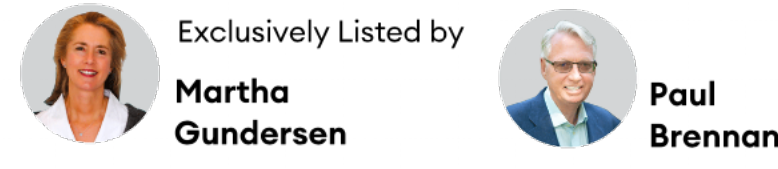




A Timeless Classic on Hither Lane

9 Hither Lane, East Hampton



Douglas Elliman

CONNECT



The Best of Enemies

Leaked documents, dirty tricks, nasty rumors: Richard Nixon and Jack Anderson deserved each other.

By Edward Kosner
Updated Sept. 23, 2010 12:01 am ET

SAVE PRINT TEXT

The Cliffs Notes version of The Fall of Richard Nixon is straightforward enough: The most corrupt president in American history was brought down by courageous young newspaper muckrakers who rescued the republic. But there is a supple revisionist narrative that adds more than a few layers of complexity to the established account and makes the tale much more interesting.

In "Poisoning the Press," Mark Feldstein tells the story of the long, feral struggle between two poor, driven boys born 30 miles apart in the West who grew up to be Richard Nixon and Jack Anderson. A protégé of the columnist Drew Pearson and a devout Mormon, Anderson tormented Nixon, a fighting (non-pacifist) Quaker, throughout his 30-year political career and, Mr. Feldstein says, taught Nixon some of the dirty tricks that would later destroy his presidency.

In Mr. Feldstein's telling, it's hard to decide whether Nixon or Anderson was the greater rogue. For every one of Nixon's well-known crimes against the republic, there turns out to be an equal and opposite crime against journalism by Anderson.

Dirty reporting tricks were Anderson's M.O. He bugged the hotel room of the notorious Bernard Goldfine, a Boston textile manufacturer who had bestowed an Oriental rug and a vicuna overcoat on President Eisenhower's starchy chief of staff, Sherman Adams. Anderson even rooted through J. Edgar Hoover's garbage searching for evidence that the G-man and his handsome deputy, Clyde Tolson, were lovers but found nothing more provocative than empty bottles of the antacid Gelusil. Anderson splashed stolen documents in his syndicated column, "Washington Merry-Go-Round," routinely made false accusations of homosexuality and drunkenness—and took payoffs from a mob-connected fixer.

Starting as a legman for the patrician, ruthless Pearson and then on his own, Anderson drew first blood on most of the scandals that tainted Nixon almost from the start. There was the infamous \$205,000 "loan"—\$1.6 million today—that was passed to Nixon through his squirrely brother Donald by Howard Hughes right after Nixon was re-elected as Eisenhower's vice president in 1956. In just the first three months of 1972, Anderson broke the stories of the Nixon administration's secret support for Pakistan on the eve of the India-Pakistan war; an additional \$100,000 payoff from Hughes; the fixing of an antitrust case against the conglomerate ITT in return for a \$400,000 pledge to underwrite the 1972 Republican National Convention; and the CIA plot against Salvador Allende, the Marxist president of Chile. Stolen or leaked secret documents fueled each Anderson scoop.

Nixon absorbed the lessons and fought back. He tried to insinuate a spy into Anderson's staff, arranged for counterfeit secret documents to be slipped to the columnist, even had the CIA dog him in an episode straight from the Keystone Kops. Nothing worked, and the president became so enraged by Anderson's relentless snooping that he uttered his own version of Henry II's famous death sentence for Thomas à Becket: "Will nobody rid me of this turbulent priest?"

After a hideaway chat with Nixon, his consiglieri, Chuck Colson, concluded that it was imperative "to stop Anderson at all costs." Soon plumbers E. Howard Hunt and G. Gordon Liddy were meeting with a CIA poison expert to explore slipping LSD to Anderson so that he would trip out while driving and die in a car crash. According to Mr. Feldstein, Liddy even volunteered to stab Anderson to death or break his neck in what would look like a street mugging before the hit was finally shelved as impractical.

Cataloging Nixon's villainies, Mr. Feldstein, a TV newsman turned academic, mines fresh treasures from the president's trove of secret Oval Office tapes. Nixon is even more foul-mouthed than we remember—and weirder.

At one point, the president orders his men to find out whether Anderson is the gay lover of a Navy yeoman who leaked to Anderson the secret documents proving the U.S. tilt to Pakistan. After all, Nixon says, Whittaker Chambers and Alger Hiss were romantically entangled: "They were both—that way." Earlier he lectures his aides on how "homosexuality destroyed" Greece and Rome. "Aristotle was a homo. We all know that," he explains. "So was Socrates. You know what happened to the Romans? The last six emperors were fags."

Nixon's path to Watergate was predictable, Mr. Feldstein suggests, given his character and his conviction that he had to defeat his implacable political and press enemies by any means. During the 1968 campaign, Pearson and Anderson prophesied that a President Nixon would "revert to type," create "dossiers on all potential rivals" and direct "personal goons" to do his dirty work.

They were right, but Jack Anderson, the crack sleuth, blew the biggest Nixon scandal of all. He had a tip about a Republican espionage operation against the Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate hotel. The columnist even ran into one of the burglars—a Cuban he knew—at the Washington airport a few hours before the break-in. But Anderson didn't work the tip hard and didn't pursue the Cuban, even though the man, before dashing off, blurted that he was on "top secret" business.

So a couple of young reporters named Woodward and Bernstein cultivated "Deep Throat" and carried Anderson's crusade to Nixon's doom. Seconding W. Joseph Campbell's recent book, "Getting It Wrong," Mr. Feldstein astutely notes: "All mythmaking to the contrary, Watergate journalism was largely derivative, reporting on investigations that were already under way before news outlets began covering them."

He nails the baleful Nixon-Anderson legacy, too. "The ghosts of Richard Nixon and Jack Anderson continue to haunt Washington long after their departure," he concludes. "The poisoning of politics and the press that marked their careers has tainted governance and public discourse ever since."

Mr. Kosner is the author of "It's News to Me," a memoir of his career as the editor of Newsweek, New York magazine, Esquire and the New York Daily News.

SPONSORED OFFERS

WALMART: Walmart coupon: \$10 off all walmart.com

KOHL'S: 20% off your entire order with Kohl's coupon

EXPEDIA: Expedia promo code - Up to 75% off Jamaica getaways

EBAY: Up to 15% off branded sneakers & more with eBay coupon

HOME DEPOT: 10% off furniture using Home Depot coupon code

TARGET: \$15 gift card with Spectra breast pump - Target offer

Advertisement for Quicken Loans featuring a car in a garage and text: "Mortgage Rates Fall Again. Quicken Loans continues to help homeowners find ways to save money on their mortgage. Select Your Mortgage Balance: \$50K-\$100K, \$100K-\$150K, \$150K-\$200K, \$200K-\$250K, \$250K+. REGALCULATE YOUR HOUSE PAYMENT WHEN YOU'RE READY. Quicken Loans."

RECOMMENDED VIDEOS

- 1. Joe Biden and Kamala Harris Officially Launch Presidential Ticket
- 2. NYC Sets Up Traveler-Registration Checkpoints to Enforce Quarantine Orders
- 3. This 30-Ton Robot Could Help Scientists Produce the Crops of the Future
- 4. Coronavirus Pandemic Fuels China's Self-Driving Cars
- 5. Georgia Schools Grapple With Covid-19 Cases After Reopening

WSJ MEMBER MESSAGE: NEWSLETTER. Let's Talk Politics. From campaigns to the Capitol, never miss the latest major political news with Politics Alert. SIGN UP NOW

SPONSORED OFFERS

WALMART: Walmart coupon: \$10 off all walmart.com

KOHL'S: 20% off your entire order with Kohl's coupon

EXPEDIA: Expedia promo code - Up to 75% off Jamaica getaways

EBAY: Up to 15% off branded sneakers & more with eBay coupon

HOME DEPOT: 10% off furniture using Home Depot coupon code

TARGET: \$15 gift card with Spectra breast pump - Target offer

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

- U.S. July Retail Sales Rose 1.2%
- Israel's Normalization With U.A.E. Squeezes Saudi Arabia
- Libor Pains Deepen as Deadline for Benchmark's Demise Approaches
- Reopening School During Coronavirus Means Sneezing Guards on Desks and Digital Thermometers at the Door
- Is This The Year You Finally Stop Swiping Your Credit Card?
- Yale Discriminated by Race in Undergraduate Admissions, Justice Department Says
- Storm Isaias's Most Damaging Winds Were on Its Right
- Democratic Fundraising for Top-Tier Races Masks Downballot Problems
- State-Aid Disagreement Proves Big Hurdle for Coronavirus Talks
- Are Florida Schools Reopening? Parents Can't Tell as State and Districts Fight

BACK TO TOP ▲

WSJ Membership

- WSJ+ Membership Benefits
- Subscription Options
- Why Subscribe?
- Corporate Subscriptions
- Professor Journal
- Student Journal
- WSJ High School Program
- WSJ Amenity Program
- WSJ Live

Customer Service

- Customer Center
- Contact Us

Tools & Features

- Emails & Alerts
- Guides
- My News
- RSS Feeds
- Video Center
- Watchlist
- Podcasts

Ads

- Advertise
- Commercial Real Estate Ads
- Place a Classified Ad
- Sell Your Business
- Sell Your Home
- Recruitment & Career Ads
- Coupons

More

- About the Newsroom
- Content Partnerships
- Corrections
- Jobs at WSJ
- Masthead
- News Archive
- Register for Free
- Reprints
- Buy Issues

