

Angleton's fundamental failure, which had tragic consequences for the world, was that he could never step outside his Americanism and catch even a glimpse of the violence and misery his nation's small but tenacious class of warlords and business moguls had inflicted on every country on Earth, including his own.

But this exceptionalism runs deep in American life, and through its radicalism. Even Americans in disadvantaged social groups are drilled in a low-level exceptionalism that's hard to shake off, and that's true too for many Americans with radical perspectives. For an Australian working in New York—as I was through these latter years, as a writer and editor in radical media—such a mindset was easy to see, harder to talk people out of. Some of my best friends are still fighting for justice, unaware of the cape of American exceptionalism that hovers, phantom like, over their courageous selves.

Jefferson Morley is one of them. He has written journalism and books over his long life from a progressive, American liberal perspective, with some seriously radical ideas, such as that John F. Kennedy was indeed killed in a conspiracy that included the CIA. Morley makes a fair case that Angleton was director of the Kennedy assassination's cover-ups. Angleton himself wrote that the Oswald-did-it-alone theory was 'incomplete', and he would know because he was the keeper of the CIA's extensive files on Oswald, gathered from agents who tracked the oddball ex-Marine from well before the assassination.

For Angleton and his small coterie, led by top dogs Allen and John Foster Dulles, managing the world on behalf of American business was indeed manifest destiny, and their exceptionalism powered the Cold War. After the Second World War's end, they inflicted their zeal on every part of the world that had a whiff of material value, or of cultural drift away from the individualist fantasy world of wealthy American alpha males. In the 1950s they financed enterprises such as the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), dedicated to anti-communism in thirty-five countries. In Australia they funded *Quadrant* magazine and built Pine Gap. But they were not themselves men of deep self-examination, nor even particularly bright.

Morley quotes a review Angleton wrote of the film *High Noon*, in 1952; it's about a gunslinger who gets out of jail and heads for the town whose citizens had busted him years before, with revenge in his fevered brain. The town marshal implores the citizenry to join him in fighting the evil one, but 'the banker, the merchant, the lawyer, the town clerk, all drew back', writes the

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35-year-old super-spy reviewer, idolising the marshal, played by Gary Cooper. 'They all drew back...it was the Marshall's responsibility...he put aside everything he held dear—his bride, the honeymoon in which they were about to leave. He went out into the street and did the job.'

Which is to say, shot the evil guy dead, at high noon. That's the high calling Marshall Angleton pursued, and that's how low his culture hung.

I said Morley's book is almost as scary as it ought to be. Morley almost acknowledges the consequences the planet is suffering for the hubris of these guys, but he can't go all the way and say it: that the American Project of the Twentieth Century was a failure, a disaster, run by a coterie of frat boys who grossly fucked the world, including their own unhappy nation. That is a place too scary for well-mannered American dissidents to go.

The ranks of less-well-mannered citizens of the United States are growing, and these ranks are filled particularly by women who reckon they had better take over being the banker, the merchant, the lawyer, the town clerk—and the spy, for that matter—and all work together, communally. To which Donald Trump stands fat-assed and firm to stop the lot of 'em, while his feral Svengali Steve Bannon corrals the Western world's rich and bitter yearning to be freer than everyone else. These boys will not give up their weapons, and theirs are bigger than everyone else's. High noon approaches. In his grave Jimmy Angleton rolls over, desperate for another shot of scotch; there it is: made in China. **a**

books **The Ugly Internet**

Surveillance Valley: The Secret Military History of the Internet, by Yasha Levine (Public Affairs, 2018)

One of *Surveillance Valley*'s opening anecdotes goes back to 1969, when groups of radical students at MIT and Harvard attempted to shut down ARPANET, the Pentagon-created predecessor to the internet. The students saw the proto-net of computing machines as a surveillance system, an

review by *Timothy Erik Ström*

apparatus of political control and military expansion that would be corrosive to democracy and sought to actively resist it. Jump to two, three or four decades later, and the scene is inverted, utterly. A significant proportion of people in the rich world have become enthralled by computing machines, believing in their utopian promises, even their necessity. Today a huge number of people keep their personal surveillance apparatuses within arm's reach at all times, stroking their screens with a pathological devotion while the device records



Angleton and US Exceptionalism

Phillip Frazer

data traces of all their actions and sends them off to the Silicon Valley tech titans and military spooks. What on earth happened?

Yasha Levine provides an answer to this in this important work. It's a book that spun out of his fruitful career as an investigative journalist for *Pando Daily*, a San Francisco media outlet covering Silicon Valley. One of the book's core assumptions is that technology is social, through and through. Building on this crucial but often ignored foundation, Levine argues against the modern penchant for proposing simplistic technological solutions to deeper and more complex social problems. The book's narrative unfolds around this lucid and important insight.

The book begins by analysing the internet's roots in the military-industrial complex, with a focus on it as a counter-insurgency machine for projecting neocolonial power. This sordid saga is familiar to those versed in the critical history of technology, but Levine retells these stories in an accessible and engaging way, providing important background to anyone curious about how the internet was designed to be a war machine.



The Ugly Internet

Timothy Erik Ström

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In addition to these secondary histories, *Surveillance Valley* contains some important new research. One part of this came through Levine's interviews with Stephen Wolff. Levine asked this largely unknown former military technocrat if it was right to call him 'the man who privatized the Internet?', to which Wolff replied 'yes'. This part of the story details how the Pentagon's network was developed for public use with the specific goal of handing it over to the private sector to act as an enormous engine of accumulation. This landmark decision went down without public debate or political discussion about the desirability of this outcome. Rather, it was the result of bureaucratic decree. Levine's face-to-face meeting with Wolff gives a focused and personalised look into this significant moment in the history of computers.

The most original part of the book is the scathing critique it makes of the 'privacy movement', particularly in its post-Snowden-leaks permutation. Indeed, Levine directly criticises Edward Snowden—a move very few writing about surveillance are prepared to make—noting that as a libertarian, Snowden is keen to focus blame on governments, hence letting corporations off the hook, while also enthusiastically promoting techno-solutions to social problems, specifically in the form of the encrypted web browser Tor.

Back in 2014, when Levine first began to critically report on Tor for *Pando Daily*, he was subjected to an intense

smear campaign. Levine, the iconoclast, was attacked by those wishing to protect their idol, lashing him with aggressive online trolling, unsubstantiated personal insults, anonymous complaints and even death threats. The intensity of this abuse—which notably did not engage with the substance of his arguments—put Levine on the path that led to this book. He launched a Kickstarter campaign to raise funds for *Surveillance Valley*, stating that this method of funding the project would provide him with great independence to go after the whole military-industrial oligarchic establishment. He received \$18,814 from 502 backers, which proved enough for him to bring the project to fruition.

Using a *Freedom of Information Act* request, Levine obtained a large quantity of documents that prove beyond doubt the substance of his criticisms of Tor that earned him so much nerd scorn. He details how Tor emerged from the Pentagon before spinning off into a non-profit organisation, which remained on the payroll of the Pentagon, the State Department and the CIA. The fact that Tor is a military contractor somewhat dampens its posturing as a radical, anti-authoritarian geek-punk saviour of the free internet. Further, Tor has been embraced and promoted by Facebook and Google, among other tech titans, in part because its encryptions are completely ineffective against the kinds of surveillance in which these corporations engage. This is very problematic, not only because it allows the corporate giants to concentrate even more power at the expense of democratic potentialities but because government spooks have access to the companies' walled gardens. Indeed, the documents that Snowden himself released show that the NSA has backdoor access to major tech firms. This is to say that the privacy protections offered by Tor are fatally compromised, and that Snowden should know better.

Levine weaves a grim story of the internet moving through Cold War complexes to the contradictory maze of the spy-corporation-hacktivist compound. If the internet is in a significant way an ugly apparatus ruled by military agents and corporate titans, that's because our world is, in a significant way, an ugly world, ruled by military agents and corporate titans. This is unsurprising if we accept that technology is social, and that, likewise, as Levine reiterates, simplistic technological solutions cannot address the far deeper social problems that we face. *Surveillance Valley* is a provocative and important book, for it contributes to gaining clarity about the mess we are in. **a**

