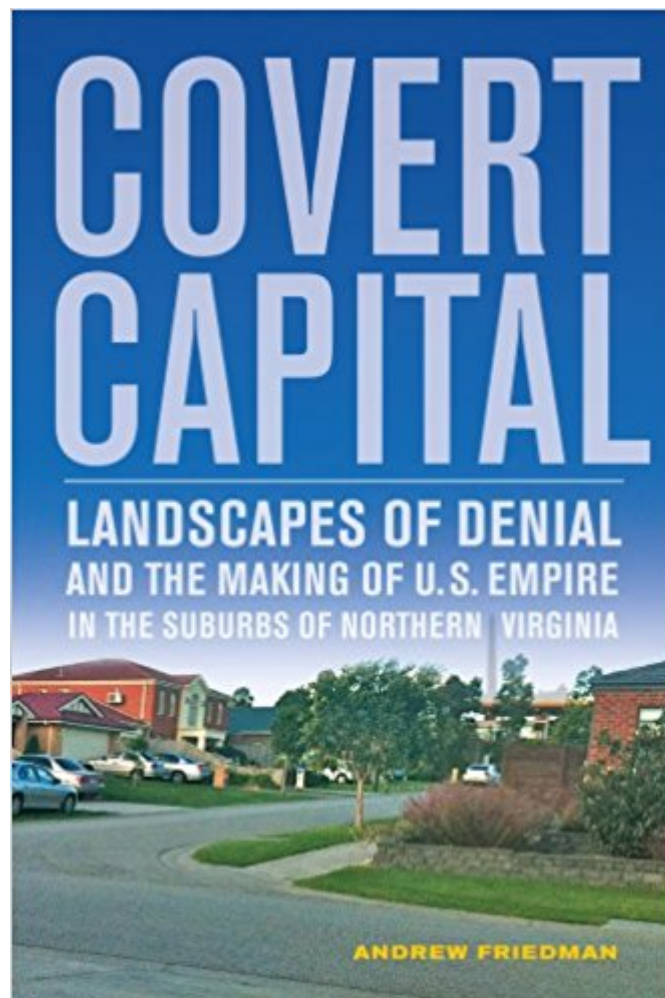


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# Covert Capital: Landscapes Of Denial And The Making Of U.S. Empire In The Suburbs Of Northern Virginia



## Synopsis

The capital of the U.S. Empire after World War II was not a city. It was an American suburb. In this innovative and timely history, Andrew Friedman chronicles how the CIA and other national security institutions created a U.S. imperial home front in the suburbs of Northern Virginia. In this covert capital, the suburban landscape provided a cover for the workings of U.S. imperial power, which shaped domestic suburban life. The Pentagon and the CIA built two of the largest office buildings in the country there during and after the war that anchored a new imperial culture and social world. As the U.S. expanded its power abroad by developing roads, embassies, and villages, its subjects also arrived in the covert capital as real estate agents, homeowners, builders, and landscapers who constructed spaces and living monuments that both nurtured and critiqued postwar U.S. foreign policy. Tracing the relationships among American agents and the migrants from Vietnam, El Salvador, Iran, and elsewhere who settled in the southwestern suburbs of D.C., Friedman tells the story of a place that recasts ideas about U.S. immigration, citizenship, nationalism, global interconnection, and ethical responsibility from the post-WW2 period to the present. Opening a new window onto the intertwined history of the American suburbs and U.S. foreign policy, *Covert Capital* will also give readers a broad interdisciplinary and often surprising understanding of how U.S. domestic and global histories intersect in many contexts and at many scales.

American Crossroads,  
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## Customer Reviews

"The book's detailed case studies are compelling reading as the author deconstructs the secret world of the American intelligence community, public and private. Recommended." (CHOICE 2014-06-01)"Groundbreaking . . . makes for eye-popping reading." (American Historical Review 2014-09-01)"Friedman's sharp critique of America's roles in Vietnam and Central America motivates and permeates the entire project. Readers will both learn a great deal about American covert operations in the twentieth century and be forced to think about the geography of the national capital as well as its surrounding suburbs in an entirely new way." (Perspectives on Politics 2014-09-01)"An original and entertaining narrative showing how Cold War planning and operations permanently changed the suburbs of Washington." (Micah Zenko The Washington Post 2013-11-14)"An innovative study of post-war American foreign policy on the home front." (Maggie Garb In These Times 2013-11-20)"It is hard to see how this book could be improved. It is almost peerless." (Trevor J. Barnes AAG Review 2015-10-02)"Covert Capital makes an important intervention in the internationalization of U.S. suburban studies. . . . The book is a tour de force." (Buildings & Landscapes 2015-04-01)"Pathbreaking. . . an important contribution." (Journal of American Culture 2016-06-01)

"Amongst the book's many achievements, it provides an exemplary analysis of the myriad ways in which everyday, intimate, and 'local' circuits of power have been deeply imbricated in the ongoing rollout of imperial geopolitics since the mid-20th century." — Jamie Peck, *Progress in Human Geography*"This spatial and cultural analysis of seemingly innocuous suburban sprawl offers a compelling picture of a nation that could both deny and pursue Empire simultaneously. It is an example of American Studies at its very best." — Ron Robin, *Diplomatic History*"The book is a tour de force." — Christopher Capozzola, *Buildings and Landscapes*"Loaded with stunning insights and fascinating revelations about a wooded swath of land just outside the nation's capital, *Covert Capital* is a model of interdisciplinary scholarship, unearthing the startling connections between landscape, empire and conspiracy." — Eric Avila, author of *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*"Brilliantly charting the myriad corridors stretching between Northern Virginia and the far-flung corners of U. S. intervention, Andrew Friedman's *Covert Capital* introduces readers to some of mid-to-late twentieth-century suburbia's open secrets: autocratic allies ensconced in leafy cul-de-sacs, other nations' futures worked out at poolside, cocktail chatter crossing CIA assets with real estate assets. In problematizing the boundaries between the foreign and the domestic, and the political and the personal, and in its subtle, interdisciplinary readings of spatial practice and architectural form,

Covert Capital is essential reading for scholars seeking to interpret the landscapes of American global power." — Paul A. Kramer, author of *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States and the Philippines*

In this highly innovative history of the U.S. empire, Andrew Friedman carefully delineates the suburban architecture that shaped even as it camouflaged America's global reach. In tracing the emergence of Northern Virginia as the nation's "covert capital," he relocates the foreign in the domestic, showing the local sources of imperial power and the quotidian making of its multi-cultural agents. Ever attentive to the ironies of empire, Friedman deepens our understanding of American power by revealing the material designs of its elaborate disavowals.

— Vicente L. Rafael, author of *The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines*

What vivid memories I have of this period.....as a NOVA CIA wife. The book captures the sentiments and issues of those years and stirs old emotions. For those reading of this era for the first time, this truly is "the rest of the story".

The book contains a lot of historical detail about the development of the intelligence community in Northern Virginia and its growth over the years, including the growth of communities from countries affected by US overseas wars, all of which were fascinating. Unfortunately, the rest of the book is so laden with academic jargon and odd analyses that I felt like one of the 49ers during the Gold Rush trying to pick out the pieces of gold from a river of mud. This could have been a great book but sadly fell short for me.

Covert Capital is a really engrossing read. Like *City of Quartz*, it mines the deep history of a region (encompassing the colonial and Confederate context of northern Virginia), while, in the tradition of *Fast Food Nation*, it investigates how a specific industry--security, in this case--shaped a landscape. All of this in rapid-fire, breathless prose, and filled with a wealth of details (did you know the Pentagon has 600 drinking fountains?). People interested in the history of American wars, especially as they impact the homefront, will find new revelations and models for thinking about American engagement in the Vietnam War and Iran crisis. Feminists, in particular, will find Friedman's analysis of the wives of diplomats and bureaucrats, and how they parlayed influence through personal networks and leisure activities, such as dinner parties, fascinating. Friedman's account of Eleanor Dulles's power brokering read like histories of Renaissance autocrats Catherine de Medici or Lucretia Borgia! Design buffs will appreciate Friedman's analysis of the architecture of institutions

(CIA headquarters at Langley and Dulles Airport) and domestic structures (the suburban fortresses of Dulles and his relocated Vietnamese and Iranian strongmen), as well as the descriptions of the layout of entire cities (Washington, D.C., Edge City) and the infrastructure, such as highways and airports, built to service these cities. Familiar names such as Philip Johnson and Eero Saarinen appear in very unfamiliar contexts--the construction of our nation's paranoid security complex. I found Friedman's sharp, unmitigated prose the most exciting aspect of the book. Gone are the tired euphemisms--he uses "torturer" instead of "interrogation expert" and "colonial independence" for what Americans call Vietnamese "recalcitrance", making a small but significant reparation for the first casualty of war, language.

This book is great for those who subscribe to The Nation and Architectural Digest and want to stay classy by believing that plausible denial was a static construct throughout the Cold War and there was never any ambiguity or evolution in the relationship between CIA and their nominal bosses. The author blends the airy language of landscape architecture, and urban planning with discussion of actual CIA covert operations. All problematic questions are avoided, and we get a CIA that is always following the will of presidents. Great way to stay classy and employed at pricey Mainline colleges. This is gutless Oceania writing, and should cause even more alarm over the rot caused by income inequality the resulting corruption in every institution in America, especially academia. Operation Mongoose? Who needs details? Blame The Bobby and move on to your pastoral rewards!

Some interesting history of the intelligence community in northern Virginia, but it takes a huge effort to tease his history out of the atrocious academic writing style. He never discusses why he has focused on northern Virginia, while ignoring the Maryland suburbs of DC and the NSA at Fort Meade. The book reads like a doctoral dissertation that was badly adapted for publication (and probably is). Friedman looks for profound meanings in rather mundane architectural details while saying little about the real "covert" sociology of Fairfax County. He also makes no attempt to integrate the story of the growth of the intelligence community into the much larger story of the booming growth of northern Virginia over the past 30 years. Much of that growth was spurred by the internet companies such as AOL, and had only indirect connections to the intelligence community. His notion that the "Dulles Corridor" was named for the Dulles brothers and their sister is absurd. The name emerged from the simple fact that businesses located along the Dulles Airport Access Road for the sake of proximity to the road to the airport and to Washington, DC.

This book provides an interesting look at the CIA in Northern Virginia by studying its architectural history. Each chapter is an essay in and of itself. While the text is highly scholarly, a layperson can appreciate the historical photographs of Eleanor Dulles' swimming pool and the Kennedy men in a Hickory Hill dining room with a sheepdog. In lieu of ever touring the CIA Langley headquarters themselves, readers can learn about its construction, landscaping, tour bus stops, and interior maintenance issues within these pages. In response to facility maintenance problems, the author shares this old joke, "Maybe the agency should abandon the Langley headquarters and start all over in a bordello in Pittsburgh." The author makes a good point in juxtaposing the evils of CIA imperialism abroad and the laconic suburban lifestyle in Northern Virginia built on gender stereotyping. The question readers may ask is can the modern day security-industrial-complex create similar enclaves in new locations? Kudos to Andrew Friedman for providing insights in a subtle and unique manner.

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