

## Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and the Manchurian Candidate

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*"I am writing this from Frederick, Maryland. I've just been filming, for Channel 4, a press conference in which the son of a CIA officer who died in suspicious circumstances presented his evidence that vice-president Dick Cheney and defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld were, in 1975, when part of the Gerald Ford administration, involved in a cover-up of the events surrounding his father's death. The press conference was due to have been two weeks ago, but when the son, Eric Olson, called the New York Times to invite them, they said, "Whoa! Do you really want to release such complex information to a bunch of journalists who'll probably screw it up? Let us do it properly instead."*

*I must try this ruse sometime. It worked on Olson. He postponed the press conference. The New York Times finally called him and said, "We missed Watergate because we thought it was just a small, unimportant break-in." What they seemed to mean was they believed his evidence but they couldn't decide if it was a huge, government-toppling White House cover-up of a murder, or a small, unimportant White House cover-up of a murder, the kind of stuff that doesn't mean much.. ."*

-- Jon Ronson, [The Guardian](#) , August 17, 2002

In the summer of 2003 (back when President Bush was renouncing the use of torture [[New Yorker](#) ]) author Douglas Valentine reminded us why blind trust in any government official or agency has historically been a bad idea. "The war on terror, and its 'homeland security' counterpart are flip sides of the same coin," he wrote. "They are the same ideology applied to foreign and domestic policy. But like CIA agent Alden Pyle in *The Quiet American*, their evil intention is wrapped in a complex matrix of transparent lies." [[CounterPunch.org](#) ]

Drawing uncomfortable conclusions about the Bush administration's secret agenda, Valentine also pointed to Miramax's Vietnam-era love story which had been put on hold following Sept. 11 due to its "anti-American" content -- a content that wasn't so much anti-American as anti-CIA. "Horrendous acts were, for propaganda purposes, often made to look as if they had been committed by the enemy," Valentine wrote, of the CIA's brutal underhanded activities that both the *Quiet American* and history underscore.

More than 40 years ago, another film spawned similar qualms. United Artists was nervous about releasing *The Manchurian Candidate* because, as screen writer George Axelrod put it, "They didn't want to make it because they thought that it was un-American."

A wildly imaginative political thriller which sprang from Richard Condon's 1959 best-selling novel, *The Manchurian Candidate* is the story of a brainwashed military veteran who unwittingly becomes a programmed assassin to further the political ambitions of his cold and manipulative mother. "Ironically," the *Washington Post* revealed, "it was a phone call

from President Kennedy -- made at [Frank] Sinatra's request -- that persuaded Arthur Krim, then head of United Artists and also the national finance chairman of the Democratic Party, to change his mind and start production.

(An additional irony, which may be more curious than telling but is entirely in keeping with the tone of the film, is that it was [director John] Frankenheimer who drove Robert Kennedy to the hotel in California the night he was assassinated.)" [[Washington Post](#) ]

First released in 1962, using the Cold War as a backdrop (and then taken out of release for decades following JFK's 1963 assassination), the film has been remade under the direction of Jonathan Demme and will hit theaters on July 30. Now set during the first Gulf War era, the new version stars Denzel Washington as Capt./Maj. Bennett Marco (Sinatra's role in the original) and Liev Schreiber as SSgt. Raymond Shaw (this time as a Gulf War veteran instead of the Korean war hero original cast member Laurence Harvey played). Meryl Streep, cast as Mrs. Iselinin (the role that Angela Lansbury made unforgettable), has disclosed that to prepare for her role as Raymond's evil dragon mother, she watched a string of political talk shows. "Anything with Peggy Noonan [or] Karen Hughes," Streep told *Entertainment Weekly*. "It's hard to get more hyperbolic than that."

When you peek beneath the *Manchurian Candidate's* fascinating plotline, however, you learn that it is not "just a movie," but is based upon actual cases of government-sponsored brainwashing, torture, Nazi collaboration, bizarre interrogation tactics, biological warfare and cover-ups. And though such an assessment sounds like paranoid lunacy, a quick study of CIA operations like MK-ULTRA (mind control), Operation ARTICHOKE (extreme interrogation) and Operation Paperclip (the Nazis' role in exporting both), along with their connection to the murder of Dr. Frank Olson, reveals otherwise.

In 1950, the U.S. government established the first program to develop human mind control techniques. Known under a variety of codenames (most notably MK-ULTRA) throughout its 23 year history, this program was designed to exert such control, according to declassified documents, that an individual would do another's bidding, "against his will and even against such fundamental laws of nature such as self-preservation." 25 years later, the Rockefeller Commission uncovered CIA plans for "programmed assassins" and said that MK-ULTRA led to American citizens being drugged, kidnapped and tortured on American soil. [[lisatrust.bogje.nl](#) ]

In 1975, as this information was exposed, the government paid \$750,000 restitution to Army biochemist Dr. Frank Olson's family, after admitting the CIA slipped Dr. Olson LSD days before his 1953 fall from a New York City building. When the Ford administration finally came clean, they promised they'd revealed everything. Yet key officials, including White House aides Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld, pushed to continue to conceal information. "The family has learned that the Ford administration was keeping information from the family," the *Baltimore Sun* reported in 2002. "Among those who advocated keeping quiet were Dick Cheney and Donald H. Rumsfeld, now the vice president and defense secretary, the Olsons learned from memos and other papers received last year from the Gerald R. Ford Library." [[FrankOlsonProject.org](#) ]

Operation ARTICHOKE, a CIA program that preceded MK-ULTRA, involved the development of "special and extreme methods of interrogation," according to declassified documents given to the family by the late CIA Director William Colby. The chief architects of the program were also "very concerned with the problem of disposing of 'blown agents' and with finding a way to produce amnesia in operatives who had seen too much and could no longer be relied upon." By the time Dr. Olson's family uncovered the truth about Olson's death, the role Operation ARTICHOKE played became clear. "In these documents the overall context for Frank Olson's death is related not to the infamous MK-ULTRA program for mind and behavior control, as is generally assumed," the family reported. "The Colby documents locate Olson's death in the context of a CIA operation called ARTICHOKE." [[FrankOlsonProject.org](#) ]

Both MK-ULTRA and ARTICHOKE grew out of "Operation Paperclip," in which Nazi scientists were smuggled into the U.S. to provide the government with information on everything from rocket science to germ warfare to torture and interrogation techniques. This "assimilation of Nazis into the U.S. government," the *National Catholic Reporter* explained, also spawned the now common practice of labeling people of conscience "enemies of the state." [[Findarticles.com](http://Findarticles.com)]

A German documentary on Operation ARTICHOKE put it succinctly: "The search for the circumstances surrounding the mysterious death of Dr. Frank Olson begins in 1945, with the liberation of the concentration camp at Dachau, Germany." [[FrankOlsonProject.org](http://FrankOlsonProject.org)]

In his book, *The Search for the Manchurian Candidate*, author John Marks devoted an entire chapter to Dr. Frank Olson, describing how Olson felt the CIA was "out to get him." [[DrugLibrary.org](http://DrugLibrary.org)] And so, from Nov. 28, 1953 (the night Olson plummeted from a 13th floor window at New York's Hotel Pennsylvania) to 1975 (when the family was paid restitution for Dr. Olson's guinea pig role in the CIA's mind control/LSD experiments) to 1994 (when Olson's body was exhumed), the family was haunted by questions. Finally, in 2002, when forensic and other evidence came to light, the Olson murder was solved. "I feel satisfied," Olson's eldest son Eric told the *Baltimore Sun*. "We're where we want to be - we know what happened."

Reminiscent of the untiring battle the Sept. 11 widows have been waging to try to unearth the truth about 9/11 inconsistencies and the stand Nick Berg's family has taken to draw attention to the Bush administration's lies regarding Nick's detention by U.S. authorities, Frank Olson's family was courageous and tireless. Eric Olson, who earned a Ph.D. in psychology from Harvard, became mesmerized by subjects such as brainwashing, survivor psychology and Nazi experiments on humans, which he rightly sensed, had something to do with his father's demise.

In 2002, all of the pieces fell into place. Dr. Frank Olson, it was discovered, ran the Special Operations Division at Fort Detrick, which, in addition to dealing with anthrax and mind control research, was involved in "assassinations materials research," "biological warfare experiments in populated areas" and "terminal interrogations." Dr. Olson did not commit suicide due to a nervous breakdown, as the family was originally told, nor did he commit suicide because of a reaction to LSD, as they were told in 1975. Dr. Olson, who was posthumously outed as a CIA agent, was simply a man who knew too much. During an August 2002 press conference, the family spelled it out:

1. "The death of Frank Olson on November 28, 1953 was a murder, not a suicide.
2. This is not an LSD drug-experiment story, as it was represented in 1975. This is a biological warfare story. Frank Olson did not die because he was an experimental guinea pig who experienced a "bad trip." He died because of concern that he would divulge information concerning a highly classified CIA interrogation program called "ARTICHOKE" in the early 1950's, and concerning the use of biological weapons by the United States in the Korean War.
3. The truth concerning the death of Frank Olson was concealed from the Olson family as well as from the public in 1953. In 1975 a cover story regarding Frank Olson's death was disseminated. At the same time a renewed cover-up of the truth concerning this story was being carried out at the highest levels of government, including the White House. The new cover-up involved the participation of persons serving in the current Administration."

"These documents show the lengths to which the government was trying to cover up the truth," Eric Olson said, regarding memos that uncovered Cheney and Rumsfeld's role in perpetuating the deceit. "For 22 years there was a cover-up. And then, under the guise of revealing everything, there was a new cover-up." [[Mercury News](http://Mercury News)]

*The London Sunday Express* blared the headline: "Scientist Was Killed to Stop Him Revealing Death Secrets; So Did Cheney and Rumsfeld Cover Up a CIA Assassination?" [[FrankOlsonProject.org](http://FrankOlsonProject.org) ] while the *Guardian* picked up where other U.S. publications did not. "This story is clearly less fun, and a lot more scary, than a CIA-LSD suicide, and it hasn't received nearly as much coverage," Jon Ronson wrote. "Few of the journalists who attended yesterday's press conference are following up the evidence Olson presented. Instead they've written about Olson's "healing process" and his "closure".

Frank Olson's legacy, for anyone willing to study it, goes beyond the *Manchurian Candidate* and implicates the U.S. government in crimes that surpass mind manipulation and run of the mill assassination. In fact, Olson's case is reportedly included in the assassination curriculum of the Israeli Mossad as "a successful instance of disguising a murder as a suicide."

But even still, the Olson saga reveals the underlying truth behind the fiction. In 2000, before conclusive evidence regarding Olson's murder was uncovered, G.Q. explained the Frank Olson/CIA/ Manchurian Candidate connection this way:

"By 1950 Frank Olson had begun expressing moral misgivings about his work [at Fort Detrick] to his wife and a few of his colleagues. Presumably, he was aware of the division's experiment in late 1950 to assess the efficacy of certain bacterial strains on human beings. The group released live bacteria over San Francisco. Several people complaining of flulike symptoms rushed to Bay Area hospitals, and later a number of delayed deaths were attributed to the test. . .

Experiments in mind control became a special fascination in espionage circles in the early 1950s, when the term brainwashing was coined. Rumors had spread that North Korea and the Soviet Union were developing mind-control techniques that could reprogram a person so he would betray state secrets and carry out political assassinations—a story told in the movie "The Manchurian Candidate." In fact, the North Koreans did perform medical, psychological and drug experiments on 900 American prisoners of war, according to documents declassified in 1996. After the tests, the prisoners were reportedly executed.

Given such a grave backdrop, the CIA sought new methods of interrogation. In 149 separate mind-control experiments, researchers used hypnosis, electroshock treatments and drugs, including marijuana, morphine, Benzedrine and mescaline. Test subjects were usually people who could not easily object—prisoners, mental patients and members of minority groups—but the agency also performed many experiments on other people without their knowledge or consent." [[FrankOlsonProject.org](http://FrankOlsonProject.org) ]

A trip to the [Frank Olson Legacy Project Web site](http://FrankOlsonProject.org) unearths a world of pertinent information. There is an article from the *New Yorker* entitled "Where the Manchurian Candidate Came From" and another from the *New York Times*, asking, "What did the CIA do to Eric Olson's Father?" There is information on "terminal interrogations" and "collaboration with former Nazi scientists" as well as a 1950s-era CIA assassination manual regarding "the contrived accident" as "the most effective technique" of secret assassination. [[FrankOlsonProject.org](http://FrankOlsonProject.org) ]

In fact, the Web site provides one-stop shopping for anyone who wants to know the kinds of things the government doesn't want you to know. But be forewarned, after reading through the research, you won't view the torture at Abu Ghraib, or Donald Rumsfeld's reported role in approving unorthodox interrogation methods in quite the same way. [[New Yorker](http://NewYorker) ] And, relevant or not, news that Nick Berg once worked on a tower in Abu Ghraib will, at the very least, raise an eyebrow. [[Guardian](http://Guardian) ]

Moreover, you'll begin to see that some questions are not, as some would have you believe, the result of an overactive imagination. As the German

documentary *Code Name ARTICHOKE* explained in August 2002: "Eric [Olson] finds himself wondering about a lot of things. Was the anthrax terrorist one of our own? Is that the reason he hasn't been caught? Because he knows something no one else should find out about? A secret his father knew, too?"

Certainly, after studying Olson's case it's clear: What was once the province of kooky conspiracy buffs has been proven to be grounded in fact. And, in addition to questions regarding the Oct. 2001 anthrax attacks, others surface: Why did George W. Bush and members of the White House staff begin taking the antibiotic Cipro on Sept. 11, weeks before the anthrax attacks? [[Washington Post](#) ]; How significant were Dr. David Kelly's concerns that he'd be "found dead in the woods"? [[BBC](#) ]; Did Dr. Don Wiley's death have anything to do with other scientists who have died under mysterious circumstances? [[Globe and Mail](#) ]; And why, as the *Christian Science Monitor* reports, is there a "deliberate effort to kill scientists," intellectuals and human rights activists in occupied Iraq? [[Christian Science Monitor](#) ]

These questions aside, once you absorb the hidden history behind the *Manchurian Candidate* and compare that with today's headlines, you can't help but feel that this is one of the weirdest moments in modern history. And, to make matters weirder, Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 911* (which also hit a bump along the distribution road) promises to draw attention to everything from Iraq-related lies to Bush and bin Laden-related oddities. [[BBC](#) ]

We've been through dark times, before, of course, and *Apocalypse Now* remains the seminal cinematic record of the Vietnam era. But though that movie was based on Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, it too has a CIA-related twist. "Some say Tony Poe (Anthony Poshepny) was the model for the Col. Kurtz character of the film *Apocalypse Now*," former UPI reporter Richard S. Ehrlich wrote in Poe's 2003 obituary, before revealing the horrors, the horrors of Poe's CIA career. (According to the obituary, Poe tossed human heads from airplanes, offered ransom for human ears, and encouraged fighters to stick decapitated heads on spikes. "Poshepny grew angry at Washington's attempts to control his activities," Ehrlich wrote. "So he sent a bag filled with human ears to the US embassy [in Laos] to prove his guerrillas were killing communists"). For his troubles, Tony Poshepny won the Central Intelligence Agency's highest award -- a CIA Star -- from directors Allen Dulles, in 1959, and William Colby, in 1975. [[Bangkok Post](#) ]

All this subtext and secret history, of course, is what adds to the overall movie-viewing experience. Moreover, whether talking about the *Quiet American* or the *Manchurian Candidate*, understanding America's seedy underside is the first step in trying to fix it.

But uncomfortable truth is not for everyone -- and "love of country" means different things to different people. And so, for those who favor love that is both rigid and blind [[BuzzFlash](#) ], Frank Oz's remake of *The Stepford Wives* hits theaters next month.

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