



Nixon's Revenge: The Fall of the Adversary Press

Saturday's White House Correspondents Association dinner exposed anew how far from Middle America our elite media reside.

At the dinner, the electricity was gone, the glamor and glitz were gone. Neither the president nor his White House staff came. Even Press Secretary Sean Spicer begged off.

The idea of a convivial evening together of our media and political establishments is probably dead for the duration of the Trump presidency.

Until Jan. 20, 2021, it appears, we are an us-vs.-them country.

As for the Washington Hilton's version of Hollywood's red carpet, C-SPAN elected to cover instead Trump's rollicking rally in a distant and different capital, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Before thousands of those Middle Pennsylvanians Barack Obama dismissed as clinging to their Bibles, bigotries and guns, Donald Trump, to cheers, hoots and happy howls, mocked the media he had stifled: "A large group of Hollywood actors and Washington media are consoling each other in a hotel ballroom ... I could not possibly be more thrilled than to be more than 100 miles away from Washington's swamp ... with a much, much larger crowd and much better people."

Back at the Hilton, all pretense at press neutrality was gone. Said WHCA president Jeff Mason in scripted remarks: "We are not fake news. We are not failing news organizations. We are not the enemy of the American people."

A standing ovation followed. The First Amendment guarantee of freedom of the press was repeatedly invoked and defiantly applauded, as though the president were a clear and present danger to it.

For behaving like a Bernie Sanders' rally, the national press confirmed Steve Bannon's insight — they are the real "opposition party."

And so the war between an adversary press and a president it despises and is determined to take down is re-engaged.

As related in my book, *Nixon's White House Wars: The Battles That Made and Broke a President and Divided America Forever*, out May 9, that war first broke out in November of 1969.

With the media establishment of that day cheering on the anti-war protests designed to break his presidency, President Nixon sought to rally the nation behind him with his "Silent Majority" speech. His prime-time address was a smashing success — 70 percent of the country backed Nixon. But the



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post-speech TV analysis trashed him.

Nixon was livid. Two-thirds of the nation depended on the three networks as their primary source of national and world news. ABC, CBS and NBC not only controlled Nixon's access to the American people but were the filter, the lens, through which the country would see him and his presidency for four years. And all three were full of Nixon-haters.

Nixon approved a counterattack on the networks by Vice President Spiro Agnew. And as he finished his edits of the Agnew speech, Nixon muttered, "This'll tear the scab off those b—s!"

It certainly did.

Amazingly, the networks had rushed to carry the speech live, giving Agnew an audience of scores of millions for his blistering indictment of the networks' anti-Nixon bias and abuse of their power over U.S. public opinion.

By December 1969, Nixon, the president most reviled by the press before Trump, was at 68 percent approval, and Agnew was the third-most admired man in America, after Nixon and Billy Graham.

Nixon went on to roll up a 49-state landslide three years later.

Before Watergate brought him down, he had shown that the vaunted "adversary press" was not only isolated from Middle America, it could be routed by a resolute White House in the battle for public opinion.

So where is this Trump-media war headed?

As of today, it looks as though it could end like the European wars of the last century, where victorious Brits and French were bled as badly and brought as low as defeated Germans.

Whatever happens to Trump, the respect and regard the mainstream media once enjoyed are gone. Public opinion of the national press puts them down beside the politicians they cover — and for good reason.

The people have concluded that the media really belong to the political class and merely masquerade as objective and conscientious observers. Like everyone else, they, too, have ideologies and agendas.

Moreover, unlike in the Nixon era, the adversary press today has its own adversary press: Fox News, talk radio, and media-monitoring websites to challenge their character, veracity, competence, and honor, even as they challenge the truthfulness of politicians.

Trump is being hammered as no other president before him, except perhaps Nixon during Watergate. It is hard to reach any other conclusion than that the mainstream media loathe him and intend to oust him, as they relished in helping to oust Nixon.

If this war ends well for Trump, it ends badly for his enemies in the press. If Trump goes down, the media will feel for a long time the hostility and hatred of those tens of millions who put their faith and placed their hopes in Trump.

For the mainstream media, seeking to recover the lost confidence of its countrymen, this war looks like a lose-lose.

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Patrick J. Buchanan is the author of a new book, out May 9, Nixon's White House Wars: The Battles That Made and Broke a President and Divided America Forever. To find out more about Patrick



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