

Unmasking the Washington Post

By Jim DiEugenio

One of the best ways to understand *The Washington Post* is to ask who Katherine Graham—owner and publisher of the *Post-Newsweek* communications conglomerate—really is. Many have thought that both she and her newspaper were somehow “liberals” because of their reporting on the Watergate affair. This colossal misconception reveals two important points about Watergate: 1) the true nature of the scandal was never understood by the public, and 2) the real orientation of the *Post* during the Kate Graham-Ben Bradlee regime was kept hidden.

Wall Street Money

Katherine Graham's maiden name is Meyer. Her father was Eugene Meyer who made the family's mighty fortune in investment banking. The Meyer family was one of the founders of the giant investment banking firm of Lazard Frères which is worldwide but on Wall Street is allied with Goldman Sachs and Lehman Bros. Eugene Meyer purchased the *Washington Post* at auction during the Great Depression for less than a million. After his death, much of the family fortune was entrusted to Lazard Frères. Its leader, Andre Meyer, was an adviser to Kate Graham.

Friends of the Agency

The man who gave the *Post* an identity was the late Phil Graham, Katherine's husband. Graham was a talented, bril-

liant, and mercurial man who was a former intelligence officer during World War II. Although Graham had relatively decent liberal instincts, he was always enamored of the intelligence community of which he had been a part. Therefore his paper allowed the Washington elite to manipulate press coverage and allow cover for CIA “assets”, i.e. Agency friendly “journalists”.

But the real change in the *Post* started in the '60's. Three things happened that radically and permanently altered the ownership and outlook of the capital's most powerful press organ. First, Ben Bradlee of *Newsweek* heard from his friend Richard Helms that the magazine would be for sale soon. Bradlee told Phil Graham who instantly wrote a check that Bradlee conveyed to Helms' grandfather as a down payment. Second, Graham allegedly committed suicide (we say allegedly because there still seems to be some mystery about his death). The result was that ownership of the paper passed from Phil to Katherine. Third, when the *Post* began publishing the Watergate story, Nixon got angry and began investigating Kate Graham and her empire. The reported intent was to take away some of the broadcasting licenses for the TV stations owned by the *Post-Newsweek* empire.

Wrong Before, Wrong Again

All of these factors allowed the Graham-Bradlee axis to take control of the *Post's* editorial slant. This is important because whereas Phil Graham had been friendly and respectful of President Kennedy, this was not true of Ben Bradlee and his new boss. On Bradlee's watch the *Post* has editorially upheld the lone gunman thesis. When Tony Summers called Bradlee and told him of the Maurice Bishop-Tony Veciana-Oswald connection, Bradlee assigned a young British intern,

David Leigh, to do what he could to discredit the story. When Leigh found that he could not and the story appeared solid, Bradlee decided not to run his report. Six months before Oliver Stone's *JFK* debuted, the *Post* ran a long attack piece based on a preliminary draft of a script. When Stone demanded a chance to respond, the *Post* refused. Stone had to threaten to purchase a full page ad to force the paper to print his reply. Earlier, when Ted Kennedy expressed chagrin over Bradlee's apparent cashing in on his relationship with President Kennedy with his lightweight book *Conversations with Kennedy*, Bradlee responded that his \$400,000 payment wasn't bad for dusting off a pile of old scribbled notes.

How to explain these actions and how to understand the apparent discrepancy between the *Post's* stance on Watergate vs. its stance on the JFK assassination? If we understand Bradlee's background and Graham's beliefs about government secrets, the paradox disappears.

The CIA, Bradlee & Graham

According to the appendix in Deborah Davis' important book *Katherine the Great*, Bradlee was involved in the CIA's overseas campaign to propagandize the Rosenberg case in the '50's. According to released documents, Bradlee flew from Paris to New York and told

Justice Department officials there that he was trying to get in touch with Allen Dulles (then Deputy Director at CIA) in relation to looking at Rosenberg documents in their possession. And Kate Graham is so friendly with the CIA that she made a speech at CIA headquarters in Langley Virginia entitled “Secrecy and the Press.” Two things she reportedly said then were, “government has a right to keep certain information secret” and “Democracy flourishes when it can keep its secrets.”

The Paisley Connection

These deep CIA connections may help explain why CIA official John Paisley was

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reportedly allowed a *Washington Post* delivery agent's I.D. number in his name. Paisley lived near the alley that housed the loading docks for the *Post*. The authors of the book *Widows* posit that Paisley may have been using the delivery routes as a communication network among local agents. What makes this even more interesting is that another of Paisley's assignments was to assist David Young of Kissinger's Plumbers Unit in digging up dirt on Dan Ellsberg who leaked the Pentagon Papers. Of course, the *Post* had printed these documents and angered both Nixon and Kissinger. Was Paisley another double agent supposedly assisting the White House but actually siding with the *Post* and CIA during Watergate?

In fact, the *Post* has tried to keep both its ties to the intelligence community veiled and fuller versions of Watergate under wraps. In the introduction to the third edition of *Katherine the Great*, Davis shows how the *Post* tried to prevent her book from being published and circulated. In the afterword to the paperback edition of *Silent Coup*, the authors reveal the media campaign waged by the *Post* and its allies to discredit and stifle their work. When researcher Anton Chaitkin tried to petition for documentation about Phil Graham's reported suicide, he was blocked by Kate Graham's refusal to allow consent. When he persisted in his quest, he states that dozens of state and federal agents entered his office and removed much of his research on the Grahams.

Too Much at Stake

Since Watergate made the *Post* America's leading paper—until the Janet Cooke fiasco dethroned it (see the Woodward story starting on page 25)—one can see why the *Post* would be reluctant to see the full story about that complex scandal emerge. It would cast doubt on the validity of the Woodward-Bernstein version. If that line was shown to be faulty, the next logical question would be this: Why did Graham and Bradlee back this dubious story with everything they had?

In this light, it is easy to answer the mystery of why the *Post* backs the "Oswald did it" myth and originated the faulty and fragmentary "Woodstein" tale about Watergate. In the final analysis, they are both "national security" cover stories that allow the government "to keep certain information secret." ♦

Hughes & the CIA

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about and he said that they were looking for \$1 million and he told them he could tell them where \$100,000 was . . ." The committee's staff interviewed Meier in an unofficial session, but never called Meier to testify, although his name is sprinkled throughout the report. Was the Ervin committee's lack of interest in this \$1 million a sign that the committee was controlled, as Robert Bennett had boasted to his case officer at CIA? (See the Bennett memorandum starting on page 22.)

Motive for the Watergate Break In?

Meier believes it was his knowledge of this loan that led to the wrath of Nixon's team against him. Meier believes this was the original reason for a break-in of Larry O'Brien's office. Meier himself personally baited Don Nixon with hints that he had told O'Brien of the loan. See the story on page 14 called "The Mystery of the Break-In" for a summary of Nixon's obsession with Larry O'Brien and Hughes.

Hughes Vanishes

The last time Meier saw Hughes alive was just before he suddenly 'vanished' from Las Vegas. Hughes had been making noises about leaving Las Vegas, but both Meier and Maheu, enemies most of the time, agreed that the disappearance should have been called a kidnapping. Intertel, a private security firm staffed largely by "ex" intelligence officers, sent a team of agents that literally threw Maheu out into the street, changed the locks, and took over the Hughes empire. It was coup, Maheu was sure. The Hughes empire had lost a lot of money during Maheu's tenure, and the move was swift and sure to remove both his influence and that of Meier's.

Shortly after, Hughes did what all the people who knew him closely knew he had said he would never do: he sold Hughes Tool Company. The newly formed Summa Corporation was the first not to bear the Hughes name—another indication that Hughes was no longer in control of his empire. Larry O'Brien's services were dropped and The Mullen Company under Robert Bennett took over the Hughes account.

Dead or Alive?

In 1970, Hughes was very unhealthy. He was reported to be severely underweight, and suffering from anemia and

pneumonia. One of the doctors who attended him before he disappeared from Vegas told a policeman Hughes would die if he wasn't put into an intensive care unit. But no one put Hughes in such a unit. No one ever saw Hughes except a very few members of a tight, secretive inner circle, and speculation seeped into the media that Hughes might really be dead. Tales of vast medical equipment surrounding Hughes persisted. And Meier, in the newly published book *Age of Secrets*, written by Canadian journalist Gerald Bellet, has the most interesting account of what happened to Hughes to date. Even the IRS prepared to call him legally dead, before his "official" death in 1976. The mystery surrounding his death is a story that will not be attempted here. But to most observers, it became gradually clear that, dead or alive, Hughes was not in control of his empire from 1970 on. His signature was apparently being forged, and he had long ago ceased seeing all but his closest associates. When the Clifford Irving biography was about to be published, the Mullen Company, representing Hughes, issued denials and eventually set the stage for a call in phone interview with Hughes, set up to

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Blakey's Secret

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names most relevant to this issue are Gerald Ford of Michigan and Wallace Bennett of Utah. Wallace Bennett is the father of Bob Bennett who, before and during the Watergate scandal, was handling the giant Hughes account for the P.R. firm he had just purchased from Robert Mullen. Under Bennett, the company went from being a cover agency for the CIA to being a near-proprietary. In the CIA memo on page 23, the reader will see that Bob Bennett is offering the services of his father if the Agency needs him to divert Sam Ervin's attention from the CIA's role in Watergate. It seems that the Agency was indulging in payback time for helping "the list" get elected.

The *Playboy* article was published before Blakey took over the HSCA. It provided corroboration for the witness in question. If Blakey was unaware of the piece, his investigation was not very thorough. If he was aware of it, it reveals his bias. As is becoming apparent with the new release of documents, Blakey's HSCA was both uninformed and biased, in a big way. ♦