

Watergate's scars a needed warning

To many Americans, the wounds inflicted upon the presidency and the nation by the Watergate affair will never heal. But for most, all that remains are scars marking the end of a dark part of American history.

A decade has passed since Richard Nixon announced his resignation from the presidency on Aug. 9, 1974, leaving a profound and painful taint on the nation's history.

Nixon's resignation ended the turbulent battle that shook the nation and threatened to rip the presidency apart at the seams. Shortly after being sworn in as president, Gerald Ford went on television to reassure the American public — to tell us that "the long national nightmare" of Watergate was over.

But fortunately, this is one nightmare that won't be forgotten upon awakening, for it teaches an important lesson about the dangers posed when the public deifies a public official.

Before Watergate, the American president represented all that was right with the nation. Nixon knew that and it proved to be his downfall.

Nixon believed, as did most Americans, that the president had to possess

super-human qualities — infallibility among them. So when faced with the prospect of telling the public of a horrible — and criminal — mistake, Nixon chose to cover it up. What the public doesn't know won't hurt it.

But two wrongs don't make a right. The American public would probably have forgiven Nixon for Watergate had he just told all and apologized for it. His lack of faith in the public helped destroy him, and he took the presidency down with him.

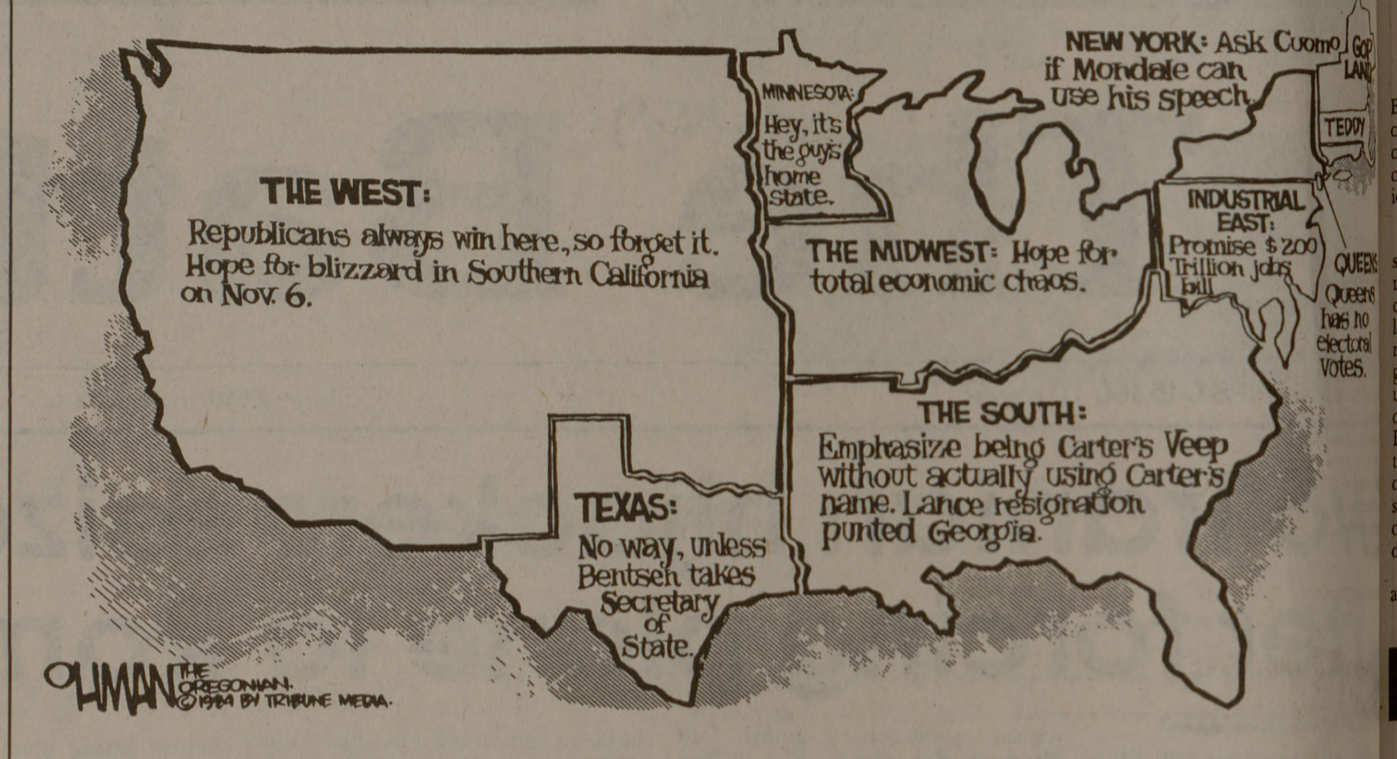
Except for Watergate, Nixon made great strides as president, especially in the cause of world peace. But because of his actions — and the criminal actions of those around him — his many achievements are relegated to infamy.

That's the price a president pays when he can't face his own mistakes — and when the public puts a politician on a pedestal.

Fortunately, many seem to have learned from this past mistake. But tragically, within a few years those hard-learned lessons of Watergate probably will be forgotten.

— The Battalion Editorial Board

.....THE SECRET MONDALE STRATEGY



Authors search for truth in the White House

Well, what is it? Is James Deakin's stuff really straight, or is Jody Powell's story from the other side of the truth?



Robert McGlohon

The media versus the White House. It's a relationship that concocts strong feelings. Two recently published books examine that relationship, each from a different perspective.

From the media comes "Straight Stuff" by former Washington correspondent James Deakin, a veteran of 25 years of White House coverage for the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

In counterpoint, former presidential press secretary Jody Powell makes his publishing debut by telling "The Other Side of the Story," a chronicle of his four years at Jimmy Carter's White House.

The two books complement each other nicely. They differ in scope — with one covering almost 30 years of presidential folly and the other limited to four years of media excess — but they overlap in their analyses of the

media, specifically the media-government relationship.

In addition, both books come to some similar conclusions.

For example, there is no liberal conspiracy to control public opinion. In fact, they conclude, reporters' politics have little to do with their coverage of an event.

James Deakin does a particularly fine job of dispelling the Liberal Media Establishment myth by detailing the press exposes of every president — liberal and conservative alike — since the Eisenhower administration.

Unfortunately, however, that's about all there is to "Straight Stuff" — a rehash of political deceptions. Deakin touches upon the media faults — superficiality, incompleteness, even bias — but he never gives them an in-depth examination and frequently brushes them off as an unfortunate but necessary handmaiden to a free press in a competitive society.

Powell deals little with those issues as well, but he examines two more-vital issues that Deakin ignores: sensationalism and accountability.

As Powell puts it, "The major bias in journalism, it seems to me, the one most likely to promote deception and dishonesty, has its roots in economics.

The fact is that news has to sell, or those who report it and edit it will find themselves searching for a new job. And that creates a bias to make news reports interesting."

And compounding that economic bias, he says, is the simple fact that journalists — unlike public officials — are not held accountable for their work.

Powell points to an almost universal refusal by journalists to report their compatriots' misdeeds.

He writes, "The process is roughly equivalent to saying, 'Well, I think the President and his chief of staff are decent fellows on the whole; let's forget about this investigative reporting business and trust them to make sure that the executive branch does its duty.'"

"We leave the question of right and wrong in the press, unlike other powerful institutions in our society, to the individual reporters and editors."

So it's sensationalism aggravated by a lack of accountability that mars the Washington press corps.

Both Powell and Deakin treat one of the most sensationally unfounded episodes to come out of Washington in recent years: the continuing saga of Carter's chief of staff, Hamilton Jordan.

One of the chapters in that saga is the Amaretto and Cream Episode: Jordan is accused by Washington Post gossip columnist Rudy Maxa of spitting a mouthful of Amaretto and Cream upon a young woman in a Washington bar. Powell, because of an earlier incident of a similar nature, overreacts in coming to his friend's defense.

It's interesting to note how little things change.

As he did then, Powell shows in "The Other Side of the Story" that Jordan was railroaded by the Washington press corps.

And as he did then, Deakin, in "Straight Stuff," ignores the evidence in the case, but concentrates on Powell's reaction.

Here's Powell's story: "On Monday morning I released the statements contradicting Maxa's charges. The reporters made their own judgements all right, but not about Rudy Maxa or the accuracy of his allegations."

"Their reaction was predictable, but unfortunately I had failed to predict it. The stories that night and the next day concentrated not on the holes in Maxa's story ... but on the number of pages in the statement we handed out."

"White House issues thirty-three-

page document to defend Jordan" twenty-two- or twenty-four-page, pending on which reporter was the counting) was the theme of the reries. My overreaction became the rather than the accuracy of the actions.

"It was a painful and bitter lesson for me."

Deakin, on the other hand, called "happy time."

Here's his story: "The White House then put out a twenty-four page statement by the bartender. He said had not seen Jordan do anything impolite ..."

"Then the White House put out nine additional pages of statements various other persons. They deny that Jordan had misbehaved. They made thirty-three pages of statements totaling 7,000 words. This was more than twice as long as Carter's State of the Union message."

Things change and change and the same.

The blurb on the Powell book states "... the news seemed to me, then now, to be wrong, unsupported, and unfair."

He just might be right.

Discovering hidden costs in daughter's collect call

By ART BUCHWALD

Columnist for The Los Angeles Times Syndicate (With the resignations of Anne Gorsuch Burford and Bert Lance, Mr. Buchwald has gone on a monastic retreat to rethink the entire November election. He left behind some of his readers' all time favorite columns.)

"Hello, I have a collect call from Miss Joyce Robinson in Oshkosh, Wis. Will you accept the charges?"

"Yes, operator, we will."

"Hi Pops. How are you?"

"Fine. What are you doing in Oshkosh? I thought you were driving to Cape Cod to visit Aunt Rose."

"We were, but Cynthia wanted to stop off and visit a boy she knew from

school who lives in Minneapolis."

"Who is Cynthia?"

"She's a girl I met in New Orleans."

"New Orleans? I didn't know you went to New Orleans."

"I wasn't planning to, but Tommy said there was a great concert of the Grateful Dead scheduled to play in the stadium. He got the day right, but the wrong month."

"Tommy?"

"He was hitchhiking on 95."

"You started out with Ellen Mulberry. Where is she?"

"She met some kids she knew in Fort Lauderdale, and they were driving to Mexico, so she decided to go with them."

"So you're now traveling with Cynthia and Tommy."

"No. Tommy stayed in New Orleans, and Cynthia left yesterday. She said she couldn't wait until my car was fixed."

"What's wrong with your car?"

"The motor fell out. That's what I'm calling you about. The garageman said it will cost \$550 to fix it up."

"That's a fortune!"

"You don't have to pay it if you don't want to. I can leave the car here. I met a guy who has a motorcycle, and he says he'll take me as far as Detroit."

"I'LL PAY IT!"

"How's Mom?"

"She's on the extension. I think she

was fine until we got your call. Where are you staying until you get your car fixed?"

"I met some nice kids who have a religious commune near here, and they said I could stay with them if I promise to devote the rest of my life to God."

"That's nice."

"The only problem is I have to shave my head."

"Can't you stay at a motel?"

"I don't have any money left."

"What happened to the \$300 I gave you?"

"Two hundred went for expenses and 100 of it went for the fine."

"What fine?"

"We were fined \$100 for speeding

in this little-bitty town in Arkansas."

"I told you not to drive fast."

"I wasn't driving. Fred was."

"Who the hell is Fred?"

"He's a vegetarian, and he says vegetarianism is finished in the West."

"That's worth \$100 to hear. Are you going to Cape Cod to visit Aunt Rose or aren't you?"

"As soon as I get the car fixed, I'll send me the money care of West Union. You don't want the man to dent the door at the same time?"

"Your car had no dented door."

"It does now. I have to go. Bye. Some kids I met are going to take white-water canoeing. Goodbye. Bye Pops — have a nice day."

The Battalion
USPS 045 360

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The Battalion is published Monday through Friday during Texas A&M regular semesters, except for holiday and examination periods. Mail subscriptions are \$16.75 per semester, \$33.25 per school year and \$35 per full year. Advertising rates furnished on request.
Our address: The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald Building, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843.
Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843.

Letter: GSS fights oppression

Editor:
I couldn't believe it. I have enjoyed reading Steve Thomas's column since he began writing for The Battalion. If he was a little corny with his one-word paragraphs, at least he was always intelligent. But notice my use of the past tense. His commentary about Gay Student Services on August 7 left me incredulous.

"Gay rights have nothing to do with it"??? That's where you are deeply, dangerously and terribly wrong, Mr. Thomas. Gay rights have everything to do with it, and GSS is not based "on a method of having sex." GSS (along with gay rights in general) is based on fighting oppression. "Who one wishes to have sex with" is indeed "a private affair." It is indeed ridiculous to have organizations based on private affairs. It is almost as ridiculous as oppressing people for those private affairs.

It is non-gay people who link oppression with "private affairs," therefore making them a public issue! I have said on many occasions that the "gay problem" is really the "non-gay problem." Gays get accused quite often of being pre-occupied with sex, but the preoccupation, I assure you, is far more real in the minds of non-gays. We are not so obsessed with sex as are non-gays obsessed with their ideas of our sex. And as long as heterosexuals make it their business to ridicule, castigate, or oppress on the grounds of a "private affair," then we will fight for our rights. As long as any two people are made to feel shame or inferiority about the God-given love they share and nurture, then we will fight for our rights. As long as men and women are encouraged to turn to self-deception, self-hatred and suicide rather than to celebrate with pride their gift of sex-

uality, we will fight for our rights. As long as two women or two men can walk down the street holding hands and kiss good-bye in a bus station without fear for their lives, we will fight for our rights. As long as the repressives and theologically conservative preachers of fundamentalism spy their lies about us, we will fight for our rights. Our "sexuality reflects on societal interaction" only as much as non-gays single us out of this pluralistic society because of "a private matter," and as long as that occurs, we will fight and fight and fight. We will stop when people learn that prejudice and oppression are stupid and that simply do not accept heterosexual judgement on our lives.

Rev. Jon Miller
Metropolitan Community Church
in the Brazos Valley