

Jim White

1/10/90

Your speculation is more persuasive than the UBI version of the "Hougan Harper's piece, of which I'd not even heard until I received the copy from you. I'd ~~like~~ like to read the original, in part because I wonder if Hougan is up to more than ~~was~~ irresponsible journalism.

I believe that motive is a dependable means of analysis in the absence of fact but that the most credible analysis based on motive can be wiped out by fact. I'm still somewhat tired from yesterday's exertions with the snow and want to catch up on mail and get back to another battle of the affidavits today so I won't go as much into detail as I'd like.

You have no factual error. Hougan is overloaded with it. Another example is that it was not McCord who was responsible for the cross-the-street lookout at the Howard Johnson motel. It was Baldwin, the former FBI SA from Conn.

In assessing possible CIA motive it is necessary to split it into before and after. Before it was all for Nixon, so much so that it willingly assented to what Hoover opposed successfully, as in the "Huston plan.

While I have no reason to believe that the CIA was involved in the Watergate planning or execution it was heavily involved by at least indirection in ways I have researched fairly fully, through Hunt and Mullen in particular. I'm satisfied that there was a CIA/Post deal for the aftermath and know that Mullen was a ~~prime~~ prime Woodward source. Recently I gave this a test, although testing was not my purpose. After the Post's serialization of the Woodward/Armstrong Brethren and after reading what it has about the efforts against Douglas I phoned the Post and left word for Woodward that I have much on this which has not been published and he is welcome to it. He has not returned my call. He was in but in conference when I phoned.

The Post's objective was more restricted than the praises it received for its reporting indicates. Its limited purpose was to get rid of that great liability and greater danger, Diablo, aka Nixon. The CIA's was to restrict what would be reported, to keep as much as possible from its door. Both succeeded. Neither went a step farther. I was aware of this contemporaneously, as you may recall from my notes and memos relating to Woodward and Bernstein.

The Senate's WG committee, regardless of the desires of any Member, were similarly restricted. Baker really covered up rather than expose in his minority report.

There really were no CIA victims. Helms, who would have had to go in any event, came out of it fine save that Iranian developments must have wrecked his new business. The Colby effort was overdue and necessary. It is not what has hurt CIA morale. Rather is it that the CIA dismal record eliminated all alternatives. The Angletonians survived and grew powerful not on achievement but by exploitation of the cold war beliefs, which were most extreme and pernicious with them. They would have had to go in any event. Likewise had the time for dirty tricks, all counterproductive when they succeeded, long passed. (You'd never know it now but it remains true.)

McBird was a true believer. His hobby was compiling a blacklist, of those who would be confined without due process in an emergency, all those whose views were to the left of John Birchers'. I am without doubt that he loved the CIA as sons love fathers. But his GOP acts were consistent with his personal beliefs.

What is not easy to comprehend is the totality of professional incompetence that characterizes these people. What they did and got away with all sneaks, by and large, get away with. The odds were better in their case because they had power behind them. They were really careless. I see it all the time. It is incredible that the spooks would file overtly perjurious affidavits and lie as consistently as they do to courts, depending on what to now they've had, immunity. They do this over the least consequential matters. The latest is a vindictive effort to beat me out of costs in an

FOIA case. Why should they run these risks and go to considerable trouble and expense in an effort to beat me out of a few hundred dollars? But they do and have and at last word were even considering a second Motion to Reconsider to the appeals court. (Which I prayed they'd be stupid enough to do.) In a last night's phone call Jerry McKnight confirmed my estimate of the affidavit I prepared in response to their false one. I left nothing but the spelling disproved. I hope that the judge has finally had a belly full.

Visualize a Hunt and ~~his~~ his career of success in the CIA, and Helms so taken with Hunt's puffy puffs of the CIA that he had his novels in his office. Or an Angleton able to dominate as long as he did. There was nothing but a succession of intelligence disasters under these people, the greater disasters being those that went accord to plan - did not overtly fail. They survived only on the power of the government, the mystiques they fathered and fostered and the services they rendered those who kept them going. Plus on cold war fears. Look back and evaluate and you'll see I am right on this. They were always the most professional incompetent, succeeding in such ploys as the Khrushchev denunciation of Stalin only when someone else wanted them to, had his own ax to grind.

This is no less true of the FBI, as my examination of so many thousands of pages leaves without doubt. Utter incompetence except for co-existing with the bureaucracy in DC and its requirements. The FBI was competent only in keeping out of serious trouble. It wasn't in any other field, area or endeavor.

The bigger and richer it got the more crime flourished. I don't recall a single case of advancement based on competence or performance outside the bureaucratic game.

While it can be argued that those who executed the breakins were pretty much limited to the Cuban stupidities they used, who in his right mind would have trusted a Fiorini or Barker for more than daring? Who could believe that a Barker would be equipped with a very expensive ~~trans~~ as transceiver and would let himself be dominated by either the pennies batteries cost or the possibility of noise when he could for pennies have had an earphone and that would not have let any noise escape? But if he'd used the equipment he carried they'd not have been caught.

You are correct on the tape, it had to be the way McCord used it. But why use tape at all? A steel pin would have jammed the lock and been invisible. The use of such simple devices was not unknown within the spookeries.

Hougan serves an unseen master, seeks cheap fame or a fast buck but has not done substantial work or even thought his case out well. It requires that McCord want to destroy himself when he could have accomplished the Hougan end without harm to himself by merely getting "sick" at the last minute and squealing on the others. (He didn't blow it over principle, only when he saw that he was being victimized and in an effort to ease his won burden.)

On the Lane story and suit and the split with Garry, all of this provides a real opportunity to do something long overdue about Lane. I wish one of those involved was as of a disposition to make the effort, that I'm sure could and would succeed now. The Javers account of the Freed involvement can't be accurate, that Freed would not do the book. For fame or money he'd do anything. His own account, to a friend of mine, is more credible: that he horned Lane, his close pal, in on the deal. Freed was to do the book, Lane to milk Jones.

Time for Lil to get up and for me to see if it is safe to go out for the paper and then farthur, to see if my little tractor is ready to come home. I no soon, with great help from neighbor Paul, got the snow blade on than the regulatory shorted out. The blade is valueless for a real snow but could have pushed the slush I had to push yesterday and is a little much for me. However, I did it alone, even when I had help, to get the exercise. A strapping college freshman who has been a friend since his high school days, was here when I went out for the second assault than finished the job. He offered to do it but we continued talking while I did it. Thanks and best,

Startling Watergate Theory

Washington

It on the night of June 17, 1972 James McCord had told his team the coast was clear when he saw the last employee lock the door and leave the Executive National Club, the history might have been different.

In all likelihood, the team of burglars would not have been caught, the break-in would have gone unnoticed and the investigation and impeachment hearings against Richard M. Nixon never could have been held.

But McCord, who was watching the officers from across the street, did not tell his team for nearly an hour that the coast was clear.

Meanwhile, the building guard discovered the taped doors and notified the police.

Now comes investigative reporter Jim Hougan, a Washington editor of Harper's magazine, with the thesis that anomalies and discrepancies in testimony, and actual mistakes made during that break-in, have never been explained away as accidental or unlucky.

In an article entitled "Watergate Conspirator Dined Fellow Burglars," in Harper's January issue, Hougan suggests that convicted burglar McCord, leader of the five-member team arrested in the Watergate that June night, deliberately sabotaged the break-in and "led his associates into a trap."

McCord was a career Central Intelligence Agency official who retired after 19 years from his active agency role in 1972 to set up a private security firm in Washington. His only clients were the Republican National Committee and the Committee to Reelect the President.

When the re-election committee was set up, McCord became its chief of security. And when Gordon Liddy's plan for disrupting the opposition called for putting "bugs" on the Democratic headquarters telephones, McCord was put in charge.

Confusion over contradictory testimony about the break-in was

disputed by the Senate Watergate committee as impossible to resolve since at least three and possibly four break-ins had occurred in the weeks before June 17, and the witnesses could have been referring to one or another of the earlier incidents.

There it remained, unclarified, until Hougan became interested while researching a book and filed for a former McCord

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employee, now deceased, against the Washington Star.

In his article — which may later be expanded to book length — Hougan indicts McCord on a long list of mishaps or inaccuracies, including:

• Placing the now-famous tape horizontally across the latch to the Watergate garage, so it was visible. If it had been placed vertically

along the side of the door it could not have been seen unless the door was opened.

• Telling his colleagues at the "command post" at the Howard Johnson diner across the street that he had been delayed because he had checked the doors and "the tape was still there." Actually guard Frank Willis had found the tape and stripped it off.

• Insisting the operation should go forward after associate E. Howard Hunt learned the tape was missing and argued that the break-in should be halted.

• Much later, it was McCord who "blew the whistle" on the entire operation in a letter to Judge John Sirica — in an attempt, he said, to avoid a jail term.

There were other examples. But the most serious was the hour-long delay in informing his colleagues that the coast was clear although, watching from the Command Post across the street, McCord had seen the last employee leave, dusting the lights and locking the door, and had watched the employee cross the street to the

Howard Johnson restaurant with Willis, the building guard.

Even as he told his colleagues the offices were still lighted he not only knew they were dark and empty but that the guard was away from the building.

"I can think of no innocent explanation for the deception," Hougan writes.

That hour, he says, may have changed the course of U.S. history: "Had McCord told the truth and had the burglary begun at this time rather than much later, it would almost certainly have gone undetected..."

And it was, of course, the investigation of the burglary that began the long road leading ultimately to the House Judiciary Committee's approval of impeachment resolutions for abuse of power, obstruction of justice and tax evasion — and Nixon's resignation in disgrace.

So how, and why, did it happen?

McCord was a well-thought-of operative and administrator at the CIA, and an experienced investigator and security man, yet "at every juncture he made decisions that proved catastrophic, applied 'trickery' that was ludicrous, and misled his accomplices..."

"That a career CIA officer such as McCord should blunder so completely is about as likely as a pediatrician accidentally decapitating his patient. Indeed, it is even less likely since incompetence will not suffice as an explanation," the article says.

But Hougan also says, "I do know that McCord sabotaged the break-in and that another Watergate covertop continues into the present was not an end to the matter — merely a beginning."

The writer's investigation is continuing, and he gives high priority to finding the motive that led McCord to act as a double agent.

Hougan was asked in an earlier telephone interview where he would look. All he would say was that the CIA — particularly the counterintelligence division — is high on his list.

HW:

31 December 1979

Originals of the attached clipping and this memo are going to DW for the files if he wants them. I'm sending these copies to you since this is not a new topic, at least at this end of our long correspondence.

Regarding Hougan's theory, you may recall that at the time Jenifer and I did some extensive speculating based on the same set of circumstances plus others which fitted the same pattern -- that the Watergate break-in, at some critical point or points, and as a result of careful and determined planning, was designed to be detected and exposed. The bungling was simply too universal and too thorough to permit any other truly logical conclusion.

(On one point, I think Hougan is wrong because he apparently knows little or nothing about the properties of adhesive tape. Placed vertically along the door's edge the tape could not have withstood the pressure of the spring behind the bolt. Placing it horizontally, around the two corners and along the face and back of the door, is the only way the frictional properties of the tape could be used to keep the bolt recessed in spite of the strength of the spring.)

Hougan does not go beyond describing the circumstances which led him to postulate an intention to sabotage the break-in; he puts a high priority on finding the motive behind such an intention, however, and says coyly he'd look first at CIA counter-intelligence.

You may recall that at the time we explored this area speculatively. Our postulates ran more or less like this: If the break-in actually was planned to be sabotaged, the probable political effects were obvious -- damage to the Republicans and Nixon's chances of re-election with a corresponding benefit to the martyred Democrats and McGovern's chances of replacing Nixon as President. We then had to ask: who the hell could want McGovern to defeat Nixon at such cost to the whole political process? Certainly not the Republicans. And the Democrats were not much likelier candidates, since if discovered the caper could only result in retaliation and plunge the whole campaign to a level wholly incompatible with McGovern's whole image. So there had to be a wild card, a joker in the deck which came from outside the normal political apparatus. The presence of so many ex-CIA figures in the picture was obvious from the beginning, of course, and the CIA itself -- with its need-to-know modus operandi and its chronic condition of operating with its right hand never knowing what the left was doing, -- appeared to be the only group within which a sub-clique could have the resources as well as the privacy with which to conceive and effect such an unorthodox way of wrecking a favored candidate and electing an underdog. Why would they want to? The answer would have to have nothing to do with right-wing or left-wing politics in this country, not fundamentally. The central reason would have to lie in the usual motive of the kingmaker -- to insure his own future. If elected, McGovern would have been a weak president, with a hostile Congress and therefore a weak administration. Nixon, on the other hand, especially after his daring volte-face on China, appeared likely to be an even stronger president than before, hard to control, fully capable of destroying anything in his path. McGovern, of course, would have been easily intimidated and far less likely to try cracking down on the whole CIA set-up, including our kingmaker clique.

Of the figures who have surfaced since then, Angleton strikes me as the most plausible guru to this element, if it existed.

jdw