

Frank J. Rafalko, *MH/CHAOS: The CIA's Campaign Against the Radical New Left and the Black Panthers* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2011). Pp. 328, biblio., index. \$32.95. ISBN 978-1612510453

The CIA's Operation MHCHAOS — a secret program of the 1960s-70s targeting radical student activists, African-Americans, and others abroad as well as domestically to determine whether they had foreign influences — deserves objective and scholarly examination because, to date, our understanding of it is incomplete. While offering new details, this book is not an objective examination. Instead, the author, a former CIA counterintelligence officer who participated in MHCHAOS, offers a tendentious account and unapologetic defense of the program with an ideological bent essentially stating that American liberties must be protected by violating those very liberties. Even more, the author views the mid-1970s congressional investigations of intelligence agency abuses as nothing more than a “circus act” (p. 90) revealing the “synergistic” relationship between congressional liberals and the news media, who “naturally protect each other,” with the latter serving as the “propaganda outlets for liberal philosophy” (p. 5). Essentially, he argues, the apparently liberal press was engaging in yellow journalism (p. 23). Even more, when discussing the investigations, Democrats always have ulterior, career-building motives while Republicans are portrayed as always acting fairly (pp. 94-95). In fact, the author employs the term “ultraliberal” in the book which is reminiscent of the hard ball, partisan rhetoric dating from the Nixon administration and Vice President Spiro Agnew and speech writer Pat Buchanan. Worse yet, the author employs, either directly or by quoting others, *ad hominem* attacks on various people. For example, Senator Frank Church (D - Idaho) is described pointedly as “a rogue jackass” (p. 93), and Congressman Otis Pike (D - NY) is described, by quoting CIA Director William Colby, likewise as a “jackass” (p. 96).

When defending MHCHAOS the author employs the classic partisan tactic of repeatedly focusing on minor errors in detail rather than the larger issue of the propriety of CIA efforts. To cite just a few examples, the author writes that MHCHAOS employed 42 people rather than the reported 54 (p. 18). The author also cites Seymour Hersh's reporting that the CIA opened 10,000 files on Americans and takes him to task because, in reality, the CIA only open up 9,994. Then, the author claims that since this number is only 4 percent of the some 250,000 protestors across the country, which had a total population of 203 million people, the CIA's efforts were, therefore, "miniscule [sic]" and presumably proper (p. 24). The author also cites *Newsweeks'* and the Rockefeller Commission's claim of about 30 agents working for MHCHAOS, but takes them to task by saying MHCHAOS never did have agents on its staff nor did the CIA "employ agents on its staff or in its divisions." It is common for people outside of the CIA to refer to CIA officers (the proper term) as agents (which are in reality CIA assets or sources, unlike the better known FBI agents). This is the author's actual point, which he never makes clear. Instead, he cites it as yet another error about MHCHAOS that "illustrates how erroneous myths are created" about the program. In fact, while using the improper terminology both *Newsweek* and the Rockefeller Commission were close with their numbers about how many CIA officers worked on the highly secretive MHCHAOS program (p. 27).

When defending MHCHAOS, the author repeatedly states that the program was strictly one that investigated Americans while abroad to determine if there were foreign links. Penetrating foreign intelligence agencies, he writes, was too difficult a task to obtain this information. CIA therefore recruited Americans, as a "logical step," and placed them in the domestic student movement to "build up his bona fides" and "legitimacy" before being sent

abroad. These recruits, he writes, inevitably “saw some things” within the US which the CIA then reported to the FBI. The CIA then opened files on these reported individuals, which the author dismisses as an insignificant number and then claims this activity was proper because counterintelligence cannot operate without extensive databases, and therefore it was not illegal. This is, in fact, the crux of critics’ arguments because by law the CIA is prohibited from engaging in domestic surveillance of Americans, which this clearly was (pp. 55, 61).

While the author’s argument about the propriety of MHCHAOS is wholly unconvincing, some details he offers about the program hint, significantly, at the CIA’s use of separate filing procedures. We know about J. Edgar Hoover’s extensive use of separate filing procedures to isolate and protect FBI files containing sensitive information or evidence of illegal activity, and scholars have discovered several examples of the CIA doing the same. The author reveals, interestingly enough, that MHCHAOS made use of files that were not made part of the CIA’s central filing system (which could allow CIA officials to claim, in a technically truthful way, that their central files contained no information on subject X if asked in a court-ordered discovery motion). He states, quite clearly, that MHCHAOS “did not send any of these documents to CIA’s record section for filing; all documents were filed by our own secretaries or by each officer in the unit” (p. 24). Further, the files and computer database of information was kept “in-house, rather than housing this information in the DDO [deputy director for operations] or the DCI [director of central intelligence]” (p. 55) and the files were kept in a basement vault with strict document controls (pp. 58-59). Finally, the author writes that no one except MHCHAOS officers had access to these files, and the “files were sacred within the unit” (p. 202).

Other than offering a few new details about Operation MHCHAOS, this book is

otherwise a stridently partisan account and unconvincing defense of at best a highly controversial and, at worst, illegal CIA program.

Douglas M. Charles

Penn State University, Greater Allegheny