A Strange New Watergate Book


By James DiEugenio

Let me start this critical essay with a quiz. On this, the 40th anniversary of Watergate, what author could write a book about that legendary scandal in which the following occur:

1.) Richard Nixon is not elected president until page 403.

2.) The Watergate burglars do not get caught until page 638.

3.) More space is spent on the JFK assassination than on the Watergate trials.

4.) Jimmy Hoffa is presented as a more prominent figure in the scandal than John Dean.

If you answered “Lamar Waldron” to all four questions, you would be correct. But before we explain who Waldron is and what this book is like, let us do a brief review of Watergate to try and fit his book into an appropriate backdrop.

In the early morning hours of June 17, 1972, five men were caught breaking and entering into the Democratic National Committee (DNC) headquarters at the Watergate hotel complex. The five were James McCord, Frank Sturgis, Eugenio Martinez, Virgilio Gonzalez and Bernard Barker.
After search warrants were obtained, authorities later rounded up two other men who were involved in the crime: Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt. Due to the listening devices and cameras in evidence it was clear they were illegally spying on the Democratic headquarters.

Former Attorney General John Mitchell who was then running Nixon’s reelection campaign – denied any connection between his organization and the burglary. Mitchell said none of the men apprehended that night was “operating in our behalf or with our consent.” (Washington Post 6/19/72)

This denial soon became untenable. For instance, when the address book of one of the burglars was examined, Hunt’s name and phone number at President Nixon’s White House was listed in it. (Stanley Kutler, The Wars of Watergate, p. 188) James McCord, who had given the police a false name, worked under Mitchell for the Committee to Reelect the President, or CREEP. (ibid, p. 189) Liddy also served there as, of all things, a legal counsel. (ibid)

Six weeks later, it was discovered that a Nixon campaign check for $25,000 wound up in the bank account of Barker two months before the break-in. (Washington Post, 8/1/72) In the spring of 1973, the Senate created a bipartisan committee headed by Sen. Sam Ervin, D-North Carolina, to investigate.

By then, Liddy and McCord had been convicted on multiple charges stemming from the burglary; the others had pleaded guilty. Judge John Sirica suspended very long sentences over the seven men in hopes one of them would talk.

In March, one of them did. In a letter to Sirica, McCord said that pressure had been applied to the defendants to remain silent; others involved had not been named; perjury had occurred in the courtroom; even though he had worked for the Agency for many years, Watergate was not a CIA operation. It really originated out of the White House. (Kutler, p. 260)

McCord’s Role

In an interesting aside, in December 1972, McCord had written to John Caulfield at the White House that, “if [CIA Director Richard] Helms goes, and the Watergate operation is laid at the CIA’s feet every tree in the forest will fall. It will be a scorched desert.” (ibid, p. 261)

McCord’s letter was the beginning of the end. He could expose, among other things, that hush money was being sent to the defendants through CREEP employee Herbert Kalmbach. (Kutler, p. 273) He was also one of the most important witnesses that summer for the Ervin Committee.

That proceeding was a disaster for the White House. It exposed the fact that the
Watergate burglary was not an isolated incident. For the White House had set up a covert unit — called the plumbers — to not just gather intelligence on the Democrats but to “plug leaks” in the press about Nixon’s foreign policy. Their most notable previous crime was a burglary at the office of Daniel Ellsberg’s psychiatrist in 1971. This was intended to gather information to smear Ellsberg who had leaked the secret Pentagon Papers to the *New York Times*.

By the summer of 1973, President Nixon’s Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman and Domestic Adviser John Ehrlichmann had resigned, and legal counsel John Dean had been fired. Dean felt Nixon was setting him up as the fall guy for Watergate. So he decided to testify for Ervin.

Dean stated that Nixon knew all about the extensive cover-up of Watergate and had contributed ideas to the plan. The problem with Dean’s testimony was that it amounted to his word against Nixon’s. But after Dean, another White House aide, Alexander Butterfield testified. Butterfield revealed the existence of an extensive taping system in the White House. This system would show just how far Nixon’s culpability went.

Archibald Cox had been appointed Special Prosecutor for the scandal. He requested several of these tapes as evidence for his criminal case. Nixon only agreed to hand over written summaries. Cox rejected this deal. On Saturday, Oct. 20, 1973, Nixon ordered Attorney General Eliot Richardson to fire Cox. Richardson resigned instead. His deputy, William Ruckelshaus, did the same. Solicitor General Robert Bork finally terminated Cox.

This episode quickly became known as the “Saturday Night Massacre.” Nixon had made a huge miscalculation. For this event created an immediate firestorm in Washington and throughout America. It even ignited demands for impeachment. And an impeachment panel was assembled in the House under Rep. Peter Rodino, D-New Jersey. Nixon had to turn over some tapes.

The Watergate Tapes

Texas lawyer, and former Lyndon Johnson confidante, Leon Jaworski, replaced Cox. One month later Judge Sirica announced the infamous 18-minute gap on one of the tapes. Although Nixon tried to attribute this gap to an accident by secretary Rose Mary Woods, an expert panel later adjudicated that the erasure was deliberate. (Kutler, p. 431)

In late December, a Harris poll revealed that, by a margin of 73-21, the public felt that the President had lost so much credibility he should step down. (ibid, p. 430) On Dec. 31, Jaworski announced that 12 others had now pleaded guilty in the scandal, and he was charging four more individuals. Nixon still refused to
Jaworski and Rodino demanded more tapes. Nixon balked, claiming executive privilege, even as Mitchell, Haldeman and Ehrlichman were being indicted. After a lower court ruled against his claim, Nixon appealed to the Supreme Court. On July 24, 1974, the Supreme Court ruled against the White House. One of the tapes showed that, contrary to what Nixon had claimed, he was actively involved in the cover-up.

This tape was made on June 23, 1972, just a week after the break-in. It consisted of Haldeman and Nixon discussing using Vernon Walters of the CIA to block an FBI investigation of campaign money being funneled to the plumbers. Within a week, the House returned three articles of impeachment. Facing sure removal from office, Nixon resigned on Aug. 9, 1974.

What I have outlined above is the official story of Watergate. It was first propounded by the Washington Post, chiefly through reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. And it was followed by the Ervin Committee, with prominent minority member, Howard Baker, continually asking: “What did the president know and when did he know it?”

Actor Robert Redford then further imprinted this version on the public consciousness. Redford actually purchased the rights to the Woodward-Bernstein book All the President’s Men before it was published.

When the book became a runaway bestseller, and the film was nominated for eight Oscars, this strengthened the Post version as part of Americana: two young, intrepid reporters relentlessly pursued the truth about a scandal and, in a David and Goliath duel, brought down a corrupt and evil president. Justice had won out. Woodward, Bernstein and editor Ben Bradlee became journalistic heroes.

But even in 1976, when Woodward and Bernstein were becoming even wealthier because of their sequel, The Final Days, there were puzzling questions laying around which the Post, the MSM and the film did not address. Some of these questions were brought up in the minority report of the Ervin Committee, led by Baker and his counsel Fred Thompson. They also surfaced in the House report by Rep. Lucien Nedzi, D-Michigan.

For instance, how did a private eye from New York named A. J. Woolsten-Smith know in advance that the Republicans had a spy operation manned by several Cubans that targeted the DNC? Smith then passed this information on to Democratic operative William Haddad, who actually informed the target of the DNC break-in, Larry O’Brien, about it in late March. (The New Republic, 6/23/82)

Astonishingly, O’Brien’s assistant, John Stewart, then met with Woolsten-Smith.
and Haddad on April 26 and learned that Liddy and McCord would be involved in
the burglary as well as Cubans from south Florida. (Jim Hougan, Secret Agenda,
p. 79)

Smith uncannily said that the purpose of the raid was to show that Fidel Castro
had contributed illegal funds to the Democrats. (Which is what the Cubans
actually thought they were looking for evidence of at the DNC.) Woolsten-Smith
even showed Stewart an example of a bugging device that would be used.

Origins of the Plumbers

Another question: Why did Hunt visit Miami in April of 1971 to recruit Barker
and Martinez for certain operations which had not been planned yet? (ibid, p.
27) As White House aide Charles Colson told author Jim Hougan, “The Pentagon
Papers hadn’t been published. The Plumbers were months away. So you tell me: How
did Hunt know that he’d need the Cubans?” (ibid, p. 29) [The New York Times
began publishing the Pentagon Papers on June 13, 1971.]

This is an interesting question from Colson, the man who would hire Hunt to work
in the White House two months later. Which leads to another interesting question
about Hunt, who told the Cubans he had retired from the CIA. Yet, he was working
at the Mullen Company, a public relations firm, at the time. Why would he need
to recruit Cubans for a PR company? It was later discovered that the Mullen
Company was used as a front organization to place and conceal CIA agents.

Richard Helms had personally intervened with Robert Mullen to hire Hunt. (ibid,
p. 6) And finally, why did Hunt and McCord deny that they knew each other prior
to their work for Nixon, when it is almost certain that they worked together in
the Agency as far back as Cuban exile operations in late 1962. (ibid, p. 18)

As the reader can see, the Woodward-Bernstein-Ervin version left some nagging
questions in the narrative, and also some gaping holes in the characterizations.
These, and many other lacunae, caused a major revision of Watergate in 1984,
when Jim Hougan published Secret Agenda. This book allowed for much more CIA
involvement in Watergate, especially through Hunt and McCord. And the author
made a good argument for the final break-in at the DNC being sabotaged.

In 1992, there was another revision. This one was by Len Colodny and Robert
Gettlin in their book Silent Coup. By this time, the political spectrum in
America had switched far to the right. Therefore, this book argued that John
Dean was not the man responsible for bringing down Nixon. He was actually
covering himself because it was he who proposed the break-in. This second
revision was not as successful or as influential as the first.

Nixon’s Fears
As more tapes from the era were declassified, a new reason emerged to explain the creation of the so-called “plumber’s unit,” the extralegal covert operators meant to perform burglaries for the White House. It had been assumed that the motivation for starting the “plumbers” was to plug leaks like that of the Pentagon Papers. However, the tapes indicate that it more likely was about a search for a White House file which revealed information about Republican efforts to sabotage Vietnam War peace talks before the 1968 election.

The Republicans understood that President Johnson was making progress toward a negotiated end to the Vietnam War in 1968. To counteract the possibility of such an election-year peace breakthrough, which could have thrown the close election to Hubert Humphrey, they opened a backchannel to the leadership of South Vietnam through right-wing Chinese émigré Anna Chennault. She convinced the leaders in Saigon that they would get a better deal if they refused to cooperate with Johnson and waited for Nixon to be elected.

It turns out, however, that Johnson knew a great deal about this interference in his foreign policy. According to audiotapes of LBJ’s phone calls released in 2008, Johnson even confronted Nixon with the possibility that the White House would reveal the Chennault operation before the 1968 election. However, Johnson ultimately chose to stay silent about the Republican sabotage and Nixon narrowly defeated Humphrey.

After taking office, Nixon was told by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover that Johnson had instructed the Bureau to perform surveillance on the Republicans to find out what they had done to sabotage his peace initiative. This wiretap information had then gone into a file at the White House. But on Johnson’s orders the file was removed by national security adviser Walt Rostow before LBJ’s presidency ended. [See Consortiumnews.com’s “LBJ’s ‘X’ File on Nixon’s ‘Treason.’”]

Nixon grew exasperated that he could not find the file and became even more concerned in June 1971, in the days after the New York Times began publishing the Pentagon Papers, which had focused on the Vietnam War’s history through 1967. If Johnson’s file on Nixon’s 1968 peace-talk interference found its way into the press, it could have represented a powerful sequel to the Pentagon Papers and could have destroyed Nixon’s reelection hopes.

An aide in the Nixon White House, Tom Huston, suspected the missing file could be at the Brookings Institution. After Huston voiced this belief to Haldeman, Nixon told Haldeman on June 17, 1971, to act on Huston’s previously composed plan for illegal break-ins: “I want it implemented. God damn it, get in and get those files. Blow the safe and get it.”

On June 30, 1971, Nixon even recommended the involvement of burglars under the
command of Howard Hunt. “You talk to Hunt,” Nixon told Haldeman. “I want the break-in. Hell, they do that. You’re to break into the place, rifle the files, and bring them in. Just go in and take it. Go in around 8:00 or 9:00 o’clock.” [For details, see Robert Parry’s “The Dark Continuum of Watergate.”]

A New Book

Now we have Lamar Waldron’s Watergate: The Hidden History, an attempt at a further revision of the Watergate story. Yet, I predict it will be even less successful and influential than Silent Coup. I have had the opportunity to observe and interact with Waldron at length. I read and reviewed Waldron’s previous two books (written with Thom Hartmann) called Ultimate Sacrifice and Legacy of Secrecy.

I have also seen him speak at two JFK conferences. And, most recently, I dealt with him at Appian Way, Leonardo DiCaprio’s production office in West Hollywood. DiCaprio’s father Giorgio is producing a film about the JFK assassination based upon Legacy of Secrecy. Paul Schrade and I went to Appian Way to discuss this project with Giorgio and documentary producer Earl Katz.

More precisely, we were there in hopes of talking them out of their decision. Unfortunately for us, and many others, we were not successful. No matter how many cogent and accurate flaws we pointed out in the books, it wasn’t enough. No matter how many ad hominem attacks or non-sequiturs Waldron responded with, DiCaprio and Katz never, ever took exception.

For instance, during our discussions, Waldron said that Peter Noyes’s book Legacy of Doubt was a New York Times bestseller and that it was labeled as such on its paperback version. Later, I checked the Times bestseller lists for 1973, when the book was published. It did not show up anywhere on the list. Further, the paperback version says nothing about being a bestseller. How could it say such a thing? The book was never released in hardcover.

Before I demonstrate why that false attribution about the Noyes book is important, let me describe the contents of Waldron’s new 792-page book, Watergate: The Hidden History. The first section, well over 100 pages, consists of a biography of Richard Nixon. It takes us from his college days to the end of his vice presidency.

If one looks at the footnotes for this section of the book, another rather surprising characteristic reveals itself: Waldron’s overwhelming reliance on secondary sources. The two books that the author uses there, and throughout, are the biographies of Nixon by Stephen Ambrose and Anthony Summers. If you have read those biographies, as I had, there really was not any reason to read this
The second major section covers the Kennedy administration’s Cuban policy up until and beyond JFK’s assassination. Again, this section goes on for hundreds of pages. And it is nothing if not self-indulgent. Much of this is used as a platform for the author to propagate his take on the assassination of President Kennedy. And although Waldron insists on trying to connect this to the end of the book, there really is no credible relationship established between the two crimes of the Kennedy assassination and Watergate.

The third part deals with Nixon’s second attempt to gain the White House, his election, his reelection, and his downfall due to the Watergate scandal. Thus, the actual arrest of the Watergate burglars does not occur until more than 600 pages into the book, with less than 100 pages of text left in the volume. Talk about putting the horse after the cart.

**Curious Structure**

After having read the book and taken 26 pages of notes, I do not really understand why this structure was done. Explaining Nixon’s odd character could have been accomplished in a much shorter space. More importantly, Waldron never really establishes any connection between JFK’s murder and Watergate, so the second section is also dubiously inserted.

Perhaps, Waldron was most interested in exposing to a new and unsuspecting audience his bizarre Kennedy assassination theory, which connects JFK’s murder on Nov. 22, 1963, to an alleged plan to invade Cuba that December. People might have picked up the new book thinking that they were going to be reading about Watergate.

But besides noting that virtually no one in the JFK research community buys into Waldron’s theory, even people to whom Waldron dedicates his book, it is important to note that there is simply no credible evidence for it. (For a long analysis as to why not, click here.)

As with his previous books, this tome is much inflated in size and there is no way to justify its bloated length. I blame this on Waldron’s editors at his publishing company, Counterpoint in Berkeley. They are also to blame for the poor production quality of this volume. For instance, on page 551 the name Liddy is spelled Libby, and on page 261, Waldron writes that the U.S. had 161,000 advisers in Vietnam in 1963, which is so off as to be ludicrous.

There is also no way that a very considerable sum of Waldron’s book actually connects to Watergate, even on Waldron’s unusual terms. Waldron writes as if Teamster union boss Jimmy Hoffa were an important figure in Watergate.
As far as I can tell he bases this on three factors. First, there is an alleged 
bribe by a Mafia friend of Hoffa to forestall any indictment of the Teamster 
leader during the latter days of the Eisenhower administration. (What that would 
have to do with Watergate eludes me, but let us proceed as if it’s relevant.)

Then, there was a forestalled indictment of Hoffa under Eisenhower. Next, there 
was some kind of tip-off to the Watergate Committee by Hoffa. The problem with 
this evidence is multileveled. First, it is poorly sourced; second, it is 
questionable on its surface; third, it has little, if anything, to do with 
Watergate.

**Unreliable Source**

Let us examine the first. Waldron describes Dan Moldea’s 1978 tome, *The Hoffa 
Wars*, as a great book. (Waldron, p. 80) To say that I disagree is an 
understatement. But Moldea’s book provides some of the sourcing for this half 
million-dollar bribe to Nixon by the Mafia on Hoffa’s behalf. The problem with 
this story is that if one looks at the annotation of Moldea’s book, the source 
for this is a man named Edward Grady Partin.

Moldea does what he can to conceal the myriad liabilities of Partin as a 

usiness. For example, he buried some of the derogatory information about him in 
his footnotes. (Moldea, p. 427) These consisted of charges of embezzlement and 

kidding.

The late and illustrious Fred Cook expounded on Partin at much greater length in a 
long article in *The Nation* (April 27, 1964). In 1943, Partin was arrested for 
breaking and entering. He drew a 15-year prison term. He twice broke out of 

ail. When finally freed, he joined the Marines and was dishonorably discharged.

Partin then became chief of a Baton Rouge union local. When he was suspected of 
embezzlement of union funds and visiting a Castro aide in Cuba, an investigation 
was triggered. But before the investigators arrived on the scene, the local’s 
600-pound safe, containing all the local’s records and books, disappeared from 
the union hall. The now empty safe was later recovered from the Amite River.

But the investigation continued and Partin was indicted for forging a withdrawal 
card, which removed one of his critics from the union. Two other critics were 
ambushed and beaten up by six Teamsters. One of these two, A. G. Klein, was then 
killed when a truck loaded with sand “fell on him” in St. Francisville, east of 

aton Rouge. These incidents caused further inquiries about Partin.

In summer 1962, Partin was indicted on 26 counts of forging union records and 
embezzlement. If convicted of all charges and given the maximum penalties, he 
would have been fined $260,000 and sentenced to 78 years in prison. Later,
Partin was indicted on charges of manslaughter and leaving the scene of an accident. He was then indicted for kidnapping. But since the two infants later showed up at the courthouse, he was made eligible for parole.

At first, Partin had trouble raising the bail money, but he miraculously succeeded in securing a $60,000 bond. After his release on Oct. 7, 1962, he telephoned his acquaintance Jimmy Hoffa, who did not know the call was recorded.

In other words, to escape a possible 78-year sentence, Partin had agreed to turn informant against Hoffa. Suddenly, his legal problems disappeared. (Though after Hoffa was convicted, Partin then was indicted on new charges of extortion, obstruction of justice, racketeering and further embezzlement of union funds.) It was Partin’s testimony that was key in convicting Hoffa of jury-tampering.

But then, after Hoffa’s conviction, Partin still had many more tales to tell. Since Moldea’s book was published after the discoveries of the Church Committee, Partin’s new stories had the appropriate topicality. Somehow, Hoffa was the original go-between for the CIA-Mafia plots to kill Castro. (Moldea, p. 12) Hoffa was involved with gun-running activities into Cuba. (Ibid, p. 107) And Hoffa was also sending aircraft to Castro. (Ibid, p. 123)

Again, these late-arriving accusations against Hoffa have serious problems. To name a serious one, there is no corroboration for them that I know outside of Partin. The Church Committee never found any trace of Hoffa being involved with the CIA-Mafia plots. [Hoffa disappeared on July 30, 1975, and was presumed murdered in a gangland hit.]

But even worse, as I later discovered in the declassified files of the Jim Garrison investigation, a professional society of polygraphers got hold of a lie detector test that the Justice Department had done on Partin. At a convention held in New York, they announced they had found traces of deception throughout the test, but especially in the part dealing with a death threat by Hoffa against Robert Kennedy. In other words, the test was rigged in advance since the technician knew Partin would lie.

In light of the above, Moldea was, at best, unwise to use so much of Partin in his book. But Waldron is even worse because although Moldea is not upfront about Partin’s serious problems as a witness he at least mentions some of them. Waldron mentions none of them.

The other problem with this so-called Nixon bribe is that, as Waldron finally acknowledges, it didn’t work for Hoffa was later indicted by the Eisenhower Justice Department (Waldron, p. 147), which, of course, makes the origin of the story even more questionable.
Concerning the third supposed link between Hoffa and Watergate, Waldron writes that Hoffa tipped off the Senate Watergate Committee about the CIA-Mafia plots to kill Castro. He footnotes this to Moldea’s book. Yet, when I turned to the listed reference on page 321, I could not locate the information.

This last difficulty points up a recurrent problem with the author. For instance, in this book, Waldron makes much of a later alleged bribe from the Teamsters to Nixon to pardon Hoffa and to bar him from replacing the new Teamsters’ president Frank Fitzsimmons. Nixon did do both things. But Waldron tries to relate this alleged bribe to the famous segment on the March 21, 1973, tape in which Nixon was talking to John Dean about the Watergate burglars’ demands for large sums of hush money. Nixon states, “What I mean is you could get a million dollars. And you could get it in cash.” But when one looks up the source for this, a *Time* magazine article of Aug. 8, 1977, it is all very speculative, part of an FBI inquiry that was ongoing.

Since the target was Charles Colson, and he was never indicted on any such charge of receiving bribe money, one can say the case was never proven. But further, we know through the Ervin Committee that the money to pay the burglars to keep quiet was given to Nixon’s personal lawyer Herbert Kalmbach by campaign chairman Maurice Stans from presidential campaign funds. (Kutler, p. 371)

But then there is an even more serious instance of questionable referencing. Early on in the book Waldron clearly implies that Howard Hunt was working for the Plumbers unit before Charles Colson at the White House officially hired him on July 7, 1971. (Waldron, p. 19) When I read this I thought it was a really interesting discovery.

But I then noted it was sourced to Stanley Kutler’s book *Abuse of Power*. That book was published in 1997, fifteen years ago. Why did no one pick up on it in the interim? Well, when I looked up the source material I discovered why. Kutler’s book is a transcription of declassified Watergate tapes interpolated with his comments.

In summer 1971, President Nixon is talking with first, Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman, and then his counsel Charles Colson. The topic is the aforementioned possible burglary at the centrist-oriented Brookings Institute. In conversations dated June 30 and July 1, the three are discussing people to run a raid at Brookings. Nixon brings up Hunt’s name as an example of someone who they could use for such a mission.

Then on July 1, Colson brings up Hunt’s name again. Nixon asks how old he is,
and Colson replies he is 50. Nixon says that would be alright because he may still have the energy. (Kutler, pgs. 6, 13) In reading this through, it’s clear that Hunt is not working for the White House at the time. His name is being floated as someone they could use for some illegal activities. Hunt is hired a few days later.

**Stale Material**

In light of the above, it is now time to cut to the chase. What is the testimony or evidence on which Waldron bases his nearly 800-page attempt at radical revisionism? Well, it’s not anything recently declassified from the National Archives. It is an unsworn interview given by Frank Sturgis to journalist Andrew St. George in 1972. (Waldron p. 575)

Sturgis said that the reason the burglars were at the Watergate was they were looking for the Cuban Dossier put together by Castro’s intelligence force on attempts by the CIA to kill him. Waldron never asks: What on earth would that be doing at the DNC? And he never asks this either: What would it be doing in Maxie Wells’s desk? For one of the burglars, Eugenio Martinez, had the key to her desk. (Wells was secretary to Spencer Oliver, the executive director of the Association of State Democratic Chairmen.)

No other book has given credence to Sturgis’s claim. Nor has any other official investigation of Watergate endorsed it. Further, Frank Sturgis had a notorious reputation as being an unreliable witness. Authors and investigators like Edwin Lopez and Gaeton Fonzi have concluded that he was a disinformation agent. (Gaeton Fonzi, *The Last Investigation*, p. 80) And as far as I can see, Waldron provides no other corroboration for Sturgis.

There are other things in the book that make this idea dubious. For instance, why would James McCord, Gordon Liddy and Hunt risk being sent to jail over this document? As a product of Castro’s intelligence network, it could easily be denied. The really important bombshell in this regard was, of course, the Church Committee’s uncovering of the CIA’s Inspector General report on the plots.

This was something that could not be denied since the Agency itself had generated it back in 1967 under the supervision of Director Richard Helms for President Johnson. And when the Church Committee exposed these plots, backed up by the report, it did create a considerable furor.

But here is another major problem for Waldron: Richard Nixon is not named in either document. As John Newman does, one can make a case that Nixon was privy to the origins of these plots. (*Oswald and the CIA*, pgs. 113-132) But he never figured in their operation, and there is no evidence he knew about them once
they began. (ibid, p. 131) So why would he be included in any report on their operation? He wouldn’t be, and Nixon had to know that.

I have to say this because this is the argument Waldron makes. He goes as far as to state that Nixon ordered the break-in at the Watergate, though there was never any credible evidence adduced for this by either the Ervin Committee or the Special Prosecutors’ office headed by Leon Jaworski.

The best evidence that could be produced was that John Mitchell, after turning down two previous break-in and sabotage plans in his office, finally approved a third presentation. This presentation was a revised version that was scaled down by Gordon Liddy. It was then passed on to Jeb Magruder, who was the Deputy Director of Nixon’s re-election committee under Mitchell. Magruder presented this version to Mitchell at a third meeting in Key Biscayne, Florida. According to Magruder’s Ervin Committee testimony, Mitchell approved the plan. Something that Mitchell disputed.

**Magruder Interview**

But Waldron now uses an interview Magruder did in 2003 for PBS when Magruder then changed his story in a significant way. He said that during the meeting at Key Biscayne, he himself called Haldeman. Magruder told the Chief of Staff that he was not enthusiastic about the plan; but Haldmen said he was and so was Nixon.

Haldeman then asked for Mitchell. Magruder passed the phone as requested. He then said he overheard Nixon’s voice say, “John, we need to get the information on Larry O’Brien, the only way we can do that is through Liddy’s plan, and you need to do that.” After that, Mitchell approved the plan and the funding. (Waldron, p. 551)

This exchange, with Nixon saying the reason for the break-in was to wiretap O’Brien, contradicts Waldron’s thesis about the Cuban Dossier, but Waldron ignores that. He also ignores the fact that Magruder had published a book on Watergate in 1974. There he did not mention this conversation with Nixon. In fact, in that book, called *An American Life*, he actually stated that, to his knowledge, Nixon did not know about the Watergate break-in in advance.

Secondly, there was another witness in the room with Magruder and Mitchell, Fred La Rue, who denies Magruder’s 30-years-later-recovered memory. As with the Cuban Dossier angle, this belated story about a Nixon phone call at Key Biscayne lacks credibility. And the fact that it is single sourced, from a witness who has told conflicting stories in the past, makes it more so.

There is no denying that the reason for the break-in was always murky. As
Magruder alludes to above, most people thought that the motive was to spy on Larry O’Brien, who had been effectively attacking the White House over the Dita Beard/ITT influence-peddling scandal and who was believed to have information about Nixon’s connection to billionaire Howard Hughes.

Hughes had given Nixon’s brother Donald a six-figure loan prior to the 1960 election. This became public and hurt Nixon in the press. Therefore, many people believed that Nixon was very much worried that O’Brien, who had worked for Hughes as a lobbyist, had more dirt on this Nixon/Hughes topic. John Meier, a close adviser to Hughes, kept telling Donald Nixon that this in fact was the case.

Journalist Robert Parry has also dug up another possible reason for the break-in and the targeting of Spencer Oliver. Parry interviewed Oliver for his book Secrecy and Privilege. It turns out that Oliver was spearheading an effort on behalf of the Democratic state chairmen to block the candidacy of George McGovern, whom many Democrats viewed as a sure loser.

One idea was to deny McGovern any delegates from the Texas state convention and then replace him at the Democratic National Convention with Terry Sanford, former governor of North Carolina. The Republicans, from the beginning of the 1972 campaign, had plotted to subvert stronger candidates, like Maine Sen. Edmund Muskie, to ensure that Nixon would be running against a perceived weak candidate like McGovern.

Oliver, whose phone (along with O’Brien’s) was bugged when the Watergate burglars first penetrated the Democratic headquarters in May 1972, later came to believe that Nixon’s campaign learned of this last-ditch effort to stop McGovern by listening in on Oliver’s phone, which as it turned out had the only operational eavesdropping device.

Oliver further suspected that former Texas Gov. John Connally, a Democrat who had joined the Nixon administration as Treasury Secretary, and Connally’s longtime protégé, Robert Strauss, who was still part of the Democratic hierarchy, were tasked by Nixon’s campaign to intervene in the Texas Democratic convention to make sure that McGovern got enough delegates to put him within reach of the nomination. Waldron mentions this interesting aspect, but he then drops it for the Cuban Dossier angle. (Waldron, p. 590)

Loose Ends

Let me briefly deal with two other points to which Waldron attaches great weight. At the end of the book, there is summary of an interview the Watergate Committee did with Mafia figure John Roselli. After reading it twice, I don’t
know why it’s there. There is simply nothing of substance in it that relates to Watergate.

Finally, there is the matter of the Chilean Embassy break-in. A few days before the Watergate break-in there was a reported break in at the Chilean Embassy in Washington. ([*New York Times*, 2/26/99]) Waldron explains this as the Plumbers searching for the Cuban Dossier. Presumably, Castro was somehow shopping it around to other countries. However, other authors, like Andrew Rudvalvige, chalk the break-in up to trying to gain information about the socialist designs of President Salvador Allende who Nixon and Henry Kissinger were obsessed with overthrowing. ([*The New Imperial Presidency*, p. 74])

So, in summary, what does this book actually represent? As someone familiar with both Watergate and Waldron, I believe it represents three things. As previously mentioned, it’s a way for Waldron to sneak in his weird and untenable theory about the Kennedy assassination into a different subject area.

Secondly, it serves another personal obsession of Waldron’s. It’s a way to somehow inject the Mafia into the Watergate scandal, something that, to my knowledge, no one had really done before. Waldron doesn’t either, but he tries.

And there is a third general motif that has now become typical of Waldron: The attempt to cover up a paltry amount of new and pointed material by burying it in hundreds of pages of irrelevancy. I think this is supposed to convey the illusion of depth and erudition.

Fortunately for him, Waldron has his own mini-echo chamber. Thom Hartmann was his writing partner on *Legacy of Secrecy* and *Ultimate Sacrifice*. Hartmann now has his own daily TV show called *The Big Picture with Thom Hartmann*. Waldron makes appearances there to promote his books.

Previously, when Hartmann was on Air America Talk Radio, Hartmann interviewed him there. Syndicated columnist Liz Smith, a protégé of Walter Winchell, has always promoted a Mafia angle in the JFK case. Therefore, she essentially prints Waldron’s press releases.

There is no doubt that Waldron is a tireless worker on his own behalf to the point that he has been involved with more than one cable special on the JFK case. And this is where Giorgio DiCaprio saw him and got in contact with him. DiCaprio then got in contact with documentary film-maker Earl Katz to do an accompanying documentary film with the *Legacy of Secrecy* feature.

Well, in the acknowledgements to *Watergate: The Hidden History*, we now see just how deeply DiCaprio and Katz have bought into Waldron’s absolutely ahistorical methodology. On page 756, the following sentence appears: “Thanks is also due to
producer Earl Katz, for helping to clear the Watergate documentary rights for this book.”

It’s a chilling thought that we may actually have to face a cable TV documentary about Jimmy Hoffa’s (non-existent) role in Watergate. That is the price one pays for titling a former comic book creator, which Waldron was, as a historian.

James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era.