

J. Robert Oppenheimer:

A Spy? No. But a Communist Once? Yes.

By John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr

The relationship of physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer to communism and Soviet espionage has been controversial subject since 1954, when the decision of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) to decline renewal of his security clearance put the issue firmly into the public arena. Journalists and historians addressed the issue repeatedly in the decades that followed. Nothing fueled the liberal/left critique of the so-called “national security state” more than the supposed excesses of the US government in the Oppenheimer case, save the cases involving [Alger Hiss](#) and the [Rosenbergs](#).^[1]

But while the emotional level, even shrillness, of the debate continued, the substance of the argument became increasingly stale and repetitive; there was little new evidence to clarify the ambiguities of the matter. In the last two decades, however, new evidence has emerged that, while not resolving all ambiguities and still leaving a number of details unclear, nonetheless allows confident answers to the question of whether Robert Oppenheimer was a Communist and a spy. It demonstrates that he had, indeed, been a Communist but had not been a spy.

We addressed the issue of Oppenheimer’s involvement in Soviet espionage in “[Special Tasks and Sacred Secrets on Soviet Atomic Espionage](#),” which critiqued and rejected the claims in books written by former KGB officer Pavel Sudoplatov and journalists Jerrold and Leona Schecter that Oppenheimer consciously assisted Soviet espionage and did so in a substantial way. This essay reviews the evidence indicating that Oppenheimer was a secret member of the Communist Party, USA (CPUSA), joining at some point in the late 1930s and actively participating in a secret Party faculty unit at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1939, 1940, and 1941. Secondly, it critiques the conclusion of Oppenheimer biographers Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin that he was never a Communist. Finally, it discusses the evidence indicating that in early 1942 he quietly left the Party, coinciding with, and likely connected to, his formal recruitment into the Manhattan atomic bomb project.^[2]

Oppenheimer and the CPUSA

[*Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*](#), summarized the state-of-the evidence in 1999 regarding Oppenheimer's relationship to the Communist movement:

In the postwar period he [Oppenheimer] came under suspicion when it was realized that the Manhattan Project has been penetrated by Soviet intelligence. The basis of the suspicion rested on Oppenheimer's background, ambiguous conduct, and reticence. He had been an ardent Popular Front liberal and ally of the Communist Party, from the late 1930s and until early 1942, the latter date indicating that his attachment to the Communist cause was strong enough to withstand the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939. Over that period Oppenheimer had given generous monetary contributions to the CPUSA, and he had often delivered the contributions to Isaac Folkoff, a senior leader of the California Communist Party who also functioned as the Party's West Coast liaison with the KGB. Further, until shortly before joining the Manhattan Project, Oppenheimer had socialized with Steve Nelson, the director Communist Party activity in the San Francisco Bay area, a leading figure in the CPUSA covert apparatus on the West Coast, and, like Folkoff, a Party contact with the KGB.

Oppenheimer's younger brother Frank and Frank's wife were concealed Communist Party members. Frank vehemently denied Communist Party membership until 1949. He then admitted he had joined the Party in 1937 and remained a member until 1941. Robert's own wife, Katherine, had been a Communist and married to Joseph Dallet, a full-time functionary of the Communist Party who had died while serving as a Communist political commissar with the International Brigades in the Spanish Civil War. . . .

Looking back on the evidence, Oppenheimer's ties to the Communist Party up through 1941 were very strong. He was not simply a casual Popular Front liberal who ignorantly bumped up against the Party in some of the arenas in which it operated. . . . Throughout his life Oppenheimer declined to provide a detailed or accurate accounting of his relationship with the CPUSA in the late 1930s and early 1940s [\[3\]](#)

In private conversations with security officers and later in public statements, Oppenheimer admitted his political and financial support for Communist-backed causes in the late 1930s and his social relationship with various Communists. While admitting in 1954 to generous contributions to CPUSA official Isaac Folkoff, he said the funds were not for the CPUSA itself but for various causes supported by the Party such as Spanish Civil War veterans and unionization of farm workers. He explained, "I doubt that it occurred to me that the contributions might be directed to other purposes than those I had intended, or that such purposes might be evil. I did not then regard Communists as dangerous; and some of their declared objectives seemed to me desirable." He also

emphatically denied under oath Party membership or any covert participation in Communist Party meetings or activities.^[4]

Even prior to 1999 several sources contradicted Oppenheimer's denials of direct CPUSA links. In December 1943 FBI listening devices picked up a conversation between Steve Nelson, chief of the CPUSA in the San Francisco Bay area, and Bernadette Doyle, organizational secretary of the CPUSA's branch in Alameda County, which included Berkeley where Oppenheimer lived. Nelson and Doyle spoke of both Oppenheimer brothers as CPUSA members, but Nelson mentioned that Robert had become inactive. (That Frank was not characterized similarly along with some other evidence throws doubt on Frank Oppenheimer's claim that he dropped out of the CPUSA at the end of 1941.) Nor was this the only time FBI surveillance picked up such incriminating information. Earlier in 1940 a wiretap of the phone of Isaac Folkoff alerted the FBI to a private meeting of senior Communists at Haakon Chevalier's home. Follow-up FBI surveillance noted that Oppenheimer's car was parked outside the meeting place. In 1945 the Bureau tapped a meeting of the Executive Committee of the North Oakland Communist Club, at which one Party official, Katrina Sandow, stated that Oppenheimer was a Communist Party member and another official, Jack Manley, boasted that he had been "close to Oppenheimer," whom he called "one of our men." Lastly, an undated FBI report, sourced only to informant "T-2" identified Oppenheimer as belonging to a secret Communist Party professional section.^[5]

Another source that contradicted Oppenheimer's denial was Paul Crouch, an ex-Communist official on the payroll of the California (state) Senate Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities who in 1950 testified that he had seen Oppenheimer at a meeting of a Party professional section in July or August 1941 at a house in Berkeley. When Crouch identified the house where he thought the meeting had taken place, it turned out to be a residence where Oppenheimer had lived for a time in 1941. He also accurately described the interior. Sylvia Crouch backed up her husband's story. Oppenheimer, however, denied there had ever been such a meeting at his house or that he had attended a Party meeting elsewhere and said he was in New Mexico at the time. The FBI was never able to verify Crouch's story or Oppenheimer's alibi one way or another. Oppenheimer had been in New Mexico in that period, but several days were not accounted for. Since Crouch had not been able to provide an exact date, it was possible that Oppenheimer could have driven back to Berkeley for a meeting.^[6]

Our 1999 appraisal was that Oppenheimer had "strong ties" rather than casual ones to the CPUSA and had not been candid about his relationship, but we thought the evidence was not sufficient to confidently say he had been a Party member. Subsequent evidence, however, has established firmly both his Party membership and covert participation in Party activities. This post-1999 evidence regarding Robert Oppenheimer's relationship to the CPUSA has been thoroughly examined in Gregg Herken's 2002 book, *Brotherhood of the Bomb: The Tangled Lives and Loyalties of Robert Oppenheimer, Ernest Lawrence, and Edward Teller*, supplemented by his website brotherhoodofthebomb.com, and a 2009 essay, "[Target Enormoz](#)" in the *Journal of Cold War Studies*.^[7]

Herken details and documents Oppenheimer's introduction (via girl friend Jean Tatlock) to CPUSA circles in the San Francisco Bay area in the late 1930s, and his close friendship with Haakon Chevalier, a professor of French literature and active Communist. Chevalier's private writings and correspondence describe Oppenheimer and himself as members of "a 'closed unit' of the Communist Party" at the University of California, Berkeley. They also provide evidence that Oppenheimer not only largely wrote two 1940 pamphlets circulated by the "College Faculties Committee, Communist Party of California," but also paid for their printing and distribution.

Herken also noted that the prominent physicist Philip Morrison, who had been Oppenheimer's doctoral student and a young Communist, remembered Oppenheimer as the author of another Party-line pamphlet (defending the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939), and stated that he, Morrison, had delivered it to the printer for Oppenheimer, who also paid for its distribution. David Hawkins, a young Communist and philosophy graduate student, while agnostic on Oppenheimer's Party membership, confirmed that the Young Communist graduate student and junior faculty group he belonged to, which included other Oppenheimer students, met in secret at various private homes, including the Oppenheimer home.[\[8\]](#)

After the publication of his book, Herken added additional evidence on the website devoted to his book. Barbara Chevalier, Haakon's widow, had allowed Herken to read her private journal and memoir, in which she confirmed that both her husband and Oppenheimer had been members of a closed CPUSA unit and "Oppie's [Oppenheimer's] membership in a closed unit was very secret indeed." However, she asked Herken not to disclose the information during her lifetime, and he did not until after her death in 2003.[\[9\]](#)

Second, Herken cited the historian Gordon Griffiths's unpublished memoir that included a restored section dealing with his activities from 1940 to 1942 at the University of California, Berkeley as a graduate student in history and a young Communist. Griffiths wrote that a Party officer assigned him to:

perform a useful function for the Party in a role that involved little or no risk of exposure. This was to serve as liaison with the Faculty group at the University of California. I acted in that capacity for the rest of my period of graduate studies at Berkeley, that is, from I believe the Fall of 1940 until the Spring of 1942.

Of the several hundred members of the faculty at Berkeley three were members of the communist group. The oldest was Arthur Brodeur, an authority on Icelandic sagas and Beowulf of the English Department. The other two were Haakon Chevalier of the French Department and Robert Oppenheimer of Physics. . . .

The faculty Communist group met regularly, to the best of my recollection, twice a month, in the evening at Chevalier's or Oppenheimer's house. I brought Party literature, and collected dues from

Brodeur and Chevalier. I was given to understand that Oppenheimer, as a man of independent wealth, made his contribution through some special channel. Nobody carried a Party card. If payment of dues was the only test of membership, I could not testify that Oppenheimer was a member, but I can say, without any qualification, that all three men considered themselves to be Communists.

. . . The most important activity of the faculty group was the publication of an occasional “Report to Our Colleagues.” It offered a Communist view of some current issue. Free of jargon, these letters were stylistically elegant and intellectually cogent. There were avowedly written by Communist members of the faculty, but unsigned. They were printed on expensive bond, no doubt paid for by ‘Oppie.’ He was not their sole author, but he took special pride in them.[\[10\]](#)

In 1999, the Russian atomic energy program began publication of a documentary history of the development of the Soviet atomic program. One volume reproduced a Soviet intelligence document—dated no later than January 1946, and entitled, “The State of Development of the Problem of Using Atomic Energy in the Capitalist Countries”—that listed leading American and British scientists involved in atomic research. The entry for Robert Oppenheimer described him as “a not publicly acknowledged member of the American Communist Party.”[\[11\]](#)

The final items of evidence of Oppenheimer’s CPUSA membership are references in KGB archival documents dealing with its atomic intelligence effort in World War II where Oppenheimer is identified as a candidate for recruitment as an intelligence source largely on the basis of his Communist Party membership. Quotations from the documents first appeared in Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev’s 1999 book, *The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America—The Stalin Era*, but the underlying sources, Vassiliev’s notebooks with 1,115 pages of extracts and summaries of KGB archival documents did not become public until the notebooks were acquired by the Library of Congress in 2009 and were the basis of our book, coauthored by Vassiliev, *Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America*.[\[12\]](#)

The notebooks include a Moscow Center report on atomic intelligence in February 1944 that states:

we should consider it essential to cultivate the following people: ‘Chester’— Robert Oppenheimer, b. 1906, an Amer[ican] Jew, secret member of the fellowcountryman org[anization CPUSA] . . . In view of the special significance and importance of the work he does, he is supposedly kept under special security, and as a result the fellowcountryman organization received orders from its center to break off relations with ‘Ch.’ to avoid his exposure.

. . . The fact that he is a fellowcountryman, as well as his friendly attitude towards our country, gives us reason to expect that his cultivation will yield positive results. (“Fellowcountryman” was a KGB term for a local Communist).[\[13\]](#)

Similarly, a Moscow KGB headquarters review of technical intelligence in the western United States, prepared after the August 1944 return to Moscow of Grigory Kheifets, chief of the San Francisco KGB station since 1940, noted that one of the “leads” pursued

in 1943-1944 was “Robert Oppenheimer, a US cit[izen], born 1906, a secret fellowcountryman.” Another reference to Oppenheimer’s Communist membership was in a November 1944 directive from the KGB headquarters in Moscow to Leonid Kvasnikov, just appointed to oversee scientific/technical intelligence at the KGB station operating from the Soviet consulate in New York City. The directive focused on atomic intelligence and pointed to a number of candidates for recruitment. One was “Robert Oppenheimer, an Amer[ican] Jew, a secret member of the fraternal, works in camp ‘y’ on the development of the atomic bomb.” (“The fraternal” was another term in KGB communications for a local Communist Party and “camp y” was the designation for the Manhattan Project’s Los Alamos facility).[\[14\]](#)

Taken in total, this evidence convincingly indicates that Robert Oppenheimer joined the CPUSA in the late 1930s. Exactly when he joined is not clear. Certainly by 1939 he was active in the secret Communist faculty unit at the University of California, Berkeley, remained so in 1940 and into 1941, and actively participated in public Party-related activity through the end of 1941. A corollary of this evidence is that Oppenheimer repeatedly perjured himself on government security forms he signed, in statements to security officials and his colleagues, and under oath in testimony to the AEC.

The Bird and Sherwin Version

While the evidence of Oppenheimer’s adherence to the Communist Party is robust and voluminous, not every one accepts it. In their 2005 Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, *American Prometheus*, Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin had access to virtually all of this evidence (with the notable exception of Alexander Vassiliev’s notebooks, which only became public in 2009). Yet they firmly maintain that he was not a Communist Party member. In Bird and Sherwin’s view, Oppenheimer was: “a left wing New Dealer. . . . [A] classic fellow-traveling New Deal progressive who admired the Communist Party’s opposition to fascism in Europe, and its championing of labor rights at home.”[\[15\]](#)

How do they justify this view in light of the evidence summarized above? First, they split hairs, insisting that Oppenheimer “did not have a Party card” and was never a “formal, card-carrying member” of the CPUSA. The CPUSA did issue cards to ordinary Party members. But in the mid-1930s the Party’s membership expanded beyond its traditional immigrant, working-class base to include thousands of middle-class

professionals and intellectuals. The Party valued the increase in influence these professionals brought to the movement and realized that their position in society would be jeopardized by disclosure of their secret membership in the CPUSA. It responded by creating small secret Party units for professionals.

Unlike regular members, those in the professional sections were exempted from the usual Party requirements of doing what was called “Jimmy Higgins” work: selling the *Daily Worker* and other Party publications on street corners, holding picket or protest signs at Party-backed demonstrations, packing public meetings to cheer or shout abuse as required, and other such tasks that allowed the CPUSA to field more activists than much larger left/liberal movements that made less exacting demands on its members. As a security measure to reduce the chances of exposure, these professional sections rarely issued Party cards, unless a member insisted on having one out of personal pride. Gordon Griffiths stated that “nobody carried a Party card” in the Berkeley faculty Communist unit when he and Oppenheimer were active in it. Bird and Sherwin even quote Griffiths’s comment but insist that having a Party card was an essential element of being a CPUSA member. It wasn’t. To take that position leaves one in the silly stance of pretending that many thousands of Communist professionals who participated in the Party in the 1930s and 1940s through its professional sections weren’t really Communists.

The CPUSA also maintained secret Party membership lists. Names of members in the professional sections were also kept in more secure locations than the lists of regular Party units. Even ordinary members, however, were sometimes listed on a membership list under a pseudonymous Party name. Members of the professional sections, however, were almost always listed under a Party name or even a code of some sort. When he first joined the CPUSA in 1937 Frank Oppenheimer used the Party name of Frank Folsom. At some point in 1946 or 1947 the FBI obtained from “a highly confidential and reliable source,” the financial records of the San Francisco Bay area Communist Party. The FBI phraseology “a highly confidential and reliable source” likely meant a surreptitious entry without a search warrant by FBI agents into the office or home where the CPUSA records were hidden (an illegal burglary to the FBI’s critics). The records detail contributions from Party members X-1 and X-2, and it seems clear from what is said about them that these are references to the Oppenheimer brothers—Robert as X-1 and Frank as X-2.

Bird and Sherwin accept that X-1 and X-2 were the Oppenheimer brothers. They do not, however, regard the contributions as evidence of Robert Oppenheimer’s Party membership. They simply assert that the generous contributions Oppenheimer (X-1) made to the Party, \$1,800 a year (the equivalent of more than \$27,000 today) were as he said, contributions for social justice causes. Bird and Sherwin insist “he did not pay dues,” and was, thus, not a Party member. They do not, however, insist that his brother’s funds (X-2) were nothing more than generosity to liberal causes. Since Frank had publicly admitted to being a CPUSA member, they accept that he was a Communist. That Party records treated X-1 and X-2 alike goes unmentioned.[\[16\]](#)

In his discussion of the Berkeley Communist faculty unit, Griffiths stated that he, “collected dues from Brodeur and Chevalier. I was given to understand that

Oppenheimer, as a man of independent wealth, made his contribution through some special channel.” Bird and Sherwin even quote Chevalier making the same point:

According to Chevalier, who spoke with Martin Sherwin at length and in detail, each member of this alleged “closed unit” paid dues to the Communist Party—except for Oppenheimer. “Oppenheimer paid his separately,” Chevalier speculated, “because he probably paid a lot more than he was supposed to.”

Triumphantly, Bird and Sherwin declare this to mean: “as Robert always insisted, he made contributions to causes, but never paid dues at all.”[\[17\]](#)

Bird and Sherwin’s view that dues payments narrowly defined are, like the physical Party card, an essential technical element of Party membership is wrong. Not even the CPUSA thought that. For example, in August 1939 a senior CPUSA official gave a report to the Communist International in Moscow on the organizational status of the CPUSA. He presented three measures of membership. The largest, 88,000, were “enrolled” members. These were persons who had joined the CPUSA and were carried on its membership rolls. The next largest, 66,000, were “registered” members. These were persons who had in that year newly registered or reregistered with a local Party unit. The final figure, 46,000, was “dues-paying” members. Whether you paid dues, annually registered with a local Party unit, or had enrolled in the Party the previous few years, you were a Communist in the eyes of the CPUSA. The Party regarded all three definitions as definitions of membership, just different degrees of current participation.

The Communist Party certainly wanted and encouraged members to pay dues and dunned those who did not. But that was because it needed the money. It was not an essential element of membership. And in Oppenheimer’s case, his generous contributions were so far beyond the Party’s regular dues, insisting that he also pay regular dues would have been stupidly insulting to a highly generous contributor and member.

In addition to pettifoggery over Party cards and hairsplitting over contributions versus dues, Bird and Sherwin define the statements of Chevalier and Griffiths that they knew Oppenheimer as a Communist and the FBI’s wiretaps of CPUSA officials referring to him as a Communist as cases of mistaken identity. Acknowledging that most of his family, friends, and political associates were Communists, they write:

Moving in such circles, he inevitably left the impression with many of his friends who were formal Party members that he was one of them. Robert, after all, wanted to be liked and he certainly believed in the social justice goals the Party espoused and worked for. His friends could think what they wanted. Not surprisingly, some in the Party did think he was a comrade. And naturally, when the FBI used wiretaps to monitor the conversations of these people talking about Oppenheimer, they heard bona fide Party members discuss him as one of their own.[\[18\]](#)

In addition to Oppenheimer fooling friends, associates and both the chief of the Bay area CPUSA and the organizational secretary of the local Party organization, Bird and Sherwin suggest that Oppenheimer may have briefly *fooled himself* into thinking he was a Communist, writing, “for a brief time, he may well have thought of himself as an unaffiliated comrade.” That, however, was evidently an error Oppenheimer quickly got over, and Bird and Sherwin go on to make Oppenheimer’s Party membership a matter of his mental state, and, reading his mind, they declare him not a member:

Were all members of the Berkeley “discussion group” also members of the CP? Apparently, Chevalier believed they were; Oppenheimer insisted that he, at least, was not. He would fund specific causes through the CP—the Spanish Republic, farm workers, civil rights and consumer protection. He would attend meetings, offer his advice and even help the Party’s intellectuals write position papers. But he did not have a Party card, he did not pay dues, he was totally free of Party discipline. His friends might have had reasons to think he was a comrade, but it was clear to him that he was not.^[19]

In the passage above and else where Bird and Sherwin state repeatedly that Oppenheimer was not under CPUSA “discipline” and did not take Party “orders,” stating, “most importantly, there is no evidence that he ever submitted himself to Party discipline.” Chevalier’s troublesome claim that he and Oppenheimer were part of a “closed” (secret) Communist faculty unit, prompted Sherwin to seek some way around the problem during an interview:

When Sherwin pressed him again, “Did you receive any orders from the Party?” Chevalier said, “No. In a sense we weren’t [regular Party members].” At the time he explained, it was possible for men like himself and Oppenheimer to think of themselves as politically committed intellectuals who were nevertheless free from Party discipline. Members of this group contributed money to the Party’s causes; they gave speeches at Party-sponsored events; and they drafted articles and pamphlets for Party publications. And yet, explained Chevalier, “We both were and were not. *Any way you want to look at it.*”^[20]

The way Bird and Sherwin want to look at it, of course, is that Oppenheimer was not a Party member.

As for the matter of “discipline,” they write as if that had some technical meaning and Oppenheimer didn’t fit the criteria. While that term is often found in literature on the CPUSA, it doesn’t have a particular meaning. It is just a way of referring to the expectation that Party members would attempt to carry out Party instructions. Many tried, but few lived up to the Bolshevik model of the perfect Party militant, and some didn’t bother to try at all. Valuable members in the professional sections of the Party were not expected to act like working-class militants manning a picket line. Nor did these professionals get “orders from the Party” to undertake such wastes of their talent and

influential positions. Instead, they were expected to do exactly what Bird and Sherwin allow that Chevalier and Oppenheimer did: “contributed money to the Party’s causes; they gave speeches at Party-sponsored events; and they drafted articles and pamphlets for Party publications.” Finally, and very significantly, they supported the Party’s position on controversial matters of the day such as the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Soviet invasion of Finland.

Oppenheimer’s role in writing several of the 1940 publications issued by the “College Faculties Committee, Communist Party of California” caused Bird and Sherwin considerable difficulty and resulted in their presenting a historical misreading of these pamphlets. Chevalier recalled Oppenheimer as the chief author and financier for their printing and distribution. Griffiths also thought that Oppenheimer paid for them and noted that “he was not their sole author, but he took special pride in them.” Philip Morrison also remembered Oppenheimer as the author of a Party pamphlet defending the Soviet invasion of Finland in 1939 and said that he also paid for the printing and distribution. Bird and Sherwin dismiss Morrison’s evidence because the actual pamphlet has not survived. As for the others, they ignore Griffiths and write,

Chevalier’s claim is too thin a reed on which to rely for a positive identification of Oppenheimer as the author of the pamphlet, but it does suggest that Robert might have had a hand in editing a draft of it. [\[21\]](#)

Notice that this is a reference to only one of the two pamphlets that have survived. Bird and Sherwin seek to treat those pamphlets separately.

They allow that the 20 February 1940 pamphlet may have had some Oppenheimer input, but, Bird and Sherwin insist, that it was “more than anything else, a defense of the New Deal and its domestic social programs.” This is a complete misreading of the pamphlet. By this point in early 1940 President Roosevelt had aligned America firmly with Great Britain, France, and those other nations fighting Nazi Germany. He had also begun the first steps toward American military mobilization. Meanwhile, the CPUSA had dropped its former support for America joining an international alliance against fascism and for American rearmament. In accordance with the Nazi-Soviet Pact, the CPUSA attacked any assistance to Britain or France and depicted any American military preparation as a cynical roll-back of New Deal domestic programs. Aside from its sophisticated writing style, the February pamphlet is straight-forward and typical Communist propaganda, presenting the Party line of the Nazi-Soviet Pact period.[\[22\]](#)

The second surviving pamphlet, from 6 April, continues exactly the same theme, attacking FDR’s mild, even timid initial war mobilization measures in exaggerated terms as an assault on the common people and depicting FDR himself as a “reactionary” and “war monger.” These latter remarks are a major problem for Bird and Sherwin because they insist that Oppenheimer was an ardent New Dealer and FDR loyalist rather than a Communist. Seeking to distance Oppenheimer from the remarks, they write:

If Oppenheimer had anything to do with this second pamphlet, his rational style had abandoned him. Is it possible that he really thought of Roosevelt as a “war-monger”? . . . If Oppenheimer had something to do with drafting these pamphlets, his words reveal someone primarily worried about the impact on domestic politics of a world teetering on the brink of a great disaster.[\[23\]](#)

Distancing Oppenheimer from authorship of this pamphlet flies in the face of two independent witnesses, Chevalier and Griffiths, who gave him the key role, corroborated by a third witness, Morrison, who credited Oppenheimer with the key role in penning another typical Nazi-Soviet Pact period pamphlet. To depict this 6 April pamphlet as about “domestic politics” is to thoroughly misunderstand the propaganda slant the CPUSA gave its Nazi-Soviet Pact period assault on Roosevelt’s alignment of the United States with the anti-Nazi belligerents and its tentative rearmament.

Historical judgment is not based on casuistic hairsplitting, mind-reading, or explaining away troublesome evidence. It must be based on a common sense evaluation of the weight of the evidence and documentation. In a sensible test attributed to the poet James Whitcomb Riley, “when I see a bird that walks like a duck and swims like a duck and quacks like a duck, I call that bird a duck.” By that test Oppenheimer was a Communist in the last years of the 1930s and into early 1942. It is ironic that from among all the books written about Oppenheimer, the one that won the Pulitzer Prize is so lacking in accuracy and integrity on this critical point.

It’s notable that Kai Bird, one of the authors of this willful misreading of the ample evidence of Oppenheimer’s Communist Party membership, was also the co-author of an [essay](#) that used embarrassingly *weak* evidence to smear Wilder Foote, an aide to Secretary of State Edward Stettinius. In that opposite exercise, the goal was to suggest Foote was the Soviet spy with the code name “Ales” in order to divert attention from [Alger Hiss](#), the real name behind “Ales.”[\[24\]](#)

Let us add, however, that at least Bird and Sherwin attempted to deal with the evidence against Oppenheimer by dissembling it. Other Oppenheimer scribes (apart from Herken, of course) have essentially disregarded it. Jeremy Bernstein’s 2004 *Oppenheimer* simply waved away the evidence of the physicist’s Party links and bluntly stated, “I believe Oppenheimer . . .” David Cassidy’s 2005 *J. Robert Oppenheimer* noted the evidence but, without confronting it, judged that “there is so far no conclusive evidence that Oppenheimer was ever [a] member of the Communist Party.” Jennet Conant’s 2005 *109 East Palace* never addressed the matter of the Berkeley faculty CP unit and, while describing security officials’ suspicions about Oppenheimer, dismissed the whole matter via a reference to his “earlier dabbings in left-wing politics.” Priscilla McMillan, in her 2005 *The Ruin of J. Robert Oppenheimer*, was decidedly ambiguous in her treatment of the evidence, but seemed to come down on the side of his having been only a fellow traveler. Abraham Pais’s 2006 *J. Robert Oppenheimer* was not so much ambiguous as confused, and failed to even note Gordon Griffiths’s memoir, open for research since 2004. While Pais shunned an explicit stand, he appeared to see Oppenheimer as never

having been a Party member. Charles Thorpe's 2006 *Oppenheimer* also missed the Griffiths memoir and avoided any detailed discussion of the other evidence; nevertheless Thorpe asserted "there is no conclusive or firm evidence that Oppenheimer ever joined the Communist Party." Only Herken's *Brotherhood of the Bomb* thoroughly explored the evidence and accurately judged that Oppenheimer had been a Party member in the late 1930s and into 1941. That only one of these eight biographies of Oppenheimer accurately assessed his relationship to the CPUSA reinforces the themes we discussed in our 2003 book *In Denial: Historians, Communism and Espionage*. By and large, American scholars and historians cannot bring themselves to write dispassionately about the elephant in the room, domestic communism, anticommunism, and Soviet espionage.^[25]

In addition to Herken, we should note one other scholar who has taken a realistic and scholarly approach to the evidence. Barton J. Bernstein never wrote an Oppenheimer biography, but in the 1980s and 1990s he published several detailed studies of the 1954 hearing that addressed the Party membership issue, coming down on the side of Oppenheimer's not having been a member, although allowing for some ambiguity in the question. In a 2004 conference paper published in 2005, however, Bernstein reassessed the matter in detail in light of the new evidence that had appeared since the mid-'90s. In the process he moved a considerable distance. His rejection of the Bird/Sherwin depiction of Oppenheimer's relationship to the CPUSA was thorough. Bernstein made then many of the same points we make now about the weak analysis and special pleading in the Bird/Sherwin narrative. Bernstein noted, for example, that

further adding to interpretive problems, Bird and Sherwin seek—but unsuccessfully—to establish that Oppenheimer in November 1940 was a strong FDR supporter. Their single source, a biography of Ernest Lawrence, does not state, contrary to their assertions, that Oppenheimer strongly endorsed Roosevelt. Indeed, that biography is not even clear on whether Oppenheimer supported FDR in the November 1940 election—and that may be an additional key weakness in the Bird/Sherwin argument about Oppenheimer's politics in 1940.

Bernstein concluded, "It seems most reasonable to acknowledge that the evidence leans heavily in the direction that Oppenheimer was a CP member, but that any contention that he was definitely a member is excessive and any conclusion that he definitely was not is also excessive."^[26]

Oppenheimer Drops Out

The evidence also indicates that in 1942 Oppenheimer dropped out of the Communist Party. Because Oppenheimer's membership in the CPUSA was secret, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when he joined and to say exactly when he left. The Bay area CPUSA financial records the FBI obtained showed that Robert (professor X-1) ceased his

financial contributions to the CPUSA in April 1942 but Frank (identified as X-1's brother and having the initials "F.O.") continued until October.[\[27\]](#)

The February 1944 KGB report quoted above refers to the CPUSA headquarters instructing its Bay area unit to cease contact with Oppenheimer. Perhaps it did, but the FBI's intercepted phone conversation of December 1943 between Nelson, chief of the CPUSA in the Bay area, and Doyle, CPUSA organizational secretary, did not reflect any such order and suggested that Robert's inactivity was at his initiative. An FBI transcript (discussed below) of a March 1943 conversation between Nelson and Joseph Weinberg, also implied that the initiative was Oppenheimer's.

Because Oppenheimer never provided a candid account of his role in the Communist Party, we have little to go on about what motivated his abandonment of communism. He could have dropped out in 1942 for opportunistic professional reasons in order to make it easier to participate in the Manhattan Project. Repeatedly in 1940 and 1941, his friend and colleague Ernest Lawrence (inventor of the cyclotron, chief of the famed Radiation Laboratory at Berkeley, and winner of the Nobel prize in physics in 1939) had counseled and occasionally berated him to abandon radicalism, to put aside all political activity, and focus on science and the atomic project. And certainly after World War II his stance on key Cold War issues was incompatible with someone in or close to the Communist movement. His ideological preferences, clearly, had changed over time. But how swiftly they changed and what motivated his shift remains unclear.[\[28\]](#)

Confirmation of his shifting attitudes comes from more than the negative evidence of Oppenheimer's exit from Communist-related political activity in 1942. As his authority in the expanding Manhattan Project increased in 1942, he hired a number of his physics graduate students to work on bomb-related projects at the Berkeley Radiation Laboratory. Several were either active young Communists or close to the Party. But when Oppenheimer hired them, he required them to promise to give up political activity. A year later, in August 1943, Oppenheimer returned to Berkeley from Los Alamos to recruit additional staff for the rapidly expanding Los Alamos atomic facility. He had heard that several of his graduate students had continued to support Communist-linked causes, and confronted Rossi Lomanitz, Joseph Weinberg, and David Bohm in a testy exchange. He required them to once again pledge to avoid political activity and even had Lawrence, who ran the Radiation Laboratory, witness their renewed pledges. He also told Weinberg that he would not be hired for work at Los Alamos. Oppenheimer didn't tell Weinberg, but the intensity of Weinberg's continued adherence to communism was a leading reason Oppenheimer decided not to take him to Los Alamos.[\[29\]](#)

Earlier in March 1943 the FBI listening device at Steve Nelson's residence had picked up a conversation between Nelson and Weinberg. His work at the Berkeley Radiation Laboratory had allowed Weinberg to pick up a good deal of information about the progress of the bomb making project, and he wanted to deliver the information into the hands of the CPUSA and, perforce, to the Soviet Union. (Weinberg later would be recruited as a source by the KGB.) Weinberg briefed Nelson, who made notes, about what he had picked up about various highly technical (and highly secret) aspects of the

atomic program. (The next day Nelson arranged a meeting with Peter Ivanov, publicly an official at the Soviet consulate in San Francisco but covertly an officer of Soviet military intelligence, GRU. The FBI surveilled the meeting a few days later and assumed that Nelson handed over his notes of what Weinberg had told him).

In addition to Weinberg passing along to Nelson what he knew of the bomb project, the two also discussed “the professor,” and from the context this was clearly a reference to Oppenheimer. Nelson complained that “the professor” was “very much worried now and we [Communists] make him feel uncomfortable.” Weinberg agreed, and said of Oppenheimer’s political attitudes, “You won’t hardly believe the change that has taken place.” Nelson offered the opinion that “to my sorrow, his wife is influencing him in the wrong direction.” Although Katherine Oppenheimer had herself been a Communist and been married to the Communist political commissar of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion killed in Spain, some of Oppenheimer’s associates thought that she wanted social standing and prestige and regarded Oppenheimer’s association with communism as a barrier to his becoming recognized as one of the nation’s leading scientists.[\[30\]](#)

Weinberg met with a KGB agent in late 1945 and once again discussed Oppenheimer. The report on the meeting sent to Moscow stated that Weinberg “does not see ‘Yew’ [Oppenheimer] at all these days. Moreover, he [Weinberg] tried to create the impression . . . that ‘Yew’ had changed and was losing his left convictions.” Oppenheimer had publicly supported the Federation of Architects, Engineers, Chemists and Technicians (FAECT), a small Communist-led union in 1940 and 1941. By 1946 FBI listening devices at Frank Oppenheimer’s home overhear Robert declining a request from two Communist FAECT organizers that he address a FAECT rally. The FBI also reported that the two organizers had talked to another CP official who said Oppenheimer had “done nothing towards maintaining contact” with the Party and had ignored Nelson’s attempts to maintain contact.[\[31\]](#)

Oppenheimer was also the subject of a lengthy October 1945 report quoted in Vassiliev’s notebooks that was written by Charles Kramer, a KGB source on the staff of US Senator Harley Kilgore. Kramer had attended a Washington breakfast in late September at which Oppenheimer discussed with Kilgore pending legislation dealing with control of atomic energy research and development in the postwar period. An intense political controversy was brewing, with the US military supporting continued Pentagon control over nuclear weapons production and tight federal government control over nuclear power and other atomic research. A vocal section of leftists and liberals, however, was attempting to minimize the military’s role and pushing for the United States to relinquish control over atomic weapons to an international body that would include the USSR in its governing structure and would share American nuclear secrets with the world. A number of junior and some senior Manhattan Project scientists vigorously supported the proposal to internationalize control of nuclear energy and hoped that Oppenheimer, then at the peak of his prestige, would support their position. Kramer’s report of Oppenheimer’s views was not one to please the Soviets:

Oppenheimer is playing a curious role in the entire atomic energy discussions now going on inside and outside of government. As noted last week, his central position seems to be that nations must arrive at profound political collaboration in the atomic age or face disaster. This is the theme which he seems to propound publicly to most groups and individuals. At the same time he has consistently supported the War Department and its scientific henchmen, Vannevar Bush and James B. Conant in their attempts to rush through the warlike May-Johnson bill to set up an Atomic Energy Commission for so-called “purely domestic aspects” of atomic energy, even though most of his fellow workers on the atomic bomb disagree violently with the bill and all of them desire that greater consideration be given to the bill before rushing it through to passage.

At present a wide breach is developing between Oppenheimer and the younger scientists who have to date practically worshipped him not only for his scientific acumen but for his political sagacity as well. Last week, before the hearings reopened on the May-Johnson bill in the House Military Affairs Committee, O-r was striving desperately to maintain a united front of the scientific workers, particularly the top level of physicists, to prevent any open break with the War Department and the administration on its desire to get the bill put through quickly. He was unsuccessful, as you have seen from the newspapers—two associates, Dr. Leo Szilard and Dr. H. L. Anderson, came out openly against the bill, while O-r and Arthur Compton came out supporting the bill, although with some amendments in O-r’s case.

O-r’s position (as explained by some of his opponents and as have been gathered from his own remarks) is that the present research work would go to pieces unless something immediately is done to continue the work on atomic energy. He thus separates the so-called ‘domestic’ problems from the foreign or international problems, and says that the United States must continue its work in atomic energy, even with the May-Johnson bill’s imperfections, even though the international political problems are not taken care of. At the same time he argues publicly that the international aspects, that is, the political relations with other countries, is of more decisive importance than the domestic ones, and repeat the warning that we must learn to live with other nations or be destroyed.

Under questioning by Senators Fulbright, Magnuson and Kilgore, in public hearings last Wednesday, he even said, “This may not only be the last war, but the last victory,” meaning that no nation would survive an atomic war. But when a group of younger scientists testified at the same hearings that we must perform a miracle in political science and international relations if we are to consider any developments in, or attempt to keep atomic energy research secret, O-r termed their view in effect as political naiveté. While the bulk of the younger physicists and

other scientists are opposed to the May-Johnson bill, and are opposed to secrecy, O-r seems to take his stand with those scientific bureaucrats who want to keep it secret under the terms of the May-Johnson bill.

Kramer evaluated Oppenheimer as a liberal “in need of conversation and guidance from the ‘right kind of people.’”^[32]

Whatever the initial reason for Oppenheimer’s dropping out of the CPUSA in 1942, it seems clear that by 1946 he was a firm supporter of the developing Cold War liberalism that would dominate the Truman administration and the Democratic Party in the late 1940s, ’50s, and into the mid ’60s.

The Tangled Web of Deception

The dilemma Oppenheimer faced after World War II as the Cold War developed was whether to be honest and candid about his earlier participation in the Communist Party. Openly admitting the extent of his earlier Communist involvement and explaining why he had dropped out and changed his views would have been one course. People do change their views, and in the Cold War there were a number of Communists who became ex-Communists and made very public declarations of their past allegiance and why they had come to reject communism. Their loyalty to the US government were never again doubted, although none of these ex-Communists stayed in sensitive government positions.

Oppenheimer, however, did not take that course. Possibly one problem was that he had by that time already made false declarations on various government security forms and false statements to government officials. Being forthright and admitting his earlier false statements might have opened him to legal actions for perjury, although candid admission of past false statements is rarely prosecuted unless some demonstrable harm came from the action. Moreover, in the highly charged and contentious atmosphere of the early Cold War, Oppenheimer may have feared that his formidable rivals might exploit the vulnerable situation he had put himself in. They might not be willing to accept his claims of having changed his views and demand that he be prosecuted for his past perjury, or at least denied any further access to security classified information. Oppenheimer was a major voice in the US atomic community advising against proceeding with development of the hydrogen bomb. In this he was opposed by much of the military leadership and by scientific colleagues such as Edward Teller. Some of them likely believed that discrediting Oppenheimer on security grounds was one sure way to remove an obstacle to the H-bomb program.

Further, admitting past false statements would have been embarrassing and painful for anyone, but particularly difficult for Oppenheimer. A man of tremendous intellect, his tolerance for those of lesser talent was limited. Part of the vehemence of his critics within government nuclear circles came from those, such as AEC chairman Lewis Strauss, who

had felt themselves patronized by Oppenheimer. (Even his good friend Haakon Chevalier wrote a thinly disguised novel about Oppenheimer with the title *The Man Who Would Be God*). Admitting evasions and lies, and eating humble pie, may just have been too much for Oppenheimer to stomach. Senator Clinton Anderson (D-New Mexico) touched upon Oppenheimer's skill at making matters worse during a 27 November 1963 telephone conversation with Lyndon B. Johnson. The new president was asking Anderson about the political wisdom of holding a White House ceremony in the physicist's honor. Oppenheimer, said Anderson,

was *foolish* in the things he did . . . for instance, somebody would say to him, "Oh, weren't you a Communist?" He was so *damned mad* to think that they would *question* the guy who had developed the bomb. He'd say, "Oh sure, sure" [and] walk away in scorn. [He was] *sarcastic*—but the *worst* of it is that those things appear in the record.^[33]

Whatever his reasons and motivation, he chose to admit only to a loose association with some Communists and to having supported and given money to various Communist causes. Oppenheimer concealed his direct participation in the CPUSA and continued to make false and misleading statements under oath. Given a considerable volume of contradictory evidence, in the end the AEC had sufficient doubts about his candor that it declined to renew his security clearance when it expired in 1954.

Knowing what we know now, America's public interest would have been best served if Oppenheimer had been able to continue in his role as a consultant to the government on various atomic and security projects. The evidence that by the mid-1940s he had left his earlier Communist allegiance behind and sincerely supported America's role in the Cold War is fully convincing. But, of course, one of the major contributing factors to his loss of security access was his own unwillingness to provide a candid and honest account of his earlier Communist ties and why he had put them aside. The AEC in 1954 did not know what we now know in 2011. Its decision not to renew his security clearance was understandable under the circumstances.

John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr are contributing editors to *Washington Decoded*, and the authors of many books on the history of American Communism and Soviet espionage.

[1] Books published in the last decade alone include Gregg Herken, *Brotherhood of the Bomb: The Tangled Lives and Loyalties of Robert Oppenheimer, Ernest Lawrence, and Edward Teller* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2002); Jeremy Bernstein, *Oppenheimer: Portrait of an Enigma* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2004); Jennet Conant, *109 East Palace: Robert Oppenheimer and the Secret City of Los Alamos* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005); Priscilla J. McMillan, *The Ruin of J. Robert Oppenheimer: and the Birth*

[*of the Arms Race*](#) (New York: Viking, 2005); Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin, [*American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer*](#) (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005); Cathryn Carson and David A. Hollinger, eds., [*Reappraising Oppenheimer: Centennial Studies and Reflections*](#) (Berkeley, CA: Office for History of Science and Technology, 2005); Abraham Pais and Robert P. Crease, [*J. Robert Oppenheimer: A Life*](#) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Charles Thorpe, [*Oppenheimer: The Tragic Intellect*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); David C. Cassidy, [*J. Robert Oppenheimer and the American Century*](#) (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

[2] Harvey Klehr and John Earl Haynes, “[*Special Tasks and Sacred Secrets on Soviet Atomic Espionage*](#),” *Intelligence and National Security* 26, no. 5 (2011).

[3] John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, [*Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America*](#) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press [Nota Bene], 2000), 327-328, 330.

[4] Bird and Sherwin, *American Prometheus*, 123.

[5] J. Edgar Hoover to Maj. Gen. Harry Vaughn, 28 February 1947, President’s Secretary’s Files, Papers of Harry Truman, Harry S. Truman Library; Bird and Sherwin, *American Prometheus*, 137-138, 337.

[6] Crouch testimony: California legislature, “Sixth Report of the Senate Fact-Finding Committee on Un-American Activities” (Sacramento, 1951), 210-228; Hoover to AEC Security, 19 May 1950, box 3, Records of the Personnel Security Board, AEC Division of Security, RG 326, National Archives; Herken, *Brotherhood of the Bomb*, 230-231; Philip M. Stern, Harold P. Green, and Lloyd Kirkham Garrison, *The Oppenheimer Case: Security on Trial* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 164-165.

[7] Gregg Herken, brotherhoodofthebomb.com; Gregg Herken, “[*Target Enormoz: Soviet Nuclear Espionage on the West Coast of the United States, 1942–1950*](#),” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11, no. 3 (Summer 2009). See also a 2004 conference paper published as Greg Herken, “Was Oppenheimer a ‘Closet Communist’? The Debate and the Evidence,” in Carson and Hollinger, eds., *Reappraising Oppenheimer*, 51-56.

[8] Herken, *Brotherhood*, 28-32, 50-57; Herken to Silvers, 15 January 2004, reproduced at brotherhoodofthebomb.com; Bird and Sherwin, *American Prometheus*, 173.

[9] Selected excerpts from Barbara Chevalier’s unpublished journal, “Robert Oppenheimer and Haakon Chevalier: From the Memoirs of Barbara Chevalier,” brotherhoodofthebomb.com.

[10] Gordon Griffiths, “Venturing Outside the Ivory Tower: The Political Autobiography of a College Professor,” Gordon Griffiths Papers (Washington, DC: Library of Congress Manuscript Division), 26-28 and on the internet at brotherhoodofthebomb.com. One of the authors of this essay, John Haynes, acquired Griffiths’s unpublished memoir for the

Library of Congress in 2004. The memoir had existed in two versions: an original that included passages dealing with Oppenheimer and the Communist faculty unit with which Griffiths worked, and a version that had these passages removed due to their controversial nature. In a December 2002 statement explaining the provenance of the missing section, the Griffiths children wrote, “In light of the renewed controversy over Oppenheimer’s alleged membership in the Communist Party (an issue whose significance derives in large part from Oppenheimer’s own vehement denials), and the dearth of evidence that could help to settle the matter, and in the realization that no one still alive can possibly be harmed by the information, we have decided to make this passage public.” Children of Gordon Griffiths, “A Passage from the Unpublished Memoirs,” 30 December 2002, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

[11] “*Sostoyanie razvitiya ispol'zovaniya atomnoi energii v kapitalisticheskikh stranakh* [The State of Development of the Problem of Using Atomic Energy in the Capitalist Countries]” memorandum from P. A. Sudoplatov to L. P. Beria, n. d. (c. January 1946), transcribed in L. D. Ryabev et al., eds., *Atomnyi proekt SSSR: Dokumenty i materialy* [Atomic Project of the USSR: Documents and Materials] Vol. II, Book 2 (Moscow: Nauka Fizmatlit, 1999-2007), 317.

[12] Allen Weinstein and Alexander Vassiliev, [*The Haunted Wood: Soviet Espionage in America—The Stalin Era*](#) (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 183-185; [Alexander Vassiliev Papers](#), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; John Earl Haynes, Harvey Klehr, and Alexander Vassiliev, [*Spies: The Rise and Fall of the KGB in America*](#) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

[13] Ovakimyan and Graur, report to Merkulov on “*Enormoz*,” February 1944, KGB file 82702, v.1, 143, Alexander Vassiliev, *Yellow Notebook #1 [2007 English Translation]*, trans. Philip Redko (1993–1996), 10.

[14] Semen Semenov, “Background on work on XY line in Western US,” July 1945, KGB file 40129, v.3a, 415, Alexander Vassiliev, *White Notebook #1 [2007 English Translation]*, trans. Steven Shabad (1993–1996), 117; Moscow Center to “Anton,” 10 November 1944, KGB file 40159, v.3, 448, Alexander Vassiliev, *Black Notebook [2007 English Translation]*, trans. Philip Redko (1993–1996), 113.

[15] Bird and Sherwin, *American Prometheus*, 135-136. See also a Bird/Sherwin summary of their view on Oppenheimer’s party membership, largely taken from their biography, in Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin, “Robert Oppenheimer and the Communist Party,” in Carson and Hollinger, eds., *Reappraising Oppenheimer*, 57-76.

[16] *Ibid.*, 151.

[17] *Ibid.*, 138.

[18] *Ibid.*, 136.

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[19] Ibid., 135, 151.

[20] Ibid., 136, 138-139.

[21] Ibid 144.

[22] Ibid., 145.

[23] Ibid., 136.

[24] Kai Bird and Svetlana Chervonnaya, "[The Mystery of Ales](#)," *American Scholar*, Summer 2007. For a rebuttal, see John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, "[The New McCarthyism](#)," *Washington Decoded*, 11 April 2007. On Hiss as Ales, see Eduard Mark, "[In Re Alger Hiss: A Final Verdict from the Archives of the KGB](#)," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Summer 2009), 26-67.

[25] Bernstein, *Oppenheimer*, 134; Cassidy, *J. Robert Oppenheimer*, 195; Conant, *109 East Palace*, 175; Thorpe, *Oppenheimer*, 55; John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, *In Denial: Historians, Communism and Espionage* (San Francisco, CA: Encounter Books, 2003).

[26] Barton J. Bernstein, "The Puzzles of Interpreting J. Robert Oppenheimer, His Politics, and the Issues of His Possible Communist Party Membership," in Carson and Hollinger, eds., *Reappraising Oppenheimer*, 106-107.

As we make clear here, in our view the additional evidence that has become available since Bernstein's 2004 paper should move one's judgment from "leans heavily" to "confidently establishes" that Oppenheimer was for a few years until early 1942 a covert Party member.

[27] Herken, *Brotherhood*, 57; Jerrold L. Schecter and Leona Schecter, [Sacred Secrets: How Soviet Intelligence Operations Changed American History](#) (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 2002), 313-314.

[28] Herken, *Brotherhood*, 57.

[29] Ibid., 62, 107.

[30] Quoted in *ibid.*, 96.

[31] KGB New York to Moscow Center, 20 October 1945, KGB file 82702, v.1, 376, 424-425, Vassiliev, *Yellow #1*, 331 Bird and Sherwin, *American Prometheus*, 337.

[32] "Vadim" to Moscow Center, 19 October 1945, KGB file 82702, v.1, 422-443; "Report by 'Mole,'" 22 October 1945, KGB file 82702, v.1, 496-497, Vassiliev, *Yellow #1*, 32-35.

[33] Max Holland, ed., *The Presidential Recordings of Lyndon B. Johnson: The Kennedy Assassination and the Transfer of Power, November 1963–January 1964*, Vol. 1, November 22–30, 1963 (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), 193.