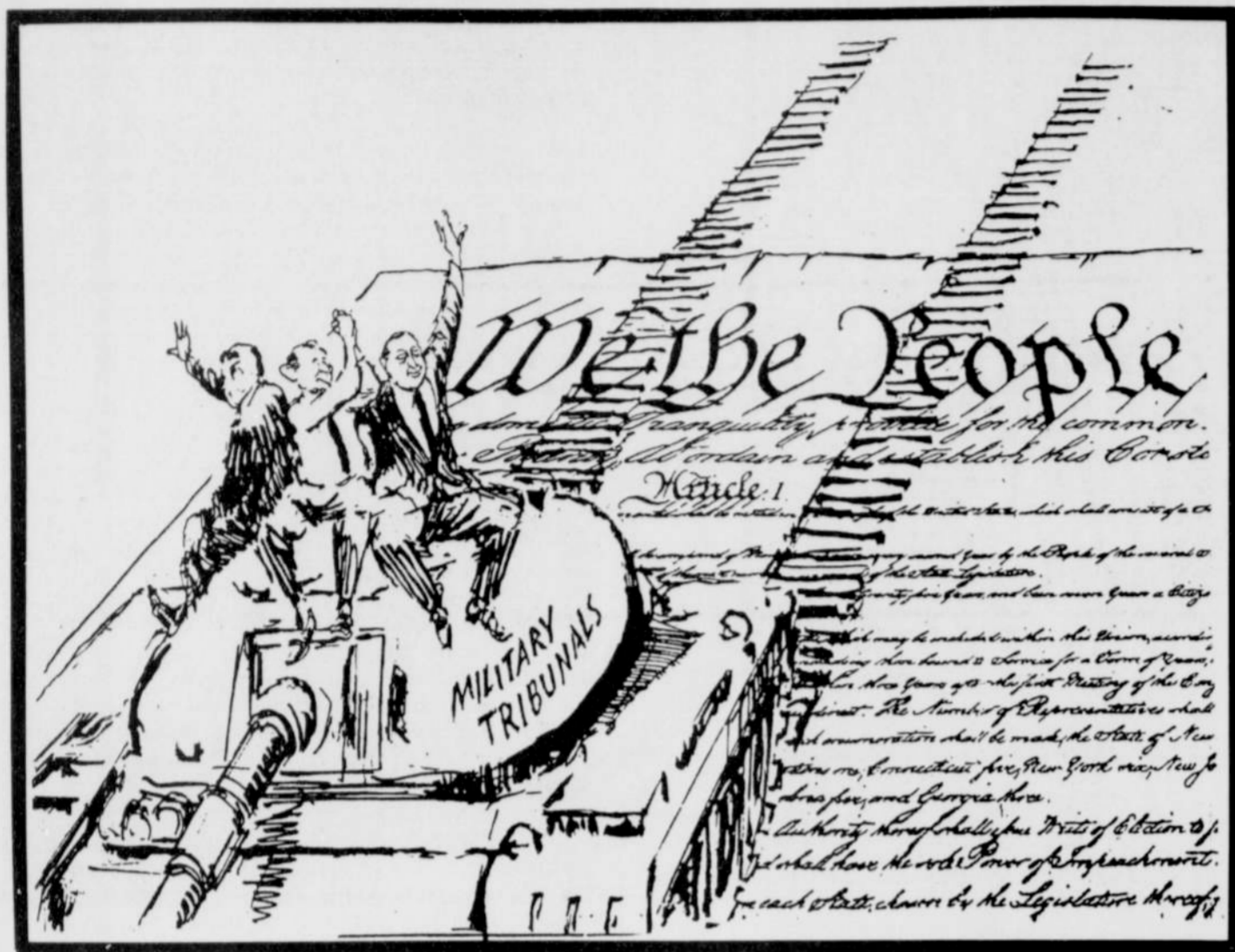


FAILED PRESIDENCY



REX BABIN (THE SACRAMENTO BEE)

BY MARK A. GOLDMAN

The territory of a state is inviolable. It may not be the object, even temporarily, of military occupation or other measures of force taken by another state directly or indirectly on any grounds whatsoever.

~ARTICLE 20, OAS CHARTER

We hear reports of George W. Bush receiving approval ratings of upwards of 80%. As for me, I already see a failed presidency and an arrogant President destined for impeachment.

On November 2, 2001, Bush signed an executive order giving sitting Presidents the power to seal the records of any previous President even if the previous President wants the records made public. I see this as a thinly veiled attempt by the current sitting President to cover up illegal acts and atrocities by his father during the former Bush's presidency — which crimes, I might add, should have resulted in the father's impeachment.

This, along with the military tribunals, dismantling of civil liberties, denial of established legal procedures (as in detaining suspects without charge; the inappropriate monitoring of conversations between clients and their attorneys; the attempt to deny public access and scrutiny of legal processes; eliminating legitimate judicial review of trials), clamping down on the press and impeding its investigations into various allegations about illegal activities of the CIA and its affiliates, expanded wire and internet tapping privileges in favor of security police as they intrude into the privacy of citizens (resulting in harassment of innocent people as well as besmirching their reputations), the effective merging of the FBI into the CIA, heightened rhetoric and disinformation promulgated by this administration in an effort to quell dissent, is, I believe, all part of a conspiracy designed at least in part to insulate Bush Sr. from ever having to face fair and adequate public scrutiny of his alleged crimes against the Constitution and humanity.

Given its true rationale, the dismantling of Constitutional protections and usurping power legitimately reserved for the people is, in this layman's view, patently illegal. Undermining the Constitution to cover up his father's illegal acts and and/or the illegal acts of others is obstruction of justice — an impeachable offense — and I predict Bush Jr. will wither be impeached by Congress or by history. If not the former, we might as well begin shedding tears now.

Why are we all trapped in this coverup? I don't know all the many truths that now hide in secret files, but I do know that as a result of 9/11 some Americans are taking a closer look at U.S. foreign policy to review what behaviors this country might have engaged in that would cause people in other parts of the world to hate and/or distrust the USA as much as they do. There is a lot to review. The evidence is voluminous and damning. One example alone should be enough to illustrate Bush's claim that we are hated because we love freedom and democracy is

both silly and absurd: On December 20, 1989, on orders from then President George Bush Sr., U.S. troops descended on Panama in what was reported to be a legitimate hunt for "strongman" Manuel Noriega. The mission was called *Operation Just Cause*. By January 3, 1990, Noriega was in hand and the operation was labeled a success. Mainstream media outlets, repeating what they were told, reported that about 250 Panamanians had lost their lives in the operation and Bush Sr. reported to Congress and the American people that Panama was returned to democratic rule. Thus the beginning of a big lie.

What was not reported was this little excursion caused as many as 20,000 Panamanian civilians to lose their homes and possessions, while upwards of 4,000 men, women and children lost their lives — wantonly murdered as U.S. personnel laid waste large residential areas in the poorest districts of Panama City. There are documented reports that U.S. troops purposely burned entire neighborhoods to the ground, moving from house to house, block by block. Journalists were shot dead on the spot with cameras still in hand. There are reports that during the incursion, American soldiers shot and killed indiscriminately anything and everything that moved, and then, in the weeks following, rounded up blacklisted Panamanians, executing some on the spot and detaining others without charge or trial, some of whom may still be unlawfully detained to this day. While the mainstream press was censored (or censored themselves), eyewitnesses were reporting that they saw American troops collecting the bodies of scores of dead civilians and burying them in mass unmarked graves — only to be dug up later by survivors looking for the dead and missing. While there is no way to tell for certain how many Panamanians lost their lives, estimates from four human rights groups range from 2,500 to 4,000.

The source of this information is credible, much of it documented in the film, *The Panama Deception*, which won an Academy Award in 1993 for best documentary. But an 'Oscar' or not, chances are you never saw *The Panama Deception*, not

even on PBS. I am interested to know why. (Other sources I looked at before writing this article will be posted at the following web address: www.gpln.com/panama.htm. I'm sure you can find more.)

While the American people celebrated their victory over Panama, the United Nations and world community condemned the United States for the invasion, which clearly took place without legal authority under U.S. law, or under any law. It was a contravention of various treaties signed by the U.S., the Geneva Convention and other authorities of international law. This fact was ignored by the American Press.

For many years before, during and after his ascent to power, Manuel Noriega was bought and paid for by the CIA. The CIA always knew Noriega was a corrupt despot, a drug smuggler and an arms dealer. He did not become an anathema to the U.S. until he was finally more of a liability to the CIA than an asset, at which time he took on a new persona — "Strongman" Noriega, drug dealer and enemy of freedom loving peoples everywhere. In the same tradition it might be noticed that the Taliban rulers of Afghanistan were transformed into the world's great enslavers and tormentors of women, but only after 9/11. Just like Noriega, the Taliban were always despots and the people they ruled were always in pain — But somehow, prior to 9/11 the treatment of women never seemed quite so troubling to U.S. Presidents, their administrations or the CIA.

Once we take a look at what happened in Panama, we will have to look into what happened in other countries as well. Would it be a surprise to discover that U.S. strategy has, time and again, been to destroy budding democracies? Why should we do that? Because democracies are difficult to control, whereas puppet dictatorships are easy to control — all that is needed is to buy and make sure they stay bought, which is what certain American interests have been after and usually get.

The tragedy of 9/11 will not be forgotten and those who perpetrated the deadly deeds must be brought to justice. But those who did this, while having the ability to kill our loved ones and temporarily terrorize our nation, had no ability to fundamentally damage the Constitution itself. That task can only be accomplished from within.

To limit dissent and the free flow of information under the guise of National Security is simply a flagrant deception and a scurrilous attack on our freedoms and on our posterity. Covering up crimes and atrocities committed by a President or a shadow government (either under his control or has control over him) that operates under our national name but outside the framework of the Constitution, and without any substantive checks and balances, is not in the National Interest. It never was and never will be.

The President is not a king or a ruler. He is servant to The People. And if you and I, being no longer innocent or ignorant, then we are not The People and he is not the servant — and America is not America anymore.

To those who claim that only Americans are entitled to justice, I say: You don't believe in justice, and you don't believe in America either.

Those who have carried out despicable and illegal acts in our name have disgraced our country, its people and themselves. If *We The People* are too afraid to seek the truth, to know the truth, to tell the truth, or to believe in justice, how can we rightfully call ourselves free?

There are too many dead and too many dying. There are too many web sites, too many books, too many tapes, too many allegations from credible, brave and honorable sources to pretend any longer that we don't know, or can't know, what has been done in our name or who has been hurt by those acting in our name. We must stand up to honor the living and dead, to ask questions, to take responsibility for the crimes committed without our approval or consent — to ask the world's forgiveness, and to make reparations where they are due. We must pray and work for peace and justice, and we must turn this treason around.

Mark Goldman lives in Vashon, Washington.

A BLEAT FROM THE PEN

BY ROBIN SAWYER

Americans are cowards. I can hear the gasps, angry denunciations and cries of treason as the pigs rooting in this country shake their snouts in rage at such a statement. There have been times when Americans stood against great tyranny to lift the world to a better place. Today we are often the tyrants, as we have also been in the past.

It's laughable to watch Americans shake with fear as they worry about dying in a terrorist commandeered plane, or an anthrax attack. Much more likely most of us will die of a self-induced heart attack, a stroke, or in one of the automobiles we so dearly love. I can almost hear my detractors shouting those worn out words "Love it or leave it!" Those of us who do love America know that the American dream is destroying this country. American prosperity is burying this nation in landfills, pollution, sprawl and a host of other social illnesses.

It is doubtful George Bush and his Iran-Contra cabinet could have asked for anything more than September 11. A political blessing falling from the sky, it gave them something to blame the economy on and a reason to spend lots of money fighting wars that can't be won....

...If you have read this far you probably agree with much of what I've said. If not, you're probably not reading this. Most of us seem only to want an endorsement of the opinions we form, seemingly based on popular opinion. If I were to put you in a room filled with Nazi peers for a while, you might very likely come out wearing a swastika — not because you really believe Nazi dogma, but because we really are much like sheep (kind of a hybrid sheep/swine, really).

George really has the flock behind him now as he calls out the sheepdogs to take care of the wolves surrounding us and we huddle together, bleating for revenge from beneath our flag.

What will we do with Osama if we catch him? The likely answer is execute him, which is exactly what he hopes we will do. Of course, action is necessary and there are a number of things that can be done, including crippling the appropriate financial networks, educating people who may be inclined to commit terrorist acts, fixing the problems with our intelligence agencies, and examining our own behaviors to see how we may be inciting these terrorists. It appears we are okay with terrorists (even Osama) as long as they support our interests, meaning we have often provided financial and other types of support to known terrorists if it furthered our aims.

What's new? We say one thing and do another — kind of like our ancestors did with the treaties. So, when it is all said and done, will the world be safe from terrorists? Not likely. What's more likely is there will be more crusaders running around avenging the deaths of their martyrs, calling for holy wars and rallying the sheep in their countries to oppose the wolves. If it wasn't for the lost lives, the pain and the agony, all this would almost be comical — like a cartoon. But it's not a cartoon. It's the world we live in — a world fast running out of resources to keep people happy. What happens then?

I am old. What happens to those who follow concerns me only because I have a child who is part of the human experience. I often think of John Donne's words: "No man is an island," meaning what we do, and what happens to us, affects ourselves and others. If the world does not come together it may soon come apart — in our children's lifetimes. What will our legacy be?

Robin Sawyer lives in Hillsboro. His most recent article for the NCTE, "Searching For Justice," appeared in May/June 2001.

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