

**Kathryn S. Olmsted.** *Challenging the Secret Government: The Post-Watergate Investigations of the CIA and FBI.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996. Pp. xiii, 255. Cloth, \$34.95; paper, \$15.95.

Almost immediately after Watergate, the news broke that the CIA and FBI had been guilty of huge abuses of power both in the United States and abroad. The media, Congress, and the White House all promised investigations. However, contrary to popular expectations, the inquiries were stymied. The end result, Olmsted argues, was that neither Congress nor the press pushed for changes, or challenged the executive branch, in the oversight of the intelligence community.

Olmsted looks at how both houses of Congress organized investigative committees, and the executive response. Otis Pike (D-NY) led the House effort and Frank Church (D-ID) the Senate's, and the book details the convoluted efforts of these committees to ferret out information. The executive branch opposed these efforts with propaganda and delayed by resisting the committees' requests for documents. During this delay, Olmsted posits, public opinion swung away from the investigations. By the time the findings were issued, Congress was seen as overly prying, and so no real reform was accomplished. Publication of the Pike Committee's report was even suppressed.

This effort is researched and written well. Among its sources are interviews, committee reports, and papers of Frank Church and Gerald Ford, in addition to the newspapers, magazines, journals, and books one might expect. In addition, the work is well annotated with forty pages of notes. It develops and defends clearly its primary thesis that the press and Congress failed to change the oversight of the CIA and FBI.

It is, however, in Olmsted's larger claims that one begins to have questions. One of these is that the press, after this "year of intelligence" ended, ceased to monitor the intelligence agencies as closely. This, however, ignores the media's intense coverage of the Iran-Contra affair, among others (Olmsted mentions Iran-Contra, but only in terms of Congressional oversight), and she overlooks the media's comprehensively more intrusive and acrimonious approach. This work ends, in terms of press coverage, right after this episode, which leaves one wondering how it affected the larger media picture. Secondly, she ignores the overall issue of how the nation perceived the national security apparatus, arguing merely that the press returned to being deferential. She sidesteps the point, which she herself admitted, that the public's image of the agencies had changed.

This book clearly has potential for use at a number of different levels in history courses. It might be used in a survey, although it does not adequately link these episodes with what came before and has come hence, as is often needed in such a course. Among the courses that would benefit from this book are ones on journalism, journalistic history, governmental history, and the twentieth century. Due to its narrow focus, this work's potential for lecture material is limited. However, its strong bibliography allows it to serve as a good jumping-off point for one who might want to learn more about the period.

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