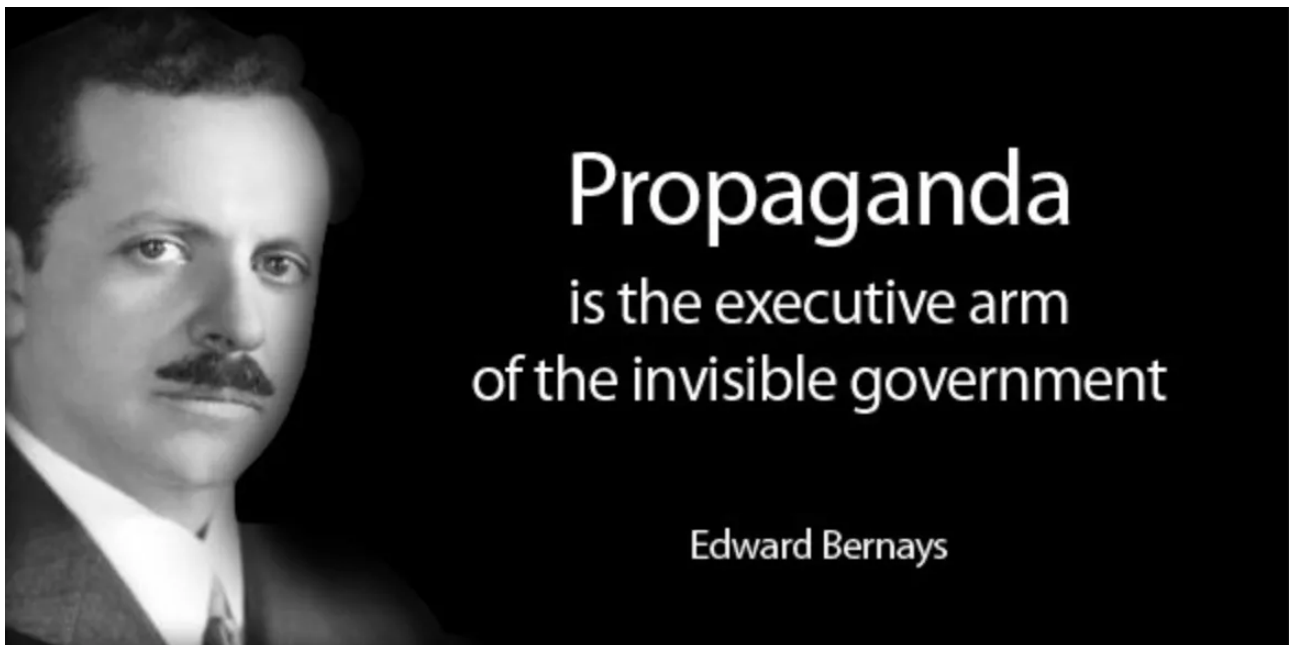
The Establishment of Front Organizations

A critical aspect of Operation Mockingbird was establishing seemingly independent organizations that were covertly funded by the CIA. These front organizations were designed to promote CIA viewpoints while giving the appearance of impartiality. Some of the most prominent front groups founded in the early 1950s include:

- Committee on Cultural Freedom (CCF) - Founded in 1950 to combat pro-Soviet leftist views among intellectuals. Published magazines and sponsored conferences to push anti-communist perspectives.

- Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF) - Founded in 1950 to arrange exhibitions, concerts, and other cultural events promoting the CIA's agenda.
- National Committee for a Free Europe (NCFE) - Founded in 1949 as a private charity to fund Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. Used as conduits for CIA funds toward media projects.
- Asia Foundation - Founded in 1954 to fund pro-American and anti-communist media overseas. Served as a CIA pass-through organization.

These front groups concealed CIA involvement and millions in CIA funding while allowing their agenda to be promoted through seemingly neutral channels. The CIA exercised great influence over their operations, using them to funnel money to favored causes and launder funds.

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Propaganda in Practice

At its peak in the 1950s and 60s, Operation Mockingbird represented the full realization of CIA propaganda ambitions. The CIA was dictating stories, producing news, and influencing coverage through their media assets to push their chosen narratives on the American public as well as

internationally. This allowed the CIA to present events and foreign leaders from the perspective they wished to promote.

The Cold War produced a boom in propaganda on both sides. Operation Mockingbird represents perhaps the most extensive domestic media campaign. According to author Steve Kangas, its goals were to:

- Promote corporate interests and American capitalism
- Promote American power globally, especially against communism and the Soviet Union
- Promote presidential administrations friendly to the CIA such as Eisenhower and Nixon
- Undermine Soviet international credibility by promoting anti-Soviet propaganda and intelligence.

Some propaganda operations exposed over the years include:

- Paying journalists to write pro-American stories for foreign news outlets.
- Publishing and distributing books and magazines promoting CIA viewpoints, translated into dozens of languages.
- Using front organizations to recruit foreign journalists to write stories planted by the CIA.
- Influencing depictions of foreign leaders like Fidel Castro and Jacopo Arbenz to promote negative impressions.
- Placing false or exaggerated stories depicting communist countries and the Soviet Union as dangerous, aggressive, or on the verge of collapse.
- Fabricating documents and letters in order to influence public opinion and policy decisions.
- Inserting pro-American propaganda directly into news wires used by media outlets.

The scope and scale of CIA propaganda through Operation Mockingbird was unprecedented. The goal was to actively shape perceptions and the global flow of information. Wisner's OPC helped produce and circulate up to 5,000 books in Germany to reeducate the German people after WWII. In the US, book publishing firms and major studios were infiltrated. A 1952 CIA memo described a deal with the House of Representatives' Foreign Relations Committee to produce a comic book painting the CIA as heroic defenders of American values. Mockingbird assets within journalism also promoted McCarthyism in order to root out, or in many cases, witch hunt, communist elements in America. The Korean War and conflict in Vietnam were reported with pro-government narratives designed to gain support from the public. Corporate and political interests aligned with CIA goals were advanced while alternative voices, especially anti-war voices, were suppressed.

"Operation Mockingbird" was a fully implemented CIA program to spread disinformation throughout American media. CIA Director William Colby testified to the Church Committee that over 400 CIA agents were active in the US media to control what was reported through American mainstream television, newspapers, and magazines.



Domestic Fallout and the Decline of Operation Mockingbird

While the CIA's foreign campaigns have been more extensively documented, Operation Mockingbird also produced blowback at home. In the 1960s and 1970s, CIA infiltration of political movements allowed illegal domestic spying on American citizens. Groups like Students For a Democratic Society (SDS) were infiltrated and disrupted using propaganda. This was later exposed during the 1975 Church Committee hearings.

In the mid 1970s, multiple U.S. investigations exposed unethical CIA activities and shined a light on Operation Mockingbird. The Church Committee, the Rockefeller Commission, and the Pike Committee all

published reports uncovering covert CIA programs related to domestic surveillance, assassination plots, and media manipulation. The Church Committee's investigation led to calls for greater oversight of intelligence agencies. The hearings also revealed journalists from 25 news organizations had been part of the CIA payroll. As a result, incoming CIA director George H.W. Bush announced that non-government affiliated reporters could no longer be paid or contracted by the agency.

Though Operation Mockingbird was not officially acknowledged, the revelations led many journalists to feel betrayed and many Americans to distrust the CIA and the government. Though it officially ended the Mockingbird program, many believe infiltration has persisted through recruitment of individual journalists and editors committed to advancing the interests of their government sources. Those who remain skeptical of corporate media point to Mockingbird as a key reason for distrust.

At its peak, the CIA and Operation Mockingbird likely represented the most sophisticated media manipulation apparatus in history. Despite increased scrutiny, Operation Mockingbird persisted in more limited forms through the 1980s. In 1977, Carl Bernstein estimated the number of CIA-affiliated journalists had dropped to between 50-100. The propaganda apparatus had been damaged, but not entirely dismantled. Regardless, the CIA's decades-long campaign to covertly influence the media left many questioning journalistic integrity and accountability. Were media outlets meant to keep the public honestly informed or misinform them on behalf of shadowy government agencies? The consequences of these actions continue to reverberate today.

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The Legacy of Operation Mockingbird

Though the CIA ended Operation Mockingbird in the 1980s, the agency continued to maintain influence over journalists, media outlets, and news coverage through successor programs and initiatives. Those who believe

similar media manipulation continues to this day point to CIA-influenced coverage of more recent global events, especially wartime coverage.

In addition, front organizations like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) have been accused of continuing America's tradition of media infiltration post-Mockingbird. Founded in 1983, the NED provides grants for "democracy promotion" internationally. Critics argue it functions as a modern replacement of CIA front groups. Much like those earlier operations, the NED offers the CIA and government access to foreign media under the guise of promoting free press and human rights.

The spirit of Operation Mockingbird lives on through mass surveillance programs, targeting of sources and whistleblowers, and cozy relationships between intelligence agencies and major media outlets. In the past few years, we have seen a massive resurgence in illegal propaganda dissemination while favoritism and cultivated narratives are still clearly discernible in coverage of key issues. From criticisms of overly deferential reporting in the buildup to the Iraq War to documents exposing collusion between intelligence officials and network executives, the specter of unwarranted media manipulation remains very real.

Without vigilance and accountability, Operation Mockingbird demonstrates how easily intelligence agencies can hijack the much-needed flow of public information. Uncovering this history is essential, because knowledge of how mass media has been covertly infiltrated and manipulated in the past offers insights to identify and resist similar efforts in the present. Though the goals and scale may have shifted, the CIA and other government agencies undoubtedly retain immense interest in influencing media and controlling narratives. Examining how Operation Mockingbird operated at its peak provides a blueprint to ask questions, think critically, and never accept news coverage as neutral or unbiased. The core lesson is that non-transparent collusion between media and government threatens journalistic independence as well as the public's right to know.

Modern Propaganda Model

The use of misinformation and propaganda to influence public opinion is one of the most common techniques employed by governments seeking to control narratives in the media. History is rife with examples of state actors deliberately spreading false or misleading information through media channels under their influence.

In 1988, authors Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky wrote *Manufacturing Consent*, which postulated a propaganda model for modern media. They argued major media outlets will always reflect the perspectives of their corporate ownership and back the government narratives they find appropriate. Chomsky has maintained nothing as overt as Operation Mockingbird is still ongoing. But the incentives within the system implicitly lead media members to self-censor and support their own privileges.

Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model views private media as promoting narratives favorable to their owners, advertisers, or investors. Stories which undermine their parent company or business interests will be avoided. Hollywood films with military funding that portray the US favorably are an example. Additionally, Herman and Chomsky argued advertising dollars inherently bias coverage. Reporting that might offend or implicate an advertiser is discouraged through revenue dependency on commercial backers. They also contended that sourcing biases coverage. The White House, Pentagon, and corporate think tanks fund extensive media lobbying efforts. Reporters form dependent relationships with official sources, giving the latter greater influence over narratives.

Modern Government Influence

The relationship between governments and the media has always been complex and multifaceted. On one hand, the media plays a crucial role in keeping governments accountable. On the other, governments often seek to influence and control the media to promote their own agendas. This

dynamic tension continues with governments employing various overt and covert tactics to shape media narratives according to their own interests.

Direct government involvement in media was officially suspended after the Church Committee reforms. But influence and collusion persists through lobbying efforts, ideological biases, careerist incentives for journalists, and dependence on official leaks. In their book *Manufacturing Consent*, Herman and Chomsky argued an "understanding" still exists between government and media where certain narratives are promoted.

The Bush administration received heavy criticism for paying pundits and planting fabricated news stories to sell the Iraq War. Under Obama, liberal commentators accused outlets like Fox News of waging "ideological warfare" against Democrats. This led Obama advisor Anita Dunn to name Fox as an "arm of the Republican Party." But after winning election, Obama declined to reinstall the Fairness Doctrine mandating impartial coverage which was scrapped under Reagan. MSNBC and liberal shows like *The Daily Show* have been accused of becoming ideological safe spaces for Democrat-aligned narratives.

Still, the removal of regulations like the Fairness Doctrine has enabled politically-aligned networks on both sides. Politicians and outlets often work together to craft narratives, with leaks, scoops, and exclusive interviews given as incentives for favorable coverage. Unsurprisingly, stories threatening the interests of either will be avoided. This "revolving door" between media and government has led to increased distrust. As politicians cycle into media as commentators and news figures join political campaigns, bias becomes more pronounced.



Dr. Udo Ulfkotte: A Courageous Journalist Who Exposed the Truth

Dr. Udo Ulfkotte was a German journalist and author who became renowned for exposing how the mainstream media was manipulated and controlled by intelligence agencies. He worked for over 17 years as an editor for one of Germany's largest newspapers, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, and began noticing that stories he wrote were often heavily edited or suppressed if they went against establishment narratives.

He admitted he was part of this corrupt system earlier in his career and wanted to expose it so the public understands how their perceptions are being managed and manipulated on a mass scale. This led him on a path to uncover the shocking degree of media infiltration by intelligence agencies like the CIA and BND in Germany.

In his book "Gekaufte Journalisten" (Bought Journalists), published in 2014, Ulfkotte detailed how journalists are systematically corrupted through bribes, threats, promotions, trappings of fame, and other inducements to become obedient propaganda mouthpieces for intelligence agencies and powerful interests.

Ulfkotte described how journalists at major publications are routinely invited to "training courses" in the U.S. and elsewhere where they receive

lucrative gifts, insider information that allows them to profit on stocks, and other benefits to bend them to the will of intelligence agencies. Those who play along are promoted within their media company, while those who refuse get shut out of career advancement. He recounted how he was once invited by the CIA to a weekend workshop and given a pen with embedded spy technology as a gift. Many "journalists" return from such junkets brainwashed and ready to toe the propaganda line.

The primary goal is to spread narratives on behalf of the American and German national interests. Topics like energy security, defense against perceived threats, and the dangers of "rogue" nations are frequent themes. Journalists are taught to view conflicts as black and white affairs with America and its allies in the "white hats" against existential threats from foreign enemies. Any nuance or examinations of root causes of tensions that may implicate Western governments are strictly verboten. Reporters who stick to the script are rewarded through TV appearances, book contracts, fellowships, and top jobs. Those who go against the grain are sidelined from access and advancement.

Ulfkotte documented how Western intelligence services like the CIA have infiltrated countries around the world and have agents working within local media outlets to shape narratives and political outcomes. German journalists are heavily pressured to report stories according to the whims of the BND, Germany's foreign intelligence agency. Those who refuse get their stories cut or again passed up for promotion. The disturbing reality is that this happens not just in Germany but in many other Western nations as well, especially the Five Eyes alliance countries of the U.S., Canada, U.K., Australia and New Zealand.

Big technology firms like Google, Facebook, and Twitter also play a censorship role under the guise of filtering out "misinformation." Dissenting voices and investigative reports that expose corruption and wrongdoing by Western governments are suppressed through various algorithms and manual methods.

Ulfkotte became a prominent voice speaking out against plans for an expanded NATO that in truth is an offensive pact against Russia. By expanding eastwards over the years and incorporating former Soviet states, the threat to Russia's security was heightened needlessly. Ulfkotte argued that European nations should develop their own security solutions and not depend so heavily on the U.S. However, his anti-NATO views were controversial and cut against mainstream security narratives.

Ulfkotte was very outspoken about how corporate advertising dollars corrupted journalism in Germany. He described how the pretense of "objective reporting" was demolished when he witnessed journalists go on luxury vacations in 5-star hotels paid by corporations and then return to their newsrooms where they shaped narratives to favor their corporate sponsors. He details how German media minimized stories about the Fukushima nuclear disaster in deference to Japanese advertising money. Ulfkotte also exposed corruption in sports doping with the German football league, and documented bribery related to big construction projects as Germany prepared for the World Cup in 2006. He came to realize such corruption was endemic and expected if you wanted to advance in mainstream journalism.

For his honesty and courage in exposing uncomfortable truths, Ulfkotte was attacked and smeared in the same German media outlets he once worked for. The lackey journalists he criticized turned their guns on him to paint him as conspiratorial and unhinged. However, the German public resonated with his message, leading his book "Gekaufte Journalisten" to become a bestseller. Its English counterpart was slated for release in 2017 under the title "Journalists for Hire: How the CIA Buys the News." Unfortunately, Ulfkotte died in January 2017 at the age of 56 before the English edition could be published. It's possible his death may have in fact been an intelligence assassination designed to suppress the book's worldwide release.

Ulfkotte's widow went on to publish the English language edition later in 2017, renamed *Presstitutes: Embedded in the Pay of the CIA*, along with

updated facts and documents supporting Ulfkotte's explosive claims. The book includes a desperate letter he wrote her sharing his fear that he would be "suffocated" for what he uncovered and planned to make public. Indeed, such truth-tellers are threats to the establishment and often pay with their careers or lives, with their legacies smeared.

Dr. Udo Ulfkotte's life work stands as a testament that some still cling to real journalistic ethics - shining light on abusive power rather than serving it. His experiences reveal the systematic corruption infesting mainstream Western media. The quest for truth requires looking beyond the daily distraction narratives and being brave enough to confront uncomfortable realities. The public owes a debt of gratitude to Ulfkotte for his sacrifices in exposing this grave problem, especially in such a direct, candid manner. Ulfkotte's courage inspired other journalists around the world to blow the whistle on how intelligence agencies dictate narratives and manipulate public perceptions. His death was a loss for the truth community, but his revelations will echo on and inspire independent-minded journalists for generations.

The life story of Udo Ulfkotte teaches us that mainstream Western media has been extensively infiltrated and cannot be fully trusted. We must seek out independent voices and sources to understand international affairs accurately. It also shows that no matter the personal risks, brave journalists dedicated to the truth will fight to expose corruption and lies. Dr. Ulfkotte paid a steep price for following his conscience, but his sacrifices were not in vain. He succeeded in pulling back the curtain and revealing the manipulation that shapes public narratives. For this he will be remembered as a courageous champion of honest journalism.



Corporate Consolidation

Increasing consolidation of American media in the hands of just five "massive conglomerates" magnifies corporate and political influence over content. These mergers reduce competition and diversity of opinion. In 1983, fifty companies owned 90% of US media whereas today 90% is controlled by just five: Comcast, The Walt Disney Company, Time Warner, Viacom, and CBS Corporation. With more centralized control, concerns persist over the independence and merits of investigative journalism.

Of course, the internet has enabled new independent journalists and political dissidents to circumvent traditional media control. Social media theoretically makes it more difficult to stifle stories threatening these conglomerates. But platforms like Facebook and Google have themselves become vehicles for propaganda and censorship - often at the behest of government. Their content algorithms have faced manipulation by corporate and political interests. As traditional outlets face revenue declines, consulting and collaborating with Silicon Valley has become more common. These relationships threaten to undermine the independence traditional journalism was founded upon.

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The Rise of Tech Platforms as Tools for Propaganda Dissemination

Over the past decade, a handful of technology companies have amassed unprecedented power over the flow of information in the digital age. Google and Facebook now control over 70% of digital advertising revenue in the US, giving them dominant influence as news intermediaries. Two-thirds of Americans consume news via social media, with Facebook alone reaching over 40% of the population. In this environment, the algorithms and policies of Silicon Valley shape access to information - whether consciously or not - by determining patterns of media consumption.

Recognizing the platforms' newfound strength, governments worldwide have sought to harness their capabilities for propaganda and censorship. States exploit tools like targeted ads and viral misinformation to manipulate public opinion. Officials pressure companies to spread preferred narratives and suppress dissenting voices. Meanwhile, traditional media institutions face existential challenges adapting to a platform-centric media ecosystem.

The massive proliferation of digital media over the past decade has enabled governments to disseminate propaganda with unprecedented ease. Social media provides direct, unfiltered access to citizens, while leveraging advanced data analytics to tailor messages based on psychological profiles. Governments use these capacities to project propaganda, promote cults of personality, and suppress dissent. Even in democracies, officials exploit platforms to shape narratives, manage perceptions, and influence elections.

For example, government agencies like the FBI and DHS now work closely with Facebook, Twitter, and Google to monitor and remove “foreign disinformation.” This collaboration allows the state to leverage the platforms' scale to censor speech. Congress has pressured tech CEOs to tweak algorithms to reduce the viral spread of certain content, thereby shaping the information diets of millions of users. These trends reflect a shift - government efforts to control narratives now center on Silicon Valley, rather than legacy media.

Both journalists and civil libertarians warn that concentrated private power over digital communications poses risks to free expression and democracy. They caution against overzealous regulation of platforms, instead advocating reform of antitrust and media ownership laws to curb excessive corporate control. But so far, concrete policy action has been limited, even as alignment grows between government and tech interests.

This collaboration enables propaganda dissemination when discussing topics like public health, defense, or education. The state provides selective information to promote policies, while suppressing counter-narratives and dissent. Silicon Valley's data tools allow the tailoring of messages to different demographics for maximum manipulation. For instance, Facebook may assist a government campaign promoting vaccination while censoring anti-vaccine groups. Or Google may help disseminate information portraying military action positively, while silencing anti-war voices.

Of course, the line between misinformation and legitimate counter-narratives is often blurred. Marginalized groups with dissenting views frequently have their speech censored as "false" or "dangerous" misinformation. Throughout history, those in power have labeled dissenters as spreaders of misinformation and lies as a pretext to silence them. Classifying counter-narratives as "fake news" or propaganda provides cover for censorship that entrenches official narratives and agendas.

Across societies, state censorship has been used to control the flow of information, manipulate opinion, sanitize discourse, and silence oppositional speech. Even in democracies, officials invoke rationales like public welfare, national security, and civic integrity to justify restrictions on expression. But such restrictions often serve to protect power structures, stifle dissent, and allow state propaganda efforts to flourish.

Some argue censorship is necessary to combat the rapid spread of misinformation on digital platforms. They contend the virality of falsehoods threatens democracy, public health, and social cohesion. But granting governments and corporations the power to determine truth inevitably leads to political and ideological censorship. Those in power shape

standards of credibility and definitions of deception to serve their interests. And historical precedents highlight the likelihood of censorship expanding when governments and tech companies hold unchecked power to police speech.

Maximizing freedom of expression should be the priority. Censorship often backfires by lending credence to suppressed ideas - as we have seen, the Streisand effect shows that banning content makes it more alluring. The marketplace of ideas relies on vibrant debate and diversity of thought to allow the truth to emerge. Censoring speech undermines this process, as does the manipulation of the manufactured [Overton Window](#) by only allowing certain approved perspectives to have a place within mainstream discourse. Restricting commentary and dissenting perspectives distorts discourse in favor of dominant power structures and orthodoxies. Dissenting speech serves as a vital counterweight against confirmation bias, groupthink, and blind consensus around potentially misguided conventions. Allowing authorities to dictate approved narratives paves the way for the endorsement of dangerous groupthink and the silencing of those challenging injustice.

Vibrant public debate, not state-sanctioned opinion, produces a healthy society. Protecting controversial and unpopular speech establishes crucial precedents against the incremental expansion of censorship. Challenging speech forces reflection and growth - even when it seems offensive or untrue. The free trade in ideas allows the truth to emerge through discourse, debate, critique, and rebuttal. Censorship prevents us from confronting positions that diverge from our own, breeding intolerance and dogmatism. In the long-run, the open and free exchange of all ideas, not government-approved commentary, leads to greater understanding and a healthier society.

The recent swell of propaganda enabled by digital platforms is deeply concerning. States worldwide exploit these tools, in partnership with tech companies, to disseminate disinformation and silence dissent. But heavy-handed government regulation is never the solution, often opening the door

to an increased likelihood for a power grab. Speech bans historically expand inexorably to quash dissent and opposition.

In clarifying X's approach to moderation, Yaccarino introduced the concept of "freedom of speech, not freedom of reach,"



X CEO Linda Yaccarino: "Lawful But Awful" Content To Be Hidden
Source: Reclaim The Net

How Operation Mockingbird Lives On: Gatekeeping and Message Control in the Social Media Age

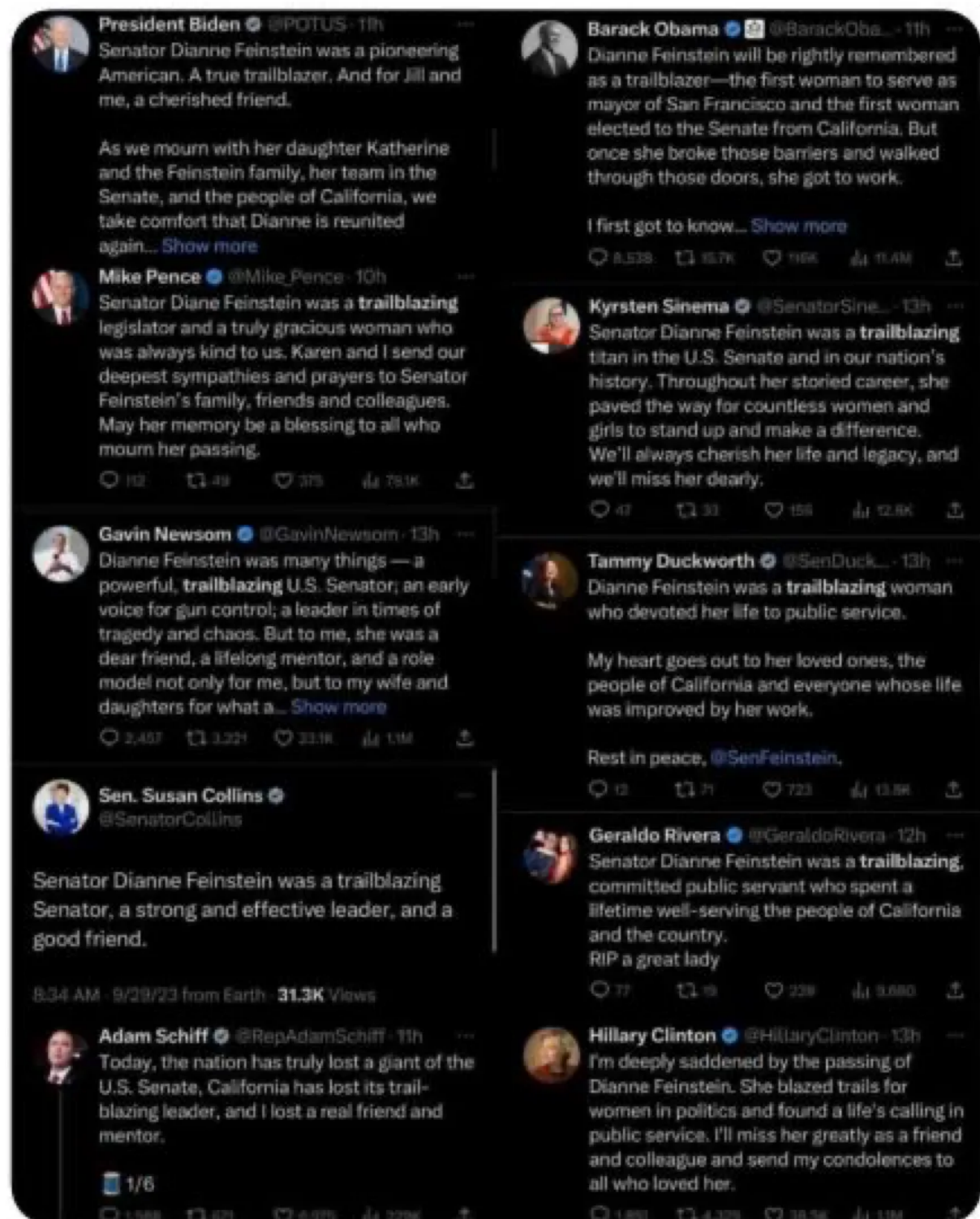
The CIA's covert Operation Mockingbird may have officially ended in the 1970s, but the techniques it pioneered for influencing public opinion continue to be employed today. Social media has opened new avenues for spreading establishment narratives and marginalizing dissent. As in the Cold War era, intelligence agencies and political operatives work hand-in-glove with media companies to curate what information reaches the masses and how it is framed.

The most insidious Mockingbird technique was repeating key themes across multiple platforms to imprint desired talking points in the public mindset. The same phrases, statistics, and metaphors would be broadcast on television, printed in news articles, transmitted on radio programs, and embedded in Hollywood films. To the masses, it appeared a viewpoint was

organically going viral, rather than the coordinated work of intelligence operatives. This illusion of consensus, still employed today, made the messaging seem trustworthy and beyond reproach.

Modern clickbait headlines and social media echo chambers leverage the same psychology. Talking points are seeded by political PR firms, then amplified by algorithms that reward engagement over accuracy. The manufactured illusion that "everyone" shares a particular belief pushes individuals to adopt it through peer pressure. This "bandwagon effect" was another tactic promoted in CIA field manuals.

Are all the establishment politicians' social media run by the same person?



While the Mockingbird program placed its operatives directly within media companies, the Internet allows intelligence agencies to outsource narrative management to third-party influencers. Monitoring platforms like Facebook and Twitter identifies high-reach accounts that can be co-opted as part of

propaganda campaigns - either willingly or through hacking. The Army's Social Media in Strategic Communication handbook, published in 2016, explicitly describes this strategy.

Influencers on social media are being utilized as a modern incarnation of Mockingbird. Their posts, mirroring government talking points, can be mistaken for grassroots digital activism. But their messaging is professionally synchronized across social networks using hashtag campaigns, memes, and clickbait content. This has also been enacted using an army of bots relaying the same message simultaneously across many platforms and channels. Website cookies and browsing history provide the data to profile which demographics are responsive to different narratives so messaging can be micro-targeted, just like ads and online radicalization efforts.

Mainstream outlets continue to be complicit in spreading covert propaganda. U.S. intelligence partners with entertainment studios to consult on film and TV storylines promoting narratives about terrorism, geopolitics, and technology. News networks run pre-packaged government footage with scripted voiceovers, posing as independently-gathered field reports. Even major newspapers publish stories ghostwritten by intelligence agencies during presidential administrations from both parties, as historical documents confirm.

This infiltration of media has sharpened the American public's inability to distinguish editorial agendas from truth. When audiences view all information as narrative rather than fact, confirmation bias drives them to select only the partisan perspectives they wish to hear. Ratings feedback loops reward media outlets that cater to these selective desires rather than report objective reality. The resulting fragmentation of the information ecosystem into distinct right-wing and left-wing bubbles undermines societal cohesion.

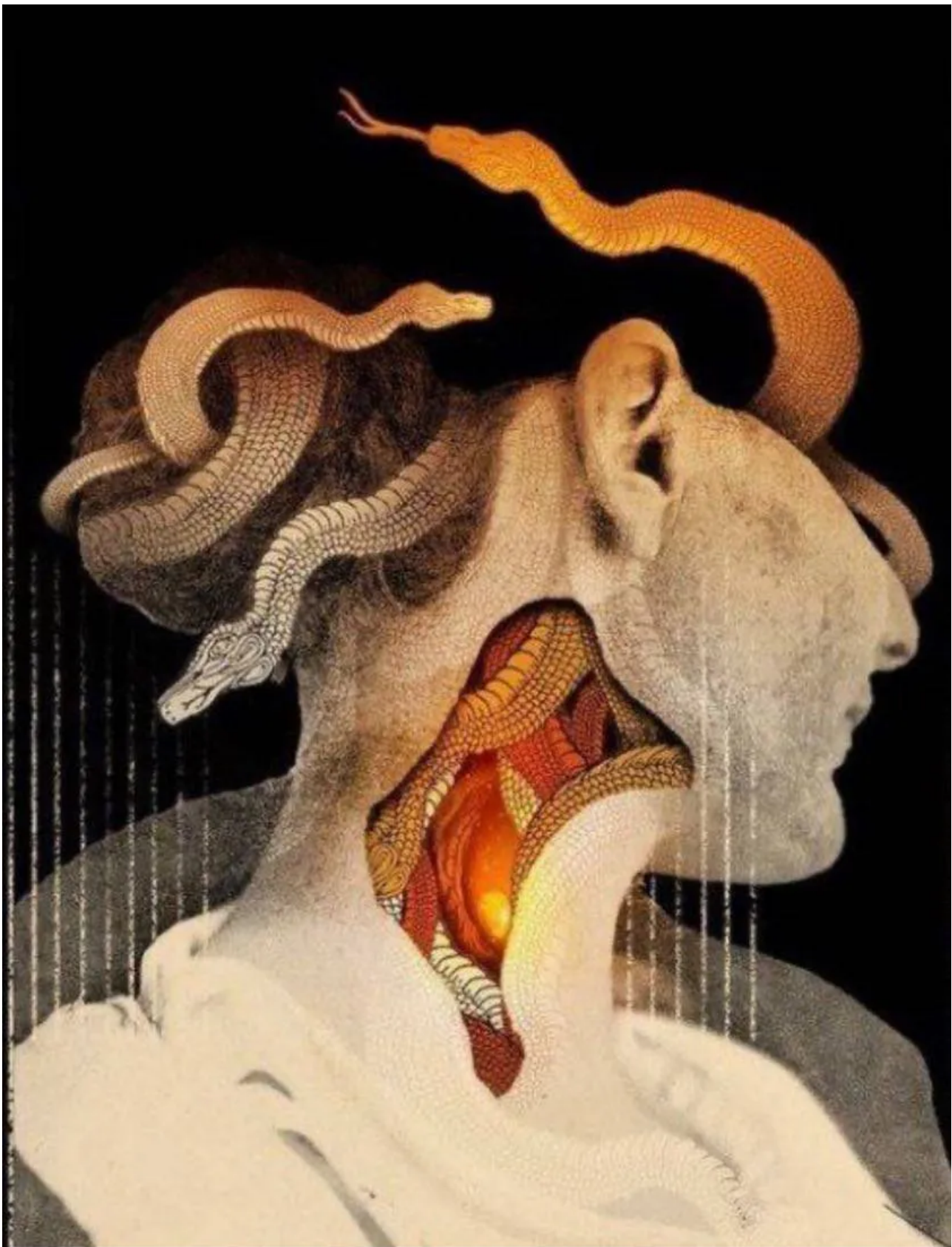
The Internet was thought to have democratized access to narratives by removing gatekeepers like newspaper editors, but other forms of gatekeeping have emerged in their place, such as CEO Linda Yaccarino at

X.com issuing a statement that “Freedom of Speech is not freedom of reach” in order to rationalize her new policies which have locked down and [shadowbanned](#) the accounts of dissenting voices so that they are unable to even reach their own audiences effectively.

A similarly abusive policy has been instituted at Facebook with 30-day account bans on those who create posts that conflict with “fact-checkers” who are funded by vaccine companies, a major conflict of interest. As revealed by Rep. Thomas Massie (R-KY), a major source of Factcheck.org’s funding is the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, an organization that holds over \$1.8 billion of stock in a vaccine company and is run by a former director of the CDC.

As the root technique of engineering consensus is so integral to human nature, supposed “fact-checks” against “disinformation” compete against emotional gut reactions. Just as in the Cold War, people's innate desire to conform to the perceived in-group beliefs drives them into ideological camps. This impulse is what the architects of Mockingbird understood decades ago.

As the RAND Corporation observed as early as 2001, online discourse is "easier to manipulate [than traditional media], in sophisticated as well as simple ways." Tech firms are now the unelected editors and gatekeepers, shaping perceptions with opaque algorithms trained to maximize time-on-site. Their commercial incentives are aligned with sensationalism and confirmation bias.



The basic purpose of subversion is to screw up the perception of reality for your enemy to such an extent that he does not perceive you as the enemy.

- Yuri Bezmenov

Moving Forward

Governments continue to employ extensive media influence strategies ranging from censorship and propaganda to ownership controls and regulations. Both authoritarian and democratic regimes leverage the media to promote narratives that serve their geopolitical interests and consolidate power. An unfettered independent press, though rarely seen even when claimed, remains crucial to keeping entities accountable and upholding free expression.

Examples from the past provide important lessons for media on how to counter disinformation and intimidation from state actors. By adhering to truth, amplifying critical voices, diversifying ownership and sources, and minimizing partisan biases, media organizations can resist unwarranted government influence. Simultaneously, individuals should continue to push back against government overreach and demand media freedom.

The key lesson of Operation Mockingbird is that shaping narratives which seem to emanate organically from within a population is far more powerful than top-down messaging. People revolt against overt control of information, but are receptive when they believe an idea represents group consensus. This remains true even when online discourse amplifies artificial consensus created by covert actors. The only countermeasure is teaching individuals media literacy skills to identify emotionally manipulative framing, detect political PR tactics in online culture, and analyze how algorithms skew their social feeds toward confirmation bias. This critical analysis is crucial in the fight against propaganda, an essential civic skill for the 21st century.

The technologies may have evolved, but the motivations and methods of institutional messaging remain much the same as in the Cold War era. The shadow of Operation Mockingbird looms large, as new platforms are co-opted to manufacture and manipulate public opinion. Media literacy provides the light to cut through the darkness. But only if we teach individuals to decode how narratives take on the illusion of truth.

The government-media dynamic will continue to evolve with changes in technology, politics, and society. But maintaining the media's independence to objectively monitor power remains essential for the health of any society. Overall, the diverse cases of government media interference over the past decade reaffirm the need for constant vigilance and advocacy to prevent excessive control or manipulation. With concerted efforts on all sides, the integrity of open public discourse can prevail over authoritarian forces.

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Michael Newberry Oct 3 Liked by The Starfire Codes

Demi, I'm gobsmacked! Brilliant expose!

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Charles Small Oct 3 Liked by The Starfire Codes

Great article! I wanted to add. My great uncle talked about working for British Intelligence

in spring of 1941 at Rockefeller Center. Donovan, who is credited with the birth of the CIA, was involved there as well. The British were hiring Americans to control the media narrative. This is primarily where it began. I found a book that I believed mentioned my great uncle, Shanghai Conspiracy. I found that the Japanese translation of the book removed the part mentioning my great uncle. The book was published in 1952 and in that year the CIA controlled the media in Japan.



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