

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

Jefferson Morley

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## Angleton Unrevealed

*By David Robarge*

Readers who pick up *The Ghost*, hoping finally to have a comprehensive and objective treatment of James Angleton, the Agency's long-time, shadowy, and controversial chief of counterintelligence, will be sorely disappointed.

What they will find is an erratically organized account of most of the key events in Angleton's life, along with an agglomeration of often badly sourced suppositions, inferences, allegations, and innuendoes frequently cast in hyperbolic or categorical language.

*The Ghost* displays the most prominent shortcomings of journalistic history: reportage substitutes for cohesive narrative, with vignettes and atmospherics stitched together with insufficient discernment among sources. One of Morley's more dubious ones—an [anonymous blog post with no citations](#), from which he pulls an outlandish quote—inadvertently provides an insight into what his ulterior motive in writing *The Ghost* appears to be: “This is not about who James Angleton was so much as *what James Angleton had to be*” (emphasis in the original).<sup>[1]</sup>

In pursuit of a story he seems to have already written in his mind, Morley manipulates historical facts, engages in long leaps of logic, and avoids inconvenient contradictory evidence and interpretations to produce yet another superficial caricature of a deeply complicated personality.

### Questionable Logic

The most problematic feature of *The Ghost* is Morley's penchant for reaching grandiose conclusions based on sketchy or no evidence, contorted reasoning, or

unfamiliarity with intelligence processes and the history of the events in which he places Angleton. To cite just three from among numerous instances:

- Morley overstates Angleton’s part in the [Italian election operation](#)—he hardly was its “miracle worker.”
- No persuasive evidence shows that Angleton had a “supporting role” in the [MK/ULTRA](#) project, that he “help[ed] give birth” to it, or that he “pursued the use of psychoactive drugs for intelligence work,” other than a brief relationship Angleton had with a colleague who worked on the program.
- An Israeli diplomat is alleged to have been “Angleton’s man in Havana.” But they met only a few times, and the diplomat declined Angleton’s request to contact CIA agents in Cuba.[\[2\]](#)

Morley’s highly dubious rendering of the Kennedy administration’s policy toward Cuba, and Angleton’s involvement with it, is more troublesome. For starters, the United States did not have “two divergent Cuba policies” represented by the Joint Chiefs of Staff’s “engineered provocation” plan called [NORTHWOODS](#) and the White House’s “autonomous operations” using Cuban exiles, possibly in conjunction with the assassination of Castro.[\[3\]](#)

The administration’s policy was what it *did*, not what was *said* in meetings or *written about* in plans and memoranda. [NORTHWOODS](#) was never carried out, and the CIA’s integrated covert action program codenamed [AM/WORLD](#) became the focus for the rest of Kennedy’s presidency. Morley later asserts that Angleton stressed Lee Harvey Oswald’s Cuban ties so the White House would activate [NORTHWOODS](#), but he presents no evidence besides Castro’s suspicions, which corroborate nothing.

Morley describes the CIA Counterintelligence Staff’s paper “Cuban Control and Action Capabilities”—an assessment of the Castro regime’s counterintelligence apparatus, issued in May 1963—as “one of the most important documents bearing Angleton’s name to ever surface.” Allegedly, the paper “confirms [Angleton’s] leading role in US-Cuba policy in 1963.” The paper’s analysis is, as Morley says, “lucid, historical, and comprehensive.” But he offers no indication that Angleton’s “most ambitious contribution to US policy toward Cuba,” which he “intended . . . to serve as nothing less than the foundation of a new national policy,” had any influence on the Kennedy administration’s deliberations whatsoever.

In addition, Morley’s insinuation that Angleton deliberately withheld the paper from the White House, the National Security Council, and Attorney General Robert Kennedy (the administration’s point man on Cuban affairs) because of “the alienation of the Kennedy White House and US national security agencies in mid-1963” betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the paper’s purpose and intended audience.[\[4\]](#)

The Counterintelligence Staff prepared the assessment, as part of its responsibilities under National Security Council Directive No. 5, to apprise members of the United States Intelligence Board (USIB) and other interested agencies about

important counterintelligence developments in foreign countries. The recipients on the paper's distribution list were the USIB's members and other US departments with equities in Cuban affairs. The White House, the NSC, and the attorney general would not have received it as a standard practice; Angleton did not leave them off as some devious tactic to influence policy behind the scenes or in a show of antagonism toward them.[\[5\]](#)

One of the most fundamental applications of faulty logic underlays Morley's overblown discussion of Angleton's role in the JFK assassination and its aftermath. Morley is not content with a gross misrepresentation, e.g., "An epic counterintelligence failure culminated on Angleton's watch." He goes so far as to contend that Angleton's "preassassination interest in Oswald" indicates his "culpability in the wrongful death of President Kennedy."[\[6\]](#)

For those wholesale claims to be valid, Oswald's CIA file would have had to contain actionable information that he posed a clear threat to the president and that he could have been preempted. But nothing in Oswald's file suggests any plotting against Kennedy before November 22, 1963. To read significance into the slightly more than one dozen random items in the file shows fallacious retrospective wisdom.

Morley's treatment of the information about Oswald that was picked up in the [HT/LINGUAL](#) mail intercept operation—key evidence in his argument about the "epic . . . failure"—also is logically contradictory. The CIA's surveillance dragnet of letters going between the United States and the Soviet Union started in 1952. It soon numbered in the thousands of targets, and Angleton had files created on nearly all of them—a program that made Angleton, according to Morley, "a founding father of US mass-surveillance policies."[\[7\]](#)

Yet, by Morley's logic, Angleton and the Counterintelligence Staff supposedly were, or should have been, preoccupied with one person—Oswald—to the exclusion of everyone else caught up in the sweep. Elsewhere in his discussion of Oswald and the assassination, Morley unskeptically draws on CIA station chief Winston Scott's memoir for details about what the Agency knew of Oswald's doings in Mexico City without noting the errors in it that were pointed out in a publicly available CIA critique.[\[8\]](#)

Morley's indiscriminating use of others' observations reaches a low point of ludicrousness when he quotes, without caveat, former State Department official Thomas Hughes's purely speculative thought that Angleton had the US Navy SIGINT (Signals Intelligence) ship *Liberty* pre-positioned off the Egyptian coast during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war "as a hedge against Israeli battlefield reverses." "The explanations for the *Liberty*'s presence in the area are so totally bizarre that you have to think Angleton was behind it . . . . Who ordered it to go there and why?" Hughes asked. "NSA didn't seem to know. CIA didn't seem to know. [The] State Department certainly never knew. The Pentagon couldn't figure it out." Morley then leaves hanging the preposterous idea that Angleton—who had no such authority—could order a Navy ship repositioned without NSA or the Navy knowing. Angleton later "cooperated" in quelling the outcry against

Israel after it attacked the ship, but Morley does not say how or offer any proof that he did.[\[9\]](#)

Many other argumentative shortcomings of *The Ghost* can be mentioned. Morley asserts that “never was [Angleton] more wrong than in the case of Yuri Nosenko,” yet he never delves into the complexities of that tangled defection case. He does not appear to have actually read Agency counterintelligence officer Tennent H. Bagley’s report arguing for Nosenko’s *male fides* although portions of it have long been declassified.[\[10\]](#)

Former MI5 technical officer Peter Wright, whom critics routinely deride as semi-paranoid, is conveniently accurate and insightful when needed for negative comments about Angleton. White House deputy chief of staff Dick Cheney’s 1975 memo arguing for a presidential commission as a ploy to contain the damage from the “[Family Jewels](#)” disclosures was not nearly as significant as Morley suggests; the [Rockefeller Commission](#) was quickly denounced as a blue-ribbon whitewash. Is Cheney hyped because of his later notoriety?

Morley cites the analysis of the Church Committee’s chief of staff, William Miller, that the political controversies in the mid-1970s over intelligence issues resulted from the clash of two factions: “the King’s Party” and “the Constitutionals.” The polarity—evocative of the Cavaliers and the Roundheads of Cromwellian England—is simplistic and ahistorical, and, courtesy of Miller, comes complete with a Star Wars allusion. Angleton, of course, is Darth Vader. He “embodied the ‘temptation of falling prey to a fascination with the workings of the dark side.’”[\[11\]](#)

Finally, according to Angleton’s former colleague John Hadden, Angleton was guilty of “either treason or incompetence” in his handling of a suspected Israeli theft of nuclear material from a US facility. No alternatives exist? And is a former counterintelligence officer competent to opine on what constitutes treason, which has been defined in federal statute and Supreme Court decisions?[\[12\]](#)

### Bad Sourcing

Throughout *The Ghost*, Morley uses a variety of dubious sources to substantiate key arguments while conveniently ignoring material that reaches different conclusions. He overuses books by Joseph Trento, Michael Holzman, and Tim Weiner, whose scholarship has been heavily criticized. His information about Angleton and the [MK/ULTRA](#) program comes mostly from H. P. Albarelli’s aptly titled book, *A Terrible Mistake*, and John Marks’s *The Search for the “Manchurian Candidate,”* which relies heavily on anonymous interviews.[\[13\]](#)

Morley also draws upon reminiscences without apparently weighing such factors as accuracy, access, timing, or agenda, and he routinely quotes the most fault-finding passages. Alleged connections between Angleton and World War II war criminals, for

example, come mainly from an interview conducted 70 years after the events with an Army intelligence officer who was barely 20 years old at the time.

When facts are not available, Morley recurs to fiction to make his points. The story of Angleton's proposed exploitation of one of actress Greta Garbo's movies for intelligence purposes comes from a novel. An account of Angleton's relationship with an Israeli intelligence (*Shin Bet*) officer is taken from an imagined after-death conversation between the two men. A passage from Norman Mailer's *Harlot's Ghost* indirectly supports the idea that Angleton had some role in John F. Kennedy's death.

References to unsourced blog postings, some of a conspiracist nature, abound, and other citations are bizarre. A lecture by Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, for example, purportedly demonstrates Angleton's extensive involvement with the Agency's covert action office, which was not the case.

It almost goes without saying that Morley ignores reliable sources whenever they contradict his speculations, such as Frank Rafalko's book on [MH/CHAOS](#), or Samuel Halpern's and Hayden Peake's article on who ordered Nosenko's detention (Angleton did not). The same is true of this writer's declassified account of CIA and the JFK assassination, which describes the Agency's role in that event quite differently than what appears in *The Ghost*.[\[14\]](#)

### Numerous Errors

Many easily avoidable factual errors compound the other flaws of *The Ghost*. Every book has some mistakes to be sure, but the sheer quantity and variety in *The Ghost* undermine not only the reliability of Morley's narrative, but a reader's confidence that anything in the book is accurate. To mention only some of them:

- OSS Director William Donovan was not known for "aerial heroics" in World War I; he led an infantry unit.
- Bletchley Park was not an OSS training school.
- According to Morley, Angleton arrived in London in March 1944 amid destruction from the German's V weapons. But the V-1 and V-2 surface-to-surface rockets were not used until June and September, respectively.
- DCI Roscoe Hillenkoetter was not "brought on" to CIA when it was created; he already was there as head of the Agency's predecessor.
- DCI Walter Bedell Smith, not Allen Dulles, merged the Agency's early espionage component, the Office of Special Operations (OSO), with the Agency's covert action element, the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC), to create the Directorate of Plans.
- Angleton had no authority to allow NSA spy Sidney Joseph Petersen, Jr. "to plead guilty and avoid a public trial," nor does Morley's source (an article by historian Cees Wiebes) suggest that.

- The Soviet spy ring called the *Rote Kappelle* operated during World War II, not in the 1920s; Morley confuses it with the Trust deception operation.
- The star-shaped batteries seen in aerial photographs of Cuba in August 1962 were for launching SAMs, not MRBMs.
- The reporting of [GRU Colonel Oleg Penkovsky](#) was not called the “Penkovsky Papers”; his documentary material was codenamed [IRONBARK](#), and reports of his debriefings were labeled [CHICKADEE](#).
- Public Law 110, which allows the CIA to admit up to 100 persons into the United States each year for national security reasons, is not “a secret arrangement”—it is part of the CIA Act of 1949 (specifically, section 7 of 50 US Code section 403h) that established the Agency’s special administrative authorities.
- MH/CHAOS did not—could not—“spy on and infiltrate the entire antiwar movement.”
- Nosenko was not given LSD during his detention. Administering it and truth serum was discussed, but DCI Helms refused to authorize using either.
- Former KGB officer Igor Orlov was not “blameless” of spying against the United States. He was a penetration of the CIA in the 1950s but was inactive when the FBI surveilled him as part of Angleton’s molehunt in the 1960s. The fact that he was never caught doing anything operational is irrelevant to his earlier espionage.
- KGB officer Yuri Loginov was not executed by a firing squad after Angleton arranged for his turnover to the Soviets (see Tom Mangold’s interview with Oleg Gordievsky in *Cold Warrior*).[\[15\]](#)

### Sensationalist Style

Morley tells his Angleton tale in a succession of relatively short, almost impressionistic paragraphs and terse sentences with lots of brief, loaded segues or section endings. Many irrelevant passages are seemingly dropped in for some atmospheric or contextual effect, e.g., citing Hunter Thompson to make a point about Americans’ political mood in the early 1960s. *The Ghost* is also chock full of overstatements, hit-and-run allegations (often couched with “probably,” “might have,” “possibly,” and “perhaps”), and profound-sounding but lurid, unsubstantiated observations. Here are just a handful of them:

- “Angleton had become a lethal man.”
- “Imbued with fascist sympathies and anti-Communist passion, Angleton channeled his convictions into Anglo-American hegemonic ambition.”
- “With this apparatus, Angleton would move the world.”
- “. . . Angleton and [American labor official Jay] Lovestone effectively controlled what American labor unions had to say about US foreign policy.”
- “Then his power became unparalleled.”
- “By the mid-1960s, Angleton reigned as the Machiavelli of the new American national security state, a thinker and strategist of ruthless clarity.”

- “Angleton was a man unbound. His empire now stretched from Mexico City to London to Rome to Jerusalem.”
- “Angleton was a ghoul, a specter who showed up around the time of death.”[\[16\]](#)

And, in a closing farrago:

[Angleton] was an ingenious, vicious, mendacious, obsessive, and brilliant man who acted with impunity as he sought to expand the Anglo-American-Israeli sphere of influence after the end of World War II. Like his friend Ezra Pound, his mastery was sometimes indistinguishable from his madness. He was indeed a combination of Machiavelli, Svengali, and Iago. He was an intellectual, charming, and sinister. In retirement, at last, he was harmless.[\[17\]](#)

### Still a Gap

As this writer has noted elsewhere, historians and journalists have produced what seems in overview to be a workable bibliography on Angleton, but, including publication of *The Ghost*, significant gaps remain. The literature on him still shows flaws in scholarship, distorted focus, and a propensity to either rationalize or, more often, demonize Angleton without sufficiently understanding him as a historical actor who was shaped by and, in turn, shaped events.[\[18\]](#)

Morley’s use of the JFK [Assassination Records Collection](#) at the National Archives, along with his interviews with Angleton’s family and associates, add a small measure of insight. Yet the conundrum of Angleton’s life and career remains. As one scholar of Angleton has written with only mild exaggeration, “One could ask a hundred people about [him] and receive a hundred lightly shaded different replies that ranged from utter denunciation to unadulterated hero worship. That the positions could occupy these extremes spoke of the significance and the ambiguity of the role he had played.”[\[19\]](#)

Angleton is perhaps the CIA’s most compelling and misrepresented figure, and until still unrevealed information about him and the Counterintelligence Staff becomes available, he will continue to be to history the enigma he fashioned himself to be in life.

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## Washington Decoded

[1] “[James Angleton: 7 Types of Ambiguity](#),” [brainsturbator.com](#), cited in Morley, *Ghost*, 70. Morley describes the anonymous brainsturbator.com blogger as a “CIA watcher.” The outlandish quote from the blog asserted that as chief of the Counterintelligence Staff, Angleton became “a ghost in the system, wired into the center of a Panopticon rendered in paperwork. He operated ahead of the conventional intel process, monitored all internal communications, and used a vast network extending far outside the official CIA to keep tabs on the entire Langley establishment. From raw SIGINT to Special Operations, Angleton was an invisible supervisor.”

[2] Morley, *Ghost*, 54, 59, 61, 101.

[3] Morley, *Ghost*, 129.

[4] Morley, *Ghost*, 128, 130.

[5] National Security Council Intelligence Directive No. 5, “US Espionage and Counterintelligence Activities Abroad,” 18 January 1961 revision. The directive states that the Counterintelligence Staff, “in consultation with the US Intelligence Board and other interested departments and agencies . . . shall develop appropriate policy recommendations for National Security Council consideration with respect to the overall US counterintelligence effort conducted outside the US and its possessions.”

[6] Morley, *Ghost*, 141, 239.

[7] Morley, *Ghost*, 261.

[8] “[Comments on Chapter XXI of Winfield \[sic\] Scott’s Manuscript \(Draft\) ‘It Came To Little](#),” JFK Assassination Records, National Archives, document identification number [1993.07.21.19:54:08:930590](#).

[9] Morley, *Ghost*, 182, 183.

[10] Morley, *Ghost*, 159; “[The Examination of the Bona Fides of a KGB Defector: Yuriy I. Nosenko](#),” February 1968, JFK Assassination Records, National Archives, document record number [104-10210-10021](#).

[11] Morley, *Ghost*, 244-245.

[12] Morley, *Ghost*, 262.

[13] Joseph J. Trento, [The Secret History of the CIA](#) (Roseville, CA: Prima, 2001); Michael H. Holzman, [James Jesus Angleton, the CIA, and the Craft of Intelligence](#) (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008); H. P. Albarelli, [A Terrible Mistake: The Murder of Frank Olson and the CIA’s Secret Cold War Experiments](#) (Walterville, OR: Trine Day, 2009); John Marks, [The Search for the “Manchurian Candidate”: The CIA and Mind Control](#) (New York: Times Books, 1979). See, for example, these two

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reviews of Weiner's book: Nicholas Dujmovic, "[Review of \*Legacy of Ashes: The History of CIA\*](#)," *Studies in Intelligence*, Volume 51, Number 3 (2007), and Jeffrey T. Richelson, "[Sins of Omission and Commission](#)," *Washington Decoded*, 11 September 2007.

[14] Frank J. Rafalko, [MH/CHAOS: The CIA's Campaign Against the Radical New Left and the Black Panthers](#) (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2011); Samuel Halpern and Hayden Peake, "[Did Angleton Jail Nosenko?](#)" *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence*, Volume 3, Number 4 (Winter 1989), 451-464; David Robarge, [John McCone As Director of Central Intelligence, 1961-1965](#) (Washington, DC: CIA History Staff, 2005; declassified in 2015), 331-350.

[15] Morley, *Ghost*, 15, 17-18, 35, 54, 105, 109, 113, 160, 186, 187, 188, 189, 239. Cees Wiebes, "[Operation 'Piet': The Joseph Sidney Petersen Jr. Spy Case, a Dutch 'Mole' Inside the National Security Agency](#)," *Intelligence and National Security*, Volume 23, Number 4 (August 2008), 488-535; Tom Mangold, [Cold Warrior: James Jesus Angleton, The CIA's Master Spy Hunter](#) (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 225-226.

[16] Morley, *Ghost*, 20, 27, 73, 75, 76, 158, 171, 212.

[17] Morley, *Ghost*, 266.

[18] David Robarge, "['Cunning Passages, Contrived Corridors': Wandering in the Angletonian Wilderness](#)," *Studies in Intelligence*, Volume 53, Number 4 (December 2009), 49-61.

[19] Robin W. Winks, [Cloak and Gown: Scholars in the Secret War, 1939-1961](#) (New York: William Morrow, 1987), 437.