

*Spying in America: Espionage from the Revolutionary War to the Dawn of the Cold War.* Michael J. Sulick. Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2012. ISBN: 9781589019263

Even from the preface of *Spying in America: Espionage from the Revolutionary War to the Dawn of the Cold War*, Michael J. Sulick hints that this may not be a standard historical monograph. Sulick comes to history not as a trained historian but rather after a 28-year career at the C.I.A. Unlike most histories, his book was “reviewed by the C.I.A. to prevent the disclosure of classified information.” (xii) And, in contrast to the trend toward more narrow historical studies, this book covers 180 years of American history in roughly 275 pages.

Easy to read and useful for educators, *Spying in America* is based mostly on secondary sources. The book is broken into five parts and organized chronologically. Sulick includes sections titled The Revolutionary War, The Civil War, Espionage during the World Wars, The Golden Age of Soviet Espionage—the 1930s and 1940s, and the Atomic Bomb Spies. There is a balance problem in the organization of the text that does not detract much from readability but does raise questions. One wonders why parts vary so much in length.

The book is best as prosopography or collective biography, replete with biographical tidbits that will engage any reader. For example, Sulick writes about the Confederate spy Thomas Conrad, who “played a significant role in establishing the ‘Doctor’s Line,’ an organized system of couriers, often physicians ostensibly on house calls, who relayed intelligence to Richmond like runners passing batons in a marathon.” (97) In considering so many biographies of spies, the author argues that motivations for

American spies fit the following categories: "money, ego, revenge, romance, simple thrills, ideological sympathy, and dual loyalties." (7)

While the author tells great stories of a host of spies, it is often evident that Sulick is not a trained historian. Some sections read like general, descriptive textbook entries. At times, the author makes claims that professional historians would avoid. For instance, in a section on the revolutionary war, he writes, "Edward Bancroft and Benjamin Church were two civil servants with significant access who betrayed their country by spying for the enemy." (37) One might ask, whose country? Historians such as Joanne Freeman have discussed the deeply British identity of the colonists on the eve of the Revolution. Isn't revolution itself a betrayal of sorts, even if justified by political theorists like Locke and Rousseau? Sulick also writes about the "Roaring Twenties" as "an era marked by prosperity, decadent materialism, jazz, and the bootlegging of illegally smuggled liquor." (127) Historians of the 1920s stopped making such statements long ago. At times, the sources are inadequate to the historical task. Sulick claims that slaves were some of the "best collectors and couriers of espionage information." He discusses John Scobell, a freed slave whose race was part of his cover. This great story, however, has no source. (103) In another case, the story of Shinto Japanese monks who "tied miniature cameras to the talons of carrier pigeons and sent the feathered spies flying over military bases" was so fantastic that it sent me straight to the footnotes. The source for this story was an anti-Japanese book published in 1943 called *Betrayal from the East*; the racism in the source does not mean that the carrier pigeon story is false, but a thorough historian would have verified the story with another source rather than using one that was surely a product of the historical and historiographical trends of World War Two.

Despite these setbacks, minor flaws that will bother only professional historians, *Spying in America* makes two outstanding contributions. First, Sulick is best as an author when he allows his expertise to shine through. The reader is presented with spy-craft in a natural and accessible way such as in the following: “Communications is the riskiest element of espionage.” (23) He also writes about a “quintessential little gray man who becomes an extraordinarily effective spy precisely because he attracts no attention.” (135) Or, “For intelligence professionals, defectors are manna from heaven.” (181) Such claims may be obvious to an intelligence operator, but they are certainly not obvious to the lay reader. Perhaps this book should have been written as a series of lessons of historical spy-craft. The final sentence in the book suggests as much: “There has been no moment in American history more urgent to apply these lessons than now in order to prevent spying by those dedicated to destroying the American way of life.” (274)

The second fine contribution of *Spying in America* lies in its relevance for educators. On numerous occasions, I imagined teaching the stories that Sulick related. Teachers will love the tale of Emma Edmonds, the woman who “disguised herself as a man to enlist in the Second Michigan Infantry” and “later undertook espionage missions for the Union behind Confederate lines.” (104) On one mission, Edmonds “dyed her skin with silver nitrate, donned a minstrel wig, and posed in double disguise as a man and an African-American.”(104) On another occasion, while disguised as a man, she took on the role of a woman, “a pudgy Irish immigrant named Bridget O’Shea.” (104) Teachers concerned with issues of identity would find such stories rich with possibility. In another case, Sulick writes about a German spy who left his bag full of “German subversion plans for America” aboard a train in 1915 and later placed an ad in the newspaper to try to

retrieve the documents. The stories give a human face to espionage and history. Most of the spies here were more bureaucrat than James Bond. They had various motivations, from ideology to money to revenge. The human qualities captured by Sulick will fascinate students.

Overall, what *Spying in America* might lack in historical scholarship it entirely makes up for in utility in the classroom. Sulick has provided a compendium of fascinating tales and a source that might be used in the classroom at all levels. It is surely an odd time in the history of espionage, a moment when the C.I.A. is discovered spying not only on foreign nations, but also, according to the *New York Times*, on the United States Senate; I'm not aware of a spy story in this or any book where a nation's intelligence resources have been used so widely to spy on its own people.

Dr. Brett Schmoll, California State University - Bakersfield