

# **Sex scandals and sexual blackmail in America's deep politics**

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Note: In my 'Blackmail and the Deep State', also in this issue of *Lobster*, I discussed the importance of political blackmail as a force in America's deep politics from the late 1950s to Watergate. This article, which also addresses Watergate, focuses on the politics of sexual blackmail and sex scandals over many decades.

In 2016, American voters elected as their 45th President a man who privately boasted of groping women, admitted getting his mistress (Marla Maples) pregnant while still married to his first wife (Ivana Trump), and bragged of having 'three other girlfriends' while 'living with Marla'.<sup>1</sup> Despite this record, many conservative evangelical leaders and other champions of 'family values' supported his candidacy against former Senator Hillary Clinton.<sup>2</sup> Trump appears to be surviving even apparently calculated leaks by hostile U.S. intelligence officials of unsubstantiated reports that Russian spies 'tried to blackmail him with sex tapes' that showed him cavorting with prostitutes in a Moscow hotel room.<sup>3</sup>

*Books cited in the footnotes are listed in the bibliography at the end of the essay.*

1 David Fahrenthold, 'Trump Recorded Having Extremely Lewd Conversation About Women in 2005', *Washington Post*, 8 October 2016; Mary Jones, 'Trump's Reference to Bill Clinton Affair Underscores His Own History of Infidelity', *Washington Post*, 25 September 2016; Chris Cillizza, 'Donald Trump's "John Miller" Interview is Even Crazier than You Think', *Washington Post*, 16 May 2016; cf. Amber Phillips, 'GOP Senator Calls Out Donald Trump's "Many Affairs" in Lengthy Tweetstorm', *Washington Post*, 25 January 2016.

2 Sarah Pulliam Bailey, "'Still the Best Candidate": Some Evangelicals Still Back Trump Despite Lewd Video', *Washington Post*, 8 October 2016.

3 Scott Shane, 'What We Know and Don't Know About the Trump-Russia Dossier', *New York Times*, 11 January 2017. No evidence has surfaced to corroborate these widely reported allegations, which appeared in an opposition research memos by former MI6 officer Christopher Steele.

It remains to be seen whether Trump's electoral success reflects a sea change in public attitudes or simply his unique ability to flout the conventional rules of American politics. For most of U.S. history, revelations of such personal behavior would have knocked a presidential candidate out of the race. America's moralizing culture has treated unconventional or unauthorized sex by politicians as shameful and even shocking – even though it is far more common than many people assume.<sup>4</sup> As we will see, the media's willingness to shame politicians through exposure of their personal transgressions has changed markedly over time, but has always been a threat to their careers.

One outstanding consequence has been to elevate the importance of sexual blackmail and public exposure as tactics of covert political intrigues, just as they have been in espionage.<sup>5</sup> If information is power, then information about adultery, homosexuality, and other private sexual indiscretions by officials is power of a high order indeed. Individuals and organizations that are adept at collecting and controlling such information – such as law enforcement, spies, private eyes, journalists and lawyers – thus play a key role in the hidden campaigns of the deep state. One perverse measure of the importance of sex in America's 'deep politics' is the paucity of systematic attention paid to it by political scientists.<sup>6</sup>

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4 Larry Flynt and David Eisenbach, *One Nation Under Sex* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), provides numerous examples of sexual affairs and transgressions by past American presidents.

5 See, for example, Phillip Knightly, 'The History of the Honey Trap', *ForeignPolicy.com*, 12 March 2010 at <<http://foreignpolicy.com/2010/03/12/the-history-of-the-honey-trap/>>; Christopher Beam, 'The Spy Who Said She Loved Me', *Slate.com*, 9 December 2010 at <[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/explainer/2010/12/the\\_spy\\_who\\_said\\_she\\_loved\\_me.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2010/12/the_spy_who_said_she_loved_me.html)>; Jonathan Zimmerman, 'Petraeus and the Blackmail Myth', *Los Angeles Times*, 16 November 2012; Wikipedia, 'Love, honeypots, and recruitment' at <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recruitment\\_of\\_spies](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Recruitment_of_spies)>

6 As Mark West notes, calls for systematic research 'that would link issues of official misconduct with larger characteristics of political systems [are] met with a deafening silence punctuated only rarely by serious investigation.' See Mark West, *Secrets, Sex, and Spectacle: The Rules of Scandal in Japan and the United States* (Chicago: University of

Law professor Mark D. West defines scandal as 'an event in which the public revelation of an alleged private breach of a law or a norm results in significant social disapproval or debate and, usually, reputational damage'.<sup>7</sup> Sex has long been a key driver of public scandals in the United States. America's Puritan moral heritage creates a perfect environment for scandals driven by displays of outrage, real or feigned, among public officials, celebrities, the media and members of the public.<sup>8</sup> In Italy, by contrast, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi continued to enjoy widespread favor despite revelations about his 'bunga bunga' parties with young strippers and erotic dancers; as one Italian psychiatrist explained, 'It's a Catholic mentality: sin at night and confess in

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*Note 6 continued*

Chicago Press, 2006), p. 3. Peter Dale Scott similarly remarks, 'Scholarly memories, possibly because of denial, tend to be short when it comes to sexual politics.' Scott, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 235.

Angus McLaren, *Sexual Blackmail: A Modern History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) offers a few reflections on the political uses of blackmail.

For an historian's reflections on changing patterns of exposure of sexual transgressions in American politics, see John H. Summers, 'What Happened to Sex Scandals? Politics and Peccadilloes, Jefferson to Kennedy,' *Journal of American History*, vol. 87, no. 3 (December 2000), pp. 825-854.

<sup>7</sup> West, *Secrets, Sex, and Spectacle*, p. 6. Apostolidis and Williams define it as 'the publicization of a transgression of a social norm', involving a public disgrace. See *Public Affairs: Politics in the Age of Sex Scandals*, eds. Paul Apostolidis and Juliet Williams (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Oscar Wilde comments on the relationship between Puritanism and public scandal in his 1893 play *An Ideal Husband*. The extortionist Mrs. Cheveley tells her victim:

'Remember to what a point your Puritanism in England has brought you. In old days nobody pretended to be better than his neighbors. In fact, to be a bit better than one's neighbours was considered excessively vulgar and middle class. Nowadays, with our modern mania for morality, everyone has to pose as paragon of purity, incorruptibility, and all the other seven deadly virtues – and what is the result? You all go over like ninepins – one after the other. Not a year passes in England without someone disappearing. Scandals used to lend charm, or at least interest, to a man – now they crush him'.

Available at <<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/885/885-h/885-h.htm>>.

the morning'.<sup>9</sup> In Japan, where paid sex with schoolgirls was made explicitly illegal only in 1999, political and celebrity sex scandals are also exceedingly rare.<sup>10</sup> France, another traditionally forgiving culture, has become much more critical of sexual transgressions by political leaders in recent years.<sup>11</sup>

### **Sex and political scandals in early America**

In the United States, sex scandals date back to the earliest days of the Republic. In the early 1790s, Founding Father and Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton paid hush money to the husband of his 23-year-old mistress to keep his affair with her secret. Eventually Hamilton's sworn political enemy, Thomas Jefferson, caught wind of the affair and leaked information to a muckraking pamphleteer, James Callender, whose exposé seriously damaged Hamilton's reputation. The grandson of serial philanderer Benjamin Franklin condemned Hamilton in a newspaper editorial for having 'violated the sacred sanctuary of his own house, by taking an unprincipled woman . . . to his bed.' Hamilton survived the scandal, but was later killed in a duel with his mistress's attorney and Jefferson's close ally, Aaron Burr.

Jefferson, elected President in 1800, got his comeuppance two years later. Callender, disgruntled at not winning a political appointment, publicized Jefferson's liaison with his slave Sally Heming. Hamilton supporters had a field day distributing rhymes about 'luscious . . . Monticello Sally'. But voters apparently viewed Jefferson's relationship as one of the perquisites of being a slave owner, and re-elected him

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9 Hada Messia, 'The Berlusconi Sex Scandal Explained', CNN, 25 August 2011 at <<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/europe/08/23/berlusconi.sex.scandal.explained/>>. In early 2015, Berlusconi's acquittal on charges of having sex with an under-age prostitute was upheld by Italy's high court.

10 West, *Secrets, Sex, and Spectacle*, pp. 256-257.

11 Angelique Chrisafis, "'We Can No Longer Stay Silent': Fury Erupts Over Sexism in French Politics', *Guardian*, 13 May 2016; 'Eight Other Sex Scandal That Rocked French Politics', *The Local*, 11 May 2016 at <<http://www.thelocal.fr/20160511/eight-sex-scandals-that-rocked-french-politics>>.

by a landslide in 1804.<sup>12</sup>

Sex was also a major issue in the 1828 Presidential campaign. Backers of incumbent John Quincy Adams accused General Andrew Jackson of living in adulterous sin with his common-law wife. Although Jackson won handily, the accusations helped bring on a heart attack that killed his wife shortly after the election. A few years later, in his classic *Democracy in America*, the great French social critic Alexis de Tocqueville would decry the scandal mongering tendency of American journalists to 'assail the character of individuals, to track them into private life, and disclose all their weaknesses and their errors.'<sup>13</sup>

By the early 20th century, the American media was experiencing a professional transformation. As part of a new focus on 'responsible' reporting and objectivity, the American Society of Newspaper Editors ordained in 1923 that 'a newspaper should not invade private rights or feelings without sure warrant of public right as distinguished from public curiosity'. A heightened sense of threats to U.S. national security protected Presidents in particular from published gossip. Tougher libel laws in many states also discouraged unconfirmed reports of scandal.<sup>14</sup>

### **Enter the Federal Bureau of Investigation**

Nonetheless, the importance of sexual scandal and blackmail in American politics mushroomed in the 20th century for two reasons: the growth of electronic eavesdropping technology (wiretaps and bugs), and the centralization of national intelligence gathering with the creation of the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1908. It is often forgotten that the Bureau's

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12 Flynt and Eisenbach. *One Nation Under Sex*, pp. 17-27; McLaren, *Sexual Blackmail*, pp. 30-31; <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamilton-Reynolds\\_sex\\_scandal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamilton-Reynolds_sex_scandal)>; <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jefferson-Hemings\\_controversy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jefferson-Hemings_controversy)>.

13 Flynt and Eisenbach, *One Nation Under Sex*, pp. 38-43. The authors note that another sex scandal during Jackson's term in office – the Peggy Eaton affair – helped create political splits that ultimately contributed to the Civil War.

14 Flynt and Eisenbach, *One Nation Under Sex*, pp. 70, 99. Summers, 'What Happened to Sex Scandals?' (see note 6 above).

first major order of business was 'visiting and making surveys of houses of prostitution' as a prelude to enforcing the 'White Slave Traffic Act,' also known as the Mann Act.<sup>15</sup> As one historian of the FBI has observed:

'by exaggerating the danger of organized vice, portraying it as a real menace to the American society, and by broadly interpreting the law, the Bureau in its formative years succeeded in expanding in size and jurisdiction from an obscure and subordinate government bureau, primarily engaged in examining bank frauds and anti-trust violations, to a growing and influential bureaucracy, engaged in sensational and headline-stealing cases'.<sup>16</sup>

With the Bureau's leadership, the Mann Act became a powerful legal weapon – and thus blackmail threat – against any unmarried couple who crossed state lines to have sex.

In its early years, the Bureau also expanded its power by overseeing wartime political intelligence gathering and enforcement. Collaborating with Army Intelligence during World War I, the Bureau of Investigation created a vast domestic spy network called the American Protective League. With a quarter million citizen operatives in 600 cities, the League reported on German-Americans, labor organizers, anti-war activists and other dissidents. This public/private partnership achieved what one historian has called 'arguably the world's most intensive feat of domestic surveillance ever'.<sup>17</sup> Many of their targets were arrested or deported during the Red scare of 1919-20 at the direction of Attorney

15 <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal\\_Bureau\\_of\\_Investigation#Creation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Bureau_of_Investigation#Creation)> CF 'A Brief History of the FBI', at <<https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/history/brief-history>>. Jessica R. Piley, *Policing Sexuality: The Mann Act and the Making of the FBI* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

16 Regin Schmidt, *Red Scare: FBI and the Origins of Anticommunism in the United States, 1919-1943* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2000), p. 85

17 Alfred McCoy, 'Surveillance Blowback: The Making of the U.S. Surveillance State, 1898-2020', *The Nation*, 16 July 2013 at <<https://www.thenation.com/article/surveillance-blowback/>>; Stanley Coben, *A. Mitchell Palmer: Politician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 207-232

General A. Mitchell Palmer.

During the course of their investigation of German espionage in the United States, Bureau agents discovered Senator Warren Harding, the Ohio Republican, in the arms of his mistress Carrie Phillips, a suspected German spy. A federal agent reported that Harding was passing secrets from the Navy Department to his lover, who in turn 'relay[ed] this information to friends in the German Empire'. The discovery would have been politically lethal if made public, but the Justice Department remained mum. Tipped off about the file on his transgressions, Harding switched from critic to supporter of President Wilson's war policies. Later, while Harding ran for President in 1920, the Republican Party paid tens of thousands of dollars in hush money to his blackmailing mistress.<sup>18</sup>

As the nation reverted to peace, the FBI shifted its focus to catching notorious criminals. But in 1936, at President Franklin Roosevelt's request, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover launched a broad program to collect intelligence about subversive activities in the United States. He focused on communism and fascism, two totalitarian ideologies whose popular appeal soared during the Great Depression. His agents began compiling lists of subscribers to radical and foreign language newspapers, and then wiretapping the phones and reading the private cables of antiwar leaders. Before long, the FBI was tapping the phones of key Republican leaders as well.<sup>19</sup>

Even the President's passionately liberal wife, Eleanor, came under Hoover's close scrutiny. FBI informants kept the bureau apprised of her many social and political associates

<sup>18</sup> Flynt and Eisenbach, *One Nation Under Sex*, pp. 88-89, 93-95. In 1927 another of Harding's mistresses, Nan Britton, published a tell-all book, *The President's Daughter* (New York: Elizabeth Ann Guild, Inc., 1927).

<sup>19</sup> *Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities of the United States Senate. 94th Congress, 2nd Session, Book II* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976), pp. 25-31; Kathryn S. Olmsted, *Real Enemies: Conspiracy Theories and American Democracy, World War I to 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 69; Victor Lasky, *It Didn't Start With Watergate* (New York: Dial Press, 1977), pp. 145-149, 160-161.

and their activities. Hoover drew the darkest inferences from his growing file on the First Lady. Her progressive views on economic and civil rights persuaded the FBI chief that she was political dangerous; her equally progressive social views persuaded him that she was sexually promiscuous and deviant. 'Because she numbered among her many friends several lesbians . . . Hoover concluded that Mrs. Roosevelt was one too,' writes Curt Gentry. 'However, Hoover was also convinced, at other times, that she had numerous male lovers, including at least one black'. Based on a joke intercepted through a bug in the offices of the National Maritime Union, Hoover concluded that the union's two top officials were both sexually 'servicing' Eleanor Roosevelt, probably to further the aims of the Communist party.<sup>20</sup> Hoover was careful not to use any such gossip against her while her husband was alive. In 1953, however, he arranged a briefing for top aides of President-elect Dwight Eisenhower about one of her alleged extramarital affairs with a left-wing activist – misinformation passed to him by Army Intelligence during World War II – to kill her hopes of being reappointed as a U.S. delegate to the United Nations.<sup>21</sup>

### **Hunting homosexuals**

Even if he could not touch Eleanor during the War, Hoover helped destroy one of her political allies, Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles. Welles was also one of FDR's most brilliant and trusted advisers. Hoover would later complain that Eleanor 'protected' Welles because 'his softness toward Russia served the interests of the Communist party'. An investigation by Hoover's agents in 1941 uncovered evidence that Welles had made homosexual advances to railroad porters while drunk and looked for sex partners in public parks and bathrooms. After a coalition of administration insiders and

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<sup>20</sup> Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 302; cf. Anthony Summers, *Official and Confidential: The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1993), pp. 142-149.

<sup>21</sup> Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, p. 404; Summers, *Official and Confidential*, p. 149.

Republicans threatened to expose his secret, Welles was forced to resign in 1943, eliminating a major liberal voice in the shaping of Roosevelt's foreign policy.<sup>22</sup> Evidence suggests that the whispering campaign against Welles was orchestrated in part by Hoover, who despised Welles's politics.<sup>23</sup>

On the opposite end of the political spectrum, FBI also targeted the pro-fascist Catholic priest, Father Charles Coughlin, who reached nearly thirty million listeners with his national radio show. Peter Dale Scott describes how Hoover used sexual blackmail to quiet this influential Roosevelt-hater and bigot:

'In January 1940 the FBI raided an office of the Christian Front, a group supported by Coughlin, for plotting to overthrow the government. Two years later Coughlin was silenced and his radio show went off the air.

Coughlin's subsequent silence, which lasted for decades, is usually attributed to an order from his bishop, after a deal negotiated with Attorney General Biddle. But after Coughlin's death in 1979, his psychiatrist revealed that what silenced the priest had not been "sudden obedience to his bishop, whom he had successfully defied for several years. That cover story was circulated in May 1942 by church authorities. . . Coughlin felt the effects of. . . J. Edgar Hoover [who] had proof of Coughlin's homosexual activity. That proof, communicated in the verbal exchange between Hoover and Coughlin, was sufficient to silence Coughlin's public voice until May 24, 1972. . . Hoover had died just three weeks earlier, on May 2, 1972."<sup>24</sup>

Hoover was not the only one who could play this destructive

<sup>22</sup> Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, pp. 307-310; cf. 'We Accuse Sumner Welles', *Confidential*, March 1956 at <[www.reformation.org/welles-confidential-magazine.html](http://www.reformation.org/welles-confidential-magazine.html)>; Gaddis Smith, 'Spheres of Influence', *New York Times*, 25 January 1998.

<sup>23</sup> Summers, *Official and Confidential*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Dale Scott, 'America's Unchecked Security State: Part I: The Toxic Legacy of J. Edgar Hoover's Illegal Powers', *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 29 April 2013 at <<http://apjjf.org/2013/11/17/Peter-Dale-Scott/3932/article.html>>.

game in the shadows of American politics. British intelligence agents, who sought to discredit opponents of U.S. entry into the European war, made devastating use of sexual intelligence in 1942 against Senator David Walsh, a progressive Democrat from Massachusetts. A noted anti-war and anti-colonial activist, Walsh was also the powerful chairman of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee. Embellishing facts leaked to its reporters, the strongly interventionist *New York Post* ran a series of sensational stories accusing Walsh of visiting a homosexual brothel in Brooklyn that was said to be infiltrated by Nazi spies. Walsh was secretly gay, putting him in a precarious position. Nonetheless, he denounced the stories and demanded a full investigation. The FBI actually cleared him of the paper's most serious charges, but by then Walsh had suffered through what *Time* magazine called 'one of the worst scandals that ever affected a member of the Senate'. He left politics when his term ended in 1946. According to the leading chronicler of this affair, the political assassination campaign against Walsh was led by President Roosevelt; his lover, Dorothy Schiff, owner of the *New York Post*; the British secret service; the head of its U.S. counterpart, the Office of Strategic Services; and the duplicitous general counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union, Morris Ernst.<sup>25</sup>

Although he didn't target Walsh, Hoover made it one of the FBI's priorities to hunt for 'sex deviates in government service'. According to his biographer Anthony Summers,

'He ordered agents to penetrate homosexual rights groups across the country, collect names of members, record speeches and photograph demonstrations. Such surveillance continued for twenty-three years, long after the FBI had concluded that the activists were in no way "subversive."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> David O'Toole, *Outing the Senator: Sex, Spies & Videotape* (Worcester, MA: James Street Publishing, 2005);

<[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David\\_I.\\_Walsh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_I._Walsh)> FDR had a history of unprincipled investigations of gay sex in the Navy. See <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newport\\_sex\\_scandal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newport_sex_scandal)>.

<sup>26</sup> Summers, *Official and Confidential*, p. 93.

Hoover used his files as political hand-grenades when the need arose. In 1952, for example, Hoover secretly spread smear rumors about Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson as part of a right-wing campaign to help defeat the Democratic candidate for President.<sup>27</sup>

Hoover's anti-gay crusade may have been driven in part by his own suppressed sexual proclivities – which ironically made him vulnerable to sexual blackmail as well. Hoover, who never married, always had his number two man, Clyde Tolson, at his side, from Christmas vacations in Miami to summer visits to the Del Mar racetrack. Many journalists and Washington insiders assumed they were homosexual partners, but dared not say so publicly. Anthony Summers, in his 1993 biography of Hoover, cited sources in organized crime who claimed that Hoover was compromised by incriminating photos. As a result, Hoover allegedly curbed investigations of leading mobsters to prevent proof of his sexual orientation from becoming public. Some scholars who have scrutinized the evidence find it weak or suspect, so the issue remains open.<sup>28</sup>

Investigations, leaks and threatened revelations about gay sex became almost an industry in the 1950s, especially in Washington. In 1950, as Senator Joseph McCarthy was making a splash with charges that the State Department was riddled with Communist spies, Deputy Undersecretary of State John Puerifoy defended his department's security program, which was led by a Hoover-approved ex-FBI agent, noting that it had uncovered and fired 91 homosexuals. The resulting

27 Athan Theoharis, 'How the F.B.I. Gaybaited Stevenson', *Nation*, 7 May 1990, 617ff; Summers, *Official and Confidential*, pp. 181-182.

28 Summers, *Official and Confidential*, pp. 241-243, 253-258; Athan Theoharis, *J. Edgar Hoover, Sex, and Crime: An Historical Antidote* (Ivan R. Dee, 1995); Douglas M. Charles, *Hoover's War on Gays: Exposing the FBI's 'Sex Deviates' Program* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2015), chapter 1, 'Was J. Edgar Hoover Gay? Does it Matter?', pp. 1-21; Claire Potter, 'Queer Hoover: Sex, Lies, and Political History' (2006), Wesleyan Division II Faculty Publications, paper 21, at <<http://wescholar.wesleyan.edu/div2facpubs/21>> Jack Anderson put Hoover and his close aide Clyde Tolson under surveillance to determine if they had a homosexual relationship, but came up empty-handed. See Mark Feldstein, *Poisoning the Press: Richard Nixon, Jack Anderson and the Rise of Washington's Scandal Culture* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), pp. 137-139.

'lavender scare' led to the firing of almost 600 federal employees, in addition to thousands more 'separated' by the military for suspected sexual deviancy. As historian David K. Johnson observes, 'In 1950, many politicians, journalists, and citizens thought that homosexuals posed more of a threat to national security than Communists'.<sup>29</sup>

In the wake of the homosexual witch-hunt, 'State Department morale plummeted,' writes Curt Gentry. 'One result was a self-censorship which undoubtedly had an effect on American foreign policy, few daring to express their opinions freely for fear they would be held accountable' to department security officers.<sup>30</sup>

Using dossiers supplied under the table by the FBI at Hoover's direction, Senator McCarthy himself chose to focus instead on alleged Reds in government.<sup>31</sup> That may be because the bachelor from Wisconsin was himself vulnerable to whispered charges of homosexuality. His mean-spirited chief counsel, Roy Cohn, was certainly gay, as one Army witness intimated during the Army-McCarthy hearings.<sup>32</sup>

When it came to scoring political points against McCarthy, some liberal critics were almost as 'McCarthyite' as the senator in their use of innuendo. Crusading columnists Drew Pearson and Jack Anderson created a dossier of rumors about McCarthy's sexual leanings. In the words of Anderson's biographer, they 'persuaded a friendly attorney to bring up the sordid rumors in a Nevada court trial, creating legal protection for the charges, thus allowing [their column] to safely quote the accusation that McCarthy was "a disreputable pervert".'<sup>33</sup> Anderson's friend and business partner, *Las Vegas*

29 David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 1-2. See also Charles, *Hoover's War on Gays*; Randolph W Baxter, "'Homo-Hunting'" in the Early Cold War: Senator Kenneth Wherry and the Homophobic Side of McCarthyism', *Nebraska History* 84 (2003), pp. 119-132.

30 Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, p. 409.

31 Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, pp. 378-380.

32 <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roy\\_Cohn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roy_Cohn)>

33 Feldstein, *Poisoning the Press*, p. 50. Pearson and Anderson would remain almost as preoccupied as Hoover by reports of celebrity gay

*Sun* publisher Hank Greenspun, joined that campaign in 1952 by writing, 'It is common talk among homosexuals in Milwaukee who rendezvous in the White Horse Inn that Senator Joe McCarthy has often engaged in homosexual activities'. Greenspun kept at it, charging in 1954, 'The plain unvarnished truth is that McCarthy, by his own admission, is a security risk on the grounds of homosexuality'.<sup>34</sup>

One potentially genuine security risk was nationally syndicated political columnist and closet homosexual Joseph Alsop, whose highly placed sources regularly leaked him top secret information about U.S. foreign and military policy. In 1957, during a visit to the Soviet Union, the influential pundit was lured by the KGB into a homosexual 'honey trap' and photographed in compromising positions at Moscow's Grand Hotel. At the urging of his friend and neighbor Frank Wisner, former head of covert operations for the CIA, Alsop privately came clean to both the CIA and FBI. Senior Eisenhower administration officials, who resented Alsop's public derision of the President and his irresponsible scare-mongering about alleged Soviet nuclear superiority (the so-called 'missile gap'), looked for ways to use the material. In 1959, Attorney General William Rogers and Hoover began briefing senior government

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*Note 33 continued*

sex. They set back California Governor Ronald Reagan's presidential ambitions by reporting in a 1967 column that members of his staff had engaged in a male sex orgy at a cabin in Lake Tahoe. Anderson caused turmoil in the Nixon White House by investigating charges, leaked to him by a disgruntled Murray Chotiner, that Haldeman, Ehrlichman, and Dwight Chapin 'engaged in homosexual and perverted activities'. Anderson also put Hoover and his close aide Clyde Tolson themselves under surveillance to check on rumors that they had a homosexual relationship; the worst Anderson could come up with was that Hoover was a regular consumer of heartburn medication. Feldstein pp. 85, 108-111, 137-139.

34 Greenspun, 'Where I Stand', *Las Vegas Sun*, 25 October 1952 and 1 February 1954. See also Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, p. 433; Arthur Herman, *Joseph McCarthy: Reexamining the Life and Legacy of America's Most Hated Senator* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), pp. 235-236. It was the issue of McCarthyism that brought Greenspun together with the Washington lawyer Edward P. Morgan, who, in 1950, had been chief counsel to a Senate Foreign Relations Committee investigation of Senator McCarthy's claims about Communist infiltration of the State Department.

officials about Alsop's dark secret. Before long, as no doubt intended, word leaked out. A gossip item in the conservative *National Review* magazine declared,

'A prominent American journalist is a target of Soviet blackmail for homosexuality. U.S. authorities know it. His syndicate doesn't – yet. The feverish activities of Washington's internal security personnel suggest that a major scandal may be under an intelligence Agency's rug. The complete nervous breakdown of a top intelligence officer sparked the furor.'

But Hoover vetoed an aide's proposal to plant bugs in Alsop's house, and the famous columnist was never fully outed. When Eisenhower left office, Alsop could rest easier knowing that the new President, Jack Kennedy, was his Georgetown neighbor and social friend. Alsop's past finally came back to haunt him in 1970, however, when the Soviets began distributing to prominent Washingtonians photographs of Alsop and 'Boris' in the buff, apparently in retaliation for a series of nasty columns Alsop wrote about the Soviet ambassador. CIA Director Richard Helms negotiated a truce, and the two sides cooled off their attacks.<sup>35</sup>

### **Kennedy's women and Hoover's files**

Alsop's predicament was bad enough, but President Kennedy's was even worse when it came to compromising FBI files and political blackmail. Disclosures of Kennedy's insatiable appetite for casual sex and his countless flirtations have tarnished the Camelot image over the past few decades. And with good reason: one need not be a moralist to recognize how politically reckless JFK's behavior was. It derailed his agenda for reforming the FBI, and very nearly brought down

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<sup>35</sup> Gregg Herken, *The Georgetown Set: Friends and Rivals in Cold War Washington* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), pp. 208-209, 243-244, 260; Edwin M. Yoder, Jr., *Joe Alsop's Cold War: A Study of Journalistic Influence and Intrigue* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Louis Menand, 'How the Cold War Made Georgetown Hot', *New Yorker*, 10 November 2014. David Auburn's Broadway play, 'The Columnist', dealt with Alsop's KGB nightmare; see Terry Teachout, 'A News Columnist With His Own Secret', *Wall Street Journal*, 26 April 2012.

his presidency. His sexual appetite was no secret to Washington insiders, friends and foes alike. As the French ambassador commented in his diary, Kennedy's 'desires are difficult to satisfy without raising fears of scandal and its use by his political enemies. This might happen one day, because he does not take sufficient precautions in this Puritan country'.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, the Kennedy brothers' fiercest political enemy, Teamster President Jimmy Hoffa, 'almost certainly' had compromising surveillance tapes on Jack's brief affair with film star Marilyn Monroe.<sup>37</sup> Hoffa later claimed to have information on four of Attorney General Robert Kennedy's mistresses around the country and likely had access to recordings of RFK's own intimate meetings with Monroe. Hoffa told one reporter that if he were president, 'I would have the FBI bring in the facts on these women. They're crossing state boundaries, which is against the law, and it's about time Bobby was put in his place'.<sup>38</sup>

The FBI didn't need Hoffa's direction to 'bring in the facts' on the Kennedy brothers' women, including Monroe. Every indiscretion was fodder for Hoover's files. Columnist Drew Pearson recorded in his diary what he dared not print about the FBI director's 'blackmail' of President Kennedy: 'Hoover has . . . more on Kennedy than he had on any other president. He knew every girl Kennedy had laid'.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted in Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960-1963* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), p. 611.

<sup>37</sup> Summers, *Official and Confidential*, p. 296.

<sup>38</sup> Drew Pearson, *Washington Merry-Go-Round: The Drew Pearson Diaries, 1960-1969* (Potomac Books, 2015), p. 423 (entry of 17 November 1966). See also p. 564 (entry of 6 April 1968), noting that Hoffa's appeals attorney, Edward Morgan, warned Bobby Kennedy to stop making such a public display of one affair ('Ed did him a great favor, which Bobby obviously did not appreciate'). On Monroe, see Jim Houghan, *Spooks* (New York: William Morrow, 1978), pp. 115-121; Anthony Summers, *Goddess: The Secret Lives of Marilyn Monroe* (New York: Macmillan, 1985).

<sup>39</sup> Pearson, *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, pp. 401-402, (entry of 28 May 1966). Pearson also suspected that the Kennedys pulled their punches on Nixon in the 1960 election because 'they are afraid the Nixon camp may pull something on Jack's sex life', p. 44, (entry of 29 October 1960).

Hoover began tracking the second son of Ambassador Joseph Kennedy as early as World War II. Agents tagged Jack as having an affair with a former Miss Denmark and suspected Nazi spy. (Though married, she proved to be no spy.<sup>40</sup>) During the 1960 presidential campaign, an FBI official prepared a summary memo on the Democratic candidate, noting that 'Allegations of immoral activities on Sen. Kennedy's part have been reported to the FBI over the years', starting with the World War II fling and including relationships with women in 'Palm Springs, Las Vegas, and New York City'.<sup>41</sup> That summer, Hoover slipped information from his files on Kennedy's 'womanizing' to Senator Lyndon Johnson, giving the Texan political leverage to secure his place as Vice President on the Democratic ticket. Once elected, the new president kept the aging FBI director on against the advice of his aides. 'John F. Kennedy was afraid not to reappoint him,' said columnist Jack Anderson years later. 'I know that because I talked to the President about it. He admitted that he'd appointed Hoover because it would've been politically destructive not to'.<sup>42</sup>

Hoover was often at odds with the new president's hard-driving Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy. But Hoover obtained a secret ace when the FBI picked up word that President Kennedy was seeing a beautiful young socialite named Judith Campbell.



Like many of his sexual conquests, Campbell had been introduced by singer Frank Sinatra. She was a friend of Sinatra's Mafia associate John Roselli and mistress to Chicago mob boss Sam Giancana. In other words, President Kennedy was unwittingly sharing a consort with one of America's top underworld leaders and a key target of his

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40 Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, pp. 613-614.

41 Summary memo, FBI Supervisor Milton Jones to FBI Assistant Director Cartha DeLoach, 13 July 1960, in Athan Theoharis, ed. *From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1991), pp. 32-33.

42 Summers, *Official and Confidential*, pp. 272-275.

brother's drive against organized crime. His vulnerability became starkly apparent when the FBI learned that Hoffa's top wiretap expert had heard that Campbell was 'shacking up with John Kennedy'.<sup>43</sup>

Hoover prepared a memo itemizing the various contacts between Campbell and the White House – and her Mafia associations – for Bobby Kennedy and one of the President's special assistants on 27 February 1962. A month later, President Kennedy and Hoover dined together. 'There is no record of what transpired,' writes crime historian Mel Ayton,

'but, according to White House logs, telephone contact between Campbell and Kennedy occurred a few hours after the luncheon. Historians are in agreement that it is likely Hoover used this meeting to apprise the President of how reckless and dangerous it was to be connected to a woman who was also friendly with members of the Mafia. Hoover was using subtle blackmail.'<sup>44</sup>

Making matters worse, Hoover also delivered to Bobby Kennedy devastating news that the CIA had teamed up with Mafia leaders – including Giancana – for a top-secret program to assassinate Fidel Castro, in effect immunizing them against federal prosecution.<sup>45</sup> The power of this sex-crime-and-intelligence story remained so strong that as late as 1976, a Senate committee investigating CIA abuses and assassination plots avoided mentioning Campbell's name or true association with the President, referring to her only as a 'close friend' of JFK.

Hoover again put the Attorney General in his debt a year later, when members of Congress and journalists began

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43 Belmont to C. A. Evans, 15 March 1962, re Judith E. Campbell, NARA Record Number: 124-10225-10038.

44 Mel Ayton, 'The Truth About J. Edgar Hoover', *Crime*, 19 July 1995; cf. Charles Rappleye and Ed Becker, *All American Mafioso: The John Rosselli Story* (New York: Doubleday, 1991) p. 215 and Richard Mahoney, *Sons and Brothers: The Days of Jack and Bobby Kennedy* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1999), pp. 97-100, 156-7, 164, 278 and *passim*.

45 See Jonathan Marshall, 'Blackmail in the Deep State' in *Lobster* 73, at <<http://www.lobster-magazine.co.uk/free/lobster73/lob73-blackmail-deep-state.pdf>>.

investigating wholesale corruption by Senate Secretary Bobby Baker, who had been Vice President Lyndon Johnson's closest aide in the Senate. Jack Anderson reported in a nationally syndicated column that one source of Baker's influence was his Washington club where beautiful 'party girls' entertained top legislators. Anderson's partner Drew Pearson recorded in his diary, just two weeks before JFK's assassination in Dallas, that

'Bobby [Baker] was the pimp, apparently, for President Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, [Florida Senator] George Smathers, and various others in procuring girls. . . . Bobby Baker apparently realized that the way to get ahead in Washington was through sex and thereby gained a lot of influence. How much of this is going to come out at the Senate hearings remains to be seen. . . . The FBI, as usual, was playing politics. Bobby and Lyndon are on the telephone about thirty minutes a day, and Lyndon is worried over the developments. This, of course, could knock Lyndon off the ticket for 1964.'<sup>46</sup>

One of the party girls Baker procured was a 27-year-old beauty named Ellen Rometsch.<sup>47</sup> Besides delighting certain members of Congress, she also entertained President Kennedy several times in the spring and summer of 1963.



Evidently the President vetted only her looks before taking her to bed. Married to a sergeant stationed at the West German embassy, Rometsch had grown up in East Germany and belonged to a Communist youth group before moving to the West with her family in 1955.<sup>48</sup> Jack Anderson

reported further that she had had an affair with an attaché at

<sup>46</sup> Pearson, *Washington Merry-Go-Round*, p. 203 (entry for 8 November 1963). Pearson's source was Edward P. Morgan, a friend of Baker's lawyer, Edward Bennett Williams.

<sup>47</sup> *Life* magazine ran its first photo of Rometsch on 8 November 1963 in a story titled, 'That High-Living Baker Boy Scandalizes the Capital', p. 32. It referred to her as 'the German call girl'.

<sup>48</sup> Seymour Hersh, *The Dark Side of Camelot* (Boston: Little Brown, 1997), pp. 387-390.

the Soviet embassy.<sup>49</sup>

To Hoover, this intelligence recalled the sensational Profumo affair then grabbing headlines in Great Britain. The British scandal eventually prompted the resignation of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan after public revelations that his War Minister, John Profumo, frequented the same 19-year-old model and party girl favored by a Soviet naval attaché.<sup>50</sup> In June 1963, the FBI opened a thick file on the Profumo matter – code-named Bowtie – and began sharing information on trans-Atlantic sex rings and alleged Soviet espionage with the White House, CIA Director, Secretary of Defense, and Secretary of State.<sup>51</sup> Making matters worse, Hoover learned of allegations that President Kennedy had had sex with two women linked to the British affair. On June 29, 1963, a conservative Hearst newspaper in New York sent a shot across Kennedy's bow, writing, 'One of the biggest names in American politics – a man who holds a very high elective office – has been injected into Britain's vice-security scandal.' The President's fixer, Bobby Kennedy, ultimately had to wield his legal authority over newspaper antitrust issues to suppress publication of further details.<sup>52</sup>

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49 Bobby Baker, *Wheeling and Dealing: Confessions of a Capitol Hill Operator* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 80.

Baker's comments on the Quorum Club and Rometsch can be found in Todd Purdum, 'Sex in the Senate: Bobby Baker's Salacious Secret History of Capitol Hill', *Politico*, 19 November 2013 at <<http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2013/11/sex-in-the-senate-bobby-baker-099530>>. Baker claimed that Hoover used his knowledge of Rometsch's sexual relationship with Congressman Gerald Ford, (R.-Michigan), to blackmail him into providing back-channel information on the Warren Commission to the FBI. Note that Baker was represented by the ubiquitous Edward Bennett Williams.

50 On the Profumo scandal, see among various works, Anthony Summers and Stephen Dorril, *Honeytrap* (London: Coronet Books, 1989).

51 Declassified FBI files on the Profumo affair, with extensive deletions, are available online at <[https://vault.fbi.gov/John%20Profumo%20\(Bowtie\)](https://vault.fbi.gov/John%20Profumo%20(Bowtie))>.

52 Summers, *Official and Confidential*, pp. 305-307; Hersh, *The Dark Side of Camelot*, pp. 394-398; F. J. Baumgardner to W. C. Sullivan, June 30, 1963, re 'Christine Keeler, John Profumo, Internal Security – Russian and Great Britain', at <<http://tinyurl.com/gomd2uc>>.

Summers incorrectly cites the date of the article as 23 June.

That July, while the Profumo scandal was still unfolding, FBI agents began questioning JFK's stunning but politically suspect bedroom partner, Ellen Rometsch. Desperate to contain the potential political damage, the Attorney General had Rometsch hustled onto a plane, deported to Germany, and paid to keep quiet. That October, however, a Washington journalist friendly with Hoover reported that 'the beautiful brunette had been attending parties with congressional leaders and some prominent New Frontiersmen from the executive branch of Government. . . The possibility that her activity might be connected with espionage was of some concern, because of the high rank of her male companions.'

Matters came to a head when the *Washington Post* reported on plans for a closed-door Senate committee hearing on 'a spicy tale of political intrigue and high level bedroom antics' regarding 'a 27-year-old German woman of alluring physical proportions'. The 27 October story, which appeared just nine days after the resignation of British Prime Minister Macmillan, was headlined ominously, 'Hill Probe May Take Profumo-Type Twist'. Bobby Kennedy had to plead with Hoover to invoke his secret files to shut down the entire congressional investigation into Baker's sleazy club. The FBI director complied, sparing the President, Vice President, and leaders of Congress additional embarrassment.<sup>53</sup>

RFK paid a heavy price to cover up his brother's sins, however. The attorney general had to give Hoover assurances that he would be retained as FBI director. He also approved Hoover's wiretaps on Martin Luther King, Jr., a key White

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<sup>53</sup> A biographer of the lead Senate investigator of the Bobby Baker affair writes, 'In January 1964 a Republican member of the Rules Committee confided . . . that Senate Majority leader Everett Dirksen had been told by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to ignore Baker's call girl connections because . . . "a complete investigation would disclose such a large percentage of the Senate as being of such low morals that it could undermine the confidence of the people in the integrity of their government and may even prove disastrous to the country.'" Carol Hoffecker, *Honest John Williams: U.S. Senator from Delaware* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000)

House ally.<sup>54</sup>

Had Hoover not cooperated, the results for the administration and the country could have been disastrous, argues presidential historian Michael Beschloss:

'[W]ere the President forced to resign in 1963 or 1964 in a sex-and-security scandal, the politics of the United States could have been poisoned for a generation. The American Right and others might have explained Kennedy's failure to exploit the American nuclear advantage at the Bay of Pigs, in Laos and Berlin, and during the Missile Crisis as the result of the President's compromise by Soviet bloc intelligence.

In a climate in which every American decision of the Cold War would be scrutinized for signs that American officials were secretly laboring under the thumb of the Russians, what American leader would have had the courage to bring similar suspicion on himself by pressing ahead for better relations with the Soviet Union?'<sup>55</sup>

## **The Johnson Years**

Lyndon Johnson certainly remembered Hoover's service in the Bobby Baker sex scandal when he assumed the presidency after the assassination of JFK. Hoover had long been friendly with the Texas Senator and Vice President. Now he continued to win favor with President Johnson by offering up titillating gossip on members of Congress and various celebrities. According to White House aide Joseph Califano (later a law partner of Edward Bennett Williams, and lawyer for the Democratic National Committee), President Johnson once 'even had one Senator's mistress contacted to have her persuade her lover to vote to break a filibuster'.<sup>56</sup> Hoover also

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<sup>54</sup> Hersh, *The Dark Side of Camelot*, pp. 398-410; Summers, *Official and Confidential*, pp. 310-312; Flynt and Eisenbach, *One Nation Under Sex*, pp. 186-189; Peter Dale Scott, *Deep Politics and the Death of JFK* (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), pp. 230-232; Mel Ayton, 'The Truth About J. Edgar Hoover', *Crime*, 19 July 1995.

<sup>55</sup> Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, p. 617.

<sup>56</sup> Victory Lasky, *It Didn't Start with Watergate*, p. 202. On LBJ's love of gossip from the FBI, see also Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, pp. 577-578.

made himself indispensable by working to cover up the 1964 arrest of Johnson's chief of staff on a morals charge at the men's room of a YMCA two blocks from the White House.<sup>57</sup>

Hoover, meanwhile, snooped relentlessly into Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s private life as part of his fanatical campaign to discredit and destroy one of America's greatest civil rights leaders. Bugs installed in King's hotel rooms picked up evidence of his sexual flings – material Hoover then used to pressure the Kennedys to distance themselves from the reverend.<sup>58</sup> In 1964, Hoover circulated smears against King to key cabinet officers, intelligence chiefs, U.S. ambassadors, and reporters; but to his fury, no one leaked the scurrilous material. That November, after King had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, a senior FBI official (or officials) sent King a poison pen letter, with a sample surveillance tape enclosed. It threatened to expose him as a 'colossal fraud and an evil, vicious one at that', and invited him to commit suicide 'before your filthy, abnormal fraudulent self is bared to the nation'. When King received the letter and the tape – knowing full well that it came from the FBI – he told aides despondently, 'They are out to break me.'<sup>59</sup> He nonetheless kept up his historic organizing efforts until an assassin put him down in 1968.

Ultimately, no politician had the courage or independence to curb Hoover's abuse of compromising sexual secrets. The Director's legendary confidential files kept legislators and Presidents in line, even without specific threats. When Harry Truman succeeded Roosevelt as President and learned about the extent of FBI surveillance, he

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57 Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, pp. 567-570; J. R. de Szigethy, 'Blackmail in America: A Dark History', August 2004, at <[http://www.americanmafia.com/feature\\_articles\\_274.html](http://www.americanmafia.com/feature_articles_274.html)>.

58 Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, pp. 567-570.

59 Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, pp. 572-576. In 1968, after King was assassinated, Hoover leaked to Jack Anderson a story that the FBI believed King might have been murdered by an African American dentist from Los Angeles who was jealous of King for sleeping with his wife and possibly even fathering a child with her. Pearson and Anderson eventually broke the sordid story in context of a column about Attorney General Robert Kennedy approving the FBI wiretaps on King – hurting Hoover's foe in African-American communities during 1968 primary election. See Feldstein, *Poisoning the Press*, pp. 89-90.

wrote in his diary, 'We want no Gestapo or Secret Police. FBI is tending in that direction. They are dabbling in sex-life scandals and plain blackmail . . . and all congressmen and senators are afraid of [Hoover]'.<sup>60</sup> Truman did precisely nothing about it. Years later, President Nixon would observe that 'Information was one of the primary sources of Edgar Hoover's power . . . and that knowledge made him as valuable to his friends as it made him dangerous to his enemies'. Former CIA Director Richard Helms told a biographer of Hoover:

'I learned a lot from fellows who had worked in Hoover's office before joining us. I used to hear how certain senators and congressmen would get caught in cathouses over in Virginia. When the report came in, Hoover would put it in his personal safe. If there was any problem with that senator, he would say, "Don't worry, I've got those papers right in my safe. You don't have a thing to worry about." . . . He played a very skillful game.'<sup>61</sup>

It was Jack Anderson who first exposed the full extent of the FBI's snooping into the sex lives of famous Americans. He cited raunchy FBI files on actors Rock Hudson, Marlon Brando and Jane Fonda; novelist James Baldwin; quarterback Joe Namath; boxers Muhammed Ali and Joe Louis; and civil rights leaders Martin Luther King and Ralph Abernathy, among others. Anderson's first column on the issue ran on 1 May 1972. A day later, Hoover died of a heart attack.<sup>62</sup>

### **Was Watergate really a sex scandal?**

Sexual blackmail reached its apogee during the Nixon years, and may have played a key part in triggering the Watergate scandal. A theory first seriously advanced by investigative reporter Jim Hougan in his 1984 book, *Secret Agenda*, holds that employees of the Democratic National Committee spent

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<sup>60</sup> Anthony Summers, 'The Secret Life of J. Edgar Hoover', *Guardian*, 31 December 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Summers, *Official and Confidential*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>62</sup> Feldstein, *Poisoning the Press*, p. 298; Jay Feldman, *Manufacturing Hysteria: A History of Scapegoating, Surveillance, and Secrecy in Modern America* (New York: Pantheon, 2011), p. 295.

time during the 1972 Presidential campaign setting up dates between Democratic officials and classy call girls who operated out of the neighboring Columbia Plaza apartments. He speculates that the CIA was keeping tabs on the many dignitaries and high-level officials who patronized the prostitutes; also monitoring them, in all likelihood, was a private eye employed by James McCord, head of security for the Nixon re-election campaign. Watergate, wrote Hougan, 'was not so much a partisan political scandal as it was, secretly, a sex scandal, the unpredictable outcome of a CIA operation that, in the simplest terms, tripped on its own shoelaces.'<sup>63</sup>

His theory was amplified by authors of the best-seller *Silent Coup* and endorsed on the speaker circuit by Watergate burglar Gordon Liddy.<sup>64</sup> They hold that when details of a Columbia Plaza prostitution ring became known to local law enforcement after the chance arrest of one major participant, White House Counsel John Dean sent the burglars into the DNC to learn more – either to blackmail the Democrats, or to discover what they knew about the involvement of his fiancée

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<sup>63</sup> Jim Hougan, *Secret Agenda* (New York: Random House, 1984), p. xviii. Hougan speculated that during the second break-in the Watergate burglars 'may have been looking for a kind of calendar, or log' of call-girl hook-ups arranged through the DNC. As several reviewers noted, Hougan combined significant new revelations with heaps of speculation based on circumstantial evidence. For a respectful but critical review, see J. Anthony Lukas, 'A New Explanation of Watergate', *New York Times*, 11 November 1984. For a longer and more sympathetic review, see Phil Stanford, 'Watergate Revisited', *Columbia Journalism Review*, March/April, 1986.

Stanford later contributed to the literature with his own book, *White House Call Girl: The Real Watergate Story* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2013). As early as 1975, Jack Anderson broached this theory: 'The Watergate wiretap transcripts, still sealed by the courts, are full of sex talk. What the White House wanted to know about the Democrats, apparently, was their sex secrets. The Waterbuggers bugged the only telephone that didn't go through the Democratic headquarters switchboard. The Democrats used this phone, therefore, to make their most intimate calls.' See Jack Anderson, 'Ford Used Files Against Douglas', *Nevada Daily Mail*, 3 February 1975.

<sup>64</sup> Len Colodny and Robert Gettlin, *Silent Coup: The Removal of a President* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991). See also Stanford, *White House Call Girl*.

with one of the prostitutes. Dean then led the entire Watergate cover-up, hoodwinking not only prosecutors but his fellow White House colleagues, who never suspected what he was up to.

This wildly revisionist scenario sharply divides Watergate experts. Dean called *Silent Coup* 'absolute garbage' and waged an eight-year legal battle in federal courts to punish his accusers. The *Washington Post's* Bob Woodward called the book 'untrue and pathetic'; his side-kick Carl Bernstein derided it as 'lunatic', and Sam Dash, chief counsel to the Senate Watergate Committee, termed it 'a fraud'. On the other hand, *Los Angeles Times* national correspondent Robert Scheer praised it, as did Watergate historian Joan Hoff, saying the authors 'destroyed what little plausibility Woodward & Bernstein had'.<sup>65</sup>

The theory starts with one of several puzzling anomalies that Hougan discovered from declassified FBI case records and interviewing obscure Watergate participants. A Washington D. C. police detective who arrested the burglars *in flagrante* found a key in the possession of the Cuban burglar Eugenio Martinez. It fit the desk of a secretary named Ida Wells, who was a relative nobody in the DNC.<sup>66</sup> The burglars had also affixed a camera to her desk, as if to record documents. Wells,

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65 George Lardner, Jr., 'Watergate Libel Suit Settled', *Washington Post*, 23 July 1997; Steve Weinberg, 'Was Nixon Duped? Did Woodward Lie', *Columbia Journalism Review*, November/December 1991; see also review blurbs of *Silent Coup* on <[www.watergate.com](http://www.watergate.com)>.

For John Dean's summary of the affair, see Dean, *Conservatives Without Conscience* (New York: Viking, 2006), pp. xvii-xxvii. See also Robbyn Swan, 'Was Sex the Motive for the Watergate Break-In?' *Telegraph*, 16 June 2012, which partially debunks the sex angle.

For more coverage of the Dean lawsuit, see Andy Thibault, 'Watergate Figure Says Sex Talk Was Target of Break-In: Claims DNC Boss Was Not the Focus', *Washington Times*, 13 September 1996; 'Liddy Acquitted of Slander with Watergate Tie-In', *Washington Times*, 14 April 1998; 'Liddy Case Dismissed', Associated Press, 29 January 2001; Darragh Johnson, 'Second Trial Opens In Watergate Case', *Washington Post*, 25 June 2002.

66 That a key to Ida Wells' desk found on one Watergate burglar is a genuine mystery, but it's possible that Alfred Baldwin made an impression of her desk lock while scoping out the DNC during an undercover visit to the office.

as it happened, was secretary to a mid-level Democratic campaign official named Spencer Oliver. For reasons never fully explained, James McCord bugged Oliver's phone during the first Watergate burglary. It was the only bug that worked.<sup>67</sup> Jeb Magruder, Nixon's deputy campaign manager, said the conversation summaries 'were not particularly revealing of anything of any importance'.<sup>68</sup>

According to the Watergate prosecutor, much of what it picked up was not political but sexual – 'extremely personal, intimate, and potentially embarrassing'.<sup>69</sup> Nixon's aide John Ehrlichman told the President after the break-in that the bug at the DNC overheard 'mostly this fellow Oliver phoning his girlfriends all over the country lining up assignments'.<sup>70</sup> Apparently, Oliver was out of the office a great deal, so other DNC employees also used his phone for private, intimate calls.

Wells said in response to a 1997 lawsuit that she was 'appalled by a lot of the romantic and sexual behavior I saw going on at the DNC. . . . People were just sleeping with each other kind of indiscriminately . . . one-night stands and things like that'. She gossiped about all this on her phone. 'It was kind of crude at times', she admitted.<sup>71</sup>

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67 In McCord's account, at least. Hougan argues that no bug was ever placed in the DNC by the Nixon gang. The only thing we can say for sure is that the FBI and phone company found no bugs after the break-in.

A bug was found on Oliver's phone in September 1972, but it may have been placed there subsequent to the burglary.

68 Magruder comments in *Watergate and Afterward: The Legacy of Richard M. Nixon*, eds. Leon Friedman and William F. Levantrosser (Greenwood Press, 1992).

69 Quoted in Jim Hougan, 'On the New Inquisition', <<http://jimhougan.com/index2.html>>.

70 White House conversation between President Nixon and John Ehrlichman, 14 April 1973, transcript at <<http://nixon.archives.gov/forresearchers/find/tapes/watergate/wsp/428-028.pdf>>.

71 Quoted in Summers, *Abuse of Power*, pp. 417-418. John Dean writes, 'Henry Rothblatt, who represented the Cuban American [burglars], had learned that the DNC surveillance had revealed that both married men and women at the committee were having office affairs; he wanted to leak this information to embarrass them over the lawsuit' filed by the DNC after Watergate. John Dean, *The Nixon Defense: What He Knew and When He Knew It* (New York: Viking, 2014), pp. 152, 676, note 27.

One of the first major histories of Watergate noted as an aside, 'So spicy were some of the conversations on this phone that they have given rise to unconfirmed reports that the telephone was being used for some sort of call girl service catering to congressmen and other prominent Washingtonians'.<sup>72</sup> Supporting that speculation, a Washington, D.C. attorney named Phillip Bailey, who represented various prostitutes, said that he had convinced Oliver's secretary at the DNC to arrange phone dates on behalf of a prostitute he represented, Heidi Riken.<sup>73</sup> Long protected by one of DC's leading mobsters, Riken worked out of the Columbia Plaza apartments. Riken, reportedly, was best friends with John Dean's fiancée, Maureen. The authors of *Silent Coup* and, more recently, Phil Stanford in his book *The White House Call Girl*, argue that John Dean ordered the second break-in at the DNC at least in part to find out what dirt the Democrats might have on Maureen and other Republicans.<sup>74</sup>

That's a huge stretch. There definitely were call girls operating out of the Columbia Plaza apartments, who serviced both DNC officials and Republicans.<sup>75</sup> The 'trick book' obtained by police from one such operation contained the names of 'movers and shakers of the capital', including 'at least one U.S. senator, an astronaut, a Saudi prince, a clutch of U.S. and

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<sup>72</sup> J. Anthony Lukas, *Nightmare: The Underside of the Nixon Years* (New York: Viking, 1976), p. 201.

<sup>73</sup> Stanford writes that a federal prosecutor noted in a 1996 deposition that the FBI learned from its investigation of Bailey that 'employees at the DNC . . . were assisting in getting the Democrats connected with prostitutes at the Columbia Plaza'. But this doesn't prove anything about Oliver's phone. Stanford also notes that Bailey was not indicted for any activities related to Riken's Columbia Plaza operation or the DNC. See Stanford, *White House Call Girl*, pp. 109, 115.

<sup>74</sup> Stanford, *White House Call Girl*, contains fascinating material on Riken's connections to various mobsters, including the powerful czar of gambling in the Washington area, Joseph Nesline.

<sup>75</sup> Robbyn Swan in 'Was Sex the Motive for the Watergate Break-In?' *Telegraph*, 16 June 2012, cites the confirmation of Barbara Ralabate, a former madam who managed call girls at the Columbia Plaza apartments. According to Swan, however, Ralabate 'appeared not even to know' Dean's fiancée.

[Korean] CIA intelligence agents and a host of prominent Democrats'.<sup>76</sup> Dean did take an interest in finding out whether anyone at the White House might be caught up in police and FBI investigations of call girls in the capital; just a week before the second Watergate break-in, he called into his office a local prosecutor who had obtained lawyer Phil Bailey's address book, to examine its names. Dean subsequently fired one White House lawyer who was indiscreet enough to let herself be photographed by Bailey with no clothes on.

Dean's own girlfriend Maureen was also in Bailey's address book, but that didn't prove she had any ties to the sex trade or anything to be embarrassed about. And none of this provides hard evidence that call girl rings were the target of the break-in. The judge who heard her defamation suit noted that Bailey, the primary source for the prostitution stories, 'was a disbarred attorney and convicted felon with a long history of substance abuse and mental illness, had changed his story about the prostitution ring several times and was not a reliable source.'<sup>77</sup> The Watergate burglary team member who transcribed calls from Oliver's phone at the DNC said he could 'categorically state . . . that no such [call girl ring] operation was being conducted, at least from the conversations I was monitoring'.<sup>78</sup> He confirmed in a sworn statement that he heard intimate calls but no talk of 'sex for money'.<sup>79</sup> And there are plausible explanations for the bugging of Oliver's phone that have nothing to do with call

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<sup>76</sup> Hougan, *Secret Agenda*, p. 115. The trick book included the names of CIA agent Ed Wilson and KCIA agent Tongsun Park, who allegedly arranged 'trysts for the politically powerful' at Park's George Town Club, which the CIA may in turn have monitored (Hougan, *Secret Agenda*, pp. 120-121). However, the source for this information is highly suspect, the fugitive CIA officer Frank Terpil.

<sup>77</sup> This paraphrase of the District Court opinion is in United States Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit, *Ida Maxwell WELLS, Plaintiff-Appellant, v. G. Gordon LIDDY, Defendant-Appellee, Phillip Mackin Bailey, Movant*, No. 98-1962. Decided July 28, 1999.

<sup>78</sup> Summers, *Abuse of Power*, p. 529 n 13. Summers added, 'More recently he testified that had ordinary members of the public heard the conversations, many might have thought they were prostitution-related'.

<sup>79</sup> Andy Thibault, 'Watergate Figure Says Sex Talk Was Target of Break-In', *Washington Times*, 13 September 1966.

girls.<sup>80</sup> Proponents of the sex ring theory also conveniently omit the fact that the burglars were captured in the office of Democratic Chairman Larry O'Brien with a couple of ceiling panels removed – evidence that he was one of their main targets.

### **Nixon and sexual blackmail**

All this is titillating, but it's just a side-show to the bigger story of the Nixon scandals.<sup>81</sup> It's also just one part of a much bigger story about sex and politics during the Nixon years.

Nixon was acutely aware of the political dangers posed by sexual rumors. He had dodged a potential scandal after the FBI, CIA and Britain's MI6 investigated him in 1967 for having an affair in Hong Kong with a suspected Chinese spy.<sup>82</sup> J.

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80 For example, the Nixon team may simply have wanted to know about his strategic efforts during the Democratic primary to support a more centrist and viable candidate than George McGovern. See Robert Parry, 'The Enduring Secrets of Watergate', 23 May 2012, at <<http://consortiumnews.com/2012/05/22/the-enduring-secrets-of-watergate/>>. Or, consistent with the Howard Hughes theory, the burglars may have wanted to know what if anything Oliver knew about his father's sensitive work for the firm managing Hughes's affairs in Washington D. C. See Hougan, *Secret Agenda*, pp. 114-115. Watergate prosecutor Earl Silbert was said to have claimed that 'Hunt was trying to blackmail Spencer (Oliver)'. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, *Nomination of Earl J. Silbert to be United States Attorney*, Hearings, 93d Cong., 2d sess., Part I (1974), pp. 46-53. If so, the motive could have been partly personal: Hunt may have been in a power struggle with Oliver (a Democrat) and perhaps with Oliver's father, who headed the Hughes account at the Mullen agency.

81 In the words of Alan Westin, 'Whether or not one is convinced by Hougan's evidence about the CIA's infiltration and manipulation of White House operations is not critical to the essential judgment of Watergate. . . [N]othing that we now call the Watergate affair and our moral judgment of it will change, in terms of presidential responsibility and the subsequent cover-up, even if we learn eventually that the CIA was undercutting the White House Plumbers and using its surveillances to advance the CIA's own intelligence goals'. See his remarks in *Watergate and Afterward*, eds. Friedman and Levantrosser, p. 57.

82 John Crewdson, 'FBI Investigated Hong Kong Woman Friend of Nixon in '60s to Determine if She Was Foreign Agent', *New York Times*, 22 June 1976; Barbara Wilkins, 'Marianna Liu Admits She Knew Nixon in Hong Kong, but Says There Was No Spying and No Romance',

*Continues at the foot of the next page*

Edgar Hoover later briefed President Nixon personally, telling him solemnly, 'I know there's no truth to this . . . I'll never speak of it to anyone'. As one of Hoover's assistants observed, 'It was one of his favorite speeches, one he gave often to politicians' who joined the ranks of his potential blackmail victims.<sup>83</sup>

During Nixon's first term as President, White House Special Counsel Charles Colson learned from a friendly reporter that the administration's chief of protocol was using ladies from a notorious New York City brothel to entertain visiting dignitaries. Soon thereafter, on November 20, 1971, the *New York Times* ran a buried but dangerous story headlined, 'Possible Blackmail of Nixon Officials Checked Here'. It reported that 'at least two high-ranking officials in the Nixon administration . . . are among the people the Manhattan District Attorney's Office intends to question about the possibility that they were blackmailed because of their association with an East Side brothel'.

The up-scale whorehouse, run by the famous madam Xaviera Hollander, author of *The Happy Hooker*, had been secretly bugged by a city commission established to investigate police corruption. White House investigator Jack Caulfield, a former New York City police detective, obtained a copy of Hollander's client list, so he could do damage control. He reported, to the relief of senior administration officials, that the list was unlikely to see the light of day because it put notable figures from both major parties at risk.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps for

*Note 82 continued*

*People*, 4 October 1976; Toby Harnden, 'MI6 took spy snaps of Nixon and Chinese "mistress"', *Sunday Times*, 11 January 2015; Summers, *Arrogance of Power*, pp. 269-270; David Wise, *Tiger Trap: America's Secret Spy War with China* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2011), p. 169.

<sup>83</sup> William Sullivan with Sam Sloan, *The Bureau: My Thirty Years in Hoover's FBI* (New York: Ishi Press, 2011), pp. 197-198.

<sup>84</sup> 'Possible Blackmail of Nixon Officials Checked Here', *New York Times*, 20 November 1971, p. 15; Summers, *Arrogance of Power*, pp. 420-421. Emil Mosbacher's deputy chief of protocol was Nick Ruwe, who had a reputation as a wild bachelor. Ruwe allegedly made frequent use of call girls at the Columbia Plaza, though 'whether to provide sex for government guests or for personal pleasure, or both, remains uncertain'. See Summers, *Arrogance of Power*, pp. 422-423.

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the same reason, charges were dropped against Hollander.

Political operatives in the Nixon White House were deeply interested in who was having sex with whom, what kind of sex it was, and above all, how it could be exploited politically. Nixon himself had been preoccupied with secret homosexual relationships as far back as the 1940s, when his investigation of alleged Soviet spy and suspected homosexual Alger Hiss launched his national political career.<sup>85</sup> Years later, when President Nixon wanted to attack his many 'enemies' in the media, he directed J. Edgar Hoover to search FBI files for names of 'the homosexuals known and suspected in the Washington press corps'.<sup>86</sup>

One of the earliest targets of President Nixon's interest in sexual indiscretions was Senator Edward Kennedy, the last living threat from the family that had beaten and shamed him in the 1960 election. Nixon assigned to hatchet man Charles Colson 'his long-dreamed-of-hope of catching Senator Teddy Kennedy in bed with a woman not his wife', in the words of White House Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman. Knowing that 'the one jugular that fascinated [Nixon] even more than Larry O'Brien was Teddy Kennedy's', Haldeman himself directed a private eye hired by the White House to 'catch [Kennedy] in the sack with one of his babes'.<sup>87</sup> Colson, meanwhile, tried to

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*Note 84 continued*

Mosbacher's brother Robert was a Nixon fundraiser whose cash was used to mount the Watergate break-in; he later became Secretary of Commerce under President George H. W. Bush.

85 Nixon believed that ex-Communist Whittaker Chambers, the main witness against Hiss, had romantic feelings for the State Department officer. Years later, confronted with evidence of a military spy ring in his administration, Nixon requested that the main suspect be questioned with a polygraph about his homosexuality. As he told Ehrlichman and Mitchell, 'Because we got a couple on Hiss and Chambers, you know. Nobody knows that, but that's the background on how that one began. They were both that way. And relationships sometimes poison a lot of things. Now if [Jack] Anderson . . . if there's any possibility of this, John, that could be a key as well. If something, he may be under blackmail.' From White House conversation, 22 December 1971, in Douglas Brinkley and Luke Nichter, *The Nixon Tapes: 1971-1972* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), p. 336.

86 Feldstein, *Poisoning the Press*, p. 130.

87 H. R. Haldeman with Joseph DiMona, *The Ends of Power* (NY: Times Books, 1978), pp. 6, 60.

publicize an alleged affair that Kennedy carried on with socialite Amanda Burden by arranging to station at each of his campaign appearances someone carrying a sign asking, 'Where's Amanda, Teddy?'<sup>88</sup> Such tactics achieved little, however. Colson was able to get photos of Kennedy dancing with an Italian princess in Paris published in the *National Enquirer*, but that caused no stir.<sup>89</sup> Colson may have gotten more results on other occasions, however; as he told President Nixon on 2 January 1973, 'I did things out of Boston, we did some blackmail and . . . I'll go to my grave before I ever disclose it. But we did a hell of a lot of things and never got caught.'<sup>90</sup>

Sexual blackmail was also at the heart of the first major felony committed by the Nixon White House 'Special Investigations Unit,' or 'Plumbers' squad. The secret unit had been formed at President Nixon's directive in the summer of 1971 to uncover and silence unauthorized leakers of administration secrets. Topping their list of targets was Daniel Ellsberg, a former Pentagon official who had helped draft the top-secret Pentagon Papers, a highly critical study of the history of the Vietnam War. Ellsberg had leaked the 7,000-page report to the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, prompting Nixon's Attorney General to seek an unprecedented injunction against publication and bring a criminal indictment against Ellsberg. Though Ellsberg faced 115 years imprisonment and \$120,000 in fines, that wasn't enough for Nixon, who demanded that his underlings 'destroy [Ellsberg] in the press'.<sup>91</sup>

Retired CIA officer E. Howard Hunt, newly recruited to the Plumbers unit, recommended ways to accomplish the 'neutralization of Ellsberg' and his supporters by 'destroy[ing] his public image and credibility'. In particular, Hunt proposed that the Plumbers 'obtain Ellsberg's files from his psychiatric

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<sup>88</sup> Dean, *The Nixon Defense*, p. 151. Burden became New York's chief urban planner during the Bloomberg administration.

<sup>89</sup> Summers, *Arrogance of Power*, p. 379.

<sup>90</sup> Dean, *The Nixon Defense*, p. 198.

<sup>91</sup> Stanley Kutler, *Abuse of Power: The New Nixon Tapes* (New York: The Free Press, 1997, p. 6 (30 June 1971 to Mitchell).

analyst'.<sup>92</sup> Hunt and his sidekick G. Gordon Liddy, an ex-FBI agent, had heard rumors that the Pentagon Papers leaker engaged in orgies and group sex. They thought exposure of his 'oedipal conflicts or castration fears' could destroy Ellsberg's reputation.<sup>93</sup> Because an aging and cautious Hoover no longer cooperated with White House officials to stage illegal 'black bag jobs', Hunt recommended mounting a 'covert operation' to steal Ellsberg's file from the office of his Beverly Hills psychiatrist.

With White House authorization, and Liddy's help, Hunt recruited several of his Cuban-American associates from CIA days to stage the burglary over Labor Day weekend in 1971. The team botched the job – they found no files and made a mess of the office – but it set the stage for the later Watergate cover-up by implicating top White House officials in a serious felony. Eventually, exposure of the 1971 burglary set Ellsberg free and sent six Nixon operatives, including one of his closest White House advisers, to jail.<sup>94</sup>

Nixon's team also made sex a central part of their 'dirty tricks' operations against the Democrats in 1972. For example, they sent a fake mailing from presidential front-runner Senator Ed Muskie to thousands of Florida voters claiming that Hubert Humphrey had been arrested for drunk driving with 'a well-known call-girl' and that Senator Henry Jackson had an illegitimate child by a seventeen-year-old girl and had also been arrested for homosexual activities.<sup>95</sup>

The ultimate White House concept for sexual dirty tricks was encapsulated in a master plan drafted by Gordon Liddy for disrupting the Democrats during the 1972 presidential campaign. One component of his plan envisaged eavesdropping on the 1972 Democratic convention in Miami from an opulent barge equipped with 'a lush bedroom

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92 Fred Emery, *Watergate: The Corruption of American Politics and the Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. 60.

93 J. Anthony Lukas, *Nightmare*, p. 92; Hunt, *American Spy*, pp. 181-182.

94 Lukas, *Nightmare*, p. 101, footnote.

95 Summers, *Arrogance of Power*, p. 381; Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities, *Final Report*, 93/2 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1974) p. 169.

featuring a large mirror over the big king-sized bed', from which prostitutes posing as 'idly rich young women' would entertain 'high campaign officials' while being tape-recorded.<sup>96</sup> Quite aside from the women, the boat would have been a much more attractive venue for the Democrats than the convention floor, if Liddy had succeeded in his plan to sabotage the hotel's air conditioning system that summer. Fortunately for the convention delegates, Liddy's superiors never approved funding for these exotic plans, and his arrest for involvement in the Watergate burglary ended his advocacy of them.

When Sen. George McGovern won the Democratic nomination, the Nixon team turned their investigative microscope on him. Nixon's long-time political fixer Murray Chotiner hired conservative writer Lucianne Goldberg for \$1,000 a week to infiltrate the McGovern campaign as a reporter and dig up harmful gossip. 'They were looking for really dirty stuff', she recalled. 'Who was sleeping with whom . . . that sort of thing'.<sup>97</sup> Evidently, she didn't find much, but her interest in the subject never flagged. Years later Goldberg would ghost-write a draft of the romance novel *Washington Wives* under the name of John Dean's wife Maureen; and in the early 1990s she persuaded a friend to illegally tape record the conversations of White House intern Monica Lewinsky about her sexual relations with President Clinton.<sup>98</sup>

### **William Jefferson Clinton and 'womanizing'**

**W**atergate unleashed American journalists to engage in much more aggressive, adversarial standards of reporting. One

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<sup>96</sup> G. Gordon Liddy, *Will* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), p. 274; Summers, *Arrogance of Power*, pp. 400-401. Liddy claimed that Magruder asked for one change to SAPPHIRE: 'that the prostitutes . . . be brought up to Washington from Miami and put to work immediately'. He also asked if he could be set up with one of the women. 'If GEMSTONE were approved, I told him, he'd be paying for them anyway and could take his pick'. (Liddy, *Will*, pp. 285-286)

<sup>97</sup> Lukas, *Nightmare*, p. 161; 'Writer Declares She Was GOP Spy in McGovern Camp', *New York Times*, 19 August 1973.

<sup>98</sup> Judith Miller and Doreen Carvajal, 'The Book Agent: A Maverick Who is No Friend of Bill', *New York Times*, 30 January 1998.

result was to end the quiet conspiracy of White House correspondents to hold back what they knew about the intimate affairs of Presidents. At the same time, however, public attitudes toward sex were changing fast, reducing the shame experienced by politicians caught in compromising behavior.

The media's post-Watergate aggressiveness was on full display in 1987, when the *Miami Herald* ignited a press and political firestorm by publishing evidence that Presidential candidate and former Senator Gary Hart was conducting an extramarital affair with a young blonde model, Donna Rice. Hart denied the charges, but soon resigned after reporters produced evidence of his reckless infidelity. Still, more than a few critics questioned the media's close scrutiny of Hart's sex life. So did millions of Americans, whose views about sex had liberalized since the 1960s. Two-thirds of adults polled by *Time* magazine disapproved of the media reporting on a candidate's sex life and 60 percent agreed that Hart's relationship with Rice was irrelevant to his candidacy.<sup>99</sup>

In 1992, a contrite and confessional Bill Clinton survived revelations about his long affair with nightclub singer Gennifer Flowers to become President of the United States. Before long, however, Clinton's lust for women was fueling the biggest national political scandal since Watergate. 'Monicagate' got its name from a young White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, with whom President Bill Clinton had a sporadic but months-long office affair. After firmly denying their sexual liaison, Clinton was finally forced to admit to an 'improper physical relationship' with Lewinsky after being hauled before a grand jury by a conservative Republican independent counsel, Kenneth Starr. It was the bizarre culmination of Starr's failed, multi-year campaign to implicate Bill and Hillary Clinton in fraudulent financial and land deals in Arkansas, known as the Whitewater investigation.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>99</sup> John Dillin, 'Press Unfair to Hart?' *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 May 1987.

<sup>100</sup> This inquiry 'dwarfed all other independent counsel investigations, including Iran-Contra, and exceeded the cost to the government of the failure of the savings and loan ostensibly under

Evidence that Clinton had lied in a civil suit about his relations with Lewinsky led to his impeachment by the House of Representatives – the first in more than a century, and only the second in U.S. history.

The story of Clinton's affair with Lewinsky was uncovered by *Newsweek* reporter Michael Isikoff, who had spent months doggedly investigating rumors about Clinton's sex life. With no trace of irony, he wrote in his personal account of chasing the story, 'As a college student, in the early 1970s, I had been inspired by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein as they uncovered the crimes of Richard Nixon.'<sup>101</sup>

Unlike Woodward and Bernstein, Isikoff spent his time tracking down mere misdemeanors, not high crimes. But like his illustrious predecessors, Isikoff followed a trail blazed by administration opponents and the FBI. The right-wing billionaire Richard Mellon Scaife had bankrolled a major investigation of Clinton's sex life and the private lawsuit that tripped him up in order to destroy his presidency.<sup>102</sup> The FBI had no business joining that smear campaign, which had nothing to do with the original Whitewater probe. But Starr vindictively resorted to sex as a weapon after failing to implicate Clinton in corruption. As Isikoff himself wrote in 1997:

'Looking for evidence that Bill Clinton had lied about his Arkansas business deals, frustrated Whitewater investigators last November came up with a new strategy: FBI interviews with every Arkansas state

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*Note 100 continued*

investigation'. See David Kendall, 'Whitewater Was No Close Call for Prosecutors', *Washington Post*, 10 July 2016. Kendall and other critics note that the highly partisan Starr, who had no experience as a prosecutor, was appointed by a panel of right-wing judges who fired the original independent counsel. See also Susan Schmidt, 'Fiske Removed as Counsel; Fiske Ouster Stuns Congress, Staff', *Washington Post*, 6 August 1994.

101 Woody Klein, *The Inside Stories of Modern Political Scandals: How Investigative Reporters Have Changed the Course of American History* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), pp. 73-88.

102 Hedrik Hertzberg, 'Can You Forgive Him?' *New Yorker*, 11 March 2002; Murray Waas, 'Newsreal: The Men Who Kept Paul Jones Lawsuit Going', *Salon*, 2 April 1998 at <[http://www.salon.com/1998/04/02/cov\\_02news/](http://www.salon.com/1998/04/02/cov_02news/)>.

trooper who'd served on Clinton's detail in the mid- to late 1980s. The agents asked about the then governor's out-of-the-limelight contacts with a roster of characters, including more than six women with whom Clinton had allegedly had affairs. Starr's gumshoes say they were looking for loose talk, pillow talk, late-night slip-ups or soulful confessions to an intimate – anything to help make a fraud or perjury case.

The . . . project, which ended in February, was apparently a dud. But last week it blew up in Starr's face, raising new questions about his probe at a time when the political world is wondering where – and when – the three-year . . . effort will end.<sup>103</sup>

It all ended, \$70 million later, with Starr producing an X-rated final report on Clinton's 'sleaze factor'. The President survived his impeachment when the Senate failed to convict and the public largely forgave his personal sins. It also ended with the media sinking further in the public's estimation for its frenzied and salacious reporting.<sup>104</sup> As former Watergate prosecutor Richard Ben-Veniste commented at the time,

'Sadly, a wholesome desire to emulate the world-famous Watergate team of Woodward and Bernstein has, over time, morphed into a desperate competition among some in the media for fame and glory irrespective of the material available. . . . [J]ournalistic effort often is trumped by sensationalism for the sake of its entertainment value. Polls have quantified the slippage in public esteem in which journalist are held. Notable journalists have resigned and now seek to call attention to the changes from outside the profession.'<sup>105</sup>

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103 Michael Isikoff and Howard Fineman, 'A Starr-Crossed Probe?' *Newsweek*, 7 July 1997.

104 For an angry commentary on media malpractice by the former president of the New England Press Association, see Ross Connelly, 'Clinton Sex Scandal Reeks of Editorial Sanctimony', *Editor & Publisher*, 14 March 1998.

105 Richard Ben-Veniste, 'Facts Don't Lie: Whitewater Is Not Watergate', *Insight on the News*, 23 June 1997.

## **The future of sexual scandals and blackmail in America**

None of that spelled an end to politicians paying a price for sexual indiscretions.<sup>106</sup> But as scholars Paul Apostolidis and Juliet Williams observed in a 2004 book on *Politics in the Age of Sex Scandals*:

'There is a general sense among politicians, commentators, and the American public at large that at some point during the past fifteen years, a line was crossed. After the exposure of Gary Hart's infidelity (on the good ship *Monkey Business*) ended his 1987 presidential primary run, after Anita Hill's charges of sexual harassment nearly derailed Clarence Thomas's confirmation to the U.S. Supreme Court, after Bob Packwood's ignominious exit from the U.S. Senate for just such behavior, and especially after Bill and Monica, Americans from most reaches of the ideological spectrum wonder whether so much fanfare over the sexual lives of political leaders is genuinely necessary to a well-functioning polity.'<sup>107</sup>

With changing cultural mores, Puritanism has lost its powerful hold on much of the American public – even for self-proclaimed conservative Christians who increasingly forgive sexual transgressions of Republican legislators.<sup>108</sup> As a result, shame

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<sup>106</sup> As one law school professor commented in 2015, 'the President [Clinton] was impeached for lying about a sexual affair by a House of Representatives led by a man [Newt Gingrich] who was also then hiding a sexual affair, who was supposed to be replaced by another Congressman [Bob Livingston] who stepped down when forced to reveal that he too was having a sexual affair, which led to the election of a new Speaker of the House [Dennis Hastert] who now has been indicted for lying about payments covering up his sexual contact with a boy'. See Orin Kerr, 'If I Understand the History Correctly', *Washington Post*, 29 May 2015.

<sup>107</sup> Apostolidis and Williams, *Public Affairs*, p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> Cases in point include Senator David Vitter, the first Republican Senator elected from Louisiana, who received the public's forgiveness after being exposed as a client of a prostitution service in Washington, D.C.; and Mark Sanford, the South Carolina governor who disappeared for six days in June 2009 to visit his Argentine mistress. Although he was censured for his dereliction of duty, he won election to the House of Representatives in 2013.

may not be dead, but it's not what it used to be. As the *New Yorker's* Adam Gopnik observed in 'The Changing American Sex Scandal':

'American culture – or at least the part of it that gets seen every night on television and read each day on the Internet – has lost its last pretenses of gentility, and of any reticence at all about matters sexual. Blow jobs and bum jobs are both part of the standard currency of the best pop entertainment; how could you embarrass someone out of office now by detailing their sexual antics when there would be nothing there that you hadn't just seen on "Girls"?'<sup>109</sup>

Despite the public's declining trust in the media and greater tolerance of private misbehavior, however, sexual blackmail and destructive public exposés are likely to remain an important force in America's deep politics. That's because, in the post-9/11 era, intelligence agencies have nearly unlimited powers to intrude on private lives. A case in point was the zealous use by the Justice Department under President George W. Bush of a provision of the post-9/11 Patriot Act to justify the FBI wiretapping New York Governor Eliot Spitzer as he arranged to meet a prostitute at a Washington hotel. The government's lurid leaks to the press forced his resignation, although he had committed no significant offense against the public. Spitzer's fall from power was cheered by Republicans and their friends on Wall Street. Attorney Ellen Brown noted:

'It may not be a coincidence that the revelation of his indiscretions with a high-priced call girl came less than a month after he published a bold editorial in the *Washington Post* titled "Predatory Lenders' Partner in Crime: How the Bush Administration Stopped the States from Stepping in to Help Consumers". The editorial exposed the collusion between the Treasury, the Federal Reserve and Wall Street in deregulating the banks in the guise of regulating them, by taking regulatory power away from the states. It was an issue

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<sup>109</sup> Adam Gopnik, 'The Changing American Sex Scandal', *The New Yorker*, 3 June 2015.

of the federal government versus the states, with the  
Feds representing the banks and the states  
representing consumers.’<sup>110</sup>

Supporting the theory that the investigation was politically  
motivated, law professor Scott Horton cited evidence that

‘the case was prioritized and lavishly funded because it  
involved Spitzer. That perfectly matched the interests of  
Republicans eager to see Spitzer taken down, and it  
directly contradicted the long-standing guidance given to  
federal prosecutors that investigations focusing on  
persons – particularly public persons of the political  
opposition – rather than crimes are inherently  
abusive.’<sup>111</sup>

The risk that the government will collect and abuse information  
about personal sin has become ever greater in this age of  
almost ubiquitous digital surveillance. Individuals leave digital  
traces everywhere they go with a smartphone and with every  
website they browse. Agencies like the NSA have  
extraordinary capacities to follow those traces and monitor our  
communications.

The risk is not merely theoretical. The *Washington Post*  
reported that many NSA surveillance files leaked by  
whistleblower Edward Snowden had ‘a startlingly intimate,  
even voyeuristic quality. They tell stories of love and  
heartbreak, illicit sexual liaisons, mental-health crises, political  
and religious conversions, financial anxieties and disappointed  
hopes’.<sup>112</sup> A 2012 NSA document suggested the agency could  
attack ‘radicalizers’ by exposing them for, among other things,  
‘viewing sexually explicit material online or using sexually  
explicit permissive language when communicating with

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110 Ellen Brown, ‘Not Too Big to Jail: Eliot Spitzer is Wall Street’s  
Worst Nightmare’, *Truthdig*, 19 August 2013 at  
<[http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/not\\_too\\_big\\_to\\_jail\\_eliot\\_spitzer\\_](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/not_too_big_to_jail_eliot_spitzer_is_wall_streets_worst_nightmare_20130819)  
[is\\_wall\\_streets\\_worst\\_nightmare\\_20130819](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/not_too_big_to_jail_eliot_spitzer_is_wall_streets_worst_nightmare_20130819)>.

111 Scott Horton, ‘The Man Who Brought Down Spitzer’, *The Daily  
Beast*, 9 December 2008 at <[http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/](http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2008/12/09/the-man-who-brought-down-spitzer.html)  
[2008/12/09/the-man-who-brought-down-spitzer.html](http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2008/12/09/the-man-who-brought-down-spitzer.html)>.

112 ‘In NSA-intercepted data, those not targeted far outnumber the  
foreigners who are’, *Washington Post*, 5 July 2014.

inexperienced young girls'.<sup>113</sup> Other documents released by Snowden show that the NSA's partners in Great Britain developed online techniques for luring targets into sexual 'honeytraps' so they could be discredited.<sup>114</sup> Speaking to the Council of Europe in 2014, the *Guardian* reported:

'Snowden said he did not believe the NSA was engaged in "nightmare scenarios", such as the active compilation of a list of homosexuals "to round them up and send them into camps". But he said that the infrastructure allowing this to happen had been built. The NSA, its allies, authoritarian governments and even private organizations could all abuse this technology, he said, adding that mass surveillance was a "global problem". It led to "less liberal and safe societies", he told the council.'<sup>115</sup>

In 1975, just one year after President Nixon resigned in disgrace, Idaho Senator Frank Church led the most sweeping investigation of U.S. intelligence agency abuses in history. One prescient focus of his investigation was the highly secretive National Security Agency. He warned that the government's ability to monitor our every communication leaves us 'no place to hide'. That warning remains all too relevant today to understanding the power of the deep state, including the issues that raised in this article about scandal, blackmail and political pressure. Let me close with a few of his prophetic words:

'If this government ever became a tyranny, if a dictator ever took charge in this country, the technological capacity that the intelligence community has given the government could enable it to impose total tyranny, and

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<sup>113</sup> Ryan Grim, 'Top-Secret Document Reveals NSA Spied on Porn Habits as Part of Plan to Discredit "Radicalizers"', *HuffingtonPost*, 26 November 2013 at <[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/26/nsa-porn-muslims\\_n\\_4346128.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/26/nsa-porn-muslims_n_4346128.html)>.

<sup>114</sup> Matthew Cole, *et al.*, 'Snowden Docs Show British Spies Used Sex and "Dirty Tricks"', NBC News, 7 February 2014 at <<http://www.nbcnews.com/news/investigations/snowden-docs-british-spies-used-sex-dirty-tricks-n23091>>.

<sup>115</sup> 'Edward Snowden: US government spied on human rights workers', *Guardian*, 8 April 2014.

there would be no way to fight back. . . I don't want to see this country ever go across the bridge. I know the capacity that is there to make tyranny total in America, and we must see to it that this agency and all agencies that possess this technology operate within the law and under proper supervision, so that we never cross over that abyss. That is the abyss from which there is no return.'<sup>116</sup>

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Jonathan Marshall is author or co-author of five books, including *The Lebanese Connection: Corruption, Civil War, and the International Drug Traffic* (Stanford, 2012); *Cocaine Politics: Drugs, Armies, and the CIA in Central America* (University of California, 1998); and *The Iran-Contra Connection: Secret Teams and Covert Operations in the Reagan Era* (South End Press, 1987).

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<sup>116</sup> Quoted in <[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perry\\_Fellwock](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Perry_Fellwock)>; cf. James Bamford, 'The Agency That Could Be Big Brother', *New York Times*, 25 December 2005; Glenn Greenwald, *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State* (Metropolitan Books, 2014), p. 201.

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