

Media

Part 2 of a two-part series

Secret Admirers: The Bushes and the Washington Post

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February 11, 2004—A mutually beneficial relationship—both in politics and in business—between George Herbert Walker Bush and the Washington Post began in the early 1950s, when Bush solicited a substantial investment in his first Texas oil company from Eugene Meyer, former president of the World Bank, founder of the Washington Post Company, and father of the late Katharine Graham. The relationship continues to this day in the illegitimate presidency of Bush's firstborn son, George Walker Bush.

The inner dynamics of this relationship are mostly invisible to those outside the murky, ruling-class nexus of the military-industrial-intelligence complex and international investment and elite social circles that make up the permanent hidden government behind America's Potemkin republic. But the very public nature of both Bush and Graham families, combined with the diminishing need for discretion from an ever-monopolizing corporate media, make the arm's-length back scratching between the Bushes and the Post increasingly transparent.

Of course, appearances must be kept up. The natural "conflict of interests" between the political class and its "watchdog," the "independent" media—all so critical to American political mythology—must be maintained. This is especially true when the globalizing ambitions of media boards of directors dovetail perfectly with the imperial goals of the national security state, and when media operates primarily as the propaganda arm of a neofascist government. There needs to be "plausible deniability" for media to credibly claim its independence from the state.

So, for example, while the Washington Post editorial page endorses the Democratic candidate for president one day every four years, in keeping with its "liberal" tradition, the rest of the time it can spend on the front page advancing the agenda of what George W's role model Winston Churchill called "the high cabal" that oversees the interests of Wall Street and the national security state—which are generally Republican. But of course the Post, the inside-the-beltway national newspaper of record, will endorse the ideas of whichever party the Graham family and its retainers feel will best advance the unique political and financial goals of their own shape-shifting ruling-class faction.

Sometimes this means endorsing the opposite of what you really want—a typical "psychological operation," as every mother and CIA asset knows. Like in the 2000 campaign, where the Post endorsed Al Gore just before the election, but only after spending over a year with Post reporter Ceci Connolly on the front page, not only parroting the Republican talking points of the day, but pioneering their use. She incessantly repeated her own Big Lies about Gore "inventing the Internet" and Love Canal and "Love Story," even after her obvious exaggerations were exposed. It was a message of hate—specifically, media hatred of Al Gore, as the Post's media reporter, Howard Kurtz (with his own intimate ties to the Republican party) later admitted, as did Dana Milbank, the Post's White House reporter and the Bushes' fellow Skull and Bones alumnus. The Post never issued an apology for its lies about Gore's veracity, and as Robert Parry at Consortium News reported, its grudging corrections "still misled readers about what Gore actually said."

Besides the longstanding ties between the Bushes and the Grahams, there were practical financial reasons for the Post to prefer a George W. Bush administration. Even though Gore was the product of another dynastic ruling class family, and had his own personal ties to the oil industry—not to mention serving as vice-president in an administration that was scarcely less solicitous of Big Oil than the current one, as “former” CIA operative Robert Baer talks about in his book, “Sleeping with the Devil”—he was still not trusted by Wall Street. In a vulnerable period of personal tragedy, Gore had made the mistake of opening his heart about what he really felt about the environment in his book, “Earth in the Balance.” So he would always be regarded with suspicion by the energy interests at the core of America’s foreign policy establishment, which the Post serves as a kind of daily newsletter.

There were other financial interests, closer to the Post’s cold cash heart, that would also be serviced by a Bush administration. A deregulation-friendly Federal Communications Commission, headed by the son of a longtime Bush family functionary, Colin Powell, would raise the limits on what a powerful media empire like the Post Company could own. As media analyst David Podvin has discussed at the website Make Them Accountable, the Post’s student testing division is one of its most profitable properties, and Bush’s No Child Left Behind education act is specifically designed to enhance the profits of the student testing industry. And in a Bush administration, the defense and pharmaceutical industries would be sure to be swimming in tax dollars that they would spend on expensive full-page advertisements. For the aristocratic Post, George W was a smirking cash cow, who would provide the additional benefit of fumigating the White House of its recent trailer trash stench.

Beginning in the earliest days of the 2000 campaign, and continuing throughout George W’s illegitimate reign, the Post has operated as his propaganda bodyguard, protecting his “honor” on the numerous occasions when his character or actions as “president” have been called into question. The Post was the establishment voice of reason and respect for constitutional tradition in the tense and chaotic atmosphere following the Supreme Court’s theft of the presidency, and led the media chorus urging Democrats to “get over it.” When the collapse of Enron—George W’s biggest corporate contributor and training camp for key players in his administration—hit, the Post not only led its editorial page with the Karl Rove talking point that it was “a business, not a political scandal,” but made sure that that message was repeated on the op-ed and news pages. Just at the point Bush’s insider trading scandal at Harken Energy threatened to get truly dangerous, the Post set the conventional wisdom that the story was unimportant enough to bury somewhere in the first section, and firmly warned the media crowd that it was time to move along. There was nothing to see here.

The most important propaganda stage the Post has built for George W to act the role of “president” upon was, of course, what the corporate media still prefers to portray as the “defining moment” of Junior’s reign—the events of September 11. The challenge was made more difficult by Bush’s Fredo Corleone performance on the day the attacks occurred. After acting clueless enough to dawdle in front of a classroom of second-graders for nearly a half-hour following the crash of the second plane, he then spent the rest of the day flying erratically around the country (“Just trying to get out of harm’s way,” as he later told a reporter), and appearing perplexed and too small for his suit as he addressed a national television audience that night.

This was a job for Superman—which the Post provided in the form of its premier Washington insider, presidential chronicler and US Navy Intelligence veteran, the legendary Watergate reporter, Bob Woodward. Along with Post reporter Dan Balz, Woodward employed his impeccable journalistic fellatio in an eight-part, front-page series of articles giving a moment-to-moment White House account of the first days of the “war on terror,” inflating the image of a cowardly dauphin into that of a credibly decisive commander-in-chief. The articles became the basis for Woodward’s subsequent bestseller, “Bush At War”—which is probably best viewed as a sequel to his book about the first Gulf War, “The Commanders,” featuring many of the same characters.

Woodward’s relationship to the Bush family is particularly interesting (see [Part 1 of this series for more details](#)). For the uninitiated, Woodward fairly successfully inoculated himself from any future suspicion that he might be too close to the subjects of his writing with his historic coverage of the Watergate scandal. In the matrix of the corporate media, Woodward is still portrayed as the archetypal intrepid

investigative reporter who, with his scruffy partner, Carl Bernstein, spoke truth to power and brought down a president.

In the real world, Woodward has proven to be uncannily close to the highest centers of power.

As the media beat reporter for the New Yorker, Ken Auletta, wrote in his most recent article, “Not all journalists have felt excluded by the Bush White House. Bob Woodward had more access than any other journalist to Bush and his first team . . . Woodward has had a luxury that few White House newspaper reporters enjoy—time and space—and says that he has found this White House ‘more responsive’ than any he’s covered.” This from an article entitled, “Fortress Bush.”

Even before Woodward put the finishing touches on the Post’s post-9/11 portrait of George W as a fearless wartime leader, the paper’s staff was otherwise busily enhancing the mythic status of Junior’s persona—first by downplaying and fogging over the media recount of the voting in Florida, which showed that the only circumstance in which Bush could have occupied the Oval Office was what had actually happened, with the US Supreme Court halting the original vote recount; and then on December 12, 2000, crowning Bush “King of the Christians” in a front page article announcing, “Pat Robertson’s resignation this month as President of the Christian Coalition confirmed the ascendance of a new leader of the religious right in America: George W. Bush.”

Almost as important as 9/11 in bestowing a Post imprimatur of legitimacy on the Bush regime’s occupation of the White House and on its “war on terror” was the newspaper’s fierce encouragement of Bush’s invasion of Iraq. The pro-war drumbeat on the Post’s editorial and op-ed pages was so markedly one-sided that a number of media analysts felt compelled to write about it. Colin Powell’s presentation of US “evidence” of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction to the UN Security Council was not only reproduced word-for-word next day in the Post, but it received unreservedly glowing reviews on the front page, the editorial page, and from the Post’s entire stable of establishment pundits, from liberal Mary McGrory rightward. The paper richly earned its prewar reputation as “the most hawkish newspaper in America.”

Besides its saber-rattling commentary, the Post’s propaganda efforts also included frequent burial of information that did not support Bush’s Iraq policy—a tactic noted by, among others, Rachel Smolkin in the American Journalism Review and Ari Berman in The Nation. Berman’s article, published last September, seems even more relevant today. It discusses a March 16 article by veteran Post reporter (and reputed CIA asset) Walter Pincus, which “explained that US intelligence agencies believed the Bush administration had exaggerated the threat posed by Saddam’s purported stocks of WMD.” The significance of this article is that it didn’t appear until the very cusp of the US invasion, and as Berman notes, “its placement: A17.”

Berman then goes on to quote from an article written by Pincus and Dana Milbank, published two days later: “As the Bush administration prepares to attack Iraq this week, it is doing so on the basis of a number of allegations against Iraqi President Saddam Hussein that have been challenged—and in some cases disproved—by the United Nations, European governments and even US intelligence reports.” Berman wryly observes, “That one managed to vault only up to A13.” In the intelligence business, the propaganda technique the Post is using here is known as a “limited hangout.”

With the 2004 presidential campaign underway, the Post’s coverage of the Democratic candidates has so far looked like a reprise of the 2000 campaign. Like the rest of the corporate media, the Post was shocked and horrified at the emergence of Governor Howard Dean as the early frontrunner, replacing their anointed choice, Senator John Kerry. Not only did Dean’s decentralized base of small donors represent a genuine populist challenge to the usual ruling-class intramurals, but Dean’s pledge to break up the giant media monopolies meant that he had to be destroyed for practical business purposes as well. Although every major media operation joined in this public stoning with a perversely giddy malice, the unique intensity of the Post’s attack drew particular attention from media critics, like Eric Alterman at The Nation, and the unfailingly accurate David Podvin.

Podvin's column on the subject, "It's the War, Stupid!" astutely connected the Post's character assassination of Dean to his uncompromising stance on the Iraq war. The most visible and credible of the antiwar candidates, Dean's success made the Post's prominent role in the propaganda buildup to the war look increasingly ridiculous—high society's most feared vulnerability. The now infamous December 18 Post editorial attacking Dean's foreign policy was unprecedented in its shrillness. Unbecoming for a *grande dame*, but sometimes necessary when the servants get unruly.

The empire's moorings having been re-established with a string of Kerry victories in the primaries, and Dean dispatched to has-been status, the Post can now return to the same function it served the last time a stiff, ruling-class, free-trade, pro-defense Democrat sought the presidency: questioning his credibility, spotlighting every niggling flaw, and judging his policies in a Republican framework; and finally, endorsing him just before the election for his "liberal" stands on social issues and his mature, serious approach to governance—in contrast to the frat boy cowboy lining the Post's shareholders' pockets. The Post struck hard against Kerry's own populist pretensions in the immediate wake of the New Hampshire primary, with a front-page expose of his standing as the number one recipient of "special interest" money in the Senate. A headline on the February 7 front—page read, "Kerry's 19 Years in Senate Invite Scrutiny." How classy of them to wait for an invitation.

What may make this year's race more intriguing, compared to 2000, is Kerry's deeper connections to the Wall Street establishment, his eminently more masculine Vietnam War record, and his critically important membership, along with three generations of Bushes, including George W, in Yale University's most prestigious and powerful secret society, Skull and Bones.

Among those most alarmed by the fact that, if Kerry wins the nomination, this will be the first Bonesman vs. Bonesman presidential contest in American history, is author and former Republican strategist, Kevin Philips. Philips' new book, "American Dynasty: Aristocracy, Fortune and the Politics of Deceit in the House of Bush," is a devastatingly detailed and multi-generational account of the Bush family's intimate connections with the military-industrial complex and with the international investment and intelligence communities. Despite his demurrals about "conspiracy theory," Philips has performed an enormous service by bringing into mainstream consciousness ruling-class patterns that the conspiracy-minded have been talking about for years.

(Paradoxically, Philips' book is so authoritative that it got a positive, rather awestruck review on the front page of the Washington Post Book World from their curmudgeonly senior book reviewer, Jonathan Yardley. Book World seems to be the major stronghold of the Post staff's traditionally liberal faction—despite its usual trashing of any vaguely leftist offerings.)

Philips, who worked in the Nixon administration, spends several pages in "American Dynasty" discussing George Bush Sr.'s highly likely participation in the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Besides the fact that Bush's fellow Skull and Bones alumni played key leadership roles in organizing the operation, there was a personal revenge factor for Bush—whose Zapata Offshore Oil company operated in the Caribbean during that period—in that the Walker side of the family had lost a small fortune when Fidel Castro nationalized the Cuban sugar industry.

Philips then segues into a fascinating link between the Bay of Pigs and the Watergate scandal, namely, "the Pemex-Pennzoil-CIA money line coincidentally *or otherwise* [italics mine] exposed in 1972 after funds it provided through Mexican banks were found in the hands of the Watergate burglars. Of those men, a solid majority—Howard Hunt, Frank Sturgis, Eugenio Martinez, Virgilio Gonzalez, and Bernard Barker—had been involved in the abortive Bay of Pigs episode. Nixon and his senior advisers knew that the money had come through Mexican banks from 'the Texans': regional Nixon finance chief William Liedtke, Robert Mosbacher, and other Bush friends. Apparently they were not sure what that meant—what kind of a CIA pipeline was involved or what kind of usage was under way."

After some brief speculation about Bush's possible role in this money matter, Philips then goes on to quote from a book by Nixon's chief of staff, H.R. Haldeman (who has elsewhere commented that Nixon used to refer to the JFK assassination as "the Bay of Pigs thing"): "If the Mexican bank connection was

actually a CIA operation all along, unknown to Nixon, and Nixon was destroyed for asking the FBI to stop investigating the bank because it might uncover a CIA operation (which the [CIA director Richard] Helms memo seems to indicate it was all along), the multiple layers of deception by the CIA are astounding.”

It is instructive to view this anecdote in the light of history.

Considering that Nixon’s relationship with the Ivy League leadership of the CIA was one of mutual distrust throughout his presidency and that he spent his entire time in office trying to rein in a CIA he felt had wandered too far from presidential authority; and considering that the Republican National Committee director who handed Nixon the pistol with which to do the honorable thing and commit political suicide was none other than George Herbert Walker Bush; and finally, considering—especially in the context of Haldeman’s comment about “multiple layers of deception by the CIA”—that the most memorable advice given to Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward by his still-unidentified source, Deep Throat, was, “*Follow the money*,” then it hardly seems outrageous to suggest that the person whispering these words in Woodward’s ear might very well have been George HW Bush himself.

After all, in the end, the Watergate affair turned out to be a triumphant win-win for both of those longtime business partners, George Bush—the very next Director of Central Intelligence—and his lifelong secret admirer, the Washington Post.

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