

Still Dreaming of Watergate II

by Conrad Black



Of all the asinine and, at times, almost psychotic misstatements about the bone-crushing victory the president has won, the prize goes, with admirable historical symmetry, to John Dean.

It was Dean who led the destruction of lawyer-client privilege in the Watergate debacle, and with it, of much of America's claim to be a society of laws. Having been the corrupt source of many of the most fatuous illegalities in the amateur obstruction put forward by members of President Richard Nixon's entourage, John Dean was the first rat down the hawser, denouncing his client, employer, and benefactor with contemptuous disregard for the truth and in the supreme demonstration of the evil of the American plea bargain system.

This perversion of the justice system, more than anything else, has ensured that prosecutors in the United States, win a

percentage of their cases about equal to those of North Korea and Cuba. They extort inculpatory evidence against the main target by threatening witnesses and give the denunciators immunity from perjury and a sweetheart sentence.

Dean's performance exceeds in venality even the antics of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, American history's most successful fiction-writers. (At least Gore Vidal acknowledged he was writing historical novels.) Odious though Woodward and Bernstein are, irritatingly imperishable though they are, as far as I know they didn't break any laws and didn't dishonor a learned profession. (Having employed thousands of journalists for decades, I can attest that they aren't part of a profession and few of them are learned.)

With that preamble to remind us of what we are dealing with in John Dean, I [cite his tweet](#) on Friday night at 11:55, after news broke that Special Counsel Robert Mueller had given Attorney General William Barr his report and that he would recommend no more indictments: "Trump and his minions think they dodged a bullet. I have a notion—that Mueller delivered a bomb to AG Barr, who is now trying to figure out how to tell Trump in a way that doesn't cause him to start World War III. Barr knows he works for a psycho."

Thus are we reminded of the prescience and integrity of one of the sleaziest characters in American political history, the Michael Avenatti of his times, though thanks to the president he betrayed and traduced, he achieved an ostensibly serious position.

Democrats Vying to Embarrass Themselves

[Others](#) who inflict upon themselves more often than I do the cruel punishment of looking at the more egregiously bigoted news outlets are already presenting delicious examples of malicious and dishonest idiocy among the apostles of the Russian collusion fraud.

I cannot resist offering, however, the two stupidest comments I heard from the bloated dunciad of Democratic presidential candidates. Naturally, the grand prize goes to the vapidest person ever touted as a presidential candidate in my 63 years as an observer of American politics, Beto O'Rourke. Just before the revelation that there would be no further indictments, Beto asserted his knowledge "beyond the slightest doubt" that the president was guilty, in effect, of high treason—that he would only escape the death penalty because the United States and Russia were not at war. (But neither were they when Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in 1953.) And the day Trump was completely cleared of the collusion suspicion, O'Rourke declared that the investigation of Trump must continue.

Close at Beto's heels is the almost equally simple-minded and even more pretentious straw-haired airhead, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.). Standing in front of the Trump Hotel in Washington on Sunday, she called the president "a coward" and then Gillibrand ("I chose to be brave") said he was still a prime suspect of collusion with Russia, 90 minutes before the release of the attorney general's letter to the leaders of the Senate and House judiciary committees. I stop here, but not for any lack of other worthy contestants to win the sweepstakes for malice and foolishness.

In the convulsive aftermath of the sudden death of the whole impeachment fraud, the grievously outnumbered elements of the media who had kept their heads through the whole saga were severely overworked calling the witless majority of media assassins to account. The most durable and contemptible of all American media mythmakers, Carl Bernstein, claimed the role of the anti-Trump media was heroic and entirely admirable. He did so on CNN, and so was not asked by his co-defamer Brian Stelter, who although he is only 33, manages to look like he lost his hair fighting alongside Senator Da Nang Dick Blumenthal in Vietnam. Of course, Bernstein was not probingly

questioned. He never has been. This mad and pandemical egotism of the Washington media is precisely the reason why this time, the almost suicidal failure of the media must be run to ground.

No Forgiveness Without Conversion

I am venerable enough to have been a publisher of small daily newspapers at the time of Watergate, and I was one of the very few who warned where the criminalization of policy differences would lead. Eventually, Richard Nixon will be seen as the troubled but courageous, talented, and irrepressible American hero and very successful president that he was, (and was always perceived to be by his scores of millions of followers). He has been short-changed in recognition of his greatness and over-penalized for his faults, but history will sort it out, as he knew. (I had the privilege of knowing him in his last five years.)

The same ghastly group-narcissism that showered media awards among the Watergate jackals flared up again, like Camus' description of the Plague, [with Pulitzers](#) to the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* for their obscene campaigns of lies about Trump-Russian collusion. The president spoke nothing but the truth when he said on Monday: "It was an illegal take-down that failed."

It need hardly be emphasized that the right to freedom of expression is sacrosanct, and any attempt to muzzle or intimidate the media would be anathema. Even so, as the almost certain crimes of Hillary Clinton and some of her inner circle and allies—former intelligence chiefs John Brennan (now desperately [backpedaling](#)), and James Clapper, the FBI's own James Comey and Andrew McCabe, former Attorney General Loretta Lynch and her deputy Sally Yates, Yates' successor Rod Rosenstein, and many lesser figures—are resurrected and charged, untainted elements of the media must conduct a process of chastisement and reinduction of their wayward colleagues. The mercy of forgiveness must await those visited

by the grace of conversion, in this case to honest reporting and the separation of reporting of facts from tendentious personal opinion. (Both must be expressed, but not commingled.)

Having been the victim of the evils of the American criminal justice system, I would not have it inflicted on others. In any case, I do not believe in the incarceration of nonviolent, first-time offenders. I wouldn't ask more than some community service for those who seriously broke the law in the 2016 election and its aftermath.

But it was an attempted coup that would never have come to light if Hillary Clinton had won. The perpetrators must be given the opportunity to atone for their crimes and expiate them, and American posterity must understand the sanctity of the constitutional process. Those who deliver great nations from terrible fates are not always people who seem to have been selected by casting studios. This president's imperfections are not indiscernible, but he has shown himself to be a courageous and indomitable leader in excruciatingly difficult circumstances. And he is the president; those who want him out can vote against him at the next election.

Having expressed my wish for gentle sentencing, I proclaim what must now be the wish of the majority toward those who so gravely threatened the democratic republican system of American government. I am not a pious man, but so important is the proper outcome of this prolonged crisis, I am moved to cite Judeo-Christian Scripture: "God of Vengeance, God to whom vengeance belongs; show Thyself." Then it will be time for mercy, even unto the most unworthy, who shall be nameless, such as John Dean and Carl Bernstein.

First published in