

8 Historic Cases That Show the FBI and CIA Were Out of Control Long Before Russiagate

Conservatives tend to have two bad habits. First, they're prone to viewing the past through a nostalgic lens. Second, they tend to instinctively give law enforcement the benefit of the doubt.

These tendencies help explain why conservatives for decades have been able to overlook the many abuses—constitutional, legal, and moral—of US intelligence agencies.

Unlike some [more seasoned media](#), conservatives have appeared genuinely shocked by revelations of the Trump-Russia saga: [abuse of FISA warrants](#), [classified leaks](#) from top FBI brass, [corruption](#), campaign [moles](#), and [an apparent plot to remove](#) an elected president through undemocratic (and likely extra-constitutional) means.

These revelations are unique in that they have become highly public and involve a sitting president. However, an examination of the history of US intelligence agencies reveals government bureaucrats were out of control long before the 2016 presidential election.

1. That Time the CIA Considered Bombing Miami and Blaming It on Castro

It's no secret that the US government sought [to assassinate Fidel Castro](#) for years. Less well known, however, was that

part of their regime-change plot [included](#) a plan to blow up Miami and sinking a boat-full of innocent Cubans.

The plan, which was revealed in 2017 when the National Archives declassified 2,800 documents from the JFK era, was a [collaborative](#) effort that included the CIA, the State Department, the Department of Defense, and other federal agencies that sought to brainstorm strategies to topple Castro and sow unrest within Cuba. One of those plans included Operation Northwoods, submitted to the CIA by General Lyman Lemnitzer on behalf of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It summarized nine “pretexts” the CIA and US government could employ to justify military intervention in Cuba. One of the official CIA documents shows officials musing about staging a terror campaign (“real or simulated”) and blaming it on Cuban refugees.

“We could develop a Cuban Communist terror campaign in the Miami area, in other Florida cities and even in Washington,” the Operation Mongoose document says.

The terror campaign could be pointed at Cubans refugees seeking haven in the United States. We could sink a boatload of Cubans en route to Florida (real or simulated.) We could foster attempts on lives of Cuban refugees in the United States... Exploding a few plastic bombs in carefully chosen spots.



Ultimately, the broader Mongoose effort [failed](#) to remove Castro from power or effectively establish an infiltration within Cuba, though the CIA did engage in several sabotage operations. Mongoose was suspended and ultimately discontinued amid the Cuban Missile Crisis.

2. In 2014 the CIA Was Caught Red-Handed Spying on the Senate Intelligence Committee

In the summer of 2014, the CIA's inspector general concluded that the CIA had "improperly" spied on US Senate staffers who were researching the agency's black history of torture. As the *New York Times* [reported](#):

An internal investigation by the C.I.A. has found that its officers penetrated a computer network used by the Senate Intelligence Committee in preparing its damning report on the C.I.A.'s detention and interrogation program.

And that's not the worst part. *The Times* goes on to note that CIA officers didn't just read the emails of the Senate investigators. They also sent "a criminal referral to the Justice Department based on false information."

John Brennan, CIA director from 2013-2017, insisted during Senate hearings these were "very limited inappropriate actions" and that "the actions of the CIA were reasonable."

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) disagreed.

"That's not what the Inspector General [concluded]," Wyden said. "When you're talking about spying on a committee responsible for overseeing your agency, in my view that undermines the very checks and balances that protect our democracy, and it's unacceptable in a free society. And your compatriots in all your sister agencies agree with that."

Brennan, who [publicly lied](#) about the episode, was not punished and even retained his security clearance until Aug. 15, 2018.

3. The FBI's "Suicide Letter" to MLK and His Wife

Before he had a day named in his honor and a monument on the National Mall, the government viewed Martin Luther King Jr. very much as a threat. In fact, his message of peace, love, equality, and civil disobedience had the FBI so scared that agents actually sent King and his wife a package containing a strange letter and tape recording. It contained details of the civil rights activist's sexual indiscretions and encouraged him to kill himself.



In 1961, the FBI learned that Stanley Levison, a known "Red," had become a close advisor to King. The following year, Bobby Kennedy approved wiretaps on Levison's home and office, surveillance that would eventually expand. It turns out that J. Edgar Hoover stumbled on to MLK's busy sex life while investigating King.

"Hoover found out very little about any Communist subterfuge," [wrote](#) Yale historian Beverly Gage in the *New York Times* in 2014, "but he did begin to learn about King's extramarital sex life..."

The FBI apparently had no scruples about using the information to try to bring King down. James Comey, Gage writes, used to keep a copy of the King wiretap request on his desk "as a reminder of the bureau's capacity to do wrong."

4. The CIA Forced Prisoners to Participate in Mind Control Experiments in the 1950s

If you've never heard of Project MKUltra, you might find it

hard to believe. Also known as “the CIA Mind Control Program,” the effort was launched by the agency in 1953. The program used drug experiments on humans, oftentimes on prisoners who were tested against their will or in exchange for early release. The experiments were undertaken so CIA agents could better understand how to extract information from enemies during interrogations. Here is a description from the History Channel:

MK-Ultra's "mind control" experiments generally centered around behavior modification via electro-shock therapy, hypnosis, polygraphs, radiation, and a variety of drugs, toxins, and chemicals. These experiments relied on a range of test subjects: some who freely volunteered, some who volunteered under coercion, and some who had absolutely no idea they were involved in a sweeping defense research program. From mentally-impaired boys at a state school, to American soldiers, to "sexual psychopaths" at a state hospital, MK-Ultra's programs often preyed on the most vulnerable members of society. The CIA considered prisoners especially good subjects, as they were willing to give consent in exchange for extra recreation time or commuted sentences.

Whitey Bulger, a former organized crime boss, wrote of his experience as an inmate test subject in MK-Ultra. "Eight convicts in a panic and paranoid state," Bulger said of the 1957 tests at the Atlanta penitentiary where he was serving time. "Total loss of appetite. Hallucinating. The room would change shape. Hours of paranoia and feeling violent. We experienced horrible periods of living nightmares and even blood coming out of the walls. Guys turning to skeletons in front of me. I saw a camera change into the head of a dog. I felt like I was going insane."

How was any of this legal? Well, it wasn't, which is why the CIA understood it had to be concealed from the American public

at all costs.

“Precautions must be taken not only to protect operations from exposure to enemy forces but also to conceal these activities from the American public in general,” [wrote](#) a CIA auditor. “The knowledge that the agency is engaging in unethical and illicit activities would have serious repercussions in political and diplomatic circles.”

5. The FBI's Systemic Forensic Fraud in Crime Labs

In the early 1990s, [Dr. Frederic Whitehurst](#), an attorney and chemist who worked at the FBI as a Supervisory Special Agent, noticed troubling practices in the in the bureau's Investigation Laboratory.

There were “alterations of reports, alterations of evidence, folks testifying outside their areas of expertise in courts of law,” [said](#) Whitehurst. “[Really] what was going on was human rights violations. We have a right to fair trials in this country... And that's not what was going on at the FBI lab.”

In 1994, he blew the whistle on the “systemic forensic fraud” he witnessed. Nothing happened. So he took his case to the Department of Justice. The FBI didn't like that. Whitehurst was eventually chased out of the Bureau, but not before [winning](#) a \$1.16 million settlement.

Unfortunately, however, the wheels of justice turn slowly at the Bureau.

“It wasn't until ten years later that Whitehurst was finally vindicated,” notes the National Whistleblower Legal Defense and Education Fund note, “when a scathing 500+ page study of the lab by the Justice Department Inspector General, Michael Bromwich, concluded major reforms were required in the lab.”

But by then, an untold number of people had been convicted with the help of tainted evidence—evidence the DOJ [knew](#) was tainted.

In 2012 the Washington Post [published](#) an extensive review of the FBI and DOJ failures to properly review the cases impacted by the FBI lab scandal, based on Whitehurst's research.

As a result, the DOJ agreed to conduct yet another review of hair cases in collaboration with the Innocence Project and the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL).

- *3,000 cases were identified by the government that had used microscopic hair analysis from FBI examiners.*
- *500 have been reviewed as of March 2015.*
- *268 included pro-prosecution testimony from FBI examiners.*
- *257 (96 percent) contained erroneous statements from "FBI experts".*

At least 35 of these cases involved convicted criminals who received the death penalty, according to the National Whistleblower Legal Defense and Education Fund.

6. Operation Midnight Climax: Drugging Unsuspecting Johns and Filming their Interactions with

Prostitutes

In the 1950s and early 1960s, the CIA admitted to operating a “bawdy house” in a San Francisco apartment where “unsuspecting citizens were lured... for the CIA’s drug experiments,” according to a local news story report [documented](#) by the agency.

“Private citizens were taken to the bordello by \$100 prostitutes and drugged without their knowledge, usually with LSD,” the *San Francisco Examiner* reported in 1977 after the CIA admitted to the operation. Agents sat behind a two-way mirror and filmed the interactions between the drugged men and prostitutes.



Then-CIA director Stansfield Turner suggested the operation was intended to understand how drugs could potentially be used against the American people, though he called the experiments “abhorrent” and acknowledged it was “inexplicable” that the CIA would do this without the subjects’ consent. He insisted the agency had ceased the experiments 12 years prior. In a 1977 Senate testimony, CIA agents said the purpose of the experiments was to “learn about thought control and sexual behavior,” the *Examiner* noted.

7. The FBI Has Routinely Staged Acts of Terrorism

In the wake of 9/11, the FBI has, on numerous occasions, targeted unstable and mentally ill individuals, sending informants to bait them into committing terror attacks. Before these individuals can actually carry out the attack, however, the Bureau intervenes, presenting the foiled plot to the public as a successfully thwarted attack.

In 2011, journalist Glenn Greenwald [summarized](#) several examples of this deceitful tactic:

[T]he FBI subjected 19-year-old Somali-American Mohamed Osman Mohamud to [months of encouragement, support and money](#) and convinced him to detonate a bomb at a crowded Christmas event in Portland, Oregon, only to arrest him at the last moment and then issue a Press Release boasting of its success. [In late 2009](#), the FBI persuaded and enabled Hosam Maher Husein Smadi, a 19-year old Jordanian citizen, to place a fake bomb at a Dallas skyscraper and separately convinced Farooque Ahmed, a 34-year-old naturalized American citizen born in Pakistan, [to bomb the Washington Metro](#).

8. The CIA's Media Manipulation Campaigns

From the agency's earliest days, it has attempted to control the flow of information to the public. In his book [Legacy of Ashes: A History of the CIA](#), former New York Times journalist Tim Weiner [documented](#) how much influence the agency's first civilian director, Allen Dulles, had among major media companies:

Dulles kept in close touch with the men who ran The New York Times, The Washington Post, and the nation's leading weekly magazines. He could pick up the phone and edit a breaking story, make sure an irritating foreign correspondent was yanked from the field, or hire the services of men such as Time's Berlin bureau chief and Newsweek's man in Tokyo.

Weiner noted, "It was second nature for Dulles to plant stories in the press. American newsrooms were dominated by veterans of the government's wartime propaganda branch, the Office of War Information." During his time at the agency, Dulles "built a public-relations and propaganda machine that

came to include more than fifty news organizations, a dozen publishing houses, and personal pledges of support from men such as Axel Springer, West Germany's most powerful press baron."

In 1977, Carl Bernstein further exposed the CIA's efforts to influence news organization in an [article](#) for *Rolling Stone* in which he revealed that "more than 400 American journalists...in the past twenty-five years have secretly carried out assignments for the Central Intelligence Agency, according to documents on file at CIA headquarters."

The Lesson

Amid the media and political establishment's ongoing, frenzied coverage of Russia-gate, Americans are eager to pin guilt on the president have shown a willingness to trust the CIA and FBI without question despite numerous past and present reasons to be skeptical of their conclusions. Considering the CIA's long history of intervening in other countries' elections and governments, it is particularly ironic that their claims of Russia's meddling in the US' democracy are taken at face value.

Nor is the corruption and deceit limited to the FBI and CIA. Former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper [lied](#) to lawmakers and the public in 2013 when he claimed NSA did not collect any type of data on "millions or hundreds of millions of Americans." He was caught red-handed months later when whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed the extent of the agency's mass surveillance operations.

The survival of liberty depends on skepticism of government power—and make no mistake, that includes President Trump. But in light of these federal agencies' chronic tendency to engage in behavior wholly inconsistent with American values, the same distrust must be applied to the institutions that claim to shed light on abuses by unpopular leaders.

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