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BOOK REVIEW:

Watergate's Legacy and the Press

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Jon Marshall, *Watergate's Legacy and the Press: The Investigative Impulse.* Medill School of Journalism/Northwestern University Press. Evanston, Illinois, 2011. 313 Pages

The word, "Watergate," suggests a high point in American investigative journalism. Although investigative journalism may not seem as influential today as during the Watergate era, the craft will continue to have an impact on American democracy, according to Jon Marshall, who traces the past and future of investigative reporting in *Watergate's Legacy and the Press: The Investigative Impulse.*

During the Watergate period, *Washington Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein took the lead, starting in June 1972, in following up on a break-in at, and attempt to wiretap, the Democratic National Committee Headquarters at the Watergate office building. The burglars had ties to President Richard Nixon's re-election campaign. The young reporters' work contributed to Senate hearings on the matter, administration resignations, and ultimately, President Nixon's resignation.

As the 40th anniversary of Watergate approaches, we all can benefit from considering the interaction between the Fourth Estate and the Oval Office.

Marshall, a lecturer at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, traces investigative journalism's roots to before the founding of the Republic. Marshall argues that the investigative impulse began in the 1600s, when Enlightenment philosophers taught that "people have a right to question their leaders" (p. 4).

This historical approach is a delightful surprise for readers drawn to the word, "Watergate," in the title because Marshall charts the past few hundred years of the best and worst of investigative reporting. Moreover, Marshall's engrossing writing style is a primary strength of the volume.

In each of his eight chapters, Marshall grapples with separate questions regarding Watergate and investigative journalism. For instance, in Chapter 3, Marshall explores how Richard Nixon's hatred of the press contributed to his demise, while in Chapter 5, the author examines why the president's resignation emboldened journalists for a while. In Chapters 6 and 7, Marshall explains why the glow of Watergate began to wear off and discusses how the pendulum swung against the press during the presidency of George W. Bush. Marshall posits that this reversal is, in part, why the press did not really scrutinize America's engagement in Iraq. In his last chapter, the author seems optimistic about the future of investigative reporting but acknowledges that economic distress and other trends present new challenges for today's journalists.

The book has several strong features, including a foreword by Bob Woodward, who tells how he and Carl Bernstein tackled the Watergate story: "Our approach was empirical. What were the facts? What really happened? How could we verify?" (p. x). In his three-page foreword, Woodward bemoans that "urgency and speed" have altered the way journalism is practiced in the 21st century (xi). Nevertheless, he adds, "But the principles of investigative reporting outlined by Jon Marshall in this volume remain the

same" (p. xi).

The only disappointment in the book is the brevity of Woodward's foreword; it would have been useful to hear more from this Watergate reporter. But his association with the project gives it instant credibility, and Marshall's ethos as a reporter and educator gives the book depth. Marshall has written for the *Tampa Tribune,* the *Chicago Daily Herald,* the *Christian Science Monitor,* the *Chicago Tribune,* and *Quill*–the publication of the Society of Professional Journalists.

Marshall's extensive research is a major strength of the book. He conducted 17 personal interviews, including taped conversations with Woodward, and with Ben Bradlee, who was the *Washington Post's* executive editor during Watergate. Marshall uses secondary sources for much of his book, and they include books, monographs, articles, speeches, discussions, symposia, research presentations, documents, reports, broadcasts, and websites and are listed in his 29-page bibliography.

Marshall synthesizes these sources into a captivating narrative with an accessible writing style. The book would make an excellent text for an investigative reporting course and/or a course on journalism history. The 216 pages of actual text are a sufficient length to provide a concise history of investigative reporting, while still captivating today's students.

As a former instructor of advanced news writing classes, I also think this could be a great supplemental text to inspire students as they are learning the discipline of the craft, mastering AP style, grammar, and other skills related to writing solid, in-depth articles. Because investigative reporting requires a mixture of both skill and spirit, this volume could help feed students' spirits while modeling investigative techniques. The pages are replete with various approaches to investigative reporting and the stories of the people who used these strategies.

Marshall concedes that investigative journalism since Watergate has been drastically different, but he proposes it will endure, if for no better reason than people will always "be curious about the world around them. They want to make sure no one is taking advantage of them. They like a good story. And they want to know the truth" (p. 216).

Curiosity and truth may well sustain the investigative impulse in this century and the next, but this former reporter still longs for the day of Watergate-style reporting, and she thanks Jon Marshall for taking us back there, if only briefly.

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