

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 Bradlee, Mary Meyer's sister and Ben Bradlee's second wife, noted that "Mrs. Bradlee subsequently found the diary, which appeared to disclose her sister's affair with late President John F. Kennedy. Mrs. Bradlee 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. Bradlee 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 Bradlee 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. Bradlee 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 Bradlee'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 Bradlee’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*’ Washington bureau whom Bradlee had heard was frustrated with his editors at the *Times*. (Himmelman, p. 109)

Bradlee 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, Bradlee 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 Bradlee 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.

Bradlee 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, Bradlee wanted to fire Carl Bernstein. (Davis, p. 250)

Looking back at Bradlee'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 Bradlee 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 Bradlee's editorial policies were headed.)

Despite Bradlee's JFK-Watergate connections, there is substantial evidence that what Bradlee 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 Bradlee'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 Bradlee 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 Bradlee 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 Bradlee and Bradlee and his wife continued a relationship with Jackie Kennedy after her husband died.

But Bradlee 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 Bradlee could have consulted about both Kennedy's career and his assassination.

In reading *Conversations with Kennedy* today, it's obvious that Bradlee 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, Bradlee 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 Bradlee'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 Kennedy'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, Bradley 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 Bradley/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 Bradley is often described as an overly close friend of JFK some conservatives have demeaned Bradley 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*, Bradley described meeting the bereaved Jackie Kennedy when she returned to Washington from Dallas. Bradley 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," Bradley wrote. (p. 242)

Yet, Bradley 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 Bradley, *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 Bradley'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 Yazijian, set up the Assassination Information Bureau to inform the public about new developments in the congressional inquiry. In Boston – where Yazijian lived and where Bradley 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 Bradley 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 Bradley 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 Bradley was. Yazijian said Bradley 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 Bradley and the *Post* were invested in the official story and Bradley 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 Bradley out on it.

In other words, Bradley 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 Bradley 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 Bradley'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, Bradley'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](#).

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 Bradlee completed the upper elite cycle by attending Harvard. In fact, he was the 51st 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 Bradlee Jr., who also went into publishing.

Immediately after graduation in 1942, Bradlee 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. Bradlee took his money and rode a train down the East Coast. He was looking for a reporter's job in either Baltimore or Washington. Bradlee 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)

Bradlee worked the police beat there for three years, until 1951, but Bradlee 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, Bradlee's and Davis's. Bradlee 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 Bradlee 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 Bradlee'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 Bradley, 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 Bradlee 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, Bradlee 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 Bradlee had interactions with the CIA at this time since the Paris Regional Center produced CIA products when needed and Bradlee worked on them. (ibid, p. 142)

Davis said the group that Bradlee worked for planted newspaper stories and had many reporters on the payroll; Bradlee'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. Bradlee 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 Bradlee's work for USIE. In a later interview with Kenn Thomas of *Steamshovel Press*, Davis said Bradlee "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 Bradlee, 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 Bradlee was actually doing in Paris and how close he was with the CIA. Bradlee 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 Bradlee 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 Bradlee's Rosenberg campaign covered 40 countries on four continents. What Bradlee 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, Bradlee'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, Bradlee 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." Bradlee 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, Bradlee 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, Bradlee and Tony married. Assigned to *Newsweek's* Washington bureau, Bradlee settled his new family into the fashionable Georgetown area of Washington.

Two things then occurred that had great impact on Bradlee'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 Bradlee 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, Bradlee had extraordinary access to him as Tony and Jackie remained close friends.

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

As Bradlee 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 Bradley'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 Bradley 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 Bradley, 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*' reputation as the nation's premier newspaper. So Bradley sent a *Post* employee to find Ellsberg, who was in hiding in Boston. Ellsberg sent a smaller set of the papers to the *Post*.

Bradley, 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](#).

How the Washington Press Turned Bad

Exclusive: There was a time when the Washington press corps prided itself on holding the powerful accountable Pentagon Papers, Watergate, Vietnam War but those days are long gone, replaced by a malleable media that puts its cozy

relations with insiders ahead of the public interest, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

Following the death last week of legendary Washington Post executive editor Ben Bradlee at age 93, there have been many warm remembrances of his tough-guy style as he sought “holy shit stories,” journalism that was worthy of the old-fashioned demand, “stop the presses.”

Many of the fond recollections surely are selective, but there was some truth to Bradlee’s “front page” approach to inspiring a staff to push the envelope in pursuit of difficult stories at least during the Watergate scandal when he backed Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in the face of White House hostility. How different that was from Bradlee’s later years and the work of his successors at the Washington Post!

Coincidentally, upon hearing of Bradlee’s death on Oct. 21, I was reminded of this sad devolution of the U.S. news media from its Watergate/Pentagon Papers heyday of the 1970s to the “On Bended Knee” obsequiousness in covering Ronald Reagan just a decade later, a transformation that paved the way for the media’s servile groveling at the feet of George W. Bush last decade.

On the same day as Bradlee’s passing, I received an e-mail from a fellow journalist informing me that Bradlee’s longtime managing editor and later his successor as executive editor, Leonard Downie, was sending around a Washington Post [article](#) attacking the new movie, “Kill the Messenger.”

That article by Jeff Leen, the Post’s assistant managing editor for investigations, trashed the late journalist Gary Webb, whose career and life were destroyed because he dared revive one of the ugliest scandals of the Reagan era, the U.S. government’s tolerance of cocaine trafficking by Reagan’s beloved Nicaraguan Contra rebels.

“Kill the Messenger” offers a sympathetic portrayal of Webb’s ordeal and is critical of the major newspapers, including the Washington Post, for denouncing Webb in 1996 rather than taking the opportunity to revisit a major national security scandal that the Post, the New York Times and other major newspapers missed or downplayed in the mid-1980s after it was first reported by Brian Barger and me for the Associated Press.

Downie, who became the Post’s managing editor in 1984 and followed Bradlee as executive editor in 1991 and is now a journalism professor at Arizona State University passed Leen’s anti-Webb story around to other faculty members with a cover note, which read:

“Subject line: 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.”

Since I knew Downie slightly during my years at the Associated Press he had once called me about my June 1985 article identifying National Security Council aide Oliver North as a key figure in the White House’s secret Contra-support operation I sent him an e-mail on Oct. 22 to express my dismay at his “harsh comment” and “to make sure that those are your words and that they accurately reflect your opinion.”

I asked, “Could you elaborate on exactly what you believe to be a lie?” I also noted that “As the movie was hitting the theaters, I put together an article about what the U.S. government’s files now reveal about this problem” and sent Downie [a link](#) to that story. I have heard nothing back. [For more on my assessment of Leen’s hit piece, see Consortiumnews.com’s [“WPost’s Slimy Assault on Gary Webb.”](#)]

Why Attack Webb?

One could assume that Leen and Downie are just MSM hacks who are covering their tracks, since they both missed the Contra-cocaine scandal as it was unfolding under their noses in the 1980s.

Leen was the Miami Herald’s specialist on drug trafficking and the Medellin cartel but somehow he couldn’t figure out that much of the Contra cocaine was arriving in Miami and the Medellin cartel was donating millions of dollars to the Contras. In 1991, during the drug-trafficking trial of Panama’s Manuel Noriega, Medellin cartel kingpin Carlos Lehder even testified, *as a U.S. government witness*, that he had chipped in \$10 million to the Contras.

Downie was the Washington Post’s managing editor, responsible for keeping an eye on the Reagan administration’s secretive foreign policy but was regularly behind the curve on the biggest scandals of the 1980s: Ollie North’s operation, the Contra-cocaine scandal and the Iran-Contra Affair. After that litany of failures, he was promoted to be the Post’s executive editor, one of the top jobs in American journalism, where he was positioned to oversee the takedown of Gary Webb in 1996.

Though Downie’s note to other Arizona State University professors called the Contra-cocaine story or “Kill the Messenger” or both a “lie,” the Huffington Post’s Ryan Grim recounted recently in [an article](#) about the big media’s assault on Webb that “The Post’s top editor at the time, Leonard Downie, told me that he

doesn't remember the incident well enough to comment on it."

But there's more here than just a couple of news executives who find it easier to pile on a journalist no longer around to defend himself than to admit their own professional failures. What Leen and Downie represent is an institutional failure of American journalism to protect the American people, choosing instead to protect the American power structure.

Remember that in the mid-1980s when Barger and I exposed the Contra-cocaine scandal, the smuggling was happening in real time. It wasn't history. The various Contra pipelines were bringing cocaine into American cities where some was getting processed into crack. If action had been taken then, at least some of those shipments could have been stopped and some of the Contra traffickers prosecuted.

Yet, instead of the major news media joining in exposing these ongoing crimes, the New York Times and Washington Post chose to look the other way. In Leen's article, he justifies this behavior under a supposed journalistic principle that "an extraordinary claim requires extraordinary proof." But any such standard must also be weighed against the threat to the American people and others from withholding a story.

If Leen's principle means in reality that no level of proof would be sufficient to report that the Reagan administration was protecting Contra-cocaine traffickers, then the U.S. media was acquiescing to criminal activity that wreaked havoc on American cities, destroyed countless lives and overflowed U.S. prisons with low-level drug dealers while powerful people with political connections went untouched.

That assessment is essentially shared by Doug Farah, who was a Washington Post correspondent in Central America at the time of Webb's "Dark Alliance" series in 1996. After reading Webb's series in the San Jose Mercury News, Farah was eager to advance the Contra-cocaine story but encountered unrealistic demands for proof from his editors.

Farah told Ryan Grim: "If you're talking about our intelligence community tolerating – if not promoting – drugs to pay for black ops, it's rather an uncomfortable thing to do when you're an establishment paper like the Post. ... If you were going to be directly rubbing up against the government, they wanted it more solid than it could probably ever be done."

In other words, "extraordinary proof" meant you'd never write a story on this touchy topic because no proof is 100 percent perfect, apparently not even when the CIA's inspector general confesses, as he did in 1998, that much of what

Webb, Barger and I had reported was true and that there was much, much more. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[The Sordid Contra Cocaine Scandal.](#)"]

What Happened to the Press?

How this transformation of Washington journalism occurred from the more aggressive press corps of the 1970s into the patsy press corps of the 1980s and beyond is an important lost chapter of modern American history.

Much of this change emerged from the political wreckage that followed the Vietnam War, the Pentagon Papers, the Watergate scandal and the exposure of CIA abuses in the 1970s. The American power structure, particularly the Right, struck back, labeling the U.S. news media as "liberal" and questioning the patriotism of individual journalists and editors.

But it didn't require much arm-twisting to get the mainstream news media to bend into line and fall on its knees. Many of the news executives that I worked under shared the view of the power structure that the Vietnam protests were disloyal, that the U.S. government needed to hit back against humiliations like the Iran-hostage crisis, and that the rebellious public needed to be brought back into line behind more traditional values.

At the Associated Press, its most senior executive, general manager Keith Fuller, gave a 1982 speech in Worcester, Massachusetts, hailing Reagan's election in 1980 as a worthy repudiation of the excesses of the 1960s and a necessary corrective to the nation's lost prestige of the 1970s. Fuller cited Reagan's Inauguration and the simultaneous release of the 52 U.S. hostages in Iran on Jan. 20, 1981, as a national turning point in which Reagan had revived the American spirit.

"As we look back on the turbulent Sixties, we shudder with the memory of a time that seemed to tear at the very sinews of this country," Fuller said, adding that Reagan's election represented a nation "crying, 'Enough.'

"We don't believe that the union of Adam and Bruce is really the same as Adam and Eve in the eyes of Creation. We don't believe that people should cash welfare checks and spend them on booze and narcotics. We don't really believe that a simple prayer or a pledge of allegiance is against the national interest in the classroom.

"We're sick of your social engineering. We're fed up with your tolerance of crime, drugs and pornography. But most of all, we're sick of your self-perpetuating, burdening bureaucracy weighing ever more heavily on our backs."

Fuller's sentiments were not uncommon in the executive suites of major news

organizations, where Reagan's reassertion of an aggressive U.S. foreign policy was especially welcomed. At the New York Times, executive editor Abe Rosenthal, an early neocon, vowed to steer his newspaper back "to the center," by which he meant to the right.

There was also a social dimension to this journalistic retreat. For instance, the Washington Post's longtime publisher Katharine Graham found the stresses of high-stakes adversarial journalism unpleasant. Plus, it was one thing to take on the socially inept Richard Nixon; it was quite another to challenge the socially adroit Ronald and Nancy Reagan, whom Mrs. Graham personally liked.

The Graham family embraced neoconservatism, too, favoring aggressive policies against Moscow and unquestioned support for Israel. Soon, the Washington Post and Newsweek editors were reflecting those family prejudices.

I encountered that reality when I moved from AP to Newsweek in 1987 and found executive editor Maynard Parker, in particular, hostile to journalism that put Reagan's Cold War policies in a negative light. I had been involved in breaking much of the Iran-Contra scandal at the AP, but I was told at Newsweek that "we don't want another Watergate." The fear apparently was that the political stresses from another constitutional crisis around a Republican president might shatter the nation's political cohesion.

The same was true of the Contra-cocaine story, which I was prevented from pursuing at Newsweek. Indeed, when Sen. John Kerry advanced the Contra-cocaine story with a Senate report issued in April 1989, Newsweek was uninterested and the Washington Post buried the story deep inside the paper. Later, Newsweek dismissed Kerry as a "randy conspiracy buff." [For details, see Robert Parry's *Lost History*.]

Fitting a Pattern

In other words, the vicious destruction of Gary Webb following his revival of the Contra-cocaine scandal in 1996 when he examined the impact of one Contra-cocaine pipeline into the crack trade in Los Angeles was not out of the ordinary. It was part of the pattern of subservience to the national security apparatus, especially under Republicans and right-wingers but extending to Democratic hardliners, too.

This pattern of bias continued into last decade, even when the issue was whether the votes of Americans should be counted. After the 2000 election, when George W. Bush got five Republicans on the U.S. Supreme Court to halt the counting of votes in the key state of Florida, major news executives were more concerned about protecting the fragile "legitimacy" of Bush's tainted victory than

ensuring that the actual winner of the U.S. presidential election became president.

After the Supreme Court's Republican majority made sure that Florida's electoral votes and thus the presidency would go to Bush, some news executives, including the New York Times' executive editor Howell Raines, bristled at proposals to do a media count of the disputed ballots, according to a New York Times executive who was present for these discussions.

The idea of this media count was to determine who the voters of Florida actually favored for president, but Raines only relented to the project if the results did not indicate that Bush should have lost, a concern that escalated after the 9/11 attacks, according to the account from the Times executive.

Raines's concern became real when the news organizations completed their unofficial count of Florida's disputed ballots in November 2001 and it turned out that Al Gore would have carried Florida if all legally cast votes were counted regardless of what standards were applied to the famous chads dimpled, hanging or punched-through.

Gore's victory would have been assured by the so-called "over-votes" in which a voter both punched through a candidate's name and wrote it in. Under Florida law, such "over-votes" are legal and they broke heavily in Gore's favor. [See Consortiumnews.com's "[So Bush Did Steal the White House](#)" or our book, [Neck Deep](#).]

In other words, the wrong candidate had been awarded the presidency. However, this startling fact became an inconvenient truth that the mainstream U.S. news media decided to obscure. So, the major newspapers and TV networks hid their own scoop when the results were published on Nov. 12, 2001.

Instead of stating clearly that Florida's legally cast votes favored Gore and that the wrong man was in the White House the mainstream media bent over backwards to concoct hypothetical situations in which Bush might still have won the presidency, such as if the recount were limited to only a few counties or if the legal "over-votes" were excluded.

The reality of Gore's rightful victory was buried deep in the stories or relegated to data charts that accompanied the articles. Any casual reader would have come away from reading the New York Times or the Washington Post with the conclusion that Bush really had won Florida and thus was the legitimate president after all.

The Post's headline read, "Florida Recounts Would Have Favored Bush." The Times ran the headline: "Study of Disputed Florida Ballots Finds Justices Did Not Cast

the Deciding Vote.” Some columnists, such as the Post’s media analyst Howard Kurtz, even launched preemptive strikes against anyone who would read the fine print and spot the hidden “lede” of Gore’s victory. Kurtz labeled such people “conspiracy theorists.” [Washington Post, Nov. 12, 2001]

An Irate Reporter

After reading these slanted “Bush Won” stories, I wrote an article for Consortiumnews.com noting that the obvious “lede” should have been that the recount revealed that Gore had won. I suggested that the news judgments of senior editors might have been influenced by a desire to appear patriotic only two months after 9/11. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Gore’s Victory.”](#)]

My article had been up for only a couple of hours when I received an irate phone call from New York Times media writer Felicity Barringer, who accused me of impugning the journalistic integrity of executive editor Raines.

Though Raines and other executives may have thought that what they were doing was “good for the country,” they actually were betraying their most fundamental duty to the American people to give them the facts as fully and accurately as possible. By falsely portraying Bush as the real winner in Florida and thus in the Electoral College, these news executives infused Bush with false legitimacy that he then abused in leading the country to war in Iraq in 2003.

Again, in that run-up to the Iraq invasion, the major news media performed more as compliant propagandists than independent journalists, embracing Bush’s false WMD claims and joining in the jingoism that celebrated “the troops” and the initial American conquest of Iraq.

Despite the media’s embarrassment that later surrounded the bogus WMD stories and the disastrous Iraq War, mainstream news executives faced no accountability. Howell Raines lost his job in 2003 not because of his unethical handling of the Florida recount or the false Iraq War reporting, but because he trusted reporter Jayson Blair who fabricated sources in the Beltway Sniper Case.

How distorted the Times’ judgment had become was underscored by the fact that Raines’s successor, Bill Keller, had written a major article [“The I-Can’t-Believe-I’m-a-Hawk Club”](#) hailing “liberals” who joined him in supporting the Iraq invasion. In other words, you got fired if you trusted a dishonest reporter but got promoted if you trusted a dishonest president.

Similarly, at the Washington Post, editorial-page editor Fred Hiatt, who reported again and again that Iraq was hiding stockpiles of WMD as “flat-fact,” didn’t face the kind of journalistic disgrace that was meted out to Gary Webb. Instead, Hiatt is still holding down the same prestigious job, writing the same

kind of imbalanced neocon editorials that guided the American people into the Iraq disaster, except now Hiatt is pointing the way to deeper confrontations in Syria, Iran, Ukraine and Russia.

So, perhaps it should come as no surprise that this thoroughly corrupted Washington press corps would lash out again at Gary Webb as his reputation has the belated chance for a posthumous rehabilitation.

But how far the vaunted Washington press corps has sunk is illustrated by the fact that it has been left to a Hollywood movie of all things to set the record straight.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his new book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). For a limited time, 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](#).
