

John Franklin Carter's Career as FDR's Private Intelligence Operative

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In the real world and in popular imagination, spies, journalists, and the authors of espionage fiction are intimately linked.^a From Somerset Maugham and Ian Fleming to E. Howard Hunt, Milt Bearden, and Valerie Plame, there is a rich tradition of intelligence officers and former officers writing fictional accounts of espionage. The use of journalism as a cover for covert intelligence collection dates back at least to Daniel Defoe in the 18th century and in the 20th century was practiced with exuberance by Soviet intelligence agencies and intermittently by authors of spy stories such as Graham Greene and James Forsyth. Since 1976, the CIA has had a policy in place that prohibits its use of journalists accredited to US news organizations or their parent organizations for intelligence purposes.¹

It is unlikely, however, that anyone has fused—and confused—the work of spies, journalists, and novelists as thoroughly as John Franklin Carter, a journalist who ran a secret, off-the-books intelligence operation for President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Carter may be the only writer who first created a fictional intelligence agency and then persuaded a government to put him in charge of a real organization modeled on it.

a. This article is adapted from the author's *Bureau of Spies: The Secret Connections Between Journalism and Espionage in Washington* (Prometheus Press, 2018).



John (Jay) Franklin Carter pictured in 1935.

This Library of Congress capture of a 35mm, nitrate negative is credited to the photographer of the Resettlement Administration, where Carter was the director of the Division of Information. At the Resettlement Administration, Carter worked with Pare Lorentz on a series of documentary films about the New Deal, including *The Plough that Broke the Plains*, an exploration of the causes of the dustbowl, and *The River*, a history of the Mississippi Basin. Carter also found time during this period to write two books, *The New Dealers* and *American Messiahs*

Carter used journalism as a cover for intelligence operations, and as soon as his covert career was terminated, wrote a fictional account of some of his exploits.²

Carter's espionage career further blurred the lines between espionage, journalism, and creative writing because the reports he provided to Roosevelt contained an undifferentiated mix of fact and fiction. While some of the intelligence Carter and his organization obtained was accurate, and a smaller portion was consequential, much of the information Carter personally delivered to the president was so farcical that it would have been more appropriate

to submit it to the humor magazine he had edited as an undergraduate at Yale.^b

There is no evidence, however, that Roosevelt lost confidence in Carter. From February 1941 until shortly before his death in April 1945, FDR entrusted Carter and his organization with a continuous stream of unorthodox missions, conferring stature on the amateur spymaster that cabinet members, military leaders, and the heads of America's wartime intelligence organizations, including FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and Office of Strategic Services

b. Carter attended Yale with Thornton Wilder, Henry Luce, and Archibald MacLeish. He edited the *The Yale Record*.

The views, opinions, and findings of the author expressed in this article should not be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of its factual statements and interpretations or representing the official positions of any component of the United States government.

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head William J. Donovan, could not ignore. Carter concerned himself with an extraordinary range of topics: collecting dirt on FDR's political opponents, assessing the loyalty of Japanese immigrants in the months before the Pearl Harbor attack, commissioning a former associate of Hitler's to compile a psychosexual profile of the Nazi leader, obtaining reports from the Polish underground on the Holocaust, spying on New York society, and much more.

The aspiring spymaster explained his approach in 1942 in response to a request from Roosevelt for suggestions about the organization of American intelligence. Carter advocated a pre-modern version of intelligence, one that George Washington, Thomas Jefferson or Queen Elizabeth I would have recognized. Instead of centralized organizations with professional staff, Carter's vision resembled Sherlock Holmes and the Baker Street Irregulars, a group of talented amateurs running circles around hidebound bureaucrats.³ In addition to bringing on Carter, Roosevelt commissioned Vincent Astor to operate an informal intelligence operation.⁴ Two years later, Carter wrote a similar plan for post-war intelligence that Donovan characterized as "horse and buggy" thinking.⁵

The Bureau of Current Political Intelligence

Carter started his government career in 1928 as a midlevel State Department employee. His official duties must not have been taxing as

over a four-year period Carter found time to write articles for magazines, a book advocating a new constitution and warning that economic depression could spawn "an American Spartacus," and four novels—all published under various pseudonyms.⁶

In *Murder in the State Department*, a novel attributed to "Diplomat," Carter introduced the Bureau of Current Political Intelligence (CPI), a supersecret agency with tentacles reaching to the Kremlin and the Vatican, among other places. It was run by Dennis Tyler, a wisecracking, debonair diplomat. Although Tyler's CPI was described as an espionage outfit, the character was more detective than spy.

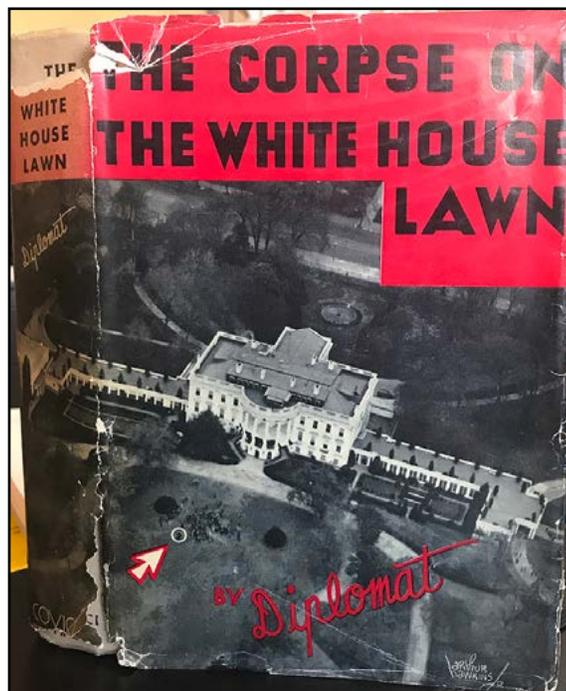
A *New York Times* review of Diplomat's second novel, *Murder in*

the Embassy, observed that the author "displays a close knowledge of the diplomatic service and a sense of humor that is refreshing in the serious business of concocting successful mystery tales."⁷ From the point of view of Carter's colleagues and employers, the biggest mystery posed by his stories was the identity of their author. As the *American Foreign Service Journal* noted, "The question is, who is 'Diplomat?'"⁸ Diplomat's cover was maintained for two additional novels about the CPI: *Scandal in the Chancery*, published in 1931, and *The Corpse on the White House Lawn*, published the following year.

The mystery was solved in the spring of 1932, and an unamused State Department forced Carter to choose between his job and a prolific but barely remunerative writing career. He chose the latter and hastily finished a book about the upcoming presidential election, according to an interview of Carter by noted

oral historian Charles Morrissey.⁹ The publisher sent parts of the draft manuscript of *What We Are About To Receive*, without revealing the identity of its author, to both candidates. Herbert Hoover did not reply. Roosevelt invited the author to meet with him at Hyde Park, New York. Carter decided that the opportunity to visit the next president outweighed the merits of maintaining anonymity.¹⁰

When Carter mentioned his plans to travel to Europe to work as a freelance reporter,



Roosevelt suggested that he look up an old acquaintance, the German-born, Harvard-educated Ernst Sedgwick Hanfstaengl.¹¹ Hanfstaengl was the son of a German art publisher and American mother. A talented pianist, he had played the piano for Theodore Roosevelt in the White House and for Franklin Roosevelt at the Harvard Club in New York before returning to Germany in 1921. There he became a member of Hitler's earliest inner circle, participated in the Munich beer hall putsch, and helped finance publication of *Mein Kampf*.¹²

At the time Carter visited, Hanfstaengl was the Nazi Party's liaison to the foreign press. The two men exchanged life stories, discovering that Carter's parents had decades earlier been friends with Hanfstaengl's mother.¹³ Hanfstaengl arranged an interview with Herman Göring, but Carter failed to find a market for his stories. Returning to the United States, he found a job at the Department of Agriculture, serving as a publicist in the Resettlement Administration and as director of the Division of Information in the Farm Security Administration, where he commissioned documentary films from Pare Lorentz.

In 1936, Carter relaunched his journalism career, renting an office four blocks from the White House in the National Press Building. Written under the penname Jay Franklin, his syndicated pro-Roosevelt column *We, the People* appeared in newspapers across the country. In 1940, Carter used the column to promote a third term for FDR, while working behind the scenes with Roosevelt advisers Thomas Corcoran and Benjamin Cohen to press Democratic leaders to

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accept the break from the two-term precedent set by Washington.¹⁴

A Small and Informal Intelligence Unit

After FDR's reelection, Carter felt he had earned the right to a reward for services rendered. Unlike countless aspirants who, having provided real or imagined political services, sought prestigious positions or government sinecures, Carter made an unusual request. At a meeting with Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles in February 1941, with the war in Europe well under way, Carter expressed the opinion that American intelligence was "pretty well loused up and floundering around." He suggested creating and putting himself in charge of "a small and informal intelligence unit operating out of the White House."¹⁵

Welles arranged a White House meeting, and on February 13, 1941, FDR gave Carter's plan the green light.¹⁶ The approval was contingent on the arrangement being kept secret and with the understanding that if any hint of the columnist's covert activities leaked to the public the White House would deny any connection to him. That afternoon, FDR instructed Secretary of State Cordell Hull to make a payment of \$10,000 (about \$150,000 today) to Carter, ostensibly for a report "on the political and economic factors of stability and instability" in Germany and neighboring countries. The money was drawn from funds Congress had

appropriated to the White House for unspecified "emergencies."¹⁷

After the initial payment, Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs Adolph Berle, who served as interagency coordinator for the government's intelligence operations, managed the payments to Carter—\$64,000 in 1941, increasing to \$121,000 in 1943 and more than \$10,000 per month by the spring of 1945.¹⁸ Berle was not informed of the amateur spy's activities, disapproved of those he learned about, and tried to undermine Carter, for example by suggesting that the FBI "use the utmost discretion in dealing with Carter and any of his representatives" and "that under no circumstances should any confidential data be furnished or should these people be granted access to Bureau files."¹⁹

Carter's first report and FDR's response set the pattern for the coming years. The March 1, 1941 memo was typed under Carter's letterhead: "JOHN FRANKLIN CARTER (Jay Franklin), 1210 National Press Building, Washington DC," followed by the names of his column, "We, the People," and radio program, "This Week in Washington." The report, titled "Raw Material Situation in Belgium, as reported by Antwerp factory manufacturing electrical equipment for the Occupying Authorities," was a list of materials, from benzene to zinc, and notations about whether they were readily available, scarce, or unobtainable in the by-then German-occupied country.

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Roosevelt's response two days later, typed on White House stationery, was addressed to "Jack Carter." It instructed him to show the list to the "Army, Navy and State Department—and also to the British Embassy." It was signed with the typed initials "F. D. R." In his next report, Carter summarized the observations of "an American businessman just returned from three months visit to Berlin on company business." It noted labor shortages, good morale, and a "determined effort being made by German authorities to take over ownership of American plants, etc., in Germany."

A March 8, 1941 memo from Carter on "Nazi Activities in the Union of South Africa" employed more colorful language. A quarter of a million South African nationalists "of all sexes, shapes, ages and sizes" were sabotaging the British war effort. Soldiers on their way to England "are set upon and beaten up in dark alleys, they are spat at by foul-breathed women." The South Africa report, attributed to an unidentified informant in Cape Town, was followed by a series of summaries of conversations with businessmen who had recently returned from Europe and Japan, and a March 31 "Summary of Conditions in Nazi Germany (and occupied countries) as reported by American businessmen recently returned from Europe."

Much of Carter's work in spring and summer 1941 was what today would be called opposition research. Some involved spying on politicians, including members of Congress. In April he passed on an account

of a conversation with British Ambassador Lord Halifax, who had described comments from Wendell Willkie. The failed Republican presidential candidate, Halifax told Carter, had observed that many Americans found FDR "indirect and tricky." Willkie, and Halifax, felt that the president was being too cautious about providing assistance to Britain.

Carter also played a role in an effort to defang Charles Lindbergh, a powerful proponent of isolationism and one of FDR's most potent critics. The president asked Carter to prepare a detailed study of the "copperheads," a term of derision that had been applied during the Civil War to Southern sympathizers and defeatists in the North. Carter delivered a 55-page report on April 22 and was in the Oval Office three days later for a press conference when, responding to a planted question, the president lectured reporters about the Civil War and labeled Lindbergh a copperhead.²⁰ The comments outraged the famous aviator, leading him to resign his cherished commission in the Army Air Corps Reserves.²¹ The

New York Times editorial page said Roosevelt had spoken impetuously but also accused Lindbergh of petulant behavior;²² his reputation took a hit and never rebounded.

On May 14, 1941, Carter forwarded to FDR a report written in confidence by a reporter for *Time* and *Life* magazines that painted a picture of Japanese infiltration, subversion, and espionage in the Philippines. The Japanese, FDR was informed, had deployed agents under a variety of covers, especially as the owners of photography studios, to every corner of the archipelago, had blanketed the country with propaganda, and corrupted members of parliament, all in preparation for invasion and occupation.

Two days after sending the Philippines report, Carter informed FDR that a member of the Swedish parliament had provided intelligence on Germany's plans to invade the Soviet Union. Millions of German and other Axis troops were massed on the Soviet border, maps of Russia were being printed in large quantities, and it was "considered a toss-up whether there will be a war." Unidentified "observers" were

Aviator and isolationist Charles Lindbergh—shown here as Herman Goering presents him a medal in 1938—became the subject of a 55-page report from Carter's organization in 1941. Source: WikiCommons.



predicting an invasion around June 1, 1941.^a

In June FDR passed a report to Carter warning that the Vichy government in Martinique was preparing to withstand an embargo or siege. The president asked Carter to send an operative to assess the potential for the Caribbean island to become a base for hostile military operations against the United States. Carter recruited Chicago businessman Curtis Munson to visit Martinique under cover as a consultant compiling a report on food security for the Department of Agriculture. In a meeting that was not noted on White House logs, Munson and Carter personally briefed Roosevelt on their conclusion that fears about military preparations on the island were overblown.²³

A Persistent Busybody

During the first year of his covert work for FDR, Carter frequently asked the White House to provide him and his agents some sort of official recognition or credentials. Roosevelt ignored the requests or batted them aside, telling Carter that he'd have to rely on his powers of persuasion.²⁴

Indirectly, however, Roosevelt signaled to top government officials that Carter was working for him. The president instructed White House staff to disseminate Carter's reports to cabinet officials, the FBI, and military intelligence agencies, as well as to Vincent Astor and Nelson Rockefeller who, like Carter, were running informal, off-the-books intelligence

a. Operation Barbarossa, the German invasion of the Soviet Union, began on June 22, 1941.

In the fall of 1941, Roosevelt asked Carter to assess the loyalty of Japanese living on the West Coast.

operations. Carter was in touch with Donovan by August 1941, if not earlier, and mentioned conversations with the Coordinator of Information in several reports to Roosevelt, suggesting that the two had a cordial working relationship.²⁵

On September 5, 1941, Carter telephoned Hoover, saying that FDR had requested that he and Munson meet with the FBI director. It was their first meeting and Hoover prepared by reading the bureau's file on Carter; he did not like what he saw. It started with a column Carter had written in 1937 that included derogatory remarks about the bureau and its thin-skinned director. A memo about the column had been routed to Hoover, who characterized it as "regurgitated filth" in a handwritten note.²⁶ The most recent item in the file was a March 1941 "We, the People" column that accused Hoover of attempting to create a US gestapo and predicting that as a result of congressional investigations into illegal arrests and wiretapping "our No. 1 G-man may become the first American political casualty of World War 2." Americans, Carter had written, "don't want a gang of G-men to go around beating us up and destroying our liberties in the name of high-pressure patriotism."²⁷

In a note to the file dictated after meeting Carter and Munson, Hoover made it clear both that he had read the clips and that he was aware of Carter's relationship with Roosevelt. "J. Franklin Carter, who writes under the name of Jay Franklin, has always viewed the FBI as a fascist organization and has stated that we are opposed to liberal thought." The memo

noted that Munson was traveling to New York at Roosevelt's request to study the refugee situation and instructed the special agent in charge of the bureau's New York office "to be very courteous to Mr. Munson in view of his influential backing."²⁸

This was the high point of Carter's relationship with the FBI. Years later, Hoover summed up his feelings about the amateur spy in a handwritten note scrawled at the bottom of an internal FBI memo: "We know Carter well & most unfavorably. He is a crackpot, a persistent busy-body, bitten with the Sherlock Holmes bug & plagued with a super-exaggerated ego."²⁹

Assessing the Loyalty of Japanese Americans

In the fall of 1941, Roosevelt asked Carter to assess the loyalty of Japanese living on the West Coast. Carter assigned the task to Munson, who spent three weeks in California interviewing FBI agents, military intelligence officials, and people from all walks of life, including first- and second-generation Japanese immigrants.

Rather than restricting himself to the immediate task, Munson felt it necessary to analyze the Japanese mind and soul.

Munson's amateur sociology was of questionable value, and even at a time when xenophobic views were pervasive in US society, his casual racism should have had no place in documents that were presented to the president. Nonetheless, Carter and Munson provided sound advice that the Roosevelt administration would

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disregard. Except for a small number who had already been identified, individuals of Japanese descent living in the United States posed no threat to national security, they reported. They went further, pointing out that Japanese Americans were at risk from their neighbors. Instead of interning them, the US government should take steps to protect Japanese, Carter advised.

Ignorance in the Place of Secrecy

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The FBI director barely hid his contempt for Carter, but Donovan maintained cordial relations. "Yesterday afternoon," Carter wrote in a January 9, 1942 memo to Roosevelt, Donovan's aide "David Bruce showed me the master plan he has developed for organization of a general world-wide secret intelligence service for the United States." Carter damned the plan with faint praise, writing that it was a good "model for a central-office organization of intelligence" but was "very hazy on actual operations." He added that the plan was based on British and German methods that were not suitable for the United States.

Summarizing his own approach, Carter suggested that "we should

strive to develop something much simpler, more happy-go-lucky and casual, and utilize ignorance in the place of secrecy as a method." By ignorance, he meant a decentralized intelligence system composed of teams that operated independently and without knowledge of each other's existence. Carter knew just the man to lead such an organization. "I am very ambitious to be allowed to try to do something along these lines on a modest and experimental scale and would like to tell you my concrete plan of operations the next time you can spare a couple of minutes after a press conference," he wrote to the president. Roosevelt occasionally invited Carter to linger behind as reporters filed out of press conferences, exchanging a few words with his operative. Probably because there was no indication that Carter's columns contained privileged information from the president, the visits didn't provoke complaints from other reporters accredited to the White House.

In arguing for expansion of their remit, especially in the Western Hemisphere, Donovan and Carter were walking into a bureaucratic minefield. Since 1940, the FBI had been conducting intelligence operations in Latin America based on a verbal directive from Roosevelt. A vague delineation of authority between the FBI and the Army had sparked a fierce turf war between the two organizations.³⁰ The last thing Hoover wanted was to cede authority or be forced to cooperate with Donovan's or Carter organizations.

On January 16, 1942, Roosevelt signed a secret directive that assigned to the FBI authority for intelligence and counterintelligence throughout the Americas, from the Arctic to Tierra del Fuego. That evening, Hoover wrote notes to the file memorializing telephone conversations with Army BGen. Raymond E. Lee, assistant chief of staff for intelligence; RAdm. Theodore S. Wilkinson of naval intelligence, and Berle at the State Department. Hoover reported that the "President had made the following notation on the Directive: 'I think that the Canadian and South American fields should not be in the Coordinator of Information field, nor in that of the J. Franklin Carter organization.'" Wilkinson, who had criticized Carter in a December 29, 1941 memo to Navy Secretary Frank Knox as "a sort of one-man Secret Service" who operated outside proper lines of authority, told Hoover "he was sorry the President had not seen fit to ignore publicly the Carter organization, but otherwise he thought it was fine."³¹

Credible and Incredible Intelligence

Carter's organization, which never had a name or a bureaucratic identity, grew to 25 employees.³² They were an eclectic collection of businessmen, journalists, and academics. In March 1941, Carter recruited Henry Field as his second in command.

Field, scion of Chicago retailer Marshall Field, had grown up in England and had been educated in anthropology at Eton and Oxford. Field's manners and erudition produced a good first impression, but his slippery relationship with

the truth often soured relationships. Shortly before Carter met him in 1940, Field's uncle, who ran the Field Museum, had been forced to recall a book Henry had written about folklore in western Asia after it was discovered he had plagiarized much of it.³³

One of Field's first forays into intelligence was a series of incredible reports that he claimed had been produced "under conditions of extraordinary secrecy from a man who is believed to have accurate and swift means of communication with Moscow." The reports, which were delivered to the president and forwarded from the White House to military intelligence agencies, spun a tale that would have seemed ridiculous even in one of Carter's novels.³⁴

Field's source claimed that an American military genius working for Stalin was directing the operations of the "Siberian Army," an entity that was poised to attack Japan within days using 8,300 planes that had been hidden in underground hangars. Subsequent reports claimed the USSR had spent \$6 billion building a series of underground forts from Leningrad to Odessa that were stuffed with troops waiting for orders to emerge and vanquish the Wehrmacht.

While there is no evidence that FDR or anyone else took accounts of the Siberian Army seriously, the president did accord some credibility to equally incredible reports. For example, on January 9, 1942, Roosevelt dictated a note requesting that Carter inform army and navy intelligence of his concerns that Nazis had infiltrated the United Service Organizations, the voluntary organization formed to entertain US troops. FDR instructed

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Gen. Henry "Hap" Arnold, chief of the Army Air Forces, to read and respond to Carter's suggestion that bombing Japanese volcanoes would set off earthquakes. Other government officials were pressed to consider Carter's reports asserting with great confidence that the labor leader John L. Lewis was conspiring with French intelligence to mount a coup and depose Roosevelt, warnings about Ukrainian terrorists hell-bent on assassinating the president, and other tall tales.³⁵

Shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack, Carter assigned one of his operatives, a journalist named William Irwin, the task of investigating Japanese intelligence activities along the US-Mexican border. Irwin drove thousands of miles through Mexico and Texas compiling lists of Japanese doctors, dentists, and ice cream shop proprietors and assigned them roles in a massive, and imaginary, intelligence operation directed from Tokyo. Carter forwarded scores of pages of Irwin's notes to FDR, the FBI, the State Department, and military intelligence organizations.³⁶

Not all of Carter's work was frivolous. He sent FDR an accurate and chilling account of the Soviet government's abysmal treatment of Polish soldiers and civilians who had been arrested when the USSR occupied half of their country. Tens of thousands, Carter informed Roosevelt, were suffering in Russian prisons and labor camps.³⁷

Of the thousands of pages Carter sent Roosevelt, possibly the most important were the 130 pages in a dossier titled "Reports on Poland and Lithuania." Compiled by the Polish underground, it was a detailed real-time report about the Holocaust. The dossier, which Roosevelt and Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles received on December 30, 1942, reinforced and expanded on information the administration had received from other sources.³⁸

The file included the first news to reach Washington about the Belzec concentration camp in southeastern Poland: "Inside and outside the fence Ukrainian sentries are posted. Executions are carried out in the following manner: a train carrying Jews arrives at the station and is moved up to the wire fence where the guards are changed. Now the train is brought to the unloading place by German personnel. The men are taken into barracks on the left, where they have to take their clothes off, ostensibly for a bath." It went on to describe how men and women were herded into a building and killed, their bodies buried in a ditch that had been dug by "Jews who, after they have finished the job, are executed."³⁹

The dossier revealed the existence of mobile extermination trucks in which poison gas was used to murder Jews, described the Auschwitz concentration camp, liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto, and atrocities in Lithuania. An appendix containing photographs of corpses stacked like firewood and other horrors made it

difficult to doubt the authenticity of the information.⁴⁰

The S Project

The most elaborate of Carter's operations involved Ernst Hanfstaengl. Since they met in 1932, Hanfstaengl's life circumstances had changed dramatically. As Hitler consolidated power, the aristocratic Harvard graduate gradually fell out of favor with the Nazi leadership, but there was no overt break. In February 1937, Göring summoned Hanfstaengl to Berlin and announced that the Führer had personally ordered him to travel on a secret mission to Salamanca, Spain. In midflight, the pilot informed his passenger that rather than landing in a city controlled by pro-German fascists, his orders were to eject him over Republican-held territory. Terrified that he would not survive his first parachute landing or that he would be killed by antifascist forces, Hanfstaengl wasted no time when the plane developed engine trouble and landed near Leipzig. He fled, first to Switzerland and later to Britain, defying Göring's orders to return home.

At the start of the war the British government interned Hanfstaengl as an enemy alien and, in September 1940, shipped him along with hundreds of Nazis to an internment camp in Ontario, Canada. In February 1942, Carter, seeking information about a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt's whom he erroneously believed was a Nazi spy, asked the FBI to track down Hanfstaengl and obtain permission from British intelligence to conduct an interview. When Carter met with Hanfstaengl in March 1942, instead of interrogating him he proposed that the former Hitler confidant travel to



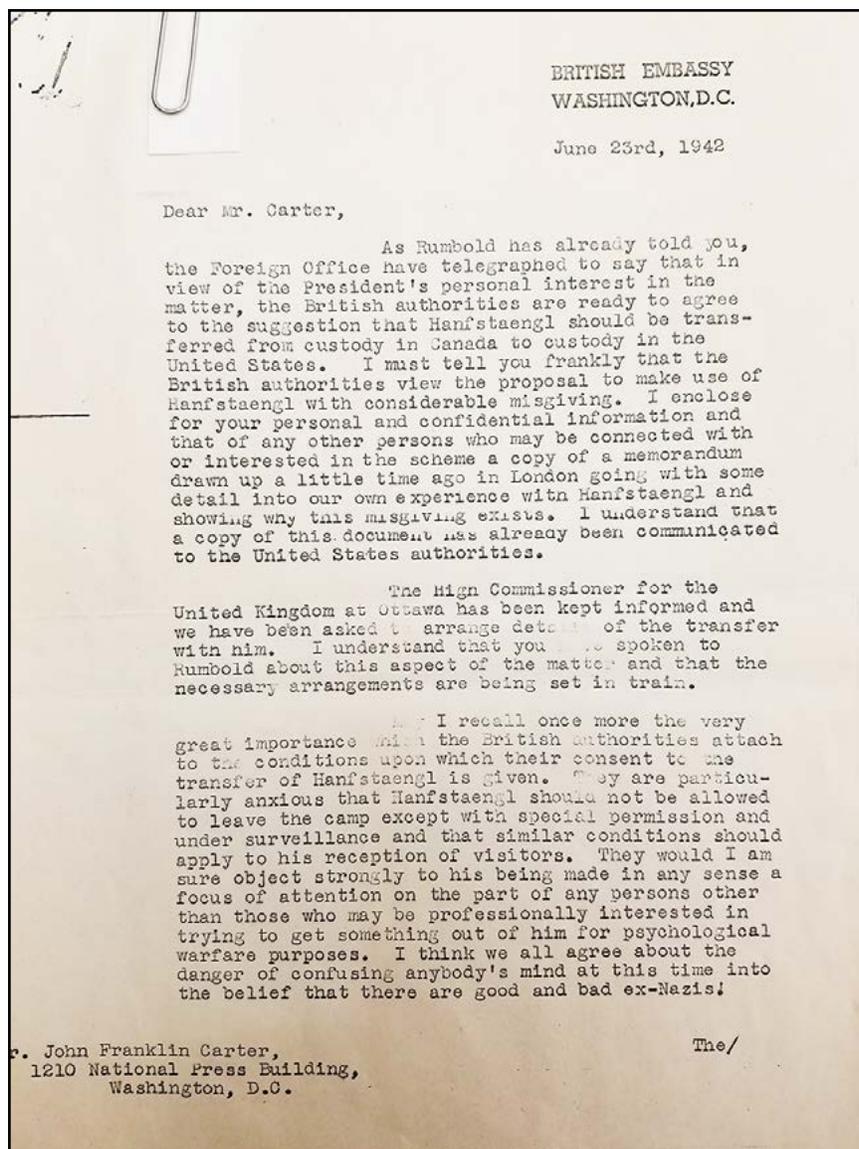
Ernst "Putzi" Hanfstaengl at the piano. Putzi had played for Theodore Roosevelt as well as for Franklin Delano before he returned to Germany from the United States, where he represented the family art business. He would become prominent in the rise of Hitler, earning places in several biographies of the Nazi leader. Undated photo: Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo / Alamy Stock Photo

Washington and help defeat Hitler. Tormented by untreated dental maladies, as well as Canadian guards who treated him with all the tenderness they believed a Nazi deserved and by German inmates to whom he was a traitor, Hanfstaengl readily agreed.

Back in Washington, Carter pitched the idea of bringing Hanfstaengl to the United States to Roosevelt and Welles. Asked how Hanfstaengl could contribute to the war effort, Carter replied, "He actually knows all these people in the Nazi government. He might be able to tell you what makes them tick."⁴¹ It took Roosevelt's personal request to Churchill to gain the British government's reluctant acquiescence and release Hanfstaengl to Carter's custody. London agreed on the condition that the arrangement be kept secret and that the German remain under guard.

Sir Gerald Campbell, British consul general to the United States, wrote to Carter in June 1942 stating that "in view of the President's personal interest in this matter, the British authorities are ready to agree to the suggestion that Hanfstaengl should be transferred from custody in Canada to custody in the United States." He said the "British authorities view the proposal to make use of Hanfstaengl with considerable misgiving." He added, "I think we can all agree about the danger of confusing anybody's mind at this time into the belief that there are good and bad ex-Nazis." (See facing page.)⁴²

In fact, Carter believed in good and bad Nazis. In a May 1941 newspaper column, Carter had suggested that the flight to Scotland of Rudolph Hess was a sign that the conflict between warring Nazi factions was coming to a climax. He wrote that one faction wished to "stabilize



UK Embassy note to Carter noting British skepticism about Hanfstaengl's utility and the conditions of his transfer from Canada to the United States. (FDR Library)

German victories, leaving Germany the supreme power on the continent, but foregoing (sic) political empire," while the other "propose to follow the world-revolution to world supremacy at any cost to German manpower and German ideas." He informed his readers that "from the start of the Hitler revolution it has been obvious that there was a group of sincere, able and patriotic Germans who worked whole-heartedly for a greater

Germany and a German mission which would create a Germany and a German people free to work out their destinies and to socialize and to rationalize the life of Europe."⁴³

In agreeing to bring Hanfstaengl to Washington, Roosevelt told Carter, "You can tell him that there's no reason on God's earth why the Germans shouldn't again become the kind of nation they were under Bismarck.

Not militaristic. They were productive; they were peaceful; they were a great part of Europe. And that's the kind of Germany I would like to see. If he would like to work on that basis, fine." Hanfstaengl and Carter believed the president wanted them to help devise a strategy to inspire the German military to depose Hitler, negotiate peace with the Allies, and combine forces against the Soviet Union.⁴⁴ In the interests of secrecy, while Hanfstaengl was in the United States, Carter and Roosevelt referred to him as "Dr. Sedgwick" after his mother's maiden name, or simply as "Dr. S.," and the enterprise was referred to as the S Project.

Initially housed at Fort Belvoir, in Virginia near Washington, DC, Hanfstaengl quickly antagonized the base commander and was moved to Bush Hill, a crumbling estate in Alexandria, Virginia, that Carter rented from two of Field's relatives. The scene quickly degenerated into a farce featuring drunken rebellious servants, balky plumbing, and a leaky roof. The drama centered on the moody and petulant Hanfstaengl, who spent much of his time at an out-of-tune Steinway banging out Bach, Beethoven, and Wagner, music that he'd once used to arouse Hitler. For a time the highest ranking Nazi to step onto American soil during the war was "guarded" by his son Egon, by then a US citizen who had enlisted in the Army.⁴⁵

Technicians from the Federal Communications Commission installed a shortwave receiver at Bush Hill that Hanfstaengl used to listen to German radio broadcasts. He wrote memos suggesting counterpropaganda, lacing his recommendations with information that he believed

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would get under the Hitler's skin. Roosevelt took an active interest in Hanfstaengl's work, reading his reports and sending questions through Carter. For example, FDR asked for Hanfstaengl's ideas about how "word could effectively be brought to reach the German people with the assurance that we do not propose a general massacre of Germans and that in the future a peaceful German people can protect and improve their living standards."⁴⁶ Hanfstaengl suggested a broadcast to German soldiers by Generals Eisenhower or Marshall. The idea, which was never put into practice, was to plant the seeds for a German military coup against Hitler.

Hanfstaengl wrote a psychological profile of Hitler, spicing it up with salacious tidbits and speculation about the Führer's sex life. Hitler had an erotic fascination with whips, and he had probably been infected with a venereal disease by a Jewish prostitute in Vienna in 1909, his former supporter and confidant wrote. Roosevelt praised Hanfstaengl's Hitler profile, advising Harry Hopkins and other White House officials to study it carefully.⁴⁷ Hanfstaengl also wrote profiles of 400 "key Nazis" that were turned over army intelligence.

In December 1942, journalists at *Cosmopolitan* magazine learned of Hanfstaengl's presence in the United States—probably from British intelligence—and the broad outlines of his activities. The magazine's editor told Carter he planned to give the story to the anti-Roosevelt Hearst newspapers. Carter convinced him to hold off until the first of February 1943. The

State Department and White House agreed to Carter's plan to get in front of the story by issuing a press release on January 28th.⁴⁸

Carter broke the news in an article distributed by the company that handled his "We, the People" column. Writing as if he had only recently learned the bare outlines of the story, Carter told his readers that the "government is making public one of the best-kept secrets of its psychological warfare against Hitler and the Nazis, the fact that Dr. Ernst Sedgwick (Putzi) Hanfstaengl has been giving our government the lowdown on Hitlerism for several months." He added that "details of the transfer from Canadian to American jurisdiction are still shrouded in official secrecy." The story ran in newspapers around the country, including without a byline on the front page of the *New York Times*.⁴⁹

While the *Times* didn't reveal Carter's role in the affair, other newspapers mentioned that he was involved in the operation. Carter lied to his colleagues, minimizing his role. If his fellow reporters knew anything about the covert services Carter was providing the White House or the existence of his intelligence unit, they kept the information to themselves.

The publicity prompted an immediate and vociferous demand from the British government to return their prisoner.⁵⁰ Roosevelt resisted the pressure, but in the summer of 1944, London turned up the heat, threatening to leak information about the administration's codding of Hanfstaengl to Roosevelt's

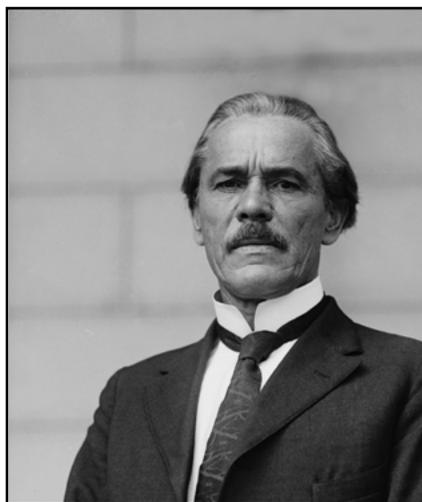
Republican challenger. The threat of newspaper stories about the White House pampering a Nazi in a mansion with servants was the last straw.

The British and Canadian governments squabbled over which country should take him, delaying Hanfstaengl's departure. In the end, Roosevelt said, "Hell, just put him on a plane and fly him over to England and turn him over. That's it." On September 24, 1944, that was what was done.⁵¹

The M Project

Carter's last large-scale mission for FDR was the M Project, a secret analysis of options for postwar migration (hence "M") of the millions of Europeans expected to be displaced by the war. In the summer of 1942, Roosevelt asked Carter to sound out Aleš Hrdlička, curator of physical anthropology at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History, about leading the project.⁵² The president knew Hrdlička and was aware that the prominent scientist was convinced of the superiority of the white race and obsessed with racial identity. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, Hrdlička had written to FDR expressing the view that Japanese had a lower level of evolutionary development than other races. The president wrote back asking whether the "Japanese problem" could be solved through mass interbreeding with other races.⁵³

Hrdlička's views were not problematic for FDR, but he warned Carter that he could be difficult to manage. Carter wrote to FDR about their first meeting, describing the anthropologist as a "stubborn, erudite, arrogant, charming, authoritarian,



Aleš Hrdlicka (on left, pictured in 1922) Czech American anthropologist and curator of physical anthropology at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History began the M Project. but he was replaced by a member of the project team, the renowned geologist and president of Johns Hopkins University, Isaiah Bowman (pictured in 1940). Hrdlicka photo © Everett Collection Inc / Alamy Stock Photo; Bowman photo © Sheridan Library, JHU/Gato/Alamy Stock Photo.

friendly, difficult, delightful old gentleman.” The president responded on July 30, 1942: “I love your memorandum in regard to the multi-adjec-tived anthropologist. I think you are completely right. I know that you and Henry Field can carry out this project unofficially, exploratorially, ethnologically, racially, admixturally, miscegenationally, confidentially and, above all, budgetarily. . . . Any person connected herewith whose name appears in the public print will suffer guillotinally.”⁵⁴

Outlining the president’s charge for the committee, Carter told Hrdlička it was expected to “formu-late agreed opinions as to problems arising out of racial admixtures and to consider the scientific principles involved in the process of miscegena-tion as contrasted with the opposing policies of so-called ‘racialism.’”⁵⁵

The committee’s task, Roosevelt told Carter, was to identify “the

vacant places of the earth suitable for post-war settlement” and the “type of people who could live in those places.” Initial work was to focus on South America and Central Africa. Roosevelt wanted the committee to explore questions such as the prob-able outcomes from mixing people from various parts of Europe with the South American “base stock.”

FDR posed some specific ques-tions, such as: “Is the South Italian stock—say, Sicilian—as good as the North Italian stock—say, Milanese—if given equal economic and social opportunity? Thus, in a given case, where 10,000 Italians were to be offer[ed] settlement facilities, what proportion of the 10,000 should be Northern Italians and what Southern Italian?”⁵⁶

Roosevelt “also pointed out,” Carter informed Hrdlička, “that while most South American coun-tries would be glad to admit Jewish

immigration, it was on the condi-tion that the Jewish group were not localized in the cities, they want no ‘Jewish colonies,’ ‘Italian colonies,’ etc.” Keeping with this theme, the president also tasked the committee with determining how to “resettle the Jews on the land and keep them there.”

Ultimately, Carter was unable to handle Hrdlicka and Roosevelt de-cided to replace him with a member of the M Project team, Johns Hopkins University President renowned ge-ographer, Isaiah Bowman. Roosevelt knew Bowman well, and was aware of his anti-Semitic views. In 1938, FDR had asked Bowman to undertake a study similar to the M Project, but on a smaller scale. Roosevelt told Bowman: “Frankly, what I am rather looking for is the possibility of un-inhabited or sparsely inhabited good agricultural lands to which Jewish colonies might be sent.” Bowman, who played a prominent role in the redrawing of European and Middle Eastern national boundaries at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, counseled the president to avoid permitting Jewish immigration to the United States, to try to keep Jewish populations in Europe, and if they left the continent to disperse them in rural areas as far away from the United States as possible.”⁵⁷

Under Bowman’s and Fields’s joint leadership, the M Project expanded far beyond Roosevelt’s original charge, producing tens of thousands of pages of reports, maps, and charts, analyses of the supposed characteristics of myriad racial and ethnic groups, and theories about optimal proportions in which to com-bine them in their new homelands. (See next page for a sampling.)

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January 7, 1944.

MEMORANDUM FOR MISS TULLY: ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BOWMAN-FIELD COMMITTEE ("M" PROJECT)

Herewith is the annual report on the administration of the "M" Project--
Bowman-Field Committee on Migration and Settlement.

J.F.C.

REPORT SERIES

| <u>Number</u> | | <u>1943</u> | <u>Copies</u> |
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| R-1 | GROWTH OF SOVIET POPULATION | 6/18 | 1 - 30 |
| R-2 | POPULATION PROBLEMS OF FRANCE | 6/28 | 1 - 30 |
| R-3 | POSSIBILITIES OF SETTLEMENT IN BAJA CALIFORNIA | 7/21 | 1 - 30 |
| R-4 | SUDETEN SETTLERS AT ST. WALBURG, SASKATCHEWAN | 6/25 | 1 - 30 |
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| R-15 | TWO REFUGEE CAMPS IN UGANDA | 7/6 | 1 - 3 |

The covering memo and a portion of the first page of appendices (then labeled exhibits) of the "M" Project Annual Report for 1943. The appendices listed, with a few titles omitted, 117 items, including reports, memoranda, translations, and treatments of Nazi German "administrative" behavior. A statistical summary (a page count) of the activity showed that 3,912 pages had been produced; the work including generation of 2,355 maps, photographs, and photostate.

More than 30 contributors were listed as helping in the project, including a number of OSS employees —secretarial and cartographic specialists. The dissemination list showed 29 recipients. The first recipient outside of the White House on the list (copy #3) was "Dr. William L. Langer, O.S.S. for Research and Analysis."

While settlement contingencies for a wide range of peoples were studied, when Roosevelt described the M Project to Churchill during a lunch at the White House in May 1943, he focused on one group. It was, he said, an effort to solve "the problem of working out the best way to settle the Jewish question," Vice President Henry Wallace, who attended the meeting, recorded in his diary. The solution that the president endorsed, "essentially is to spread the Jews thin all over the world," rather than allow them to congregate anywhere in large numbers.⁵⁸

FDR tightly controlled the distribution of reports from the M Project. There is no evidence that it had any influence on policy. In retrospect, it is most important as a window into FDR's thinking about race and immigration.

Terminated by Truman

When Roosevelt died on April 12, 1945, his personal files contained more than 3,000 pages of correspondence with Carter, profiles of hundreds of Nazis that Hanfstaengl had compiled, plus the massive outpouring from the M Project.

Carter wrote to Truman explaining his work for FDR, offering to continue his unit's covert activities, and urging the new president to fund completion of the M Project. Truman was deeply skeptical about the need for espionage or secret intelligence, and he had been informed by the State Department that the \$10,000 per month that was being spent on the M Project was a waste of money. He terminated Carter's operations, cut off funding for the migration studies,

and rejected Carter's requests to be reinstated.^{a, 59}

Carter finally received official recognition of his activities in a December 11, 1945 letter from Truman thanking him for his service. Addressed to "Jay Franklin," one of Carter's pseudonyms, Truman wrote: "In liquidating your office I want to

take this opportunity to thank you for the patriotism and insight with which you and your staff handled the duties assigned to you. There are people in the Government who have done a heroic job with no other object in view but the welfare of their country. I think your organization was in that category." Thus ended one of the stranger episodes in American intelligence.⁶⁰

Just as he had written columns about the Roosevelt administration while secretly working to undermine its political opponents, in 1948 Carter joined the Truman campaign as a speechwriter and continued to publish articles about the election. As the Cold War came to define US politics, Carter shifted his allegiance to Republicans. On November 28, 1967, age 70, Carter suffered a heart attack and died in his office in the National Press Building in Washington, DC.⁶¹

a. The OSS was disbanded on September 20, 1945.



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Endnotes

General note: Unless otherwise noted, reports and memorandums sent by John Franklin Carter to Franklin Roosevelt and correspondence from "FDR to JFC" referenced in this paper can be found in Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Secretary's File (PSF), 1933–1945, available online at <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/collections/franklin/?p=collections/findingaid&id=502&rootcontentid=140730&q=john+franklin+carter#id140730>

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