

*Watergate's Legacy and the Press: The Investigative Impulse.* By Jon Marshall. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011. xx, 313 pp. Paper, \$24.95, ISBN 978-0-8101-2719-7.)

Nearly forty years after the Watergate break-in, the legacy of that scandal continues to cast a shadow on politics and the press in Washington, D.C. How did this happen? What role did journalism play in President Richard M. Nixon's resignation? What changes in investigative reporting preceded and followed Watergate? And what does this portend for the future? These are the questions addressed in this lucid, well-researched book.

In truth, journalism's precise role in Nixon's demise is impossible to measure definitively. To the conservative writer Paul Johnson, the "Watergate witch-hunt" was "run by liberals in the media," especially the *Washington Post*, and led to "the first media Putsch in history". The television anchorman Dan Rather also viewed the media's role as pivotal—but heroic: "The record clearly shows that the [Watergate] cover-up would have worked if the press hadn't

done its job.” Academics hold a more jaundiced view. “Television and newspapers publicized the story and, perhaps, even encouraged more diligent investigation,” the historian Stanley Kutler found, but

media revelations of crimes and political misdeeds repeated what was already known to properly constituted investigative authorities. In short, carefully timed leaks, not media investigations, provided the first news of Watergate.

Similarly, the communication scholars Gladys Lang and Kurt Lang concluded that media influence on public opinion was exaggerated: “That so many of the struggles between Nixon and his opponents . . . played out on television accounts for the impression that the news media and an aroused public opinion forced the downfall of Richard Nixon,” but it was ultimately prosecutors and congressional investigators who forced his resignation. (Quotations in this paragraph can be found in Mark Feldstein, “Watergate Revisited,” *American Journalism Review*, Aug./Sept. 2004, <http://www.ajr.org/Article.asp?id=3735>.)

In *Watergate's Legacy and the Press*, Jon Marshall, a onetime reporter now an assistant professor at Northwestern University's journalism school, casts his ballot with the press: “it is doubtful that others would have brought Nixon down without Woodward and Bernstein's work,” and “the full extent of the White House's criminal conspiracy probably never would have been exposed without the *Post's* efforts” (pp. 106–7). Ultimately, of course, such counterfactual history is unknowable. The impact of news coverage can be surprisingly subtle, not least because law-enforcement officials are loath to admit being influenced by publicity. Interpretive bias is as much institutional as political: Journalists cover events in real time, when outcomes seem unpredictable, while scholars analyze events after the fact, when results often appear inevitable.

Whatever the reality, Marshall offers eight engaging chapters explaining the pre-Watergate history of investigative journalism; Nixon's battle with the press before and during his presidency; the denouement of the scandal that forced his resignation; the post-Watergate investigative heyday that followed; the decline of modern muckraking in the 1980s and 1990s; and the

economic and political struggles of twenty-first-century journalism.

Using an impressive array of primary and secondary sources, Marshall has written the best history of American investigative journalism to date, one that traces its evolution from colonial broadsheets to WikiLeaks. This important work should be read by historians and journalists, students and scholars, and all citizens who care about the kind of robust reporting necessary in a healthy democracy.

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