

DiEugenio on Parry's New Book

Exclusive: America's political dysfunction stems, in large part, from the Right's success in distorting U.S. history and the mainstream news media's failure to counter those false narratives. That has left the nation adrift in a faux reality, a crisis described by Robert Parry's new book and analyzed by Jim DiEugenio.

By Jim DiEugenio

Robert Parry is one of the growing number of former MSM journalists who departed his mainstream employers and today makes his home on the Web. The contents of his book, America's Stolen Narrative, informs us to a large degree why he departed. But beyond that, his book demonstrates why Parry's work is still exceptional and unique in his new milieu.

Many people, including myself, thought that once the so-called "liberal blogosphere" firmly established itself as an alternative to the fading MSM, it would then provide a real opportunity for a revival of genuine honest journalism. Journalism that would be unfettered by artificial boundaries imposed from the censoring pen of the editor's office.

In other words, there was a real chance that the Internet could be the new 1960's alternative press, the kind of underground truth-telling papers that Angus Mackenzie wrote about in his little book *Secrets*. As Mackenzie noted, these papers exemplified by Warren Hinckle's *Ramparts* and Art Kunkin's *LA Free Press* were so dangerous to the Establishment that the CIA established a program to counter and neutralize them.

By contrast, the problem with our so-called "liberal blogosphere" is that, with very few exceptions, there is no need to counter, let alone, neutralize these New Media outlets. One can pretty much declare that, for whatever reasons, the so-called New Media was stillborn.

The editors of sites like *Daily Kos*, *Talking Points Memo* and *Huffington Post* could easily sit on the panel that GE's CEO Jack Welch designed for "The McLaughlin Group." Welch was out to design the limits of the Conventional Wisdom. That is, the boundaries of information and opinion which he wanted the public to hear.

Well, not only could Joshua Micah Marshall, Markos Moulitsas, and Arianna Huffington easily sit on Welch's panel, they have sat on an equivalent panel as appointed by the likes of George Stephanopoulos on *ABC's This Week*. Kunkin and

Hinckle would never make the invitation list.

To his credit, neither would Robert Parry. And his new book demonstrates why not. *America's Stolen Narrative* does not abide by the Conventional Wisdom, either the Welch version or the Stephanopoulos version. In fact, it shatters the so-called CW. How? By questioning the foundation that it stands upon.

And this completely exposes the CW for what it is: A way to mollify the public into accepting things as they are, never questioning how it got that way. One way the CW does this is by shoving crimes and scandals under the rug, thereby, letting the perpetrators not only get away with criminal offenses, but allowing them to operate in the political system as if nothing had ever happened.

Most informed commentators would say that this began with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. But Parry begins with an event that seems to me to be directly related to Kennedy's murder, but about which there has been very little written about in any media. One could dub it, the First October Surprise.

LBJ's War

As anyone who has read anything about Lyndon Johnson's presidency would know, one of the most horrible mistakes the Texan made was to reverse Kennedy's policy in Southeast Asia. Instead of continuing his predecessor's withdrawal plan, in just three months, Johnson had signed off on a National Security Action Memorandum that reversed Kennedy's plan. He then began to plan on a huge air and land war in Southeast Asia.

Enabled by the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, which he clearly exaggerated for political ends, Johnson began an air war over Vietnam. Once he won the 1964 election, he almost immediately reneged on his promise not to expand the war. Very quickly, in just a matter of a few months, LBJ had inserted over 100, 000 combat troops in theater. (Kennedy had sent none.)

By 1967, this figure had multiplied to over half a million men. It was supplemented by Rolling Thunder, the code name for the largest aerial bombardment ever seen. The problem was simple: It didn't work. Both Johnson and the commanding officer in theater, General William Westmoreland, failed to understand the true nature of the war. That it was not going to be won by search-and-destroy missions trying to kill as many Viet Cong as possible. Nor would it be won by bombing suspected sanctuaries or bridges or highways.

This resulted in indiscriminate killing of civilians which turned the populace away from the Saigon puppet government the U.S. was backing. Then, in one of the greatest intelligence failures of the 20th Century, the CIA failed to prepare for the Tet Offensive. Johnson and Westmoreland were exposed and humiliated.

The massive effort they had encouraged and bankrolled was seen as a mirage. The Viet Cong had raided every major city in South Vietnam and shattered the Vietnam policy in the White House. A rethinking was led by newly appointed Defense Secretary Clark Clifford.

As Clifford noted in the classic film *Hearts and Minds*, he had entered office as a backer of the war. Once he understood that the Pentagon had no real plan to win the war on the ground, and that the bombing campaign was largely ineffective, he came to the conclusion that America could not win. (This was the same conclusion that his predecessor, Robert McNamara, had reached.)

Clifford informed Johnson of the result of his extensive review. Therefore, on March 31, 1968, Johnson went on national television and announced a bombing halt over North Vietnam. He then dropped a political bombshell. He said he would not run for reelection.

Pursuing Peace

Seeing the war was lost, Johnson's bombing halt was designed to encourage the North Vietnamese to agree to peace talks and end the war. It worked. North Vietnam agreed to begin the talks in Paris that summer.

The problem was that the Republicans understood that if Johnson secured a negotiated settlement it would greatly aid the Democratic candidate, Hubert Humphrey. In fact, it would reverse his fortunes since he was being hurt by Johnson's expansion of the war, while Nixon was proclaiming he had a secret plan to end the war.

Nixon had always been skilled in the art of political subterfuge. Such tactics had been instilled in him by his designated hatchet man Murray Chotiner. So, Nixon sought to derail the peace talks to negate any political advantage that might accrue to Humphrey. His plan was to use China Lobby leader and anti-communist activist Anna Chennault to urge South Vietnam to sandbag the talks. This was done through contacts with South Vietnamese Ambassador Bui Diem and President Nguyen van Thieu.

Johnson clearly suspected something was wrong, since many of the South Vietnamese objections to the talks, like the shape of the negotiating table, were transparent dodges. By October, through information supplied by State Department official Eugene Rostow, the White House discovered that the Republicans were behind the obstruction.

Rostow's information, garnered from Wall Street bankers, said that Nixon "was trying to frustrate the President, by inciting Saigon to step up its demands." (Parry, p. 38) Eugene's brother, Walt Rostow, who was LBJ's National Security

Advisor, passed on the information to President Johnson.

Johnson then directed the FBI to monitor American contacts with Bui Diem at the South Vietnamese embassy. This surveillance uncovered the Chennault mission, which was a violation of the Logan Act forbidding private citizens from interfering with the conduct of American diplomacy.

Johnson called Sen. Everett Dirksen, R-Illinois, to complain about what he termed Nixon's "dirty pool." (ibid) He then told Dirksen that although certain Republicans had criticized "my conduct of the war, they have never told the enemy that he'd get a better deal, but these last few days, Dick is [sic] just gotten a little shaky." (Parry, p. 39)

Johnson then read Dirksen some of the intelligence reports that backed up what Johnson was accusing Nixon of doing. Dirksen replied that some people on his side were worried about a breakthrough on the eve of the election. Johnson responded that he was not playing politics with the negotiations.

Further, Nixon had pledged that he wanted the war stopped and would support LBJ in that regard. To make sure that Dirksen knew what he had on Nixon, LBJ told the senator, "He better keep Mrs. Chennault and all this crowd tied up for a few days." (ibid)

Nixon's Gambit

Johnson's implied threats fell on deaf ears. On Nov. 2, Chennault contacted Bui Diem to convey a message from her boss that he wanted him to hold on since he understood all that was going on. (ibid, p. 40) Johnson again called Dirksen and threatened to inject the issue into the campaign. He said, "I don't want to get this in the campaign. They oughtn't be doing this. This is treason." To which Dirksen agreed.

Johnson slammed his point home: "They're contacting a foreign power in the middle of a war. You just tell them that their people are messing around in this thing, and if they don't want it on the front pages, they better quit it." (Parry, p. 41)

Next, Nixon called Johnson. Predictably, he denied any part in the sabotage of the talks. (Ibid, p. 42) But yet, on Nov. 4, another FBI report had Anna Chennault visiting the South Vietnamese embassy. And in Saigon, a young reporter for the *Christian Science Monitor* began to pick up the scent of Chennault interfering with the talks.

Correspondent Beverly Deepe heard about a cable to Saigon by Bui Diem about his contacts with the Nixon camp. (Ibid, p. 43) Deepe then drafted a story. Her

editors referred it to the White House for comment.

After conferring with Walt Rostow, Clifford, and Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Johnson agreed not to say anything, out of a concern that exposing Nixon's treachery might not be "good for the country," especially if he still won the election. Instead, LBJ and Rostow buried the Nixon file. Before leaving the White House, Johnson told Rostow to take the file with him. Clearly, LBJ did not want Nixon to have it.

But the story does not end there. By burying this treachery, Johnson did not just make possible Nixon's narrow win in the election, a win that may have been turned into a loss if Johnson exposed the subterfuge in the last few days of the election. And a Humphrey win very likely would have shortened the war saving hundreds of thousands of lives

But as Parry notes, the spiriting away of this file had an influence on President Nixon and the creation of the Plumbers Unit, the burglars who caused the Watergate crisis.

Most commentators, and even some of those involved inside the giant Watergate scandal, have maintained that the beginnings of that scandal originated with the *New York Times'* publication of the Pentagon Papers. That multi-volume history of the Vietnam War was commissioned by McNamara before he left office.

For example, *The Washington Post* had always maintained that it was this publishing event that provoked the creation of the Plumbers Unit. This was the group of saboteurs inside the White House that was supposed to plug leaks for Nixon, and also sabotage his political enemies – thereby making sure he would win again in 1972.

There is no doubt that the publication of the Pentagon Papers, which began in June 1971, greatly disturbed Nixon. But if one reads the first tape transcript in Stanley Kutler's book *Abuse of Power*, one will see that the discovery of the Johnson/Rostow file on Nixon's Vietnam gambit actually figures prominently in the White House decision to create the Plumbers Unit.

Search for the File

In a conversation between Bob Haldeman, Nixon and Henry Kissinger, it is clear that Nixon understood that Johnson had kept an intelligence file on his Chennault operation. And this file could become important now that the secret history of the Vietnam War was being publicized. After all, if Nixon had not meddled in Johnson's negotiations, perhaps the war would have wound down instead of continuing. It's clear that on this tape, Nixon is proposing firebombing and breaking into the Brookings Institution to search for that file. (Parry, p. 62)

He actually suggests putting together a group of former spies, he mentions Howard Hunt as an example, in order to perform functions like this. Therefore, not only did Johnson's failure to expose the Chennault operation help bring Nixon into the White House, it was Nixon's fear of his chicanery being exposed before his reelection campaign that gave impetus to Watergate.

This begins one of Parry's major themes. Which is this: the Democrats repeatedly go easy on the Republicans in the spirit of non-partisanship, "the good of the country," and staying on a positive agenda. And this is after real scandals.

Yet, the Republicans use every opportunity they have to exploit ersatz scandals, Whitewater, Obama's birth certificate, thereby splitting and polarizing the country, while weakening and distracting the Democratic agenda. This is an important point that the Democrats have never learned.

The book goes deeper into Watergate, revising the official narrative further. If the reader will recall, the scandal broke in the papers because the Plumbers unit led by Jim McCord, Gordon Liddy, and Hunt was caught inside the Watergate Hotel in the early morning hours of June 17, 1972.

A security guard at the hotel complex suspected a break-in and called for the police. The reason the Plumbers were there was because this was the location of the Democratic National Committee. The DNC was headed by Larry O'Brien, a former campaign manager for President Kennedy who had ties to the Hughes Corporation.

No one has ever been able to convincingly explain why this location was a target. As many have said, traditionally, there really was not a lot of valuable political intelligence on hand at party headquarters. A much more practical site would have been the presidential candidate's headquarters, in this case that would be frontrunner George McGovern's.

Because of this conundrum, many authors have tried to insert some kind of reason for this burglary at the Watergate. A likely one being that since O'Brien's desk was bugged during an earlier undetected break-in in May 1972, it may be that they were trying to find out what O'Brien had on the Nixon/Hughes relationship, which went back for decades.

The Bug That Worked

But Parry has discovered another probable reason. The other office that was bugged in May 1972 was that of Spencer Oliver and the bug on Oliver's phone was the only one that worked. In fact, one of the burglars, Eugenio Martinez, had a key to Oliver's secretary's desk.

In 1972, Oliver was executive director of the Association of State Democratic

Chairmen. In an interview Parry did with him, Oliver revealed that he was collaborating on a Stop McGovern campaign inside the party.

Oliver did not think that the liberal McGovern could defeat Nixon. He was therefore secretly backing a more moderate southerner, former North Carolina Gov. Terry Sanford. After the bugging of his office was discovered, Oliver began to suspect that since Nixon and the Plumbers favored McGovern as their opponent, information about the Stop-McGovern effort was what they were after, or at least what they obtained off his phone.

There is some interesting evidence that Parry details to back this. Nixon had appointed former Texas Gov. John Connally as Secretary of the Treasury early in 1971. Connally had always represented the conservative wing of the Democratic Party in Texas. In 1972, he formed an organization called Democrats for Nixon.

The idea behind this group was to try to paint McGovern as out of step with the mainstream of the Democratic Party. But as Parry notes, once inside the White House, Connally also provided much interesting information about the inner workings of the Democratic Party to Nixon's campaign. (Parry, p. 67)

Meanwhile, in late spring 1972, Spencer Oliver was trying to halt McGovern's progress and promote the more electable Sanford at the Texas state convention by denying McGovern delegates that could push him close to the party's presidential nomination.

But when Oliver got there he found something very curious afoot: Connally's operatives were being overly generous to the McGovern delegates; i.e. allowing them more delegates, when you normally would have expected conservatives to favor shutting the liberal McGovern out and blocking his pursuit of the nomination.

There was another surprise awaiting Oliver. Robert Strauss, then national treasurer of the party, was at the convention. This surprised Oliver because, historically, Strauss had been a moneymen for Connally in Texas and otherwise not very active in state party politics.

Oliver felt that the convention was about 70 percent anti-McGovern, and if the conservative Democrats had united with him, they could have put a serious chink in McGovern's nomination. (ibid, p. 69) Instead, McGovern finished a rather close second to Alabama Gov. George Wallace in terms of delegates, with Humphrey a distant third.

Strauss's Role

The Strauss angle has a coda to it. When McGovern lost the general election, his

Democratic Party chair, Jean Westwood, was purged. Strauss, Connally's protégé, became chair of the Democratic Committee. (ibid, p. 73) Once Strauss assumed power, he called in Oliver, who was a key party to the civil suit against the Republicans over the Watergate break-in.

Strauss wanted Oliver to drop the suit and join him in a settlement agreement with the Republicans. Oliver disagreed since he thought the longer the suit was in court, the more information would come out and the more it would hurt the Republicans. So he got another attorney to represent him.

In what Oliver saw as retaliation, Strauss cut off Oliver's paycheck, but the state chairmen agreed to pick it up. Strauss then did something else; he moved the Democratic offices out of the Watergate complex. This also struck Oliver as odd because as long as the party headquarters was there, and the lawsuit was ongoing, the hotel stood as a symbol of Republican perfidy. But Strauss insisted. So the party went to a new location at greater expense. (ibid, p. 76)

Almost until Nixon's resignation in August 1974, Strauss remained adamantly opposed to the Democrats pursuing the Watergate scandal. Later, Connally formally switched parties to mount an unsuccessful run for president as a Republican in 1976. After Jimmy Carter's defeat in 1980, Strauss continued his migration toward the GOP, too. He eventually ended up as George H. W. Bush's ambassador to Moscow. In Parry's calculus, this had been a predictable outcome.

The author then flashes forward to the (premature) end of the Carter administration. Chapter Five, I think should have a different title. It should actually be called "The Second October Surprise" or "October Surprise Reprise," instead of just "The October Surprise," in that it echoes the first one by the Nixon-Chennault apparatus, which prevented Humphrey's election.

In 1980, it appears that the Republicans repeated this pattern by again interfering in American diplomacy in order to prevent Carter from freeing the American hostages captured by the Iranian revolutionaries when the U.S. Embassy was overrun in Tehran.

The discussion of this particular scandal is probably the longest one in the volume, which is fine with me because without this clandestine episode, what we call today the Reagan Revolution would likely not have happened. Therefore, this scandal is historically important, some would say it's historically crucial.

But secondly, and this may have been done subliminally, by outlining this episode in detail, the author has essentially sketched a paradigm of how political crimes have been perfected in this country. As many commentators have observed, to pull off a scandal of this magnitude it is not necessary to

construct a perfect crime.

The term “perfect crime” is almost a myth in the political sphere. What is necessary in fact what is key is to control the cover-up. If you can do that, then the mistakes in execution become all but irrelevant.

An Incurious Investigator

In this particular instance, the mechanism for controlling the cover-up was two-fold. First, the attorney running the congressional inquiry into the affair was the late Lawrence Barcella, a cagey veteran of the ways of the Washington Beltway. A partner in a large law firm, he had done work for and with the CIA in the famous Edwin Wilson case.

As we will see, Barcella was determined to let the scandal pass quietly by constructing a whitewash of a report, one that, if it had been used as a defense in a court of law would have been dashed to pieces in a matter of minutes. But secondly, and perhaps more important, the MSM made sure that any honest reporting into the affair would be unfairly criticized, even ridiculed.

One of the most interesting aspects of Parry’s writing on this episode is that it is personal. Parry made his reputation as a journalist when, at the Associated Press and in a famous article in *The New Republic*, he was one of the first to expose the fact that the secret and illegal war against Nicaragua was being run right out of the White House. He was also one of the first to uncover the fact that the CIA-backed Contra army opposing the democratically elected Nicaraguan government was trading in cocaine to finance its operations.

When the Iran/Contra Affair exploded as a major scandal in late 1986, Parry doubted the time line that the official investigators put together about when arms began to be shipped to Iran via Israel. The official story said this began in 1985, but Parry’s research indicated it started much earlier, back in 1981. (Parry, p. 89)

If that were so, then it would seem that the first arms shipments went from the Reagan administration before there were American hostages being held in Lebanon, Reagan’s supposed motive for shipping arms to Iran. Therefore, the first arms shipments were likely the completion of a deal to delay the release of the American hostages who had been held in Iran.

While a reporter at *Newsweek* Parry was prevented from fully investigating the depths of Iran/Contra and its probable connections to a second October Surprise. But he later got an opportunity to actually do just that. The PBS series *Frontline* decided to delve into various accounts from sources claiming that the Republicans had arranged such a swap: that is arms for hostages in order to keep

President Carter from doing his own arms-for-hostages deal in the last weeks of the 1980 campaign.

A Second 'Treason'?

As it turned out, the Iranians dashed Carter's hopes of a pre-election settlement and only let the plane returning the hostages take off *after* Reagan was sworn in on Jan. 20, 1981. Why was that precise timing so necessary? Like Nixon, did Reagan's campaign, led by veteran covert operator William Casey, also violate the Logan Act? Was there a second act of "treason"? Parry's inquiry certainly seemed to indicate that such a thing had actually occurred.

Witnesses like Nicholas Veliotis, who was assistant secretary of state in the Reagan administration, confirmed that the shipments of U.S. arms began in 1981 and stemmed from contacts made before the 1980 election. Ari Ben-Menashe, an Israeli intelligence officer, confirmed that Israel had decided to cooperate with the Republican effort to defeat Carter because they despised the Camp David peace agreement Carter had forced on them. (Parry, p. 88)

Further, Ben-Menashe said he had met some of the Republican delegation in Paris in October 1980, including Vice-President nominee George H. W. Bush and Reagan's campaign director William Casey. (ibid) These arms sales continued for years since Iran needed weapons to fight its war with Iraq, a conflict which began in September 1980.

In 1991, the combination of the PBS documentary on the October Surprise, a parallel op-ed in the New York Times by former White House national security aide Gary Sick, and follow-up coverage by ABC's *Nightline* created an impact that neither Washington nor the MSM could ignore. There were calls for a congressional inquiry into the charges, and such an inquiry was organized.

But even before that got going, both *Newsweek* and *The New Republic* ran very harsh and sneering cover stories attacking the very concept of an October Surprise. Martin Peretz, who was firmly in command of the latter publication, was a staunch defender of the conservative party in Israel, the Likud. Peretz commissioned an attack article by Steven Emerson, a reporter who also had ties not just to Likud, but to the Mossad. (Parry, p. 85)

The *Newsweek* and *New Republic* attacks particularly one aimed at a *Nightline* follow-up piece on a Casey meeting with Iranians in Madrid in July 1980 turned out to be provably wrong, but the two magazines' major factual errors didn't matter. As Parry writes, "On Capitol Hill, the impact of the one-two punch of *Newsweek* and the *New Republic* could not be overstated. Whatever momentum there was for a thorough investigation of the October Surprise issue quickly

dissipated.”

Even though, in 1991, George H.W. Bush’s White House knew that Casey indeed had been in Madrid (Parry cites a White House memo to that effect, p. 97), the hired guns of the media were softening up the public perception of the scandal, paving the way for the official cover-up. Which, as we shall see, is what happened.

A Troubling Paradigm

But what the author does here, by setting up this paradigm, is to reveal a very serious fault in the American democratic system, which undermines the whole concept of democracy. The MSM, led by neocon ideologues like Peretz and oligarchs like the Graham family at *Newsweek*, is, by nature, in favor of upholding the status quo.

Therefore, when something as potentially explosive as the October Surprise story was in play, they were determined that it should be caricatured as a goofy “conspiracy theory,” therefore, making it easier for 1.) The official inquiry to say there was nothing really there, and 2.) To discourage any other journalist from pursuing the story.

To highlight this very real and dangerous attitude that the (now dying) MSM had, Parry uses independent journalist Craig Unger as a witness. Unger was one of the people hired by *Newsweek* to examine the 1980 October Surprise allegations. In doing so, Unger warned the magazine’s top editors that they were misreading records purporting to show that Casey was at a London historical seminar in late July and thus not meeting with Iranians in Madrid.

Yet, rather than heed Unger’s warning (which was later proven to be correct), *Newsweek* editors essentially told him to take a hike and pressed ahead with their false alibi for Casey as the centerpiece for their debunking cover story. (*The New Republic* did the same thing, using the same false alibi.)

Unger later told Parry that *Newsweek*’s hit piece was “the most dishonest thing that I’ve been through in my life in journalism.” (Parry, p. 96) In other words, the public be damned as to what the truth is. The MSM had a spectrum as to what the Conventional Wisdom was. The October Surprise did not fit into it. Therefore, it was macheted.

After the *Newsweek/New Republic* “debunking” stories, attorney Barcella’s path was laid out in front of him with red arrows. His job was to confirm the “debunking.” How he did that was not important since the MSM would cover his flank, no matter how silly his report was.

Though eventually having to recognize that the *Newsweek/New Republic* Madrid

“alibi” for Casey was false, Barcella and his task force simply created a new one, placing Casey at the famous and mysterious Bohemian Grove enclave in California on that July weekend when *Nightline*’s witness, Iranian businessman and CIA operative Jamshid Hashemi, put Casey in Madrid.

According to the Bohemian Grove “alibi,” Casey flew from San Francisco to London, with no possible stop in Madrid. There was a serious problem with this, however. All the documentary evidence, including a diary from a member of the private club, indicated that Casey was not there in July, but in August. (ibid, p. 98)

Further, Barcella’s task force could not hammer down an alibi for Casey for the alleged Paris meeting in October either. So, the task force relied on the uncorroborated memory of his nephew, Larry Casey. But as Parry shows, Larry Casey’s story was not credible since he had presented an entirely different alibi to the *Frontline* documentary and only changed it after it was proven to be false. (ibid, p. 99)

A Determined Cover-up

Barcella’s cover-up path was further defined by Bush-41’s White House, which supplemented the efforts of the MSM by setting up its own team to counter the story. It was led by White House counsel Boyden Gray, who worked with the CIA to stonewall document production and to help Bush’s former national security aide (and CIA veteran) Donald Gregg, another prime suspect in the scandal, avoid being subpoenaed.

But still, in the face of all this obstruction, the evidence kept piling up that the October Surprise plot had actually happened. The biographer of French intelligence chief Alexandre de Marenches stated that the spymaster told him that he had helped arrange the Paris meetings to facilitate the plot.

John Maclean, a Chicago Tribune reporter and son of famous author Norman Maclean, said that a well-placed GOP source revealed to him details of a mid-October 1980 trip that Vice-President-nominee Bush took to Paris to meet with some Iranians about the hostage controversy.

The point being, Bush wanted the Iranians to hold up any release until Carter left office. Once Bush and Reagan were inaugurated, the Iranians would get a better deal in return, i.e., more weapons to fight their war against Iraq. (Parry, p. 107)

Besides Israel intelligence officer Ben-Menashe also placing Bush in Paris, pilot Heinrich Rupp said he flew Casey from Washington’s National Airport to Paris on a rainy night in mid-October of 1980. Upon arrival, he said he saw a

man who resembled Bush on the tarmac. (ibid)

Therefore, it became imperative for Bush to also have an alibi for the weekend of Oct. 18-19, 1980. And, Barcella constructed one out of paper mache. At the time of the investigation in 1992, the Secret Service refused to reveal the full records of Bush's movements, keeping secret the identity of Bush's key alibi witness (even as Bush was demanding publicly that his alibi be accepted).

However, the congressional task force felt it could not clear Bush without getting the name of the alibi witness. So, Bush and Gray finally turned over the name to senior task force personnel but with the proviso that the investigators could not interview the alibi witness and could never release the name. Remarkably, the task force accepted the deal, clearing Bush but never interviewing his alibi witness.

It's hard to believe, but Parry had to file an appeal to the National Archives to get those Secret Service records declassified. But he didn't get them until 2012, 20 years after the investigation was over, a tribute to how effective the cover-up had been.

The alibi witness turned out to be one Richard Moore, a longtime GOP operative who had a role in Nixon's Watergate cover-up and who was quite friendly with the Bushes. (Parry, p. 110) Bush had helped rehabilitate Moore's career by appointing him ambassador to Ireland.

However, the stalling tactic had worked. By the time Parry got Moore's name, he was dead and couldn't be questioned about whether Bush was actually present in Washington or had slipped away for a secret flight to Paris.

Thus, the upside-down ways of the investigatory process in modern Washington. Normally, it would follow that if Moore had been a solid witness who could corroborate Bush's presence in D.C., not Paris, Bush would have wanted Moore to testify. Instead, Bush prevented the House task force from interviewing Moore or releasing his name so others could. Doesn't that suggest that Bush feared Moore would say Bush wasn't visiting him on Oct. 19, 1980, in Washington?

Parry notes that a previous alibi for Bush on that day being at the Chevy Chase Country Club on Oct. 19 with former Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart had already collapsed by the time the task force agreed not to interview Moore. (ibid, p. 111)

Mounting Evidence

As the evidence of Republican guilt built and the alibis failed, there was some dissent inside the House task force as to where Barcella was heading. Rep.

Mervyn Dymally, D-California, had some tough questions about both the quality of the evidence and the flimsy logic that Barcella was employing. So, Barcella enlisted committee chairman Lee Hamilton to pressure Dymally into muffling his dissent. (Parry, p. 142)

Also, with Bush defeated at the polls by Bill Clinton in November 1992, the Democrats saw even less need to press for the truth about an election a dozen years earlier. Parry notes, "Once the election passed, whatever interest in the investigation waned. People were looking toward a new Democratic administration." (ibid)

So, as with the previous October Surprise, the tendency was with a new administration to just sweep the old dirt under the carpet for "the good of the country." Barcella's report stated that there was no credible evidence of any alleged political maneuvering by the GOP in 1980 to thwart Jimmy Carter's campaign. Second, it claimed that its verdict was unanimous.

However, both points were, to say the least, dubious. Dymally told Parry that he recalled no roll call vote on the report. And as the author showed, the alibis by Casey and Bush were never supported by real facts.

The numerous witnesses alleging a Republican scheme though denounced as unreliable in Barcella's report were never impeached. Therefore, whatever the task force report said, whatever the dying MSM declared, the case is still open. By no practical forensic standard did Barcella and Hamilton close it.

Also, just as Barcella's whitewash was being sent to the printers, the Russian government replied to a request by Hamilton for information that the old Soviet Union might have had on the alleged conspiracy. But that reply also was swept under the rug. Why? Because it confirmed what Barcella and the MSM had been denying, namely that Casey, Bush and other GOP operatives *had met* with the Iranians in order to delay the release of the hostages for political gain. (ibid)

There is no way to soften what Parry relates next: Barcella deliberately buried this Russian report, which, granted, arrived late. But according to Hamilton, Barcella never showed it to the chairman to whom it was addressed. Barcella threw it in a box full of other materials. That box and other boxes containing records from the task force were later transferred to an abandoned Ladies Room in the House Rayburn Parking Garage. Fortunately for us and unfortunately for Barcella, Parry found the Russian report there in 1994.

Misplaced Trust

The book closes with two portraits of personages who figured in scandals that

the author reported on, men whom the MSM has lionized, but whom Parry's reporting reveals to be less than what they were propped up to be.

Colin Powell was revered as the one person in the Cabinet of George W. Bush who was not an undiluted neoconservative, the one guy with some common sense. Perhaps one could characterize him as a serious Council on Foreign Relations type rather than a cheerleader who would appear with Sean Hannity on Fox.

Yet, when George W. Bush decided on someone to present his fabricated case at the United Nations for war against Iraq, Powell was the one who did it. This would seem to indicate that 1.) Bush was aware of the advantages Powell had with the media. That is, they would be prepared to buy into his image. And 2.) Powell was a guy who would go along with the sales presentation no matter how bad it was. No matter if hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians would perish over a phony case for WMD, one that he was directly involved in selling.

Parry reveals that this was predictable because although the media tries to portray Powell as both independent and principled this is not accurate. Going all the way back to his service in Vietnam, Powell has been rather typical in his career advancement. Like many others, he has gone with the flow in order to get carried along by the current.

So the idea that somehow Powell exercised independent judgment and stood up for what he thought was right, this is a greatly exaggerated sales image that Bush cleverly decided to utilize. It worked. The MSM fell for it and off to war we went.

For example, Powell was part of the preliminary investigation of the infamous massacre at My Lai. Powell's early report tried to discredit the testimony of witness, Tom Glen, a U.S. soldier who was trying to blow the whistle on a pattern of abuses that included My Lai. Powell discarded Glen's claims without even personally interviewing him or sending someone to do so. (Parry, p. 170)

To say the least, as with Iraq, Powell's so-called independent judgment turned out to be terribly wrong. In a similar way, regarding massacres of civilians in Vietnam, Powell was also part of the cover-up of another case in which General John W. Donaldson was accused of slaughtering civilians. However, after the disastrous war was over, Powell joined the Pentagon chorus by saying America lost the war because civilian leaders restrained the military.

As he climbed the Pentagon ladder, Powell made friends with Frank Carlucci and Caspar Weinberger. So, when Ronald Reagan became president, they put Powell into a position to reach the top. He did so by aiding in the illegal scheme to ship missiles to the outlaw state of Iran, including some shipments directly from

U.S. stockpiles. Powell knew the logistics system so well that he understood how to bypass regular accounting procedures to conceal what was happening. In other words, he was an accessory to the crime. (Parry, p. 177)

Protected by his benefactors, and contracting convenient amnesia at a crucial time of questioning in the Iran-Contra investigation, Powell escaped any legal ramifications for his acts. But by participating in them, he was on his way to even higher positions in the GOP pantheon, eventually becoming George W. Bush's Secretary of State. His career then culminated in his lethal United Nations sideshow.

The 'Wise Man' from Wichita

Parry's last portrait is of Robert Gates, a career CIA bureaucrat who was first nominated to become CIA Director in 1987 but who withdrew his name when it became clear the nomination was headed for defeat due to his association with the Iran/Contra scandal. But after George H. W. Bush became president, he re-nominated Gates in 1991.

Many CIA intelligence analysts objected to this nomination and some risked reprisals by testifying against Gates. They accused Gates of "politicizing" CIA analysis to serve the interests of his political benefactors, a pattern that caused Gates to completely miss the crack-up of the Soviet bloc and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Gates missed this immense event because he had been serving the wishes of Casey, Reagan and Bush who in the 1980s were interested in promulgating the myth of an all-powerful Evil Empire whose power was growing, thus justifying a massive U.S. military buildup.

Though the reality was that the Soviet Union was crumbling and many CIA analysts were detecting that reality Gates did the bidding of his political masters, twisting the intelligence and punishing analysts who wouldn't go along. So, in 1991, when Bush nominated Gates to lead the CIA, some CIA analysts stepped forward to object, but their warnings were for naught. After a bruising confirmation battle, Gates was confirmed, though he was out of a job after Clinton defeated Bush in 1992.

Bush again came to Gates's career rescue, using political influence to install Gates first as a dean and then as President of Texas A&M. Bush's influence was considerable, since Texas A&M was the home to his presidential library and Bush has a school of government service there named after him (where Gates was made dean).

Evidently, George W. Bush never forgot Gates's service to Casey, Reagan and his

father. Neither did he forget that, like Powell, Gates had a public image quite different than the neocons. Therefore, when the war in Iraq was disintegrating on national TV and Bush was being advised to disengage in 2006, he may have recalled the trick Colin Powell had performed for him. Bush removed Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense and installed Gates.

Though Congress expected Gates to assist in a military withdrawal from Iraq, Gates instead organized "the Surge," an increase of U.S. troops in Iraq to squelch the resistance, a move hailed by the Republicans as a strategic victory. Thus, the GOP could claim that, well, OK, maybe it was a mistake to invade, maybe we blew the occupation, but we did put down the insurgency and prevailed.

However, as Parry shows, the Surge was never as effective as it was depicted. There were other, more important factors involved in the decline of the resistance in Iraq, many of which pre-dated the Surge. For instance, a counterinsurgency strategy implemented by the CIA killed al-Qaeda-in-Iraq leader Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi; segregation of the Sunni communities from Shiites reduced the opportunities for sectarian killings; and the decision by Shiite warlord Moktada al-Sadr to halt hostilities was intended to speed up American withdrawal.

In reality, the Surge amounted to a second "decent interval." As one may recall, Nixon and Henry Kissinger knew they could not win in Vietnam. Therefore, the plan was to withdraw American forces but to keep U.S. air and naval power there so the country would not fall on their watch but rather after a "decent interval."

The Surge was a ploy so that Iraq would not turn into a Shiite, anti-American country on Bush's watch. Al-Sadr understood that and went along with it. And today, he is a uniquely powerful figure in Iraq (and the U.S. influence is quickly dissipating).

Gates was not only the implementer of the "decent interval" but he also backed a similar concept for Afghanistan under President Obama. That is, the sending in of more combat troops to combat terrorist threats there.

Parry concludes that these "stolen narratives," which he has been at pains to uncover, have been disastrous for America. They have helped steal presidential elections, lengthen unnecessary wars, and made heroes out of men who are anything but.

America's Stolen Narrative tries to correct that history. It's a shame that with all the uproar over the New Media, he is one of the very few who does that onerous but necessary chore.

Jim DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. His new book is *Destiny Betrayed* (Second Edition) from Skyhorse Publishing.

Watergate's Washed-Away Lessons

The Republican Party that emerged from Vietnam and Watergate was determined to obliterate the lessons learned, and the Democrats veered between timidity and complicity as those lessons were unlearned. Now, the key lessons are more reminiscence than real, as Michael Winship laments.

By Michael Winship

At moments, "The Lessons of Watergate" conference, held a couple of weeks ago in Washington, D.C. by the citizen's lobby Common Cause, was a little like that two-man roadshow retired baseball players Bill Buckner and Mookie Wilson have been touring.

In it, they retell the story of the catastrophic moment during the bottom of the last inning of Game Six of the 1986 World Series, when the Mets' Wilson hit an easy ground ball toward Buckner of the Red Sox, who haplessly let it roll between his legs. That notorious error ultimately cost Boston the championship.

As *The New Yorker* magazine's Reeves Wiedeman wrote of the players' joint public appearance, "It is as if Custer and Sitting Bull agreed to deconstruct Little Bighorn." Or those World War II reunions where aging Army Air Corps men meet the Luftwaffe pilots who tried to shoot them down over Bremen.

So, too, in Washington, four decades after the Watergate break-in scandal that led to the downfall of President Richard Nixon. Up on stage was Daniel Ellsberg of Pentagon Papers fame, one of the first victims of Nixon's infamous "plumbers," the burglars who went skulking into the night to attempt illegal break-ins, including one at the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

"I want to add something to the history here that I've never told," Ellsberg said, then asked. "Is Alex Butterfield still alive?"

A voice shouted from a corner of the room, "I'm over here."

And sure enough, it was Alexander Butterfield, former deputy to Nixon chief of staff H.R. "Bob" Haldeman, and a pivotal if accidental notable in the Watergate saga. In July 1973, Butterfield let slip to the Senate Watergate committee that

Nixon made secret audiotapes of all his meetings at the White House, a revelation that cracked the scandal wide open.

We never did hear the story Ellsberg wanted to tell; he decided he needed to clear it with Butterfield before he went public. The Common Cause event was filled with such slightly surreal moments, kind of like a Comic Con for history buffs and policy wonks.

Just moments before Ellsberg spoke, I had been chatting with former Brooklyn Congresswoman Liz Holtzman, when Butterfield walked over, introduced himself and told Holtzman, "I was in love with you even when I was at the White House." Holtzman was a prominent member of the House Judiciary Committee that in July 1974 passed three articles of impeachment against Nixon. He resigned less than two weeks later.

I was there in the hearing room that summer, briefly, while they debated one of the articles. My first TV job was working for public television in Washington, and while most of the time I was in the office or studio, a colleague lent me her credentials to see a bit of the action.

The day Nixon quit, I was in Lafayette Park across from the White House taping promos for our coverage (somewhere I have a color slide of me working with our correspondent while Tom Brokaw teeters on an orange crate next to me, doing a standup).

I returned to the park that night, after Nixon's resignation speech, where a jubilant crowd celebrated his departure. When a garbage truck rolled past, they began chanting, "The moving men are here!"

Washington was a smaller town then and Watergate had become a cottage industry. Everyone you met had a rumor to spread or a story to tell. Books about the mess sold like crazy, everything from Woodward and Bernstein's best-selling *All the President's Men* to transcripts of the White House tapes to collections of Watergate "recipes."

A friend of mine and I led Watergate tours and peddled bumper stickers on the side: one read, "Nixon Bugs Me, Too." The other was the simpler yet eloquent "Impeach Nixon." In those days, D.C. didn't have cable television to entertain us. It didn't matter: We had Nixon.

Yet make no mistake, for all the general hilarity (and remember, to many, Richard Nixon had been the butt of jokes for decades before; Watergate was just the ultimate punchline), this was a true constitutional crisis.

The abuse of presidential power was staggering, from the soliciting of illegal

corporate campaign contributions used for hush money and delivered by bagmen, to the illicit actions of the aforementioned plumbers, an operation, by the way, that traced its roots all the way back to the early months of Nixon's first term.

Combined with the ongoing tragedy of Vietnam, including the secret bombing of Cambodia and the violent squelching of antiwar protest, Watergate shook the public's confidence in government as it hadn't been since the bleakest days of secession and the Civil War.

But as several participants at the conference noted, the nation and its institutions did something about it. Committees in both the Senate and House, members of both parties cooperating with one another (!), conducted thorough investigations.

In a more competitive, less consolidated news environment, a free press went on the attack (once the reporting of Woodward and Bernstein at *The Washington Post*, Sy Hersh at *The New York Times*, Jack Nelson at the *Los Angeles Times* and others awoke a moribund White House press corps).

And the courts worked, from John Sirica, chief judge of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, who cracked down on the Watergate burglars and demanded the White House turn over those audiotapes, to the highest court in the land.

As Fred Wertheimer of the reform group Democracy 21 remarked at the conference, "The Supreme Court understood that citizens had a constitutional right to protect their democracy from corruption."

People went to jail, lots of them, even the former attorney general of the United States, John Mitchell. Think about that. Many of them did hard time. Today, we couldn't even get miscreant bankers to resign in exchange for their billions in bailouts, much less prosecute them for criminal behavior.

The briefly restored public trust that followed Nixon's departure started turning back to the cynicism that endures today almost immediately, when his successor Gerald Ford absolved Nixon of his sins with a full presidential pardon. In the years that followed, the erosion has continued.

The bagmen have become the banks and Wall Street. Gridlock and intolerance have replaced bipartisanship. The efforts at campaign finance reform that followed Watergate crushed by Citizens United and other court rulings, have dwindled to the point where, as conference panelist Trevor Potter of the Campaign Legal Center observed, we are "shockingly close again to no contribution limits."

And with 9/11 and the war on terror, including ongoing drone attacks and threats to civil liberties, Morton Halperin noted, "The public is once again accepting an imperial presidency."

During its conference, Common Cause presented what it called Uncommon Heroes awards to members of the House Judiciary Committee who served during the crisis, and saluted an Uncommon Heroes of Watergate Honor Roll, a bipartisan collection of "individuals from Richard Nixon's Enemies List, members of the prosecution team, journalists and House and Senate Committee staff." All could look back 40 years and be proud they took a stand.

But the Lessons of Watergate are lessons learned and lost. We've got to organize, get our government back and make it accountable. Many believe it will take another scandal the size of Watergate, or worse, to get us back on track. Let's hope not.

Instead, four decades in the future, let there be changes for the good America can celebrate, so we don't wind up like those old ballplayers on the road, reliving an unforced error, again and again.

Michael Winship, senior writing fellow at the public policy and advocacy group Demos, is senior writer of the weekly public television series, Moyers & Company. For more information, go to www.BillMoyers.com Listen to interviews he conducted at "The Lessons of Watergate" conference: [Robert Reich on Watergate's Lessons](#); [Russ Feingold on the Path to Campaign Finance Reform](#); [Matea Gold on Following the Dark Money](#)
