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Tricia Jenkins. *The CIA in Hollywood: How the Agency Shapes Film and Television*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011. 167 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-292-72861-5.

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Cover Story

In a fascinating, highly readable, and original new work, Tricia Jenkins takes on the seldom-explored topic of the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) relationship with Hollywood. While this may conjure up cloak-and-dagger images of secretive operations as befits the agency's image on big and little screens, Jenkins concentrates instead on how the CIA has (or has not) managed that image overtly, that is, through established, above board, public affairs channels and liaisons. Highly original and well researched, Jenkins's work makes a worthy contribution to the fledgling literature on this topic. The author is an assistant professor in the Department of Film, Television and Digital Media, College of Communication at Texas Christian University.

Exploring the CIA's official government Web site, one might be surprised to find the position of "Entertainment Industry Liaison," whose purpose is to assist those seeking to portray the agency on screen or in print. While the Web site highlights the primacy of protecting national security, it also states that "our goal is accurate balanced portrayal of the men and women of the CIA, their vital mission and the commitment to public service that defines them" (<https://www.cia.gov/offices-of-cia/public-affairs/index.html>). Jenkins's work provides context for understanding the CIA's complex role with the entertainment industry, as well as an alternative view to the "accurate balanced portrayal" claimed by the industry liaison's mission statement.

Jenkins argues that the CIA not only cares about but also carefully manages its external image, especially in response to real-world events that shape public perceptions of the agency. However, it has not always been this way. The agency was largely absent from Hollywood portrayals during its early years (the CIA was founded in 1947) until the early 1960s. This changed, Jenkins argues, after the Bay of Pigs debacle in April of 1961, once the CIA's role in the ill-fated attempt to topple Cuban

dictator Fidel Castro came to light. Since then, the CIA's representation in television and films became much more prominent.

The author effectively makes this point by delving into the agency's portrayal in the popular media. To this end, she includes a table with a representative sampling of films and TV shows ranging from the 1960s to the 2000s. Entertaining as it is instructive, the table is used to illustrate the images—largely negative—employed to portray the CIA. Indeed, the sheer number of examples demonstrates that the CIA has become a staple in popular culture. (Indeed, at this writing the film *Argo* (2012), the story of the CIA cover film studio developed clandestinely to effect the rescue of U.S. hostages in Tehran, is opening in theaters nationwide.)

Eventually, the CIA grew tired of Hollywood's largely negative stereotypes, which included depictions of CIA personnel as heartless assassins; ruthless careerist bureaucrats; or, perhaps worst of all, incompetent buffoons. But it was not until the Aldrich Ames case, Jenkins argues, that the CIA took concrete steps with Hollywood to improve its public image. Ames, the infamous CIA operative responsible for revealing countless intelligence assets to the Soviets, did such irreparable harm to the agency's public persona that its very existence became questioned.

As a consequence, the agency took some unprecedented steps at "damage control" by establishing formal ties with Hollywood, one of the last government agencies to do so. One may find it surprising that the agency hired Television Production Partners (TPP) to help foster a more positive on-screen image for itself. It established the position of entertainment liaison—the first being Chase Brandon, whom Jenkins covers extensively in her work. The CIA even sought to sponsor a television show of its own, *The Classified Files of the CIA*, to bolster its image following the Ames debacle. Even though the

project never came to fruition, it set the stage for future CIA interaction with Hollywood.

Perhaps most instructive is Jenkins's description of the CIA-Hollywood collaboration with the agency's entertainment liaison as seen in case studies of such productions as *In the Company of Spies* (1999), *The Agency* (2001-2003), and *Covert Affairs* (2010-present). Here, the nature of the relationship is effectively explored, particularly CIA motivations to project a positive face in response to real-world events—whether to bolster a failing reputation, exploit success, recruit prospective candidates, or justify a federal budget increase. The agency's relationship with Hollywood is even seen to mature somewhat over time—from the previous hands-off approach to closer collaboration and even an official hosting of the premiere of *In the Company of Spies* at CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Interestingly enough, despite increased cooperation, Jenkins notes, much of the relationship remains clouded in obscurity. Little is done in writing and much occurs behind the scenes, primarily in pre-production.

The CIA's closer media collaboration has not come without cost. Jenkins argues that in its efforts to foster a more favorable public image, the CIA has overstepped legal and ethical bounds. The author devotes a chapter to her contention that the CIA violates the First Amendment by being selective in determining who it assists based on how favorably the agency is portrayed by the client. She also argues that, in contrast to the "accurate balanced" view mentioned in the CIA's vision statement,

a positive image trumps accuracy or balance as far as the agency is concerned. Indeed, Jenkins maintains that the CIA's efforts are propagandistic and the agency seeks to "whitewash" its Hollywood image. Some readers may view all of this as a bit of a distraction, but Jenkins effectively presents a balanced perspective on the issue. In its totality, her discussion supplements and adds depth to, rather than detracts from, the overall impact of her work.

A final aspect worth pointing out is the dearth of available information on the CIA's media relationship with Hollywood. In other words, the agency, as may be expected, leaves little to no paper trail, even regarding its media liaison with Hollywood. Even the official memorandums documenting the relationship included in Jenkins's book are redacted, as one might expect. For that reason, *The CIA in Hollywood* bespeaks of unfinished business and warrants further investigating. The challenge will be—without a paper trail—what more can be pursued to complete the picture?

Overall, Jenkins's work is fresh and original, and demonstrates sound scholarship. The author has a passion for the topic that translates to vibrant writing. It is also a concise as well as entertaining look at an aspect of the CIA—its media relations with Hollywood—of which little is known. Enthusiastically written and incorporating effective, illustrative case studies, *The CIA in Hollywood* is definitely recommended to students of film, media relations, the CIA, and U.S. interagency relations.

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