

# Official Washington's Delusions on Delusions

**Exclusive:** Official Washington operates in its own bubble of self-delusion in which the stars of U.S. politics, policy and media don't realize how the rest of the world sees their sociopathic behavior. This craziness is now reaching a crisis point on Iran and Russia, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The chasm between reality and the U.S. political/media elite continues to widen with Official Washington's actions toward Iran and Russia making "the world's sole remaining superpower" look either like a Banana Republic (on Iran) or an Orwellian Dystopia (regarding Russia).

On Iran and the international negotiations to rein in its nuclear program, the American people witnessed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu striding into the U.S. Congress like some imperial proconsul to deliver a faux State of the Union address that undermined the sitting U.S. president. Then, 47 Republican senators furthered Netanyahu's intent to denigrate President Barack Obama by sending an open letter to Iranian leaders designed to prevent a deal.

Yes, I know many Republicans and their overwhelmingly white "base" don't consider the African-American Obama the legitimate President despite his two election victories. But never in American history has a major political party as brazenly challenged the constitutional authority of a sitting president to conduct foreign policy.

The letter to the Iranian leaders warned that once Obama is out of office in 2017, "the next president could revoke such an executive agreement with the stroke of a pen and future Congresses could modify the terms of the agreement at any time." In other words, the Republicans were telling Iran's leaders that whatever they plan to sign with Obama and five other world leaders isn't worth the paper that it's written on.

This stunning congressional intervention into U.S. diplomacy was signed not just by a few backbenchers but by the Senate's Republican leadership and several prospective GOP presidential candidates, including Sen. Rand Paul, R-Kentucky, who had been viewed by some on the Left as well as the Right as a person who would not toe the Israeli line on Middle East issues.

This double whammy of Netanyahu's extreme rhetoric on Iran and the Republicans' extraordinary subversion of the Iranian nuclear talks left people around the world wondering whether the U.S. government had completely lost its bearings.

Meanwhile, the U.S. news media continued veering off into its own Bermuda Triangle.

What is particularly striking about this current moment is how the madness that permeates the U.S. government equally pervades the mainstream U.S. media, which is now incapable of covering major international events except through the lens of State Department propaganda, a situation that has reached extreme levels in the reporting on the Ukraine crisis.

The only filter that the MSM can place on the events in Ukraine is one endlessly vilifying Russian President Vladimir Putin. Though this technique of personalizing foreign policy disputes has become standard operating procedure for the U.S. press corps think of Daniel Ortega, Manuel Noriega, Saddam Hussein, Bashar al-Assad, Viktor Yanukovich, etc. the U.S. media's "group think" on Russia may even surpass those earlier examples.

Plus, nothing from the Ukraine crisis can ever be blamed on the U.S. government, even though Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland helped orchestrate the violent coup that overthrew Ukraine's elected government in February 2014 and threw the nation of 45 million people into a bloody civil war.

Everything must be blamed on Putin and any alternative analysis, recognizing another side to the story, must be dismissed as "Russian propaganda." [See, for instance, Consortiumnews.com's "[NYT Still Pretends No Coup in Ukraine.](#)"]

### **'Russian Propaganda'**

On Monday, the Washington Post delivered what could become a textbook case of journalistic self-delusion noting that the Russian people have developed an intensely negative view of the United States but only because the Russian media portrays the U.S. government in a hostile way.

The Post article by Michael Birnbaum blamed the collapse of U.S. popularity on "furious rhetoric [that] has been pumped across Russian airwaves a passionate, conspiracy-laden fascination with the methods that Washington is supposedly using to foment unrest in Ukraine and Russia."

Citing recent polling, the article noted that more than 80 percent of the Russian people hold negative views of the United States. But that couldn't be because of American behavior! No, it's impossible that anyone looking at the U.S. today could possibly find anything to criticize! It had to be Putin's fault, spreading spurious criticism of the U.S. via Russian media. Or as the Post put it:

"Fed by the powerful antagonism on Russian federal television channels, the main

source of news for more than 90 percent of Russians, ordinary people started to feel more and more disillusioned [about the U.S.]. The anger seems different from the fast-receding jolts of the past, observers say, having spread faster and wider.”

The article quoted Lev Gudkov, director of the polling firm Levada Center, explaining: “This anti-Western propaganda radically changed the atmosphere in the society. It has become militarist.”

Another voice cited by the Post was Maria Lipman, described as “an independent Moscow-based political analyst,” saying: “What the government knew was that it was very easy to cultivate anti-Western sentiments, and it was easy to consolidate Russian society around this propaganda.”

In other words, it wasn’t what the U.S. government has done around the world that has provoked this antipathy from the endless boasting about America’s “indispensable” and “exceptional” qualities to its destructive behavior, including spreading bloody havoc via “regime change” schemes in Iraq, Libya, Syria, Ukraine and elsewhere.

And, it’s not that the U.S. government looks clownish when the majority party in Congress expresses doubts about global warming and other scientific judgments. Nor is it the continued examples of racism and the police shootings of unarmed blacks. Nor the global spying by the National Security Agency. Nor the national self-degradation when members of Congress behave like trained seals jumping up and down to applaud Israel’s Netanyahu.

No, the only reason that the Russian people look askance at the United States is that they are being deceived by the lying “propaganda” dictated by the evil Vladimir Putin. By contrast, the American people always get the straight story from their mainstream U.S. news media, the gold standard for the world!

Official Washington and the mainstream U.S. media have taken on the characteristics of a male stalker who can’t understand why his female target finds him repulsive. It must be because someone is poisoning her mind with negative comments about his sterling personality. We now live in a system of delusions built upon delusions.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click](#)**

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## Rearranging the Chairs at CIA

CIA Director Brennan wants to make his mark on the spy agency by shifting around the lines of authority to merge analysts and operatives into specialized “mission centers,” but the disadvantages may outweigh the advantages, according to ex-CIA analyst Paul R. Pillar.

By Paul R. Pillar

Re-arranging bureaucracies has long been a favorite Washington way of pretending to make improvements. It is a handy recourse in the absence of good ideas to make real improvement.

Revising a wiring diagram is the sort of change that can be made visible to the outside world. It does not require reaching consensus about significant increases or decreases in the priority given particular programs or their budgets. It offers a basis for convincing ourselves that the bureaucracies involved will perform better, even if the main reasons we don't get everything we would like to get from those bureaucracies are to be found in the inherent, unavoidable challenges of the tasks they are assigned to perform.

The urge to reorganize is not limited to government. Revising wiring diagrams is alluring to senior managers in private sector organizations as well. It is a way of showing initiative and appearing to be dedicated both to improving the organization and keeping pace with changes in the outside world. It is one of the most visible ways for any senior manager to leave a mark and establish a legacy.

Now the Central Intelligence Agency is being hit again with the reorganization bug, with changes that Director John Brennan announced last week. The intelligence community has been subjected to this sort of thing at least as much as other parts of the federal bureaucracy.

The most notable instance was a reorganization of the community a decade ago as the most visible part of the 9/11 Commission's response to a popular demand to shake things up after a terrible terrorist attack. That change added new bureaucracy on top of continuing old organizations, and in the years since has given us little or no reason to believe that it was a net improvement.

The principal feature of the changes that Brennan announced is to move all of

the agency's operational and analytical work, and not just selected parts of it, into integrated "mission centers" covering issue areas defined either geographically or functionally.

As with most other reorganizations, both criticism and praise tend to be overstated. Any change in a bureaucracy's performance, for good or for ill, resulting from changing the wiring diagram will not be nearly as pronounced as either critics or promoters usually would lead us to believe.

A criticism of this newest reorganization, for example, is that it would lead to still more focus on current doings at the expense of longer-range analysis. But within each issue area there is no reason to believe that worthwhile long-range analysis cannot be done in the mission centers.

Another line of criticism involves a feared compromise of the integrity of analysis because of overly close association of the analysts with operators. This would only be a problem, however, where covert action is involved.

Although some unfortunate experiences involving Central America in the 1980s demonstrate the corrupting potential, covert action, despite the public image of what the CIA does, constitutes a small (and usually well-compartmented) portion of the agency's work.

There is a substantial hazard of policy preferences influencing analysis stemming from relations with policy-makers, but that is a separate matter from relations between analysts and operators within an intelligence agency.

The justification for the changes is also overstated, or fuzzy and hardly compelling. Mark Mazzetti's article in the *New York Times* about the announced changes mentions that Brennan relied heavily on "management jargon" to try to explain and justify what he was doing. There were all the unsurprising buzzwords about needing to "wring inefficiencies" out of the system and having to modernize and about not wanting to become as obsolete as Kodak, but how this makes one particular wiring diagram better than another one is difficult to see.

Brennan talked about the "array of very challenging, complex and serious threats to our national security", the sort of language that any CIA director, at any time, uses, but what does that say about the supposed advantages of a particular organizational scheme? He said a central aim was to eliminate "seams" in coverage, but aren't there seams in any organizational arrangement, including the seams that will exist between the mission centers?

The particular organizational issues involving the CIA entail, as many such issues in other organizations do, inherent trade-offs, with each possible wiring diagram presenting both advantages and disadvantages when compared to other

possible schemes.

The main advantage of the announced new arrangement is to make the interface between analysts and collectors working on the same substantive issue as close and smooth as possible. This helps the analysts to understand better the sources of some of the information on which they are relying, and it helps the collectors to understand how the information they are collecting is being used and where are the most important information gaps that still need to be filled.

A significant disadvantage is that bureaucratizing whatever is considered at the moment to be worthy of its own mission center makes for a less flexible and less nimble organization as issues change and especially as new (and sometimes difficult to recognize initially as important) issues emerge.

The seeds of future intelligence failures can be found in the seams between the centers. Interface is important not just between collectors and analysts but also between analysts working issues that are different but may turn out to be related in important ways.

Another set of disadvantages stems from breaking up what would otherwise have been critical masses of people working in the same discipline and with the same skill set. Doing so is generally not conducive to enhancing specialized skills, whether those skills involve the craft of espionage, or of analysis, or something else.

Particular mission centers, depending on who leads them and what are the relative weights of different types of people assigned to them, may tend to be co-opted by certain disciplines at the expense of the necessary professional care and feeding of those in other disciplines.

The further separation of missions and operational control from the management of employees' careers (and the new scheme will retain existing directorates, including those for operations and for analysis, for that latter purpose) will tend to exacerbate issues of personnel management, including loosening the tie between effective contribution to a specific assigned mission and reward in the form of promotions. Retention of the existing directorate structure in addition to more mission centers also makes the whole organizational structure of the agency more complicated.

A principle too rarely recognized is that the advantages of a new organizational structure are uncertain (when compared to the existing structure, which is apt to have evolved over time as experience has shown what works and what doesn't), but the costs and disruptions associated with any major reorganization are certain and substantial.

The disruption involves everything from having to forge new relationships with bosses, co-workers, and customers, to having to figure out exactly where new lines of responsibility are to be drawn. Rather than impeding accomplishment of the mission with such disruption, it often is better just to let people get on with their jobs, although anyone who makes this observation risks being rebuked as a stuck-in-the-mud resistor of change.

In the face of the inevitable trade-offs, the current organizational arrangement in the CIA, in which there are some integrated centers for selected issues such as terrorism but not for everything, is probably a reasonable compromise.

Unmentioned in much of the commentary so far on the announced changes is how much had already been done, outside the centers, to enhance communication and cooperation between collectors and analysts. This includes physical changes made years ago to locate in adjacent office space the analysts and operations officers working on the same geographic areas.

What we most need to be wary of with these latest announced changes in the CIA's organization is not some wave of corrupting influences that will destroy the integrity of analysis. We should instead ask whether this is yet another of the many examples of a senior manager using reorganization to try to make his mark and leave a legacy, especially a legacy that won't be centered on unflattering matters such as strained relations with Congressional oversight committees.

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## CIA at 50, Lost in the 'Politicization' Swamp

**From the Archive:** Almost 20 years ago even before the Iraq WMD fiasco as the CIA was celebrating its half-century anniversary, the impact of a Reagan-era "reorganization" was being felt in the "politicization" of intelligence, Robert Parry wrote in 1997. Now, [a new reorganization](#) could make matters worse.

By Robert Parry (Originally published in 1997)

Through its first three decades, the CIA prided itself on maintaining an intellectual integrity in its analysis of world events. CIA analysts often

delivered to the White House data that conflicted with what presidents wanted to hear. President Eisenhower was challenged on the bomber gap and President Kennedy on the missile gap. Presidents Johnson and Nixon didn't like many of the discouraging words on the Vietnam War.

The CIA's "operations" branch may have stumbled into bloody controversies from time to time. But the CIA's "analytical" division maintained a relatively good – though by no means perfect – reputation for supplying straightforward intelligence to policymakers.

Like so much else at the CIA, however, that tradition changed in the early 1980s, with Ronald Reagan's determination to enforce his "Evil Empire" vision of the Soviet Union. The writing was quickly on the wall. The Reagan transition team denounced CIA career analysts for allegedly underestimating the Soviet commitment to world domination.

"These failures are of such enormity," the report claimed, "that they cannot help but suggest to any objective observer that the agency itself is compromised to an unprecedented extent and that its paralysis is attributable to causes more sinister than incompetence." [See Mark Perry's *Eclipse*.]

To make Reagan's apocalyptic vision stick – to blame Moscow for the world's terrorism, Yellow Rain chemical warfare in Indochina, the Pope assassination attempt and virtually all revolutionary movements in the Third World – Reagan and his CIA Director William J. Casey set out to purge the CIA analytical division of those who wouldn't toe the party line, those who saw the Soviet Union as a declining empire still interested in detente with the West.

The CIA purge helped Reagan and Casey in another way, too. It cut off the potential for reliable CIA information reaching Congress and the public about scandals in the U.S. overt-covert paramilitary operations in Nicaragua and Afghanistan. Casey's domestic "perception management" campaigns which sought to influence the U.S. public debate on these issues also would be strengthened by ensuring only favorable CIA-blessed propaganda. [For details, see Robert Parry's *Lost History*.]

So out of view, in the closed community of the CIA, Casey elevated Robert Gates, one of the hardest of anti-Soviet hard-liners, to head the Directorate of Intelligence [DI], the analytical side.

In summer 1997 issue of *Foreign Policy*, former CIA senior analyst Melvin A. Goodman described the effect: "The CIA's objectivity on the Soviet Union ended abruptly in 1981, when Casey became the DCI – and the first one to be a member of the president's Cabinet. Gates became Casey's deputy director for



intelligence (DDI) in 1982 and chaired the National Intelligence Council.”

Gates restructured the DI from a subject-matter framework to a geographical one. That allowed Gates to jump his allies, who became known as “Gates clones,” into key positions. Some of those who rose were David Cohen, David Carey, George Kolt, John McLaughlin, Jim Lynch, Winston Wiley and John Gannon.

With the Gates regime in place, career analysts in sensitive positions soon found themselves the victims of bare-knuckle bureaucratic pummelings. Some were verbally berated into changing their analyses; some faced job threats and allegations of psychiatric unfitness; others experienced confrontations with supervisors who literally threw papers in the analysts’ faces.

### **Hyping the ‘Evil Empire’**

Early on, the Reagan administration pressed the CIA to adopt an analysis that accepted right-wing media reports pinning European terrorism on the Soviets. The CIA analysts knew that these charges were false, in part because they were based on “black” or false propaganda that the CIA itself had been planting in the European media.

But the “politicization” tide was strong. In 1985, Gates closeted a special team to push through another pre-cooked paper arguing that the KGB was behind the 1981 wounding of Pope John Paul II. CIA analysts again knew that the charge was bogus, but could not block the paper from leaving CIA.

On another ideologically sensitive front, analysts faced pressure to back off an assessment that Pakistan was violating nuclear proliferation safeguards. That was sensitive because Pakistan’s military government was aiding the Afghan mujahedeen rebels fighting Soviet troops.

Reagan also wanted analyses that exaggerated Soviet strength and Moscow’s expansionist tendencies. Again, the analysts found the evidence lacking, but the administration prevailed in hyping threat analyses. Analysts grew so fearful of reporting on Soviet weaknesses that the CIA fell way behind the curve in recognizing the coming Soviet collapse.

On many levels, the Casey-Gates assault on the CIA analysts was a dramatic behind-the-scenes story that contributed to historic developments in the 1980s: the brutal anti-communist tactics in Central America, tolerance of human rights abusers and drug traffickers among U.S. allies, false CIA reports about “moderates” in Iran that justified the Iran-Contra arms sales, and scary assessments of Soviet might which bloated U.S. defense budgets.

But this intimidation of the CIA analysts and its consequences are still little

understood in Washington. The story surfaced briefly in 1991 during Robert Gates's confirmation hearings when a handful of analysts braved the Bush administration by protesting the "politicization of intelligence." Led by Goodman, these dissidents fingered Gates as a key player in the campaign.

The "politicization" testimony added more doubts about Gates, who already was under fire for his dubious testimony on the Iran-Contra scandal. But President Bush lined up solid Republican backing and enough accommodating Democrats, particularly Sen. David Boren, the Senate Intelligence Committee chairman, to shove Gates through as CIA director.

### **Clinton's Opening**

There was, however, a brief window for change with Bill Clinton's election in 1992 – and the issue was put before Clinton's incoming national security team. Former CIA analyst Peter W. Dickson explained the problem bluntly in a two-page memo to Samuel "Sandy" Berger, who later became Clinton's national security adviser.

Dickson, an analyst who suffered retaliation for refusing to rewrite a 1983 assessment that noted Soviet restraint on nuclear proliferation, urged Clinton to appoint a CIA director who understood "the deeper internal problems relating to the politicization of intelligence and the festering morale problem within the CIA." In this Dec. 10, 1992, memo, Dickson saw a housecleaning at the top as crucial:

"This problem of intellectual corruption will not disappear overnight, even with vigorous remedial action. However, the new CIA director will be wise if he realizes from the start the dangers in relying on the advice of senior CIA office managers who during the past 12 years advanced and prospered in their careers precisely because they had no qualms about suppressing intelligence or slanting analysis to suit the interest of Casey and Gates. This is a deep systemic problem. ...

"The lack of accountability also became a systemic problem in the 1980s under Casey and Gates. ... A recent CIA inspector general investigation confirms the near total breakdown in confidence among employee[s] that management is willing to deal honestly and objectively with their complaints. Many of them concern the lack of professional ethics and in some cases personal abuse at the hands of senior officer managers – a group of individuals beholden and therefore loyal to Gates."

Dickson, a creative thinker who also investigates historical mysteries such as the real backgrounds of Columbus and Shakespeare, recommended that Clinton focus

on “intellectual integrity and accountability” in selecting a new CIA director. But Clinton instead was focusing “like a laser beam” on domestic policy, as he promised during the campaign. He seemed to have little interest in CIA reform.

Clinton did oust Gates but avoided confronting the problem head-on by installing James Woolsey, a neoconservative Democrat who had worked closely with the Reagan-Bush administrations. Under Woolsey, the Gates crowd, sans Gates, further consolidated its bureaucratic power. That trend continued during the brief tenure of Clinton’s second CIA director, John Deutch.

### **The ‘Gates Clones’**

Clinton’s next CIA director, George Tenet, also has chosen to surround himself with many of Gates’s former allies. Tenet did oust Cohen, whom the analysts considered one of Gates’s most aggressive enforcers. But other Gates-connected officials – McLaughlin, Carey, Wiley and Gannon – remained in high positions inside the CIA.

Over those 15 years, the Casey-Gates allies also trained a younger generation of analysts who moved into mid-level positions. Seeing the Casey-Gates crowd still dominating the senior levels of the CIA has discouraged many of the analysts who went public to protest the “politicization.”

In interviews, these former CIA analysts complained that Clinton allowed the CIA’s drift from the Reagan-Bush years to carry the analytical division even deeper into a backwater of shoddy scholarship and low morale.

“Clinton missed an opportunity to get the CIA on the right track,” said Goodman. “The CIA’s in a hell of a lot of trouble.”

“He blew it,” declared Dickson. “He threw it away. It’s too late now.”

Dickson predicted that the CIA, just passing its 50th anniversary, would continue on a path of gradual decline and growing irrelevance. [Dickson’s prediction proved prescient given the cascade of later failures under CIA Director Tenet.]

“I don’t see any improvement,” added John A. Gentry, an analyst who resigned in 1991 with a letter that read: “I can no longer work in an organization in which satisfaction of bureaucratic superiors is more important than superior analysis.”

Gentry, a former Army Special Forces officer and economist, compiled his criticisms in a 1993 book, *Lost Promise: How CIA Analysis Misserves the Nation*. One recommendation stated that “the destructiveness of some managers’ meanness,

dishonesty and lack of intellectual integrity is so great that significant numbers – including many senior officers – should be fired from the Agency.”

But Gentry concluded that Clinton would not reverse the damage. “You’re 15 years into decay,” Gentry said. Clinton’s CIA appointees have “fussed around at the margins, but they haven’t made the cultural, leadership and even moral changes that are needed.”

### **Ducking a Fight**

Clinton seemed to have thought that as long as he pumped money into the intelligence budget – about \$30 billion a year – and took no stern actions against the Langley power structure, the CIA would make no trouble for him.

His attitude apparently was colored by the perception that President Carter’s shake-up of the CIA in the late 1970s drove a small clandestine army of furious spooks into the Bush and Reagan campaigns of 1980. With Clinton’s sensitivity over his Vietnam draft avoidance, he also saw a messy clash over restructuring the CIA as a distraction from his domestic agenda.

“I see no indication anywhere that Clinton has taken any interest in anything that has occurred,” said Gentry. “Clinton is quite content to have a weak intelligence community.”

Still, Clinton found that his hands-off strategy did not save him from getting burned in fall 1993 when he was seeking to restore Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power. The CIA analytical division, built by Casey and Gates, sent a report to Congress which claimed, apparently falsely, that Aristide had undergone psychiatric care in Canada. The report was seized upon by conservatives in Congress who considered Aristide a dangerous leftist.

Woolsey’s tenure was marred, too, by the discovery that CIA counter-intelligence officer Aldrich Ames sold secrets to Moscow for almost a decade. Congress turned on Woolsey for supposedly not acting decisively enough to discipline senior officers who had supervised Ames.

Deutch, a brilliant but prickly scientist from MIT, succeeded Woolsey but made few significant changes at the CIA, either. Then after a failed attempt by Clinton to place his national security adviser Anthony Lake in the CIA’s top spot, the President settled on Tenet, who had served as Deutch’s deputy and before that as Boren’s top aide on the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Ironically, Tenet oversaw Boren’s half-hearted confirmation review of Gates in 1991. From the start, that investigation was limited by Boren’s commitment to Gates’s confirmation. Boren accepted Gate’s excuses about his less-than-candid

Iran-Contra testimony.

The chairman also failed to pursue allegations linking Gates to secret U.S.-arranged arms sales to Iraq in the 1980s and to the so-called “October Surprise” case in which Reagan’s campaign was alleged to have undermined President Carter’s attempts to free 52 U.S. hostages held in Iran in 1980.

The failure to vet Gates came back to haunt Tenet as the policies and personnel pushed by Gates continued to dominate the CIA’s analytical division, as CIA morale sagged further and its reputation as an intelligence agency deteriorated more.

Because the Boren-Tenet inquiry gave Gates a pass on the “politicization” charges, along with almost everything else, the intellectual corruption of the Casey-Gates era at CIA still was not widely understood. With no recognition of the rot, Tenet has no mandate to take the radical steps needed to solve the problem.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush Family and its connections to various right-wing operatives for only \$34. The trilogy includes *America’s Stolen Narrative*. For details on this offer, [click here](#).**

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## Ben Bradlee’s Not Such ‘A Good Life’ – Part 2

**Special Report:** In recent years, the *Washington Post*’s emergence as a neocon propaganda sheet has struck some as a betrayal of the *Post*’s earlier reputation as a serious newspaper. But many of the paper’s current tendencies can be traced back to its iconic editor Ben Bradlee, writes James DiEugenio in Part 2 of this series.

By James DiEugenio

Ben Bradlee’s journalistic reputation is defined in the public’s mind by his role as the *Washington Post*’s gutsy executive editor during the Watergate scandal and especially by Jason Robards’s dramatic portrayal of him in the movie, “All the President’s Men.” Bradlee’s role in Richard Nixon’s political

demise and his famous friendship with John F. Kennedy created an image of Bradlee as an icon of the "liberal media," but those chapters of his life are misleading and miss the point of who Ben Bradlee really was and what his legacy truly is.

As we saw in Part One, Bradlee came from the American ruling elite and operated within a social framework that involved close personal relationships with leading figures in the U.S. government and its intelligence community, including CIA rising star Richard Helms who had been Bradlee's friend since childhood.

In the 1950s, Bradlee not only worked as a U.S. government propagandist in France with close ties to Operation Mockingbird, the spy agency's project for penetrating and influencing the U.S. news media, but he developed close personal ties to the CIA's Cord Meyer, a senior clandestine services propagandist considered a leader of Operation Mockingbird.

Meyer and Bradlee each married sisters from the same well-to-do family, Mary and Tony Pinchot, respectively. Tony Pinchot took up with Bradlee after she met him in Paris where he was working as *Newsweek's* bureau chief. She and Bradlee then divorced their spouses and married in 1956.

After the couple moved to the pricy Georgetown section of Washington, they socialized with the great and powerful, including two other glamorous neighbors John and Jackie Kennedy. Bradlee was a *Newsweek* political correspondent and then the magazine's Washington bureau chief. So these relationships, which sometimes bordered on the incestuous, served him well as he rose through the ranks of the Washington news media.

Cord Meyer, then Bradlee's relation through marriage, was himself a close friend of James Angleton, the legendary and sinister CIA chief of counterintelligence. The two men's wives, Mary Pinchot Meyer and Cicely d'Autremont Angleton, were very close and remained so even after Mary Meyer divorced Cord Meyer in 1958. Later, Mary Meyer was widely rumored to have had an affair with John Kennedy, a relationship that supposedly continued until Kennedy's death on Nov. 22, 1963.

When Mary Meyer herself was murdered on Oct. 12, 1964, along the Georgetown towpath, it was Ben Bradlee who was called by police to identify the body of his sister-in-law. Afterwards, Bradlee encountered Angleton entering the slain woman's Georgetown house and then joined the CIA counterintelligence chief in a search for her personal diary, not to reveal its contents but to hide whatever secrets were in there.

According to an FBI document, James Angleton, Bradlee's fellow searcher, and Richard Helms, Bradlee's boyhood chum, canceled a meeting on Oct. 14, 1964,

because they were deeply involved in matters surrounding Mary Meyer's death.

As for Mary Meyer's mysterious diary, the *Washington Post's* 2011 obituary of Tony Bradley, Mary Meyer's sister and Ben Bradley's second wife, noted that "Mrs. Bradley subsequently found the diary, which appeared to disclose her sister's affair with late President John F. Kennedy. Mrs. Bradley and her husband, who was serving as head of *Newsweek's* Washington bureau, turned the diary over to Angleton with the promise that the CIA would destroy it.

"More than a decade later, Mrs. Bradley was upset when she heard Angleton had not kept his word. Through an intermediary, she got the diary back and set it on fire."

A half century after her death, Mary Pinchot Meyer's murder is still listed as unsolved and the contents of her diary remain an enduring Washington mystery, prompting speculation regarding what it might have revealed about powerful people in both the political and intelligence worlds. [These lingering mysteries have been the subject of two books, Nina Burleigh's *A Very Private Woman* (1998) and Peter Janney's *Mary's Mosaic* (2013)]

### **Mr. Insider**

So, the image of Bradley as a hard-bitten, tough-talking newsman who put the inner workings of the U.S. capital under a microscope and then shared those details with the American people, without fear or favor, was never the reality. Bradley was an insider who may have exposed some wrongdoing as he wielded the *Post* as a weapon against certain political enemies but not as a sword fighting for the unbiased and unvarnished truth.

In Bradley's elite world, it was best to keep some of Washington's secrets locked away from those who might not understand what was "good for the country." Or as his boss and benefactor Katharine Graham once noted in a speech at CIA headquarters, "We live in a dangerous world. There are some things the general public does not need to know and shouldn't. I believe democracy flourishes when the government can take legitimate step to keep its secrets and when the press can decide whether to print what it knows." (*Counterpunch*, July 25, 2001)

The reality about Ben Bradley's elitist attitude toward journalism that it is more about guiding the people than informing them is underscored by his first major hire after he became the *Post's* managing editor in 1965. That hire was David Broder, then a political reporter in the *New York Times's* Washington bureau whom Bradley had heard was frustrated with his editors at the *Times*. (Himmelman, p. 109)

Bradley made it a prime objective to hire Broder away from the *Post's* perceived

rival as a top national news publication and he was proud of succeeding. Broder and his political columns would remain a fixture at the *Post* almost until the end of his life in 2011.

Yet, Broder came to typify all that was wrong with mainstream journalism as he would regularly recite the capital's conventional wisdom and rarely rock the boat. Broder's style of journalism said a lot about who Ben Bradlee really was and where he wanted to take the *Post*.

As the Internet began to grow in the 1990s and then explode in the new millennium, many bloggers expressed their annoyance and anger at the MSM by singling out Broder and his tedious insider reporting. In fact, a new term was coined "High Broderism" which meant a long and dilatory paragraph that, once analyzed, said either very little or nothing, a gaseous obfuscation that had one objective: to defend the status quo.

In fact, toward the end of Broder's career, even some liberal members of the MSM had had enough of his pompous punditry. Hendrick Hertzberg of the *New Yorker* called him "relentlessly centrist." (April 14, 2006) Frank Rich called him the nation's "bloviator in chief." (*Politico*, Dec. 19, 2007)

Broder was so much of an insider that he began collecting hefty lecture fees from industry groups and then lobbied Congress on behalf of at least one of those groups, even though this was a clear violation of the *Post's* editorial policy. He then appears to have lied about it by saying it was cleared in advance. (*Harper's*, June 12, 2008)

By hiring Broder and then maintaining the columnist as a fixture at the *Post* for over four decades, Bradlee not only showed what kind of protect-the-Establishment journalism he valued but that he was blind to the media future that was just over the horizon.

Another early and revealing Bradlee hire was Walter Pincus, who was actually hired twice, once in 1966, and again after he left *The New Republic* in 1975. As a national security reporter, Pincus was another consummate insider, as much a trusted part of the U.S. intelligence community as a reporter covering it.

To say that Pincus has had a controversial career does not begin to describe the man. He started on CIA subsidy by spying on students abroad. (Gary Webb, *Dark Alliance*, pgs. 464-66) Covering the Watergate hearings for *The New Republic*, Pincus appears to have gotten private access to Richard Helms. (See a story Pincus wrote for the *Post* at the time entitled "The Watergate Decoy" on July 22, 1974)

In 1975, Pincus was fired as executive editor of *The New Republic*, which was



then a fairly liberal publication, and went back to the *Post*, where he said of the newly formed House Select Committee on Assassinations, that it was “perhaps the worst example of congressional inquiry run amok.”

During the Iran-Contra inquiry of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Pincus reported that Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh was going to indict Ronald Reagan, which turned out to be false. Walsh later wrote in his book *Firewall* that this phony story hurt his investigation more than anything else. Finally, and predictably, it was Walter Pincus who began the attack in 1996 against Gary Webb’s sensational exposé of the CIA and drug running.

### **Shifting to the Right**

As executive editor beginning in 1968, Bradley brought onboard other writers who would help define Official Washington’s conventional wisdom in a way that protected the powers-that-be and punished anyone who challenged the Establishment’s version of events.

It was under Bradley that editorial writers such as Richard Cohen (who began as a reporter in 1968), George Will and Charles Krauthammer first gained national notoriety. The latter two showed how the *Post* would seek out and then offer conservative writers at smaller publications *The National Review* and *The New Republic* a bigger platform to reach the broad American public and thus help set the national agenda. In the case of Krauthammer, both he and *The New Republic* had clearly turned hard to the right by the time the *Post* began carrying his column in 1985.

Bradley also was hostile toward journalists whom he perceived as being more iconoclastic and less inclined to revere the powers-that-be. For instance, before the Watergate scandal, Bradley wanted to fire Carl Bernstein. (Davis, p. 250)

Looking back at Bradley’s long career as an editor and then an executive at the *Post*, it is hard to find any liberal opinion maker or reporter that Bradley discovered or fostered. (Joseph Kraft was first hired by publisher Phil Graham, while Ben Bagdikian left the *Post* partly because he did not understand where Bradley’s editorial policies were headed.)

Despite Bradley’s JFK-Watergate connections, there is substantial evidence that what Bradley encouraged and indeed accomplished was to move the *Post* systematically to the right, making it what it is today, the nation’s neoconservative flagship promoting a militaristic global agenda for the United States.

As stated at the end of [Part One](#), one of the odd things about Bradley’s career

since 1963 is that he never tried to defend his friend John Kennedy against some of the false accusations made against his administration. A common one being that President Johnson was just continuing Kennedy's policies in Vietnam.

Did Bradley read the Pentagon Papers that the *Post* joined in publishing in 1971? If not, he might have at least read about the revelations regarding Kennedy's intent to wind down the Vietnam War before he wrote his 1975 book, *Conversations with Kennedy*.

Before discussing *Conversations with Kennedy*, it should be noted that Ben Bradley had been friends with President Kennedy for at least five years before Kennedy was killed. They also dined together at the White House on many occasions as well as visiting each other's homes and sharing drinks and conversations at least twice a week. There is no other journalist whom Kennedy was as close to as Bradley and Bradley and his wife continued a relationship with Jackie Kennedy after her husband died.

But Bradley did not write his book until 1975, a dozen years after Kennedy's death. So in addition to his own source material, there were many books that Bradley could have consulted about both Kennedy's career and his assassination.

In reading *Conversations with Kennedy* today, it's obvious that Bradley did none of this. In fact, he spent about as much time and effort on the book as a college sophomore would spend on a research paper: three weeks. (Himmelman, p. 299)

Not only is the book breezy and shallow, it is simply wrong in many places. For instance, Bradley writes that Kennedy was not really interested in foreign affairs when he was running for president and that Kennedy's presidency was more flash and dash than it was substantive which by the mid-1970s was the conventional wisdom emerging to denigrate Kennedy's presidency. (*Conversations with Kennedy*, pgs. 12, 41).

### **Worthless Book**

Reading those two comments shows how worthless Bradley's book is today because as many writers have revealed, Kennedy was not just interested in foreign policy, he was remolding the very structure of American foreign policy in a rather revolutionary way. He was reversing the militant Cold War trends created by Harry Truman and reinforced by the Dulles brothers under Dwight Eisenhower.

Kennedy was doing this in many places, but especially in the Third World. For example, during the 1960 campaign, Kennedy mentioned Africa 479 times. (Philip Muehlenbeck, *Betting on the Africans*, p. 38) As chairman of a subcommittee on Africa, Kennedy was eager to see the continent become independent and free from

both colonialism and imperialism.

This was a stark break from what the Eisenhower/Nixon administration had done. For instance, at an NSC meeting, Nixon said some of the people of Africa “had been out of the trees for only about fifty years.” Thus, it was only natural that Nixon would back political strong men in Africa and oppose the development of any viable left through labor unions and other social movements. (ibid, pgs. 6-7)

Yet, within weeks of his Inauguration, Kennedy reversed the prior Eisenhower-Dulles policy in Congo where U.S. and neo-colonial forces had opposed a leftist anti-colonial movement, although it was too late to save revolutionary leader Patrice Lumumba who was shot to death on Jan. 17, 1961, three days before Kennedy took office. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“JFK’s Embrace of Third-World Nationalists.”](#)]

Therefore, for Bradlee to write that in 1960 Kennedy was some kind of neophyte in foreign policy and deferred to Nixon in that field makes one wonder how well the author knew Kennedy or question the integrity and honesty of the book.

For instance, Bradlee informs us that he was appalled that Kennedy had discussed with the CIA the possibility of staging a student demonstration in the Dominican Republic. Bradlee adds that he vocally objected to this and was surprised that Kennedy would countenance such interference in a sovereign state’s internal affairs. (*Conversations with Kennedy*, p. 235)

Recall that Bradlee was the man who worked hand in glove with the CIA for three years in France and played a key role in preparing the European public for the electrocution of the Rosenbergs. Bradlee also leaves out some rather crucial background facts about this dialogue with Kennedy.

First, the Dominican Republic was coming out of decades of brutal repression under the bloodthirsty dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo. In February 1963, the country had elected the liberal socialist Juan Bosch as president. Kennedy had backed Bosch and wanted to extend him loans for development through the Alliance for Progress.

But Bosch was overthrown by the military in September 1963, prompting Kennedy to begin a hemisphere-wide campaign to restore Bosch to power. Kennedy broke diplomatic relations with the military junta and suspended economic aid. He then ordered all U.S. military and economic assistance agents to return home. Other countries in the area joined Kennedy in condemning the overthrow, e. g., Mexico, Bolivia, Costa Rica. The junta complained about Kenney’s harshness and like Ben Bradlee said the U.S. president was interfering with the country’s affairs.

(Donald Gibson, *Battling Wall Street*, p. 78)

But this context of how Bradlee favored a dictatorship over a democratically elected president is not the worst of what he leaves out. The Kennedy/Bradlee conversation took place in early November 1963 when because of Kennedy's support Bosch had increased his chances of returning democracy to his country, a process that continued even after Kennedy's death.

In early 1965, it looked like Bosch was about to succeed. However, President Lyndon Johnson decided to intervene with the Navy and Marines and portrayed Bosch and his followers as communists to justify the unilateral American intervention. (ibid, p. 79)

The Marines stayed in the Dominican Republic for a year and supervised new elections in which Joaquin Balaguer, a former friend and political ally of Trujillo, took power. This reactionary intervention was one of several that Lyndon Johnson, Katharine Graham's friend, implemented in reversing Kennedy's policies around the world. But Bradlee does not inform the reader of this background. After all, Katharine Graham was his boss at the time.

### **Ignoring Vietnam**

For the most part, Bradlee ignores the issue of Vietnam, but he brings it up in a jarring way near the end of the book. Bradlee tells us that Kennedy, while reading the *Washington Post* one day, noticed a photo of American soldiers in Saigon dancing with local prostitutes. The President complained that it looked like a put-up job by the Associated Press and called the State Department to do something about it. Bradlee, who was still at *Newsweek*, overheard JFK saying: "If I were running things in Saigon, I'd have those GIs in the front line the next morning." (*Conversations with Kennedy*, pgs. 234-35)

Again, Bradlee wrote the book in 1975 as the Johnson/Nixon escalation debacle was finally concluding. There had already been some writing about Kennedy's intent to withdraw from Vietnam by this time. In addition to the Pentagon Papers, there was an essay by Peter Scott in *Ramparts* in 1971 and the book by Kenny O'Donnell and Dave Powers, *Johnny We Hardly Knew Ye*, which was quite specific in pointing out that Johnson had reversed Kennedy's intent to withdraw. We know this had been made explicit with Kennedy's National Security Action Memorandum 263 in October 1963. Again, the Bradlee/Kennedy dialogue took place in November 1963, *after* NSAM 263.

Therefore, Kennedy must have forgotten that it was he who was controlling things in Saigon. He had just steamrolled his advisers into going along with him on this withdrawal order. (See John Newman, *JFK and Vietnam*, pgs. 404-07) Kennedy's

policy was reversed by Johnson shortly after Kennedy's assassination with NSAM 288 which drew up formal battle plans for committing combat troops to Vietnam in March 1964.

Though Bradlee is often described as an overly close friend of JFK some conservatives have demeaned Bradlee as JFK's "coat holder" he appears to have had a surprisingly cold and disinterested attitude toward his "friend's" murder.

In *Conversations with Kennedy*, Bradlee described meeting the bereaved Jackie Kennedy when she returned to Washington from Dallas. Bradlee noted that the widow was glad to see him and his wife and then recounted her fresh recollections of the shooting to him, possibly the first time she had discussed it with someone outside government.

"I can remember now only the strangely graceful arc she described with her right arm as she told us that part of the president's head had been blown away by one bullet," Bradlee wrote. (p. 242)

Yet, Bradlee seemed to miss the significance of this as he wrote it in 1975 because by then the autopsy materials had been made available to scholars and the damage from the fatal head shot with parts of the skull blown backwards had contributed to growing doubts about the Warren Commission's conclusion of only one shooter, Lee Harvey Oswald, from behind.

What Jackie was describing was either the Harper fragment – a large part of the rear of the skull recovered in Dealey Plaza a day later – or a smaller fragment which we see her reaching for out the back of the limousine in the Zapruder film. Both of these were indicative of a shot from the front.

Ben Bradlee, *Newsweek's* Washington bureau chief at the time, heard this from the person closest to Kennedy in the car and sat on it for more than a decade. Which brings up an issue that, oddly, no one has ever pointed out about Bradlee and his relationship with Kennedy. Many, especially on the Right, have tried to insinuate that somehow Bradlee was biased in favor of JFK. Yet, as one can see from reading *Conversations with Kennedy*, such was really not the case.

### **Wasting an Opportunity**

Secondly, there was probably not a journalist in America who was in a better position to investigate the strange circumstances of Kennedy's death than Bradlee. He had been lifelong friends with Dick Helms, who was coordinating the CIA inquiry into the assassination for the Warren Commission.

Helms was a friend and colleague of former CIA Director Allen Dulles, who was appointed to the Commission by Lyndon Johnson and was its most active member.

Dulles attended the most meetings, interviewed the most witnesses, and asked the most questions. (Walt Brown, *The Warren Omission*, pgs. 87-89)

Through his mother, Bradlee had connections to the law firm of John McCloy, another very active member of the Commission. Bradlee also was the neighbor of Mary Pinchot Meyer, Cord Meyer's ex-wife who was very close to Kennedy and was rumored to have been his mistress. Through the Meyer family, Bradlee had access to James Angleton, the chief of CIA counterintelligence with whom Bradlee searched for Mary Meyer's diary after her death less than a year later.

If that weren't enough, Bradlee still had good relations with Robert Kennedy as well as Jackie Kennedy. As David Talbot discussed in his book *Brothers*, and as Bobby Kennedy Jr. later revealed to Charlie Rose, Robert Kennedy never bought the official story about JFK's murder.

In fact, as first revealed by Tim Naftali and Aleksandr Fursenko in their book *One Hell of a Gamble*, Bobby and Jackie sent a post-assassination message to the Soviet hierarchy via Georgi Bolshakov, a KGB agent who had formerly been stationed under cover in Washington.

William Walton, a close JFK friend, told Bolshakov that the Kennedys believed the President had been victimized by a large political conspiracy, and although Lee Oswald was billed as a communist who had defected to the Soviet Union, they did not think the plot was a foreign one. At the time, Robert Kennedy was already planning to quit as Attorney General and run for political office with an eye on the White House and toward resuming JFK's pursuit of détente with Moscow. (Talbot, p. 32)

In other words, if Bradlee needed any backing to begin his own investigation of the assassination, the Kennedys would have given it to him. Bobby could have helped provide him entrance to the Warren Commission via Nicolas Katzenbach, his deputy, who was the Justice Department liaison to that body. They also would have let an expert of his choice privately view the autopsy materials.

RFK would have granted Bradlee access to men like Ken O'Donnell and Dave Powers, who, while riding in the motorcade, heard shots come from in front of Kennedy. (ibid, pgs. 293-94) What journalist was in that kind of position in 1964? Even if Bradlee was inclined to accept the official verdict that Oswald acted alone, wouldn't a true friend of JFK want to make sure the investigation was done properly?

Talbot finally posed the question to Bradlee in 2004. Bradlee was 83 and had been kicked way upstairs at the *Post* but still had a small office. The answer Bradlee gave Talbot for not lifting a finger to inquire into his friend's

assassination was this: He was worried that if he devoted resources to the case, it would harm him and the *Post* by allowing people to revive allegations about his overly close personal relationship with Kennedy. (ibid, p. 393)

Talbot left it at that but shouldn't have. In 1964, when the Warren Commission was ostensibly investigating the murder of President Kennedy, Bradlee was already financially comfortable, having been given sizeable stock options in the Washington Post Company that he knew would make him millions of dollars.

But let us grant Bradlee his (weak) argument. If I were Talbot, after listening to it, I would have immediately replied, "Okay, Ben. That was in 1964. But in 1976, you were at the pinnacle of your career. You had attained the title of executive editor of the *Post*. Why didn't you do anything while the House Select Committee on Assassinations was reopening your friend's murder case?"

### **Undercutting an Inquiry**

Actually, Bradlee did do some things, but they weren't in support of a thorough reexamination. Author Anthony Summers had called Bradlee and given him a tip about what investigator Gaeton Fonzi had discovered that Cuban exile leader Antonio Veciana had seen Oswald meeting with CIA officer David Phillips at the Southland building in Dallas in late summer 1963. Summers recommended that Bradlee inquire into that incident.

Bradlee put a British intern, David Leigh, on the case; with the proviso that he try and discredit it. Leigh investigated and told Bradlee that he couldn't discredit it, since it appeared to be true. What Summers and Leigh did not know about Bradlee's motivation was this: Phillips had also called Bradlee about the Veciana lead and the CIA friendly executive editor wanted to spike the story. (James DiEugenio, *Destiny Betrayed*, pgs. 363-64)

One of the *Post's* writers assigned to report on the House Select Committee was the CIA's good friend Walter Pincus, who disparaged the committee as "perhaps the worst example of Congressional inquiry run amok."

But there was one other incident that crystallized Bradlee's disturbing lack of concern about the mystery surrounding JFK's murder. In the mid-1970s, the interest in the Kennedy case ratcheted up to an almost fever pitch because of the revelations of the Church Committee about the crimes of the CIA and the FBI and the first televised screening of the Zapruder film showing Kennedy's head being knocked backwards by the fatal shot, suggesting a shooter in front. Those two events stirred public suspicions and led to the formation of the HSCA.

Many young people were attracted to the case. Two of them, Carl Oglesby and Harvey Yazjian, set up the Assassination Information Bureau to inform the

public about new developments in the congressional inquiry. In Boston – where Yazijian lived and where Bradlee was born – the two men faced off in a debate about the case being reopened.

I interviewed Yazijian about this debate for this article. He said, “Jim, to label my encounter with Bradlee a debate is to mischaracterize it.” Yazijian had come prepared to review the evidence in the case and explain why knowledgeable people held the Warren Commission in such low esteem. Instantly, he realized that Bradlee had a different agenda.

“He was vitriolic. He went ballistic right out of the gate. He dismissed all the critics as being irresponsible nutcases. It was nonstop pure vitriol.”

Yazijian tried to present himself as cool and composed, but he was taken aback at how hostile Bradlee was. Yazijian said Bradlee was trying to dismiss all the critics as being an “irresponsible ilk who should not be listened to. He was right; we were wrong.”

It was clear to Yazijian that Bradlee and the *Post* were invested in the official story and Bradlee did not want to hear any rational argument showing that he might be wrong. He wanted to dismiss all the contrary evidence out of hand via character assassination, thereby eliminating any argument attached to it. Looking back, Yazijian wishes he had been more prepared for this line of attack and had called Bradlee out on it.

In other words, Bradlee ended up constructing a rather perverse legacy around his friendship with his neighbor, the senator-who-became-president. From the above record, one can say that Bradlee was one of the first journalists to combine disdain for JFK’s accomplishments with disinterest in the legitimate questions surrounding his death, even when there was broad public interest in a thorough inquiry into Kennedy’s murder.

Reflecting Bradlee’s curious coolness toward JFK’s death, he concludes his book, *Conversations with Kennedy*, with a recollection about an invitation from Jackie Kennedy to JFK’s Irish wake at the White House:

“There is much to be said for the wake. Led by Dave Powers, this one was more often than not surprisingly cheerful, and always warm and tender.”

Recall the devastating impact that the murderous weekend in Dallas had just inflicted on the American people and the world. Yet, Bradlee’s takeaway from those horrific events was that he enjoyed a good wake.

## **The Watergate Reprieve**



But Bradley's defenders respond to any criticism of the *Post's* legendary editor by pointing to Watergate. You can't deny that was a journalistic triumph of the first order, they say. And it is true that *The Washington Post*, more than any other media outlet, was responsible for driving Richard Nixon from office because of his abuses of power.

But the problem is that the *Post's* version of Watergate has not held up well through history with major elements of the scandal, including how and why it started, having been missed or messed up by Bradley's investigative team. Some of that revisionism has originated at Consortiumnews.com due to the work of journalist Robert Parry.

For instance, the *Post's* version of Watergate attributes the creation of the Plumbers units to the publication of the Pentagon Papers, but that was not entirely accurate. Based on newly released tapes and documents, it now appears that the creation of the Plumbers and Nixon's desire to firebomb the Brookings Institution were due to his obsession with Lyndon Johnson's file on what's known as the Anna Chennault affair, Nixon's attempt as a candidate in 1968 to sabotage Johnson's efforts to negotiate peace in Vietnam. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Heinous Crime Behind Watergate.](#)"]

Nixon's sabotage of those peace talks was successful and helped Nixon prevent a fast-closing Hubert Humphrey from edging ahead to again deny Nixon the White House. In other words, Nixon illegally and treacherously undercut Johnson's diplomacy to win the presidency. There is not one sentence about this disgraceful episode in the 336 pages of *All the President's Men*.

Another astonishing lacunae in that best-selling book is this: there is not any mention of the name Spencer Oliver. Yet, Oliver's was one of the two phones that burglar James McCord wired for sound during the first Watergate break-in in late May 1972. (The other one was Democratic National Committee chair Larry O'Brien's, but that bug didn't work, meaning that Oliver's phone was the only one that Nixon's team spied on.)

For decades, no one could come up with a plausible explanation of why this was done or what the burglars heard on the wiretap. But Parry interviewed Oliver at length and learned that Oliver, who was the chair of the Democratic state committees, was running a last-minute effort to derail Sen. George McGovern's campaign because of doubts that McGovern could win.

In other words, Nixon's team was hearing the Democratic Party's most precise delegate count and learning of the last-ditch strategy by Democratic regulars to stop McGovern in favor of someone with a better chance to beat Nixon in November.

That meant the Republicans could turn to conservative Democrats in Texas, where ex-Gov. John Connolly, a Democrat-for-Nixon, still held great sway, to ensure that McGovern got enough delegates at Texas' June convention to put him in position to win the nomination and then go down to a landslide defeat to Nixon. [See Robert Parry's *Secrecy & Privilege*.]

Because the *Post's* coverage, led by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, more or less ignored Oliver and the first break-in focusing instead on the second foiled break-in of June 17, 1972, and the subsequent cover-up these two earlier elements of the story (why was Nixon so frightened about what the Democrats might have on him and what did Nixon get from the bug on Oliver's phone) were bypassed.

Another interesting fact, relevant to how important Spencer Oliver and his information were to the Watergate scheme, was that the burglars seemed to have gone to great lengths to secure a key to Oliver's desk. Burglar Eugenio Martinez was trying to hide this key when one of the arresting officers took it from him on June 17. (Jim Hougan, *Secret Agenda*, pgs. 178-79)

Between the two break-ins when Nixon's team was only getting information off Oliver's phone James McCord, one of the team's leaders, sent his hand-picked assistant, Alfred Baldwin, on an undercover mission to approach Oliver's secretary Ida Wells, though the precise purpose of the visit has never been made clear. (ibid, p. 202)

But the *Post*, in its two years of Watergate coverage, never appeared to have made any attempt to tie down these fascinating and important loose ends which raised grave questions about the integrity of the U.S. electoral process in 1968 as well as 1972.

### **Deep Throat's Mystery**

As for the rest of the mainstream media, its later obsession with Watergate focused only on the identity of the *Post's* key source, Deep Throat, who finally revealed himself in 2005 as FBI Associate Director Mark Felt.

Throughout *All the President's Men*, there is a rather obvious subtext criticizing the FBI's investigation of Watergate. Woodward and Bernstein could get away with this in 1974 because the identity of Deep Throat was kept hidden until Felt stepped out of the shadows some three decades later.

During the early months of the Watergate investigation, Felt was the number two man at the FBI, leaving a paradox in the book: If the FBI was conducting a poor investigation, how was Felt able to give Bob Woodward all this interesting information? Today, that question holds two answers:

First, the FBI inquiry was not substandard at all. Neither was the inquiry compromised at the top, which is another accusation the two reporters make. The Bureau's Watergate investigation, in sharp contrast to its JFK inquiry, was solid, intelligent and thorough.

But because the *Post* had disguised who Deep Throat was, this allowed Felt to indulge his own private agenda by using Woodward, which is what Bradlee said he feared most. In a private lunch with Woodward, Bradlee asked to know Deep Throat's position, since he wanted to be sure he had no axe to grind, using the *Post* to advance a personal vendetta. According to Woodward, he assured Bradlee that this was not the case. (*All the President's Men*, p. 146)

However, after Felt revealed himself as Deep Throat and the identity was confirmed by Woodward, Watergate aficionados noted that Felt indeed did have an agenda, fulfilling his lifelong dream of becoming FBI Director. In that sense, Felt's axe had a two-edged blade.

For one, by leaking this information, Felt was sabotaging Nixon's acting FBI Director L. Patrick Gray. But Felt could accomplish this only by giving Woodward some good information so he would continue to meet with him. This is why, today, the picture of Deep Throat as drawn by Woodward and Bernstein is slightly humorous. They depict him as a hero who did what he did because he abhorred the "switchblade mentality" of the Nixon White House when he was busy stabbing his boss in the back. (*ibid*, p. 130)

The risk Woodward ran in this regard was epitomized in the pages of *All the President's Men*, allowing Felt to completely fabricate a scene. Felt said President Nixon met with Gray in February 1973 about his appointment as permanent FBI director, with Gray telling Nixon that he had done his job by containing the FBI's investigation and implicitly threatening Nixon if the appointment were not forthcoming.

Upon hearing this story from Deep Throat, Woodward concludes that Gray had blackmailed Nixon. "I never said that," Deep Throat laughed. (*ibid*, p. 270)

This fiction has now been smashed by the declassified tapes and memoranda of the Nixon-Gray meeting. Gray did not lead the meeting at all and did not know what the meeting was about beforehand. In fact, he thought he was going to be replaced. Further, Nixon did almost all the talking. (*In Nixon's Web* by L. Patrick and Ed Gray, pgs. 154-81)

Apparently, Woodward never asked Felt how he knew what was discussed since the only people in the room were Gray, Nixon and his domestic adviser John Ehrlichman. But Felt is also the man who twice told Gray that he was not leaking

information to any reporters about Watergate. So this kind of duplicity was more or less standard for Woodward's source.

Secondly, as Ed Gray describes in his memoir, Woodward appears to have attributed other source information to Deep Throat that could not have come from Felt. (Gray, pgs. 294-300)

Though there are always shortcomings in reporting on a complex and developing story like Watergate, the *Post's* legendary coverage in retrospect suggests that the reporting was largely superficial and misguided.

The focus was kept on Nixon and his "men," rather than on the broader corruption of the Washington political system. Once the corrupt group was cleaned out, the wound could heal without any deeper examination of what was wrong. To this day, the *Post* has showed no interest in exploring the documents about Nixon sabotaging Johnson's Vietnam peace talks or how those revelations rewrite the history of the Watergate scandal.

### **Behind the Curve**

In Bradley's later years as executive editor, the *Post* trailed miserably on the biggest scandal of Ronald Reagan's presidency, the Iran-Contra Affair. When Robert Parry, who broke some of the early Iran-Contra stories for *The Associated Press*, was hired by *Newsweek* in early 1987, he found an institutional resistance within the Post-Newsweek company against pushing too hard on the scandal.

Parry said he heard concerns from *Newsweek* executives that taking the story too far might not be "good for the country" and that "we don't want another Watergate," i.e., a scandal forcing a second Republican president from office.

Parry recalled that there was particular opposition to digging into evidence that the CIA-backed Nicaraguan Contra rebels were involved in cocaine trafficking, a story that Parry and his AP colleague Brian Barger had pioneered in 1985. After battling his *Newsweek* editors for three years, Parry left the magazine in 1990.

But the unwillingness to turn over Washington's many slimy rocks permeated Bradley's *Washington Post* as well. As Jeff Himmelman relates in his biography of Bradley, the executive editor was planning to step down in 1991 and favored two people to succeed him: Shelby Coffey, a former *Post* editor who had moved to the *Los Angeles Times*, and *Post* managing editor Len Downie. (Himmelman, p. 440)

Bradley's job went to Downie with Bradley becoming the *Post's* vice president, a position he held until his death. Coffey became the top editor and vice president of the *Los Angeles Times*. In 1996-1997, Downie and Coffey, from their

editorial perches, oversaw the destruction of *San Jose Mercury News* reporter Gary Webb's "Dark Alliance" series, which revived the Contra-cocaine story by showing how the Contra drug smuggling contributed to the crack epidemic and the resulting violence that ravaged U.S. cities and especially African-American communities. The mainstream media attacks on Webb were so savage that he was driven from his profession, into personal despair, and, ultimately, in 2004, to suicide. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Sordid Contra-Cocaine Saga.](#)"]

Last fall, when Webb's story was revived by the movie, "Kill the Messenger," the *New York Times* [belatedly admitted](#) that the Contras indeed had been involved in cocaine trafficking and that their CIA handlers had looked the other way. But the *Post* continued bashing Webb and protecting the CIA. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[WPost's Slimy Assault on Gary Webb.](#)"]

Downie, who had moved on from the *Post*'s top job to a teaching position at Arizona State University, couldn't restrain himself from [one more pile-on](#) against Webb, circulating by email the *Post*'s new attack on Webb with the preface: "Gary Webb was no hero, say[s] WP investigations editor Jeff Leen I was at The Washington Post at the time that it investigated Gary Webb's stories, and Jeff Leen is exactly right. However, he is too kind to a movie that presents a lie as fact."

In those years, from the 1980s to the present, the *Post* shifted decisively into a neoconservative ideology, strongly supporting U.S. military interventions and U.S.-backed coups around the world.

For instance, in 2002-03, the *Post*'s editorial page wrote as flat fact that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and endorsed the U.S. invasion. Despite the absence of the promised WMD and the ensuing disaster of the war, no senior *Post* editor was held accountable. The editorial-page editor then, Fred Hiatt, remains the editorial-page editor.

## **The Shrinking MSM**

We all know what happened to the *Post* and *Newsweek* in later years. Like many of his MSM colleagues, Bradlee never saw the future coming. As a *Post* executive and board member, he missed the combination of two factors that directly impacted both of these enterprises: the rise of the Internet and the growing cynicism about the mainstream media.

The combination of those two influences steadily eroded both the magazine and the newspaper. Eventually, they were both sold, *Newsweek* for one dollar and the *Post* for \$250 million (to Amazon founder Jeff Bezos who paid more than many analysts felt the *Post* was worth, although the purchase price also included real

estate and various other holdings).

In many ways Bradlee exemplified what had gone wrong with the mainstream media, treating the American people as creatures to be herded in some direction desired by the powers-that-be rather than citizens in a democracy who required serious journalism in order to fulfill their responsibilities as voters.

Parry recalled that during his time at *Newsweek*, he clashed with editors who thought he didn't understand the proper role of journalism; Parry thought the goal was to inform the public while *Newsweek* saw its job as guiding the public.

That was surely true of Bradlee, who was never really interested in giving the people the full truth about the U.S. government and its national security state. As Himmelman pointed out, Bradlee was really more interested in staying on the good side of Katharine Graham, who valued her personal relationships with her peers among the great and powerful.

While Bradlee and Graham might have been willing to oust the scheming climber Richard Nixon, they felt differently about the members of their own elite class such as the well-connected men of the post-World War II CIA and others who ingratiated themselves with skill and grace, whether that was foreign policy guru Henry Kissinger or Hollywood royalty Ronald and Nancy Reagan.

But it was exactly that unspoken snobbishness toward the common American that has generated today's chasm of distrust between modern news consumers and the mainstream media and the organs of government.

Far from delivering all the important news to his readers, Bradlee sought to restrict the information and control the message. Or as Katharine Graham put it: "There are some things the general public does not need to know and shouldn't."

[To read Part One, [click here.](#)]

**James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. His most recent book is [Reclaiming Parkland](#).**

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## Ben Bradlee's Not Such 'A Good Life'

**Special Report:** Washington Post's editor Ben Bradlee, whose memoir was entitled "A Good Life," is remembered by many as a tough-talking, street-smart journalist. But that reputation was more image than truth as the real Bradlee

was an Establishment insider who knew which secrets to keep, writes James DiEugenio.

By James DiEugenio

When Ben Bradlee died last Oct. 21 at age 93, his widow Sally Quinn and his protégé Bob Woodward dutifully made the media rounds. They both lavishly praised his long tenure as executive editor of the *Washington Post*, which was predictable, since it was Bradlee who first hired Quinn at the *Post* (before marrying her) and Bradlee was influential in hiring Woodward, who then received much support from Bradlee.

The *Post* treated Bradlee's death something like the passing of a former president, putting the story on the front page, above the fold, accompanied by a huge close-up picture of the man despite the fact that Bradlee had stepped down from the editor's position more than two decades prior and although the *Post* had passed from the Graham family, which had hired Bradlee as editor and made him rich, to Internet entrepreneur Jeff Bezos who bought the paper in 2013.

Predictably, all of the above and more was quite flattering about Bradlee and his career in the newspaper business. The *Post*, which has fallen on hard times of late, wanted to remind its readers of a bygone age when the paper had much more cachet and influence than it does today (as did the rest of the mainstream media).

Yet, outside the MSM, Bradlee's passing did not meet with such romantic nostalgia for a Lost Eden, a longing for the good old days of an ink-stained press or for American journalism in general. There are two reasons for this:

First, the model of media that Bradlee represented the top-down decision-making on what would run in the paper, in what form and where has been exposed as very flawed. Secondly, it can be shown with plentiful evidence that Bradlee and the *Post* did some, at best incomplete, at worst spurious, reporting on at least three mammoth issues from its heyday: John Kennedy's assassination, the global policies of JFK's presidency and even Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal. There were several other major lapses, e.g., the murders of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy in 1968 and the CIA's Contra-drug-running in the 1980s.

But Bradlee made his reputation writing about John Kennedy and editing Woodward and Carl Bernstein on Watergate. In historical terms, his work on those three topics has not held up, a characterization that is actually being kind. As I will show in this two-part series, Ben Bradlee epitomized what was wrong with the MSM and why it has fallen so far in both reputation and influence.

**Born to Rule**

His full name was Benjamin Crowninshield Bradlee, though he preferred the more regular-guy Ben Bradlee. But it was his middle name that tells you much about who Bradlee was and why his path upward to the top ranks of American journalism was so easy. The Crowninshields emigrated to America from Germany in the late 1600s. Once in America, they intermarried with so many partners from Britain that they were later considered of English stock and accepted among the Boston Brahmins.

For instance, Fanny Cadwalader Crowninshield married John Quincy Adams II, the great grandson of John Adams. Through such relationships, the clan quickly rose up the ladder and became a force on the American scene.

Benjamin Crowninshield was Secretary of War under both James Madison and James Monroe. William Crowninshield was Secretary of War under Grover Cleveland. Charles Francis Adams IV, the great-great-grandson of Benjamin Crowninshield, was the first president and later chairman of Raytheon Company. Francis B. Crowninshield married into the Du Pont family.

There is an island that bears the family name, as did a World War I destroyer. There are several streets named after the family – in New York City; Providence, Rhode Island; and their home base of Massachusetts. Finally, Frank Crowninshield, Bradlee's great uncle, along with his friend Conde Nast, helped create *Vanity Fair* magazine. He then edited *Vanity Fair* for 21 years.

Ben Bradlee was the son of Frederick Josiah Bradlee, an investment banker. His mother was Josephine deGersdorff, the daughter of a wealthy New York City corporate lawyer who had once been a full partner in Cravath, Swaine and Moore, John McCloy's firm. (Jeff Himmelman, *Yours in Truth*, pgs. 60-61)

Bradlee grew up on Beacon Street in Beverly, an exclusive town on the North Shore about 26 miles from Boston, where his father bought a summer home from Harvey Bundy, McGeorge Bundy's father (*ibid*, p. 106) and where Bradlee began his newspaper career after his father arranged a summer job for him as a copy boy for the *Beverly Evening Times*. (Himmelman, p. 59)

Beverly was home to the likes of the Lodges, the Saltonstalls, the Taylors, (who owned the *Boston Globe*) and Gates White McGarrah who, in the 1930s, ran the Bank for International Settlements. His grandson was Richard McGarrah Helms, future CIA Director during Watergate.

Dick Helms was Ben Bradlee's friend from early childhood, Bradlee's first but hardly only close association with someone who would be central to the Central Intelligence Agency. (Deborah Davis, *Katharine the Great*, p. 141)

Bradlee first attended the private Dexter School in Brookline. He then went to



another private institution, St. Marks in Southborough, Massachusetts, for prep school. Most of their graduates opt for the Ivy League. So it was quite natural that Bradley completed the upper elite cycle by attending Harvard. In fact, he was the 51<sup>st</sup> member of his clan to attend Harvard. (Himmelman, p. 37)

And complementing the Crowninshield heritage with the U.S. military, while he was there he entered the Naval ROTC program. But before he left for the service, he married into another Boston Brahmin family from Beverly, the Saltonstalls. His marriage to Jean Saltonstall produced one son, Ben Bradley Jr., who also went into publishing.

Immediately after graduation in 1942, Bradley attained his naval commission. He then joined the Office of Naval Intelligence. He served largely on a destroyer, the *USS Philip* in the Pacific as a communications officer handling classified and encoded messages from fleet headquarters and Washington.

When he returned from his naval service he helped found a publication called the *New Hampshire Sunday News*. Along with major investors Elias and Bernard McQuaid, he invested \$10,000 in the enterprise and worked as a reporter there also. That weekly paper was then bought out by the notorious rightwing publisher William Loeb. (Davis, *ibid*, p.141) With this purchase, Loeb became the major newspaper publisher in the state.

That was in 1948. Bradley took his money and rode a train down the East Coast. He was looking for a reporter's job in either Baltimore or Washington. Bradley always tried to insinuate that it was just an accident he chose the *Post* since it was raining hard in Baltimore and he didn't want to get off the train.

But Katharine Graham's biographer, Deborah Davis, writes that there was actually more to it than that. A confluence of Crowninshield banking connections who were familiar with the *Post's* owner, fellow investment banker Eugene Meyer, "seem to have helped him get into the *Post*." (*ibid*)

Bradley worked the police beat there for three years, until 1951, but Bradley wanted more excitement than the position held. He made his frustration known to publisher Phil Graham, who was married to Eugene Meyer's daughter, Katharine.

There are two versions of what happened next, Bradley's and Davis's. Bradley says that through a friend from his *New Hampshire Sunday News* days, he heard of an opening as a press attaché to the American embassy in Paris. Phil Graham, then editor at the *Post*, granted him a leave of absence. (Himmelman, p. 67)

According to Davis, when Bradley threatened to leave, Graham talked to a few of his friends about him. And this is how he was hired as a press attaché at the American Embassy in Paris in 1951. (Davis, p. 141)

## The Grahams

At this point in the story, it is necessary to shift the focus to the ownership of the *Washington Post* because, upon Bradley's return to the U.S., he quickly ascended the ladder of power within journalism to a position of fame and influence that few newspaper editors have ever achieved. This could not have been done without the help of the Graham family, the owners of the *Post*.

Eugene Meyer, Katharine Graham's father, was part of the Lazard Freres investment banking clan. (Davis, p. 19) After graduating from Yale, he worked for that famous bank for four years before going independent. Early in life, he proved to be a financial adviser of the highest ability. He was under 30 when he purchased a seat on the New York Stock Exchange. (ibid, p. 26)

At age 28, Meyer opened his own investment house. By 1930, he had accumulated a fortune estimated at \$40 million to \$60 million. (ibid, p. 40) He then went into public service. He held various high positions under Woodrow Wilson, Herbert Hoover and Franklin Roosevelt. This included being Chair of the Federal Reserve from 1930-33. President Harry Truman appointed him the first president of the World Bank in 1946. (ibid, p. 27)

Although he was Jewish, Eugene Meyer avoided public identification with that religion as he was coming up in the world, according to his daughter Katharine. (Katharine Graham, *Personal History*, pgs. 6, 51) But behind the scenes, Meyer was very much involved with the American Zionist movement.

Cooperating with a hidden network of famous Supreme Court Justices Louis Brandeis and Felix Frankfurter and Cyrus Sulzberger of the *New York Times*, Meyer worked Wall Street for huge sums of money from wealthy Jewish families like the Schiffs and Guggenheims. These large sums helped form a group called the Anglo-Palestine Company, an entity that funded Jewish settlements in Palestine. (See Davis, p. 43. Also Alison Weir, *Against our Better Judgment*, pgs. 25 ff for the secret roles of Brandeis and Frankfurter)

Eugene Meyer also attended meetings investigating ways to supply arms to the young paramilitary group the Haganah. Meyer would remain a major contributor to Israel well after its establishment in 1948. But when he married his wife Agnes, in keeping with his low profile in this regard, it was a Lutheran church wedding, since that was her religion. (ibid, Davis, p. 45)

Kate Graham was born Katharine Meyer in 1917 on Fifth Avenue in New York City. She attended Vassar and then the University of Chicago. Her mother had been a reporter for the *New York Sun* and Agnes Meyer arranged for many weekend salons at the Meyer's colossal Mount Kisco estate with the likes of Thomas Mann and

Alfred Stieglitz. (ibid, p. 34, 51) From this experience, Katharine took an interest in journalism and publishing.

There was also the fact that Eugene Meyer had purchased the *Post* at auction in 1933, giving him a platform to project his personal ideas about national and international politics in Washington.

When Katharine Meyer graduated, her father got her a reporter's job at the *San Francisco Daily News*. While there, she lived with her father's sister who had married into the Levi Strauss family. In 1938, Katharine Meyer started working for the *Post*. Eugene Meyer had originally planned on grooming his daughter to eventually take over that paper, but she then met and married Philip Graham in 1940.

Phil Graham graduated from Harvard Law School and then clerked for Justice Frankfurter. (Davis, p. 78) In 1939, while Graham was his clerk, Frankfurter wrote the notorious majority decision in the *Minersville v. Gobitis* case, known as the flag salute case, which said that children of Jehovah's Witnesses had to salute the flag against their religious principles.

Frankfurter wrote that "national unity is the basis of national security." This valuation of security over the exercise of symbolic civil liberties deeply influenced Phil Graham during his stewardship of the *Post*. (ibid, p. 86)

### **Links to Intelligence**

At the start of World War II, Phil Graham enlisted in the Army Air Corps. Like Bradlee, he went into intelligence. He was trained at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. (ibid, p. 93) While there his instructor was James Russell Wiggins, whom he would later bring into the *Post*. Phil Graham worked for Gen. Douglas MacArthur and rose to the rank of major, returning home in 1945 from Japan.

At this juncture, Eugene Meyer gave his son-in-law a managerial position at the *Post* where Phil Graham initially assisted his father-in-law. However, after Eugene Meyer took over the World Bank, Phil Graham quickly rose to be publisher and editor-in-chief of the *Post*.

After the war, Phil Graham was even more national security conscious than before. So, although he remained fairly liberal on domestic issues, he was not so on foreign policy. He was really a Henry "Scoop" Jackson type of Democrat, what we might now call a neoconservative. (One exception to this was his criticism of Richard Nixon's tactics in his headlong pursuit of Alger Hiss. ibid. p. 130)

Phil Graham spent a lot of his off-time drinking and talking at private clubs

with the likes of the CIA's Allen Dulles, Frank Wisner, Desmond Fitzgerald and Richard Helms. His view of international issues was rather similar to their ideas about the importance of stopping the mythical Red Hordes of Russia and China. Along with people like Bill Paley of CBS, Graham was invited to Dulles's annual meeting of media figures at the Alibi Club, an exclusive private gentlemen's club in Washington.

Because of this significant influence and close association, it is not really accurate to argue as former *Post* employee Jefferson Morley does that Phil Graham simply discussed the spin on important events about foreign affairs and incorporated the CIA's view into those stories in his paper. It was much more systematic than that for Graham found men who shared a similar intelligence background with him and his new professional colleagues.

He also installed men from the intelligence world in his newspaper. For instance, managing editor Alfred Friendly was from Army Intelligence, as was Graham's service buddy Russ Wiggins, who became executive editor. Chief editorial writer Alan Barth was from the Office of War Information.

Another editorial writer, Joe Alsop, worked for Gen. Claire Chennault's famous Flying Tigers in World War II and later admitted he worked for the CIA as a journalist. Chalmers Roberts, national affairs editor, had worked in signals intelligence. John Hayes was from the Armed Forces Network of the OSS, the CIA's forerunner. Hayes worked on the broadcast side of Graham's expanding media empire and became executive vice-president of the parent company. (ibid, p. 132)

Exaggerating only slightly, the *Washington Post* could easily be looked back upon as a civilian intelligence center.

Out of these secret relationships came Operation Mockingbird, the CIA's project to control the media not just abroad but inside America. This media project was partly exposed during the explorations of the Church Committee in 1974-75. But the Agency reportedly drew the line at Sen. Frank Church including an exposé of it in the actual report. Therefore, Church only referred to it in the most general terms.

But disclosure went further in Rep. Otis Pike's report as published in the *Village Voice* in 1976. (See *Pike Report*, 1977, Spokesman Books, pgs. 222-24, 232-34). So much so that even the *New York Times* published a front-page story about the overseas aspects of the operation. Finally, *Rolling Stone* in 1977 and Deborah Davis in her 1979 book *Katharine the Great* largely exposed Mockingbird and Phil Graham's role in its formation.

## **Life in Paris**

When Bradley arrived in Paris in 1951, he worked as an assistant press attaché from the American Embassy for about one year. By 1952, he was on the staff of something called the USIE, or United States Information and Educational Exchange. (Davis, p. 141) This agency later became known as the United States Information Agency, which controlled the Voice of America, a pet project of the CIA's Allen Dulles for many years.

Working out of USIE's Regional Publication Center, Bradley helped create and distribute all sorts of propaganda to frame a positive image of the United States in the shadow of the Cold War. There is very little doubt that Bradley had interactions with the CIA at this time since the Paris Regional Center produced CIA products when needed and Bradley worked on them. (ibid, p. 142)

Davis said the group that Bradley worked for planted newspaper stories and had many reporters on the payroll; Bradley's group often produced stories in-house and handed them to these reporters for distribution throughout Europe.

As Davis explained, the USIE was really the propaganda arm of the American Embassy, and its products were channeled by the CIA all over Europe. Bradley also worked with a CIA-associated agency called the ECA, the Economic Cooperation Administration, which spread anti-communist propaganda. (Davis, pgs. 179-80)

In the first edition of *Katharine the Great*, the above is about the sum of what Davis wrote concerning Bradley's work for USIE. In a later interview with Kenn Thomas of *Steamshovel Press*, Davis said Bradley "went totally crazy after the book came out. . . . He was going all up and down the East Coast having lunch with every editor he could think of saying that it was not true."

In fact, under the influence of Kate Graham and Bradley, Davis's publisher withdrew and then shredded the valuable first edition of Davis's book. She successfully sued the publisher and a new publisher turned out a second edition.

By the time the second edition emerged, Davis had discovered more data on what Bradley was actually doing in Paris and how close he was with the CIA. Bradley appears to have been a major operator in the campaign to convince Europe that Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who had already been convicted of atomic espionage, deserved to die in the electric chair. Some of the declassified documents Davis got through FOIA had Bradley writing letters to attorneys from the case in America, telling them he was working with the CIA station chief in Paris and had the Agency's permission to go through its files to search for incriminating material.

Davis wrote that Bradley's Rosenberg campaign covered 40 countries on four

continents. What Bradley was doing in Paris had more than a faint echo of what Phil Graham was doing in Washington at the time.

When the office closed down in 1953, Bradley's boss informed him that he could probably get a job with the Paris office of *Newsweek*, where he did secure a position by talking to and then replacing the conservative Arnaud de Borchgave as *Newsweek's* bureau chief. (Himmelman, p. 70)

### **The Pinchot Sisters**

Around this time, Bradley met Antoinette "Tony" Pinchot, who, like himself, was married. She was traveling in Europe with her sister Mary Pinchot Meyer, wife of CIA officer Cord Meyer, on what the two women reportedly described as a "husband-dumping trip." Bradley and Tony Pinchot struck up a romance, and he began divorce proceedings against his first wife. Pinchot filed for divorce from her husband, lawyer Stuart Pittman, who would later serve as President John Kennedy's assistant defense secretary.

Like the blueblood he was, Bradley lived in the style of the old French aristocracy while he was Paris bureau chief for *Newsweek*. He vacationed with the likes of novelist Irwin Shaw in Biarritz. He rented a chateau really a castle built in 1829 and covering around 100 acres, including a swimming pool and a pond. It had 65 rooms and two ballrooms. He and Tony hosted many an upper-class party there. (Himmelman, pgs. 71-72)

In 1957, upon returning to America, Bradley and Tony married. Assigned to *Newsweek's* Washington bureau, Bradley settled his new family into the fashionable Georgetown area of Washington.

Two things then occurred that had great impact on Bradley's future. First, Tony met Jackie Kennedy, who lived just a few doors down in Georgetown. The two became fast friends, and through that relationship, Ben Bradley met Sen. John Kennedy, an up-and-coming politician from Massachusetts. This relationship had quite a fortuitous impact on his career because once Kennedy became President, Bradley had extraordinary access to him as Tony and Jackie remained close friends.

Second, in 1961, Bradley's old friend (and rising CIA official) Dick Helms told Bradley about Helms's grandfather's wish to sell *Newsweek*. (Davis, p. 229) Helms did this since he knew Bradley would tell Phil Graham, and Helms wanted Graham to buy the magazine to ensure it would become part of *Mockingbird*.

As Bradley once said, "If we could persuade somebody to buy it who shared our goals in journalism, it would be a wonderfully worthwhile thing to do." (Himmelman, p. 75. Interestingly, in Himmelman's account, which was done with

Bradlee's cooperation, Helms is left out of the exchange.)

These two episodes had a strong effect on Bradlee's career trajectory. Because he was now based in Washington, his relationship with Kennedy was pure gold in the journalistic field. As JFK's star rose and he became a presidential possibility, Bradlee "became the go-to guy for quotes from the candidate."

Bradlee's reporter days were soon over. He became *Newsweek's* Washington bureau chief. (Himmelman, pgs. 74, 82) President Kennedy would tip him off occasionally about an upcoming story, like the spy swap of Rudolf Abel for Gary Powers. (ibid, p. 86)

Unknown to Kennedy, at least at first, Bradlee kept a journal of their meetings. He later turned this journal into a book a point we shall discuss later.

### **Bradlee's Rise**

If the relationship with Kennedy brought Bradlee prestige and status in the world of journalism, the deal he helped broker for *Newsweek* made him filthy rich for life. Phil Graham rewarded him with a finder's fee: not in cash, but in *Post* stock options. The stock of the *Post* company would soon skyrocket, especially after it went public in 1971.

As Bradlee once said, Graham's generosity made him a millionaire many times over. He ended up buying a house that occupied almost an entire city block, while he owned another in the Hamptons. (Himmelman, p. 457) Bradlee's boyhood friendship with Dick Helms had paid off in spades.

In 1963, both John Kennedy and Phil Graham died. There is a mountain of controversy about the former's assassination. There is a hillock about Phil Graham's, which was categorized as a suicide but has remained a point of some controversy in Washington social circles.

At the time of his death, Graham had taken up with a young woman named Robin Webb, and Phil Graham, who received the bulk of the private stock in the *Post* from his father-in-law Eugene Meyer much more than Katharine Graham received was in position to shut her out of control of the newspaper. (Davis, p. 119)

If Phil Graham divorced Kate Graham and married Robin Webb before his death, Webb could eventually have controlled the paper. Phil Graham had changed his will three times in the last year of his life, each time giving his wife less and less of his estate. (ibid, p. 168) After his death, Kate Graham's lawyer challenged the last will and she took control of the paper after a probate hearing, with the last will not on the public record. (ibid, p. 169)

Phil Graham's death opened the door for Bradlee's ascension to the pinnacle of power at the *Post*. Katharine Graham was more conservative than her husband, as commentators have noted, she really did not like the sensational Sixties.

For instance, Katharine Graham once said about the Freedom Riders, "The students will be used by extremists who want very much to see the state occupied by federal troops." About anti-war demonstrators and civil rights activists, her opinion was that communists were working in America to create chaos. (Davis, p. 237-38)

She also supported the Vietnam War and when President Lyndon Johnson decided not to run in 1968 because of growing anti-war sentiment across the United States, she wept.

### **The Post and the War**

Kate Graham's relationship with Johnson appears to go back to 1964 when LBJ invited her to his ranch after the '64 Democratic convention. Johnson told her that although he did not like Bradlee at first, he did now. She returned the confidence by telling Johnson that although Phil Graham had gotten along well with JFK, she did not and that she very much admired what Johnson had done so far. She was in his corner, and so was her mother who wanted to contribute money to his campaign. (Davis, p. 207)

After this encounter, Kate Graham stood by LBJ through every escalation of the Vietnam War and at his invitation in early 1965, she toured South Vietnam, a completely stage-managed affair. At the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, she was given a whole spiel about how the Strategic Hamlet program was working. National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, a supporter of the war at that time, was also on hand to brief her.

Katharine Graham met with the leaders of the Saigon government, too, with the whole affair culminating in a dinner with Stewart Alsop and Rowland Evans, two media stalwarts of the Establishment who backed Johnson's militarization program at the time. (ibid, p. 222)

LBJ's manipulation worked. Upon her return, an unsigned editorial endorsed Johnson's escalation policy as part of a long war to drive communism out of Asia. Without noting that this was a reversal of Kennedy's policy as expressed in National Security Action Memorandum 263, which JFK signed in October 1963. (See *Destiny Betrayed* by James DiEugenio, pgs. 366-67)

Johnson was so appreciative of Katharine Graham's support that he allowed her editors privileged access to Pentagon officials and secret cables about the conduct of the war. (Davis, pgs. 222-23)



But, more important to the arc of Bradley's career, Kate Graham returned with an eye toward ridding herself of the old mainstays of Phil Graham's reign at the *Post*. She wanted someone younger whose loyalty to her was unquestioned. She decided to replace Al Friendly as managing editor, while Ben Bradley did all he could to flatter and charm the new publisher. He made clear that his ultimate objective was to replace Phil Graham as executive editor of the *Washington Post*.

When Katharine Graham talked to Bradley about the job, he reportedly said he really did not have any political viewpoint, but he added he would not hire any "sonofabitch reporter" who was not a patriot. (ibid, p. 224)

Bradley soon replaced Friendly and began to spend many nights at Kate Graham's home cementing an overall plan. Bradley's paeans to her knew no bounds. He once said that she could become as powerful in Washington as the president. (ibid, p. 230) Bradley also would get rid of other members of the *Post*'s old guard, such as John Hayes, and he confined Russell Wiggins to the editorial pages.

Bradley was in sync with his boss' support for a robust role of the United States around the world. The *Post*'s original Vietnam correspondent was Ward Just, who was good at relaying vignettes about combat action in the field while never seriously questioning the underlying assumptions or origins of American involvement.

But that was not hawkish enough for Bradley/Graham. In 1967, Ward Just was replaced by Pete Braestrup who adhered more to the LBJ/Kate Graham line.

As many commentators have noted, what was astonishing about the Bradley/Graham loyalty to Lyndon Johnson was not that it was a clear reversal of Kennedy, but that it continued even *after* the Tet offensive. This is why, in 1968, Kate Graham would have preferred Republican Richard Nixon over antiwar Democrat Eugene McCarthy. (ibid, p. 246) In the general election between Nixon and Johnson's Vice President Hubert Humphrey, the *Post* did not make an endorsement. (James Brian McPherson's *The Conservative Resurgence and The Press*, p. 234)

### **The Pentagon Papers**

Much of the *Post*'s hawkishness during the 1960s has been forgotten because of the newspaper's later role in publishing some of the Pentagon Papers in defiance of Nixon's court actions to block their release to the public. Many have heralded Bradley and Graham for this act, but the praise ignores two important points about the whole affair.

It was not the *Post* that published the Pentagon Papers first, but the *New York Times*, which was then enjoined from further publication due to the Nixon administration's lawsuit. It was only at this point that the *Post* began to

publish the classified papers. But that is not the whole story because the *Post* had the opportunity to publish them first.

Daniel Ellsberg, the former Defense Department official who had pilfered a copy, took them to the *Post's* editorial chief Phil Geyelin. But at the time, the *Post* was still on even terms with the Nixon administration and Nixon's chief foreign policy adviser Henry Kissinger was escorting Kate Graham to dinner and movies.

Ellsberg had met with Kissinger in September 1970 and January 1971 and expressed his concerns about the war. Kissinger passed onto Graham that Ellsberg was unreliable and unbalanced. So, when Geyelin introduced Ellsberg to Graham and Bradlee, they snubbed him. It was only then that Ellsberg went to Neil Sheehan and the *Times*. (Davis, pgs. 256-57)

In June 1971, the *Times* published about three days of stories before the White House sued and the Supreme Court ordered them to temporarily stop. But those three days created a nationwide sensation and solidified the *Times's* reputation as the nation's premier newspaper. So Bradlee sent a *Post* employee to find Ellsberg, who was in hiding in Boston. Ellsberg sent a smaller set of the papers to the *Post*.

Bradlee, aware that the court might soon enjoin him also, decided to take the documents to his own home. He then brought in several editors and reporters to scour them and get out a story immediately. (Himmelman, pgs. 46-47) The *Post* published for a couple of days before they were joined in the suit.

In those few days of stories by both the *Times* and *Post*, there was not one mention of the attempt by President Kennedy to withdraw from the conflict, which was mentioned in the Pentagon Papers. In the Gravel Edition-Volume 2, Chapter 3 is entitled "Phased withdrawal of US Forces, 1962-64." There is a discussion about Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's plan to withdraw American troops from Vietnam by 1965. It's a long chapter, about 60 pages, and it notes that the withdrawal did not happen. But that is because the phased withdrawal was stopped in 1964 by LBJ who chose to escalate instead.

Can one imagine the furor that would have been created if Bradlee had printed this story and then supplemented it with some real reporting by those involved, like McNamara himself? But how could such a thing happen with Bradlee's obeisance to Kate Graham and her infatuation with Lyndon Johnson, who was still alive at the time? On the other hand, it would have served the memory of Bradlee's deceased friend John Kennedy well. And it would have served the cause of truth.

Bradlee also never wrote about the genesis of the Pentagon Papers, which were

ordered up by McNamara as he – like several Kennedy holdovers (e.g. McGeorge Bundy, George Ball, Ken O'Donnell) – grew increasingly frustrated with Johnson's escalation policy. In 1967, McNamara decided to quit, but before he did, he ordered a complete review of just how the U.S. had gotten involved in this epic debacle.

If Bradlee would have learned this, he would have seen how this echoed just what JFK was going to do back in 1963. Kennedy told aide Mike Forrestal that when he got back from Dallas, there was going to be a long review of how America got involved in the war. (DiEugenio, *ibid*, p. 368) Under LBJ, that did not happen.

After Johnson had reversed Kennedy's policy and after four years of Johnson's disastrous escalation McNamara was finally carrying out Kennedy's wishes. Again, that would have been a wonderful story about Bradlee's old friend and would have served the cause of truth. But it never happened. In fact, there is no trace of Bradlee ever even alluding to it anywhere.

**End of Part One (For Part Two, [click here.](#))**

**James DiEugenio is a researcher and writer on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and other mysteries of that era. His most recent book is [\*Reclaiming Parkland\*](#).**

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