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

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The sociologist Michael Schudson once recalled the reaction from a former *Washington Post* editor when he approached him in 1988 to talk about Watergate: âNot another Watergate book!â[1] Nearly a quarter century later, Northwestern Universityâs Jon Marshall has weighed in with yet one more Watergate book. This one aims to shed light on the scandalâs legacy for the press and for contemporary investigative reporting. That legacy, Marshall writes, âis far more complex than a simple tale of inspiration for young journalists. It shaped the way investigative reporting is perceived and practiced and how political leaders and the public respond to journalistsâ (p. xv).

Featuring a foreword by Bob Woodward, the book is actually much broader in scope than the title suggests. Only two of the eight chapters focus specifically on Watergate itself. The first two deal with the pre-Watergate history of investigative reporting in America, beginning in the colonial era. Marshall points out that investigative reporting–though not always referred to as such–has been part of the American journalistic scene from virtually the beginning. While many writers have identified Benjamin Harrisâs 1690 *Publick Occurrences, Both Forreign and Domestick* as the first example of investigative reporting, Marshall goes back even further, to John Davenportâs 1663 pamphlet criticizing Puritan leaders on the issue of baptism, arguing that this âput in practice the emerging Enlightenment theory that people have a right to question their leadersâ (p. 4).

Marshallâs first chapter ends with the muckraking era, and in the second chapter he traces investigative reporting up through the 1960s. He gives a nod to accounts of a decline in investigative reporting during the first half of the twentieth century, but rightly notes that it did not disappear. Rather, it maintained a small but steady presence in American journalism. Marshall does a particularly good job discussing nonmainstream journalists in the black press, womenâs magazines, small leftist magazines, and the like.

The heart of Marshallâs account comes in chapters 3 and 4, which set up the background on President Richard Nixonâs thorny relations with the press and then provide an excellent prÃ©cis of the Watergate scandal and Woodward and Carl Bernsteinâs impressive reporting accomplishments. In chapter 4, titled âToppling a President,â Marshall engages the contention put forth by some that journalists played a marginal role in Nixonâs downfall, which was driven primarily by coordinated official efforts including law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, and congressional committees. Journalism historian W. Joseph Campbell forcefully makes that case in his recent book, *Getting It Wrong: Ten of the Greatest Misreported Stories of American Journalism.* Campbell includes the Watergate affair on his list, writing: âTo explain Watergate through the lens of the heroic-journalist is to abridge and misunderstand the scandal and to indulge in a particularly beguiling media-driven myth. The heroic-journalist interpretation minimizes the far more decisive forces that unraveled the scandal and forced Nixon from office.â[2]

Marshall does not cite Campbell directly, but he acknowledges the important roles played by federal offi-

cials as well as Woodwardâs own acknowledgement of those entities. Still, Marshall contends, âthe full extent of the White Houseâs criminal conspiracy probably never would have been exposed without the *Postâs* effortsâ (p. 107). Noting how closely Nixonâs machine was monitoring the Federal Bureau of Investigation, he argues that the investigation might have folded under White House pressure had it not been for the newspaperâs ongoing coverage. While much has been made of how *Post* employees from Katharine Graham down disclaimed exclusive credit for Nixonâs resignation, Marshall points out that many officials central to the investigation, including federal Judge John Sirica, viewed the newspaper as influential in the case.

Thus, while some Woodward and Bernstein scoops were recitations of what federal investigators had found–such as the story that first connected Watergate to a more systematic effort by the White House to go after its enemies–there are also clear examples where the newspaperâs coverage prompted official action. For instance, Woodward and Bernstein were first to reveal that a twenty-five thousand dollar check given to Nixonâs campaign had ended up in the Florida bank account of Bernard Barker, one of the Watergate burglars. That story, according to Marshall, led to House banking and currency committee hearings. Even though the hearings foundered because of political pressure, Marshall writes, they led Senator Edward Kennedy to begin his own private investigation, which ultimately prompted the full Senate hearings the following year.

Moreover, Woodward and Bernstein continued chasing Watergate in spite of skepticism elsewhere in the press, including some within their own newsroom. Many reporters did not believe Nixon was behind the Watergate break-in, and only a handful of full-time reporters were working on the story in the early stages, according to the book. The bulk of the journalistic establishment did not pick up the story until information started emerging from the official investigations. As for Woodward and Bernstein, Marshall writes, âtheir stories strongly influenced the people who took the actions that eventually led to Nixonâs resignation and the prosecution of his top aidesâ (p. 105). Marshall is careful in his wording here, but he makes a compelling case that the *Post* journalists contributed to the outcome of the scandal in significant ways.

Woodward and Bernsteinâs reporting won a Pulitzer Prize and made them journalistic celebrities. Marshallâs fifth chapter examines the explosion of investigative reporting that came after, and chapter 6 looks at how that reporting came with a backlash as the public grew increasingly weary of negativity in the news. While good investigative reporting continued, it declined in the 1980s and 1990s as public confidence dipped and as traditional media faced other external challenges on technological and economic fronts. Increasingly sophisticated public relations efforts by politicians also played a role, according to Marshall. After 2001, restrictions on access and renewed government secrecy (in many cases supported by the public) led to further problems, such as the mediaâs mishandling of coverage in the run-up to the war in Iraq–the focus of much of chapter 7.

In his final chapter, Marshall explores how investigative reporting is surviving–and thriving in some cases–despite massive changes affecting the media business. Nonprofits, universities, private donors, and audience members all have played a role in maintaining the âinvestigative impulseâ in the twenty-first century, producing much excellent investigate reporting while traditional media were struggling. Considering that many accounts of the history of investigative reporting have left off in the 1980s or even earlier, Marshallâs final three chapters are particularly helpful for bringing our understanding of the practice to the present. He concludes that, although muckraking is done only by a minority of journalists, their work matters for society. *Watergateâs Legacy and the Press* is, indeed, one more book about Watergate, but it is a valuable one. It is a good addition to the historiography of investigative reporting, and it is also recommended as a valuable resource for reporting classes at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

Notes

[1]. Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory: How We Remember, Forget and Reconstruct the Past* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 6.

[2]. W. Joseph Campbell, *Getting It Wrong: Ten of the Greatest Misreported Stories in American Journalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 116.

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