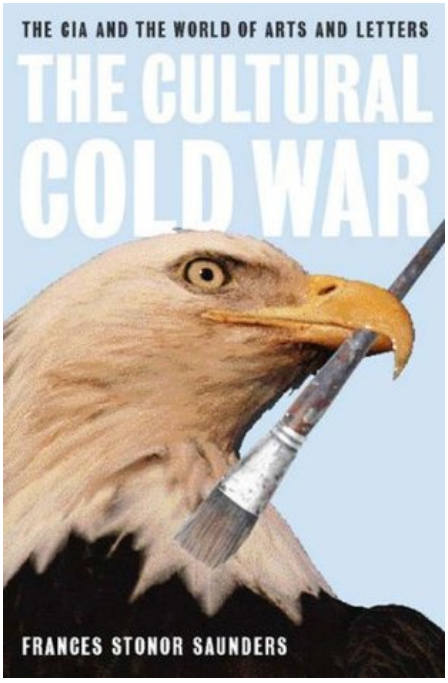

The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters

Frances Stonor Saunders

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The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters Frances Stonor Saunders During the Cold War, freedom of expression was vaunted as liberal democracy's most cherished possession—but such freedom was put in service of a hidden agenda. In *The Cultural Cold War*, Frances Stonor Saunders reveals the extraordinary efforts of a secret campaign in which some of the most vocal exponents of intellectual freedom in the West were working for or subsidized by the CIA—whether they knew it or not.

Called "the most comprehensive account yet of the [CIA's] activities between 1947 and 1967" by the *New York Times*, the book presents shocking evidence of the CIA's undercover program of cultural interventions in Western Europe and at home, drawing together declassified documents and exclusive interviews to expose the CIA's astonishing campaign to deploy the likes of Hannah Arendt, Isaiah Berlin, Leonard Bernstein, Robert Lowell, George Orwell, and Jackson Pollock as weapons in the Cold War. Translated into ten languages, this classic work—now with a new preface by the author—is "a real contribution to popular understanding of the postwar period" (*The Wall Street Journal*), and its story of covert cultural efforts to win hearts and minds continues to be relevant today.

The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters Details

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From Reader Review The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters for online ebook

muhammad lafi says

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Simon Wood says

WITH "FREEDOM" FIGHTERS LIKE THESE WHO NEEDS TOTALITARIANS?

A fine, readable book on the CIA programme to fund allegedly leftist/high cultural movements during the first half of the so called cold war. The cast of characters are a fairly unlikeable bunch - examples Nicholas Nabokov (3rd rate composer and cousin to the much more talented novelist), Irving Kristol (grandpa to the neo-conservative movement), Arthur Koestler (one time communist, writer and rapist, full time loud mouth). It hardly surprises one that those shady characters sold their souls to the CIA. What is surprising that it took so long for their cover to be blown.

Other characters include those on the right of the Labour party in Britain, and other ostensible leftists such as Willy Brandt. The pious and owlish Isaiah Berlin pops up here, then there, with advice and support but always keeping himself comfortably in the plausible deniability zone. The more one knows of Isaiah Berlins life the less comfortable one is with his writings and reputation, he was a one time spy for the putative Israeli state - and now an "independent" operator around the edges of the CIA's underhand program. What next one wonders? George "Big Brother" Orwell, a writer who I think is seriously overated, makes an appearance for his shabby informing to the secret services of his fellow writers. Of course one cant blame Orwell for the CIA production of Animal Farm but it is fascinating to look over their shoulders as they make the changes to make it politically correct in the CIA sense of that overused phrase. Sometimes, when reading this book, you get the impression that these self proclaimed and government funded freedom fighters are incapable of

defending their point of view, or attacking their opponents, in the open with the pen which is what this reader thought cultural freedom in a democratic society might entail.

The book takes sometime to get going, there being a large cast of characters to introduce. While it is undoubtedly an important and interesting book, constant immersion in the activities of such entities as the Congress for Cultural Freedom, Encounter, CIA, MI5, Information Research Department,etc can have a dampening effect on your soul. As can the accounts of McCarthyism which had a devestating effect on a huge number of progressives in the United States.

That said, it has its entertaining side to - the level of bitching between our warriors for "Cultural Freedom" is sustained at a high level: Stephen Spenders level of naivety is awe inspiring, Koestlers crassness makes one wince. Its most valuable service is in puncturing myths of the Good vs the Bad that was the official plot line for the Cold War.

A worthwhile book, and a fascinating read - and one that has a renewed relevance in recent years given the with us or against us polarisation of the War on Terror.

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lyell bark says

this is a pretty cool book how the cia funded left wing groups, artists, thinkers, philsophers etc. as a way to combat communism. cool. sort of name heavy sometimes which i s a bit annoying but whatever man. now next time your talking to all your cool friends down @the mission district you can tell them not only is the cia good at giving lsd to housewives, not killing fidel castro repeatedly, blowing up cats, and selling crack to black ppl, but they are also good at turning leftists into spineless bozos. yowzers. hot button issue!

Naeem says

You know all that paranoia that besides politics and economics, the CIA also has infiltrated all kinds of cultural institutions -- academic journals, music, international academic conferences, popular journals, export of popular music? Well now your paranoia can be exorcised, because it is all true!

Read this book and weep. Weep, not at the blood, and torture, and killing -- this book has none of that. This is drip, drip, drip of the CIA's backing of cultural influence. Sort of akin to finding out that US food aid policy is legislated to make profits from 3rd worlders and re-structure their eating habits. (I Will mention 2 books that deal with that later)

Read enough of this stuff and pain becomes laughter! Because it is funny actually to consider how much of our conscious life is built around denial. Funny -- in that nitrous oxide sense of your gut hurts from so much laughing. I mean it.

Jessica says

Essential non-fiction. Everyone should read this book to get a deeper (shocking!) understanding of the Cold War. Who knew Jackson Pollack's ab-ex paintings were tools of the CIA to stop the spread of Communism!!

The only negative effect of reading this book is coming away with the feeling that the CIA has infiltrated absolutely every nook and cranny of American life.

John Pistelli says

Someone once said that beneath or behind all political and cultural warfare lies a struggle between secret societies.
—Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972)

This 1999 book by British journalist Saunders is the classic account of the CIA's semi-secret mid-20th-century sponsorship of cultural organizations, literary and political journals, artistic movements, and related ventures (including films and political campaigns) throughout the world to combat the influence of communism.

Taking the form of a narrative history, *The Cultural Cold War* focuses on three men who were the relays between seemingly independent artists and intellectuals and the American (as well as British) intelligence services.

Saunders's stars are Melvin Lasky, a Bronx-born and City-College-educated militant anti-communist who became a prominent editor in Germany after World War II; Nicolas Nabokov, cousin to the more famous novelist Vladimir, a White Russian émigré and flamboyant composer who would go on to be at the center of the artists and writers knowingly or unknowingly recruited to fight communism; and Michael Josselson, descended from an Estonian Jewish family exiled after the Russian Revolution, who became an American citizen and then an intelligence and psychological warfare expert overseeing the Agency's domination of arts and letters.

This trio's travails are the emotional spine of the book, and Saunders treats them with sympathy, especially Josselson, whom she seems to regard as a tragic figure, a man of cultivation and passion caught in world-historical circumstances well beyond his control. At times, I felt I was reading a sequel to *Gravity's Rainbow*, another big and complex story about humanists compromised by the domineering services to which the masters of war inevitably wish to put humanism.

While *The Cultural Cold War* is a dispassionate book with a minimum of editorializing, Saunders seems to reserve most of her judgment not for the intelligence officers, but for the artists and intellectuals themselves. They either cynically or naively accepted CIA money laundered through philanthropic foundations (many of which were simply fronts, little more than mail drops for the transfer of funds) even as they nevertheless congratulated themselves for being on the side of a free society where the government did not interfere with cultural life.

The CIA was instituted in 1947, an outgrowth of the wartime OSS (Office of Strategic Services), and it became a tentacular and autonomous bureaucracy operating unaccountably worldwide. Its motivation in waging a cultural Cold War was to recruit a "non-communist left." Understanding the appeal of dissidence to artists and thinkers, and understanding too the pre-war attractions of communism during the 1930s, the CIA grasped that keeping rebellious intellectuals in the fold of liberalism would be crucial to ensure the success of "the American century."

To that end, they funded a European organization called the Congress for Cultural Freedom, the famous

British liberal literary journal *Encounter* (edited by Stephen Spender and Irving Kristol), and art and music exhibitions meant to emphasize the progressive side of American culture to European audiences skeptical that America had a culture at all. Exemplary here are the CIA's covert promotion of Abstract Expressionist painting as an individualist and apolitical antidote to socialist realism and of jazz and other African-American arts as a riposte to the Soviet Union's charges of American hypocrisy in complaining about communism's civil unfreedom.

Saunders emphasizes that the CIA really did represent the liberal side of the internal American debate over how to handle the Cold War, referring to "many romantic myths about the CIA as the extension of the American literary liberal tradition." The men she writes about were generally horrified by the know-nothing populism of Joseph McCarthy, while a number of presidents, including Truman and Johnson (but excluding the suave would-be Pericles Kennedy), resented intellectuals, distrusted modernist art, and would have preferred a more populist cultural ethos of God and country.

The American intelligence service, she notes, was staffed by the country's traditional Anglo-Protestant elite, an educated class who felt the responsibility of national stewardship: "Many of them hailed from a concentration in Washington, D.C., of a hundred or so wealthy families...who stood for the preservation of the Episcopalian and Presbyterian values that had guided their ancestors." Yet their waging of the Cold War would result, ironically, in that elite's and those values' cultural dispossession.

Part of this book's sly comedy comes in the intelligence elite's sometimes uncomprehending interaction with the "new class," primarily Jewish intellectuals, but in the background there is also the emergence of Catholic writers and black artists and postcolonial talents, all of whom the CIA recruited as a bludgeon against communism. If the literary-sociological headline of midcentury American writing is the rise of Jewish, Catholic, and African-American authors to unprecedented prominence, Saunders implies that this was in a way a project of the WASP elite, a move in the Great Game against Russian communism and for western values.

But for Saunders, this new class, particularly the New York Intellectuals, did not acquit itself well, especially those who would go on to fill the ranks of the neoconservatives. Irving Kristol seems more or less to be the book's villain. He represents for Saunders a type of pseudo-thinker who possesses an essentially militarized mind, a man who cannot conceive of intellectual life outside of polarizing combat and enemies to slay. Saunders tends to portray Sidney Hook, Diana Trilling, and Leslie Fiedler in the same unflattering light.

Quoted throughout the book as moral authorities, by contrast, are more independent-minded figures devoted to a nuanced conception of the literary and political life: Arthur Miller, Saul Bellow, Gore Vidal, Mary McCarthy, Hannah Arendt, and *New York Review of Books* co-founder Jason Epstein.

Saunders tentatively concludes that when American intellectuals, even those who had gone along with the cultural Cold War, turned against Johnson over Vietnam, he ordered the plug to be pulled on the operation, judging that "'liberals, intellectuals, Communists—they're all the same.'" The CIA's cultural activities were exposed in a California-based radical magazine called *Ramparts*, and later reported in the *New York Times*. But Saunders implies that the Agency could probably have squashed *Ramparts*'s reporting or at least effectively replied to it. But they did not; they allowed their own exposure, perhaps out of a sense that the cultural Cold War had run its course. If this is true, it makes the radical magazine's exposure of liberal intellectuals' collaboration with the CIA itself an instrument of the Agency's will, a familiar hall-of-mirrors effect from spy thrillers: is there *anything* the CIA *doesn't* control?

This problem of mirroring is the thesis, ultimately, of Saunders's book. She writes of the irony in combatting

totalitarianism by exercising (or participating in) in the state's total control over intellectual and artistic life. American and British writers and artists, in trying to fight the Soviet Union, became far too much its counterpart. This comes out, for instance, in passages where Saunders records how the Agency attempted to quash art that reflected too negatively on the U.S., recalling nothing so much as the strictures of socialist realism:

> Echoing Sidney Hook's complaints of 1949 that Southern writers reinforced negative perceptions of America, with their "novels of social protest and revolt" and "American degeneracy and inanity," the American Committee now resolved to "steer clear of incestuous Southerners. Their work gives an exceedingly partial and psychologically colored account of our manners and morals." [...] Sales of books by Caldwell, Steinbeck, Faulkner, and Richard Wright...slumped in this period.

Near the conclusion of the book, Saunders suggests that collaboration with state power, even in an ostensibly good political cause, is an abdication of the intellectual's responsibility to tell the truth:

> [E]thics were subject to politics. They confused their role, pursuing their aims by acting on people's states of mind, choosing to slant things one way rather than another in the hope of achieving a particular result. That should have been the job of politicians. The task of the intellectual should have been to expose the politician's economy with the truth, his parsimonious distribution of fact, his defense of the status quo.

Furthermore, in a preface to the 2013 edition, Saunders offers an argument against any excessive political conviction any use of propaganda:

> My sympathies are with Voltaire, who argued that anyone who is certain ought to be certified. I believe that Milan Kundera's "wisdom of uncertainty" is a touchstone for intellectual inquiry. *The Cultural Cold War* could be described as a polemic against conviction (which can be distinguished from faith or belief or values) and the strategies used to mobilize one conviction against another. In the highly politicized context of the cultural cold war, this refusal to take sides was designated, pejoratively, as relativism or neutralism. It was not a position or sensibility tolerated by either side—both the Soviet Union and the United States were committed to undermining the case for neutralism, and in the theater of operations which is the focus of this book, Western Europe, that campaign devolved from very similar tactics.

The Cultural Cold War, then, argues for a rather unfashionable thesis: the autonomy of art and intellect from politics. The authority of artists and intellectuals to scrutinize and criticize their societies is based on their disinterested distance from its governing institutions. This distance is a modern phenomenon and is ever in danger of being compromised. The idea that artists do not exist to serve the church, the state, or any other collective or constituency hardly existed before the 19th century, though there are hints of it in Greek literature's famous moments of even-handedness (*The Persians*, for instance) or in Shakespeare's constitutive ambiguities.

Materially, the distance of intellectuals from power can rarely be total, especially today when so many of us are gathered under the aegis of the university. (I myself am paid in part with taxpayer funds.) Nevertheless, we give up this ideal of artistic and intellectual independence, the true meaning of "cultural freedom" betrayed in practice by the Cold Warriors, at the risk of relinquishing whatever social power we still have.

Saunders's old-fashioned idealism, like the blurbs on the back of the book from Edward Said and Lewis Lapham, wistfully calls to mind an "ideological formation" (to use the comrades' jargon) that scarcely exists in this country any longer, a non-communist left worth supporting—non-communist not because it represents Cold War managerial liberalism (the "snivelling, mealy-mouthed tyranny of bureaucrats, social workers, psychiatrists and union officials" Saunders quotes William S. Burroughs as denouncing) but because its exponents were civil and cultural libertarians.

And what of today? What intellectual and artistic organs are being moved as we speak by the hidden hand of the deep state? I suppose we all have our suspicions, and "none" would be an absurdly naive answer. But who knows for sure? I imagine we'll learn more about what is really going on right now in about 30-50 years. In the meantime, to get an idea of how paranoid you should be, you should read *The Cultural Cold War*.

Paul Hebron says

A very thorough account of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the CIA's attempts ot channel money into various European and American thinkers to create a viable liberal/capitalist alternative to socialism/communism. Mostly interesting except that the real historical events are of the 'then he said something to thibgy, and then they sent a letter to magazine A, who then went to committee B' variety, when I was hoping for something concise like William Blum's 'Killing Hope'. The scale of CIA involvement is staggering, in everything from abstract expressionism to the revelation that George Orwell was apparently keen on 'reds-under-the-bed'-style stupidity. Also Arthur Koestler was apparently not a nice man. Does an excellent job of conveying the sense of single-minded paranoia you imagine the era to have. Useful as a source of reference, somewhat boring; would be worthwhile to have a similar volume referring to Russia.

J.M. Hushour says

It could hardly surprise anyone at this point, except in the details, but the CIA had a hand in all kinds of cultural enterprises during the 1950s and 1960s. The premise was simple: let's combat totalitarian, non-democratic art by controlling our own art non-democratically and totalitarianally. Emphasis on the 'anally'.
A lot of Saunders' analysis focuses on journals like "Encounter", "Partisan Review" and others, and the wide-ranging cast of intellectual and morons in government and intelligence work who tried to manipulate a whole generation of artists into working under the thinly-veiled funding and auspices of the CIA. The revelations aren't that big, since it all broke in the late 60s and was investigated by Congress. A lot of writers and intellectuals pretended they didn't know anything about it. Whatever.
The best bits are about the Abstract Expressionists who, rejected by Soviet formalism, became the CIA-backed darlings of modern art via the Rockefellers, MoMA and all kinds of foundations and shit.
A winner all around and is a useful tool for taking no one, academic or artist, seriously.

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Saul says

If you ever had doubts the CIA would meddle with any part of society in a relentless unbridled self-absorbed hunt to stamp out communism at any-and-all costs: well, this book should convince you. Otherwise, please grab your plush McCarthy-bear and go back to watching the Doomsday clock on Fox News. Reading is not

for you.

On a more serious note, this book is a wonderful textbook on America's cold-war fight against communism. Sure to surprise, it's chocked full of research showing how the CIA spent millions of US taxpayer dollars (gasp!) funding the modern impressionistic art-scene of the 40s and 50s in an attempt to influence world views against communism. Thankfully, the book does not try to compare communism to capitalism all that much, but instead focuses on America's unbridled cold-war mentality as it went off the rails. And while art and culture may not be the first things one considers as cold-war weapons, Saunders makes the case and shows how seriously clandestine agents took their job.

This is not an easy read. So full of names, dates and places, on many occasions I had to reread chapters in order to get the story straight. But even though oversaturated with information, I think most readers will get out of this book more than they put in.

Conclusion: A solid read for anyone thinking past efforts to make America great, might not have been so great after all. Sound familiar?

Cameron says

This book is written for an audience that already knows something about the Cold War and US politics in the 1950s, and for me it was an uphill climb since I know little about this period in American history. Fortunately Saunders is a good writer and manages to make most of it fairly interesting, although there are lots of quotations from government documents and people's letters that are laborious to wade through. Her thesis is that the CIA and its predecessors tried to engage the Communist enemy on a cultural level as well as a military / political one, with surprising results. She tells a few humorous tales along the way--books being air-dropped into the USSR as a means of "converting" the populace, and some tragic tales too: The eventual disintegration of the CIA's cultural wing, The Congress for Cultural Freedom, and the disillusionment of its staff as they drifted away to do other things. Recommended only for hard-core students of CIA history.

Conrad says

At least one review of this book on goodreads contains the usual naive-hysterical view that the CIA touches everything, and everything they touch turns to shit. While they certainly did do their share of nasty work during their salad days pre-Carter, the CIA also funded and promoted significant figures in the anti-totalitarian left, which is why I'm interested in this book.

Apparently the CIA - through its Association for Cultural Freedom - was a significant supporter of Modernism in music, literature and art, and Abstract Expressionism more specifically. They sought to provide an antidote to the Social Realism championed by Stalin in his capacity as Literary Dictator of the USSR (and if you ever want a laugh, give his lit crit a try.) They funded conferences for musicians and left-leaning writers, handed out cash to struggling artists of whom Clement Greenberg would have approved, and even reportedly had plants on the staff of several major literary journals. In some of these acts they undoubtedly did the United States' cultural stock a favor - the tail does not always wag the dog. But the confluence of lit crit and intelligence agencies really gets my blood a-pumpin', so I want to get my mitts on this book, as well as its preceding volume by the same writer.

Bên Phía Nhà Z says

??c cu?n sách này ?? tìm hi?u v? chuy?n Orwell ?ã ???c CIA tuyên truy?n nh? nào trong th?i k? chi?n tranh l?nh. ngoài cu?n này còn có m?t cu?n chuyên vi?t v? bác s? Zhivago và s? ra ??i b?n d?ch c?ng nh? b?n ti?ng Nga ? ngoài Nga nh? th? nào.

??u là nh?ng cu?n sách c?c hay và nên ??c cho ai mu?n tìm hi?u s? tuyên truy?n nh? không tuyên truy?n, chúng em có làm gì ?âu, ch? cho ti?n cho các b?n t?ng mê c?ng bây gi? thành c?p ti?n mu?n nói gì thì nói thôi mà.

Xem Animal Farm do CIA làm v?i cái k?t c?c khác h?n c?ng r?t là funny, và c? 1984 n?a. Cái xã h?i Big Brother ?ang quan sát chúng mày th?c ra là m?t th? c?c k? tinh t? mà không ph?i ai c?ng ý th?c ???c ?âu, h?i các ??ng chí hai chân l?n b?n chân ? :D