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MOVIE REVIEW

The Man Nobody Knew: In Search of My Father, C.I.A. Spymaster William Colby (2011) NYT Critics' Pick

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First Run Features

From left, Catherine, William, Barbara, Carl and Jonathan Colby in "The Man Nobody Knew: In Search of My Father, CIA Spymaster William Colby."

Son Takes His Famous Father Out of the Shadows

By ANDY WEBSTER

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Carl Colby's smart, fact-packed film "[The Man Nobody Knew](#)" operates on many levels, all riveting. Primarily an account of the career of his father, [William Colby](#), director of the [Central Intelligence Agency](#) from 1973 to 1976, it traces a history ending in 1996, when his body washed ashore eight days after he embarked on a late-afternoon solo canoe outing in Maryland. While reviewing the turbulent period spanning Vietnam and President Richard M. Nixon's resignation, we also witness the arc of a marriage, the death of a daughter and the seeming disillusionment of a selfless, if steely-eyed and implacable, civil servant.

William Colby was molded by the Office of Strategic Services in World War II, when he aided anti-Nazi insurgents in France and Norway. Working closely with the Vatican he fought the postwar Communist ascendance in Italy and helped coordinate [the coup against President Ngo Dinh Diem](#) of South Vietnam. As C.I.A. director he embraced covert activities until "[the family jewels](#)" — memos revealing the agency's domestic wiretapping and foreign assassination attempts,

among other sordid pursuits — were leaked. After disclosing details on such programs (several preceding his tenure) in Congressional hearings, he was replaced by George H. W. Bush.

The Beltway insiders interviewed include the former national security adviser Brent Scowcroft, the journalist Seymour Hersh and, at his most smugly cynical, former Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld. Carl Colby's mother, Barbara, meanwhile, is the embodiment of diplomatic poise and eloquence. Conspiracy theorists can have a field day with William Colby's death, but "The Man Nobody Knew" suggests that the culprit may have been no more than a cold warrior's crumbling facade.

**THE MAN NOBODY KNEW: In Search of My Father, [C.I.A. Spymaster](#)
William Colby**

Opens on Friday in Manhattan.

Directed by Carl Colby; edited by Jay Freund; music by Michael Bacon; produced by Mr. Colby, David Johnson and Grace Guggenheim; released by First Run Features. At the Lincoln Plaza, Broadway at 62nd Street. Running time: 1 hour 44 minutes. This film is not rated.