

How President Bush got away with his misdeeds

By Carla Binion

November 17, 1999 | The journalists-lite of nightly news and talk TV giggle when they say George W. might continue the Bush dynasty, as if they think a political dynasty is a cute idea, and a really corrupt dynasty is even more adorable. President George Bush's legacy is one of excessive secrecy, of clandestine wars and black budgets, though TV news commentators seldom mention it.

George Bush's misdeeds were about constitutional issues, not about sexual conduct, but the mainstream media (especially media-lite, i.e.: television news and most TV news talk shows) hammered away at Clinton/Lewinsky and never made the Reagan-Bush scandals clear. If the public understood the extent of President Bush's wrongdoing and cover-up, a second Bush presidency probably wouldn't be high on their priorities' list.

In 1997's "Firewall," Lawrence Walsh says Reagan and Bush got away with Iran-Contra in part because they participated in a cover-up. He writes that Reagan and Bush delayed releasing crucial government records and concealed personal notes that were necessary to Walsh's investigation. Bush also misused the pardon power, according to Walsh and others.

George Bush claimed that his misconduct in Iran-Contra was just a matter of partisan politics, a mere difference of opinion. Bush said Iran-Contra was about a criminalization of policy differences. Walsh quotes one New York Times editorial regarding Bush's "criminalization of differences" excuse: "That's a bogus complaint... When Congress calls the highest executive officials to testify, as it did in probing Iran-Contra, it is entitled to truthful testimony under pain of prosecution for telling falsehoods."

Walsh also offers this from CNN political analyst William Schneider: "It's hard to see how pardoning your former enemy justifies pardoning your former colleagues -- and possible co-conspirators... Not only did he [Bush] pardon his political allies, he pardoned them for illegal activities in which he himself may have been implicated."

Carl Bernstein wrote in the January 10 Los Angeles Times: "The escalating criminality of the Bush-Reagan era... refused to go away, like some dark stain on the national conscience. In pardoning Caspar W. Weinberger and some old friends from CIA days, Bush ensured that the stain will not be removed. With the stroke of his pen and the disingenuousness of his words, Bush forced the issue of his own culpability."

Lawrence Walsh concludes: "What set Iran-Contra apart from previous political scandals was the fact that a cover-up engineered in the White House of one president and completed by his

successor prevented the rule of law from being applied to the perpetrators of criminal activity of constitutional dimension."

Tim Weiner in "Blank Check" (the book based on Weiner's Pulitzer Prize winning newspaper series), says that no one ever stood trial for the real Iran-contra crimes, because "at each turn in the legal process, the government tried to scuttle the central charges against North, Poindexter and their co-conspirators."

The Reagan-Bush CIA claimed that volumes of information that had already been printed in the press -- facts already known to the public -- were sensitive secrets that couldn't be divulged at North's trial. Attorney General Richard Thornberg also declared key evidence (names and locations that had already been made public) to be sensitive secrets. Weiner says "the Justice Department drove a stake into the heart of the criminal cases" and prevented independent prosecutor Walsh from functioning independently.

Weiner adds that all that remained was a litany of lies, and that the whole truth about Iran-contra will never be known. Tim Weiner quotes William Richardson, an attorney turned insurance claims examiner, who once challenged the U. S. government in court about the black budget: "It's natural for an army to have secrets, but what is natural for an army is not necessarily what's best for a democracy."

A big part of the George H. W. Bush legacy is excessive government secrecy and cover-up related to serious constitutional issues. Only a political party with amnesia regarding recent history would want a political dynasty with that kind of foundation.

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