

CONSERVATIVES
WITHOUT
CONSCIENCE



JOHN
DEAN

AUTHOR OF THE NATIONAL BESTSELLER
WORSE THAN WATERGATE

A 40-PAGE EXCERPT FROM

**CONSERVATIVES
WITHOUT CONSCIENCE**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Dean was White House legal counsel to President Richard Nixon for a thousand days. He also served as chief minority counsel for the House Judiciary Committee and as an associate deputy attorney general in the US Department of Justice. He is the author of *Blind Ambition* (1976), *Lost Honor* (1982), *The Rehnquist Choice* (2001), *Warren G. Harding* (2004), and *Worse Than Watergate: The Secret Presidency of George W. Bush* (2004)

This excerpt is Dean's preface to *Conservatives Without Conscience*

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Contemporary conservatives have become extremely contentious, confrontational, and aggressive in nearly every area of politics and governing. Today they have a tough-guy (and, in a few instances, a tough-gal) attitude, an arrogant and antagonistic style, along with a narrow outlook intolerant of those who challenge their extreme thinking. Incivility is now their norm. “During the Father Bush period, there was a presumption of civility,” Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute observes, but “we lost it under Clinton,” when conservatives relentlessly attacked his presidency, and “then the present President Bush deliberately chose a strategy of being a divider, rather than a uniter.”¹

Even more troubling, the right-wing presidency of George W. Bush and Richard B. Cheney has taken positions that are in open defiance of international treaties or blatant violations of domestic laws, while pushing the limits of presidential power beyond the parameters of the Constitution. It is aided and abetted in these actions by a conservative Republican Congress that refuses to check or balance the president. These patterns were apparent long before the terror attacks on September 11, 2001, but the right wing’s bellicose response to the events of that day has escalated into a false claim of legitimacy. Many authors (and journalists) have described the extreme hubris now present in Washington, along with the striking abuses of power. While some of this activity has ostensibly been undertaken in the name of fighting terrorists, much of it is just good old-fashioned power corruption.

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Conservatives Without Conscience, however, is not a book about Bush and Cheney. My venture here is not to expose more malfeasance, misfeasance, or nonfeasance in places high or low in Washington, nor even to try to catalog it, for the gist of what is occurring under con-servative Republican rule is all too obvious. Although this is a report that cannot be given without frequent references to the administration's disquieting politics and governing, my effort, fundamentally, is to understand them, to explain why they are happening, while placing them all in a larger context, including the particular events that initially prompted my inquiry about people with whom I once thought I shared beliefs.

Frankly, when I started writing this book I had a difficult time accounting for what had become of conservatism or, for that matter, the Republican Party. I went down a number of dead-end streets looking for answers, before finally discovering a true explanation. My finding, simply stated, is the growing presence of conservative authoritarianism. Conservatism has noticeably evolved from its so-called modern phase (1950–94) into what might be called a postmodern period (1994 to the present), and in doing so it has regressed to its earliest authoritarian roots. Authoritarianism is not well understood and seldom discussed in the context of American government and politics, yet it now constitutes the prevailing thinking and behavior among conservatives. Regrettably, empirical studies reveal, however, that authoritarians are frequently enemies of freedom, antidemocratic, antiequality, highly prejudiced, mean-spirited, power hungry, Machiavellian, and amoral. They are also often conservatives without conscience who are capable of plunging this nation into disasters the likes of which we have never known.

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Although I have only recently learned the correct term for describing this type of behavior, and come to understand the implications of such authoritarian thinking, I was familiar with the personality type from my years in the Nixon White House. We had plenty of authoritarians in the Nixon administration, from the president on down. In fact, authoritarian thinking was the principal force behind almost everything that went wrong with Nixon's presidency. I had had little contact with my former colleagues, or with their new authoritarian friends and associates, until the early 1990s, when they decided to attack my wife and me in an effort to rewrite history at our expense. By then I had left public life for a very comfortable and private existence in the world of business, but they forced me back into the public square to defend myself and my wife from their false charges. In returning, I discovered how contemptible and dangerous their brand of "conservatism" had become, and how low they were prepared to stoop for their cause.

About 7:00 a.m. on Monday, May 6, 1991, I received a phone call that was both literally and figuratively a wake-up call, one that would dramatically change the political world as I thought I knew it. My last politics-related activity had been in 1982, when I wrote *Lost Honor*, a book about the consequences of Watergate during the decade that followed it. Since then I had focused exclusively on my work in merger and acquisition ventures, and I no longer had any interest in partisan politics. In fact, I had done everything I could to lower my public profile and regain my privacy by refusing to give press interviews. I became a true nonpartisan, sometimes voting for Republicans and sometimes for Democrats, always

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determined to select the best candidates for the job. I paid little attention to Washington affairs other than major events. I did maintain my relationships with old friends in Washington, including some still active at the highest levels of government and several who worked for Reagan and Bush I, but we seldom discussed politics too seriously. I discovered that I enjoyed life more outside of the political arena, and so I had no interest in returning to it.

When the phone rang that Monday morning, I assumed it was my wife, Maureen—"Mo" to family and friends—calling from Pennsylvania, where she had gone to care for my mother, who had recently suffered a stroke. I was instead greeted by Mike Wallace of 60 Minutes, and his producer Brian Ellis. Wallace quickly got to the reason for their call. "Have you heard about this new book about Bob Woodward?" he inquired referring to the Washington Post's star reporter and best-selling author. "I'm talking about a book called *Silent Coup: The Removal of a President*, by Leonard Colodny and Robert Gettlin."* Wallace explained that 60 Minutes was working on a story about *Silent Coup*, which St. Martin's Press was going to publish in two weeks, and Time magazine was going to run an excerpt from the book. Wallace said the book dealt not only with Woodward but also "with you, sir, John Dean."

"How so?" I asked. I knew about the book because Colodny had called me several years earlier looking for dirt on Woodward, and I had told him I had none. Later he called back to ask me some questions about my testimony before the Senate Watergate committee. But Colodny had said little about how I related to his book. I had assumed his project had died.

"Do you know a woman by the name of Heidi Rikan?" Wallace

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asked.

“Sure, Heidi was a friend of Mo’s. She died a few years ago. What does Heidi have to do with *Silent Coup*?” Heidi and Mo had been friends before we were married and was a bridesmaid at our wedding. Wallace ignored my question.

Employing his trademark confrontational tone, Wallace began throwing hard balls. “According to *Silent Coup*, Heidi was also known as Cathy Dieter, and this Heidi/Cathy person, as they call her in the book, had a connection to a call-girl ring back in 1971 and ’72. In fact, I gather she was the madam of the operation. According to *Silent Coup*, this call-girl ring had a connection with the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate. Apparently the DNC was providing customers for the call girls. The book says that your wife was the roommate of Cathy Dieter, and she seemingly knew all about this activity. In fact, according to *Silent Coup*, this call-girl operation was the reason for the break-ins at the Watergate.”

I was, understandably, stunned. I had never heard or seen anything that would even hint at Heidi’s being a call girl, and I could not imagine Mo’s not telling me if she knew, or had any such suspicion. And I knew for certain that neither Heidi nor Mo had anything whatsoever to do with Watergate. My thoughts raced as Wallace continued with his questioning.

“Did you know an attorney in Washington by the name of Phillip Mackin Bailley?” he asked.

When I answered that I did not, he pressed. “Do you remember an incident while you were working at the White House, as counsel to the president, when an assistant United States attorney came to

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your office, a fellow named John Rudy, to discuss Phillip Bailey's involvement in prostitution, and you made a copy of Mr. Bailey's address book, which had been seized by the FBI?"

"I recall a couple of assistant United States attorneys coming to my office in connection with a newspaper story claiming that a lawyer, or a secretary, from the White House was allegedly connected with a call-girl ring. As I recall, we had trouble figuring out who, if anyone, at the White House was involved. But I never made a copy of an address book." My mind was searching, trying to recall events that had taken place almost two decades earlier.

Wallace now dropped another bomb. He told me that according to *Silent Coup* Mo's name was in Phillip Bailey's little black address book. He also said that Bailey had been indicted for violating the Mann Act, which prohibits taking women across state lines for immoral purposes, specifically prostitution. *Silent Coup* claimed that my wife was listed in the address book as "Mo Biner," along with a code name of "Clout." Supposedly, Bailey's address book also contained the name of Cathy Dieter. Before I could digest this information, Wallace added more.

"According to *Silent Coup*, sir, you, John Dean, are the real mastermind of the Watergate break-ins, and you ordered these break-ins because you were apparently seeking sexual dirt on the Democrats, which you learned about from your then girlfriend, now wife, Maureen." When I failed to respond, because I was dumbfounded, Wallace asked, "Does this make sense to you?"

"No, no sense at all. It's pure bullshit. How could I have ordered the Watergate break-ins and kept it secret for the last twenty years?"

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“Fair question,” Wallace responded. He explained that the book claimed I arranged the break-ins through my secret relationship with former White House consultant E. Howard Hunt—Hunt, who along with Gordon Liddy, had been convicted two decades earlier of plotting the Watergate break-ins.

“I recall meeting Hunt once in Chuck Colson’s office. Hunt worked for Colson. I don’t think I ever said anything more than ‘hello’ to Howard Hunt in all my years at the White House. The only other time I have spoken to him was long after Watergate, when we gave a few college lectures together. Anyone who says I directed Hunt to do anything is crazy.” Still trying to sort out the various claims of *Silent Coup*, I asked, “Did you say this book has me ordering the break-ins because of a call-girl ring?”

Wallace said the manuscript was not clear about the first break-in. Indeed, he said it was all a bit unclear, but apparently they were saying that the second break-in was related to Bailley’s address book and a desk in the DNC. “Are you saying that none of this makes any sense to you?” Wallace asked again.

“Mike, I’m astounded. This sounds like a sick joke.”

“The authors and the publisher claim you were interviewed,” Wallace said.

“Not about this stuff. I was never asked anything about Mo, or Heidi Rikan, nor was there any mention of call girls. I assure you I would remember.”

Wallace wanted me to go on camera to deny the charges. I said I was willing, but I wanted to see the book so I could understand the basis of the charges. But 60 Minutes had signed a confidentiality agreement with the publisher, and was prohibited from providing

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any further information. When the conversation with Wallace ended I called Hays Gorey, a senior correspondent for Time magazine, who had not only covered Watergate, but, working with Mo, had co-authored *Mo: A Woman's View of Watergate*. Hays had known Heidi as well. He was aghast, and could not believe that Time was going to run such a flagrantly phony story without checking with the reporter who had covered Watergate for them. After a quick call to New York, he confirmed that the New York office had purchased the first serial rights to *Silent Coup*, and they were preparing both an excerpt and a news story.

Mo found the story laughable, and could not believe anyone would publish it. She had no information that Heidi had ever been involved with a call-girl ring, and did not believe it possible, because Heidi traveled constantly and was seldom in Washington. Mo had never heard of an attorney by the name of Phillip Mackin Bailley, and if her name was in his address book, it was not because she knew him.

By the time Mo returned home 60 Minutes had backed away from the book, because neither the authors nor the publisher could provide information that confirmed the central charges. Phillip Mackin Bailley, the source of much of the information, was “not available.” Notwithstanding 60 Minutes’s rejection of the book, Time’s editors were still proceeding. They asked Hays to interview us for our reaction, even though he had told them the story was untrue. Hays had called a number of men he knew who had worked at the DNC at the time the call-girl operation was said to be flourishing in 1971 and 1972. They all told him it was impossible that such activity could have existed without their knowing of it. One former DNC

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official told Hays that had there been such an operation he would have been a top customer. Traveling from Washington to California to interview us, Hays read the material in *Silent Coup* relating to the Deans, and could not understand why Time was treating it as a news story. Nor could I when he loaned me his copy of the book so I could see what was being said. The material in the book relating to the Deans ran about 180 pages, and as I skimmed these pages I could not find one that was not filled with false or misleading information. All the hard evidence (the information developed by government investigators and prosecutors) that conflicted with this invented story was simply omitted. I could find no real documentation for their charges. I did not understand how the authors and St. Martin's thought they could get away with their outrageous story without facing a lawsuit from us. Hays wondered the same.

We gave Hays a statement the next morning that made clear we were preparing for legal action. Hays gave us his telephone number in Salt Lake City, where he planned to stop to visit with family en route back to Washington. Several hours later we called him, because I had had another idea, and I asked if he thought it would be worth my effort to go directly to Henry Muller, Time's managing editor, to ask him to reconsider. Hays could not offer any encouragement. It was Friday evening in New York, and this issue of the magazine was heading for the printer. In addition, he confided that Time had paid fifty thousand dollars for the serial rights. But he gave me Muller's office number, and told me, "Only someone like Muller could pull a story at this late stage." I called Muller's office, and arranged to fax a letter. Rather than threatening

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legal action, I tried to appeal to Muller's journalistic good sense. They were reporting a story that 60 Minutes had investigated and rejected, and their principal Watergate reporter, Hays Gorey, had told them the story was baseless. Surprisingly, the effort worked. Within less than an hour of sending the letter, Hays called back. "You did it, Muller pulled the story. The whole thing. We're not going to even mention *Silent Coup*. I have only seen that happen once before in my thirty years with Time." Hays was ebullient, clearly proud that Time had done the right thing.

I decided to try again to persuade Tom McCormack, chairman and CEO of St. Martin's Press, to reconsider the publication of *Silent Coup*. McCormack had refused to talk with me earlier, so I faxed him a letter to let him know he was walking into a lawsuit. A day later we received McCormack's answer, when CBS's Good Morning America (GMA) called on Saturday morning to tell us that Colodny and Gettlin would be appearing Monday morning, May 21, 1991, to promote their newly published book and GMA wanted to give us a chance to respond. We faxed them the statement we had given Time. Clearly, a book tour was underway, but by pushing 60 Minutes and then Time, we had mortally wounded the book and destroyed the carefully planned launch, which might have given the story credibility. Now it would be difficult to treat *Silent Coup* as legitimate news.

Watching the authors on Good Morning America, we felt encouraged. Colodny, the older of the two, who looked to be in his early fifties, was a retired liquor salesman and conspiracy buff. Gettlin, who appeared to be in his forties, was a journalist. This was their first book. Both were tense. GMA's host, Charlie Gibson, an

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experienced journalist, was not buying the *Silent Coup* story relating to the Deans, so his questions focused on the material in the book related to Bob Woodward and Al Haig, which was as unfounded as the material relating to us. (Woodward was accused of CIA connections; Haig had allegedly plotted the “coup” of the title that had removed Nixon from office.) With St. Martin’s publicity department pumping out information about their sensational new book, requests for responses and appearances became so frequent we had to put a message on the answering machine to handle the requests. Not wanting to do anything to attract additional publicity to the book, however, we declined all appearances and issued a statement explaining that the charges were false.

We watched the authors again on CNN’s Larry King Live. Bob Beckel was the substitute host in Larry King’s absence. Colodny claimed that he and Gettlin were “not making any charges against Maureen Dean.” Yet I had made a note during my quick read of the book that they claimed that Mo’s alleged “acquaintanceship with [Phillip Mackin] Bailey, and the true identity of her friend Heidi [Rikan]...[were] the keys to understanding all the events of the break-ins and cover-ups that we know under the omnibus label of Watergate.” That was some “no charge.” After a commercial break, well into the program, both Colodny and Gettlin simply disappeared without explanation, as if snatched from their seats by hooks. In their places were Howard Kurtz, a media reporter for the Washington Post, and Gordon Liddy, Watergate’s most decorated felon. Beckel asked Liddy for his “theory” of why 60 Minutes and Time had “pulled” their stories on *Silent Coup*. Liddy said, “Well, I

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don't have to go for a theory with respect to those two things, because they are on the record." Liddy claimed none of the people charged by the book would appear on 60 Minutes. "They wanted to get John Dean, etcetera," Liddy claimed. "They wouldn't come on the program and face these two men. Time magazine just said, you know, the thing is so densely packed that it did not lend itself to being excerpted and they felt that they couldn't do it."

Liddy's remarks were untrue, for I had agreed to do 60 Minutes (as had Woodward and Haig) and I had a copy of the Time excerpt, not to mention my letter, which had killed it. Mike Wallace, who had obviously been watching the show, called in to correct Liddy's false characterizations. Wallace reported that he had read *Silent Coup*, and had interviewed Colodny and Gettlin. "And we intended to go, just as Time magazine intended to go. We checked, Gordon. I did talk to John Dean," he said. "We objected to the fact that the authors refused or declined to let the objects of their scrutiny, these three [Woodward, Haig, and Dean] in particular, see the book, read the book ahead of time, so that they could face the charges." As to the charge that I was the "mastermind" of Watergate, Wallace explained, "We could not, on our own, source the thing sufficiently to satisfy ourselves that it stood up as a 60 Minutes piece. That's why we didn't do the piece." Mo applauded when one of America's best-known journalists knocked down the book's central charge.

As a hard news story *Silent Coup* was now for certain dead and would undoubtedly have been headed for the remainder table, but St. Martin's had a lot of money tied up in it, and was determined to make it a best seller. Their plan was to sell the book to Nixon apologists and right-wingers, giving them a new history of Nixon's

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downfall in which Bob Woodward, Al Haig, and John Dean were the villains, and randy Democrats had all but invited surveillance. Who better to peddle this tale than uber-conservative Gordon Liddy? Although we did not know it at the time, Liddy had been a behind-the-scenes collaborator with Colodny in developing, sourcing, and writing *Silent Coup's* version of the Deans' involvement in Watergate. In fact, without Liddy's support St. Martin's might well have abandoned the project, for neither Colodny nor Gettlin had actually written it. St. Martin's had hired a freelancer, Tom Shachtman, to assemble a story based on material that Liddy and other right-wingers had helped Colodny assemble. Schachtman himself was contractually immunized from any legal liability, and shortly before *Silent Coup's* publication, St. Martin's had doubled its insurance coverage for defamation and worked out a plan for Liddy, who was already a St. Martin's author, to lead a charge to the best-seller list. To compensate Liddy for his efforts, and to give him an excuse to be out promoting, St. Martin's reissued a paperback edition of his autobiography, *Will*, with a new postscript that embraced *Silent Coup* as the definitive account on Watergate. In that material Liddy claimed, without any explanation, that I had duped him in "an exercise in sleight-of-hand worthy of The Amazing Randi himself," and that he had not truly understood Watergate until Colodny explained to him what had purportedly transpired, by telling him of Phillip Bailey's story. According to this revised accounting of history, Liddy's former partner-in-crime Howard Hunt was merely my pawn, working secretly for me unbeknownst to Liddy. (And unbeknownst to Howard Hunt as well, for he, too, denied the *Silent Coup* account.)

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Liddy's involvement in this specious attack did not surprise me. He had once planned to kill both Howard Hunt and me, he had said in *Will*, but his orders to do so had never come—although he did not say who he expected would send them. “Howard Hunt had become an informer,” he wrote, and when Hunt agreed to testify he became “a betrayer of his friends, and to me there is nothing lower on earth....Hunt deserved to die.” About me, Liddy wrote that the “difference between Hunt and Dean is the difference between a POW who breaks under torture and aids the enemy, and Judas Iscariot.”² The subtext of Liddy's statement is that the U.S. government had become his enemy and that Richard Nixon had become something of a Christ figure for him. Attacking Howard Hunt and me was consistent with both his conservative politics and his personality. He sought to resurrect Nixon for conservatives and blame others for his destroyed presidency. His attacks on Mo, however, were inexplicable. It did not strike me as consistent with his macho perception of himself to attack a noncombatant woman, yet he traveled the country repeating the false story that Phillip Bailey had told him. Clearly, *Silent Coup* had come at a perfect time for Liddy. Since the first publication of *Will* in 1980 he had made a living by putting his dysfunctional personality on display. By the early nineties speaking engagements were becoming less frequent for him, and his business ventures, including several novels, were unsuccessful. *Silent Coup* put him back in the spotlight, where he loved to be—publicly misbehaving.

My former colleague Chuck Colson's appearance on national television to endorse *Silent Coup* truly surprised me and stunned Mo, who was deeply hurt by his gratuitous attack. Chuck and I had

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crossed swords at the Nixon White House only once, and even then we had not communicated directly. I had had virtually nothing to do with his office, or its nefarious activities, except for the time Chuck had wanted to firebomb and burglarize the Brookings Institution, convinced that this Washington think tank had copies of documents the president wanted. When I learned of his insane plan I flew to California (where the president and senior staff were staying at the Western White House) to plead my case to John Ehrlichman, a titular superior to both Chuck and myself. By pointing out, with some outrage, that if anyone died it would involve a capital crime that might be traced back to the White House, I was able to shut down Colson's scheme. As a result, over the next several months I was told nothing about Colson's shenanigans, such as his financing the infamous burglary by Liddy and Hunt of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office after Ellsberg released the so-called Pentagon Papers, which was a precursor to the later Watergate break-ins.

After I eventually broke rank with the Nixon White House, Colson had set about trying to destroy me for telling the truth, though he backed off after purportedly finding God. He also became rather busy with his own problems. On March 1, 1974, Colson was indicted for his role in the Watergate cover-up, and six days later he was indicted for his involvement in the conspiracy to break into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist. Chuck, no doubt, sensed even more problems to come, because the Watergate Special Prosecution Force was considering charging him with both perjury and subornation of perjury.³ He was facing a lot of jail time. However, the prosecutors allowed him to plead guilty to a single—

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and given what he was facing, innocuous—charge in exchange for his cooperation, although in the end he proved to be utterly useless as a government witness, since the prosecutors could not vouch for his honesty.

Chuck and I had agreed to let bygones be bygones during the Watergate cover-up trial when we found ourselves only down the hall from each other, under the federal Witness Protection Program, at the Fort Holabird safe house in Maryland, just outside Washington. Until Colson started promoting *Silent Coup* I had taken him as a man of his word, and we had even continued to visit from time to time after Watergate was behind us. When I saw Colson promote *Silent Coup* on Crossfire, I was still unaware of his earlier prepublication discussions with Colodny about this invented history. (Colodny had illegally tape-recorded all of his telephone conversations.) Why, of all people, would Chuck Colson promote *Silent Coup's* conspicuously phony account of Watergate? Where was his conscience? How could he call himself a Christian? I promised myself I would find answers to these questions, because I did not understand what was compelling his behavior.

The promotion campaign to sell the book to conservatives worked, thanks to Liddy's nationwide tour, in which he appeared on countless right-wing talk-radio shows. By July 7, 1991, *Silent Coup* had peaked at number three on the New York Times best-seller list. On July 12, 1991, our answering machine handled a very early call. When Mo checked the message I heard her shriek, and ran to find her standing beside the answering machine sobbing and shaking. "What is it?" I asked but she could not speak, as tears poured from her eyes. As I held her I could feel every bone in her body trembling.

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“What is it?” I asked again.

“Liddy. He’s called our house.” Before Mo could explain, the phone began ringing and I answered.

“Is this John Dean?” an unfamiliar voice asked.

“Yes, it is. Who’s this?”

“Wow, that’s cool. This is really John Dean?”

“Yes. Who is this, please?”

“Oh, I’m nobody. I was just listening to the radio and Gordon Liddy was on, and he gave out your telephone number, so I thought I’d try it. Talk to you later. Bye.”

Immediately the phone rang again, this time it was a collect call, which I refused. To prevent further nuisance calls I used a technique that makes all our phone lines busy. This diverted Mo’s attention and calmed her, and she now asked me to listen to Liddy’s message, so I played it.

A smug-sounding voice said, “This is G. Gordon Liddy, calling you from the Merle Pollis Show. John, you have...” “W-E-R-E Cleveland, let’s get our call letters in,” the host interrupted. Liddy then continued, “...you have promised that you will sue me and Len Colodny and Bob Gettlin. Let’s get this suit started, John. We want to get you on the stand, under oath, yet again...Come on, John. I’m publicly challenging you to make good on your promise to sue.” The host added, “John, this is Merle Pollis, the host of the program. Would you say hello to Maureen, for me? I said she was the prettiest of the Watergate people, next to G. Gordon Liddy. I hope she’s still just as pretty. I, ah, this, this new book, however, reveals some things about Maureen that irk me. I didn’t want to think of her in that way, and it makes me very sad, and it also makes me feel,

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well, never mind. Thanks, John.”

Liddy would get his lawsuit, but on our terms, not his. Rather than give him the publicity he desperately wanted, we spent the next eight months collecting evidence and preparing the case. For eight years our lawsuit made its way through the federal courts, and St. Martin’s tried every possible ploy to prevent its going to trial. Had we taken the case to trial, Phillip Mackin Bailley, the key source for the story about the purported call-girl ring, might rank as the worst possible source of information in the annals of defamation law. Bailley had been in and out of mental institutions throughout his adult life. When we deposed him, Bailley’s attorney arranged for a psychiatrist to testify under oath that his client’s mental condition made him unable to distinguish fact from fiction. While St. Martin’s and the other defendants were spending over \$14 million of insurance company money trying to make us go away, it eventually became clear to them that we were prepared to go whatever distance necessary to make fools of them all, and that we had the evidence to do it.⁴ By the fall of 1998 we had also accomplished our underlying goal of gathering the information necessary to show that *Silent Coup* was bogus history. Ultimately, it seems, they had hoped to win the lawsuit by simply outspending us, but when that strategy failed, they sought a settlement. Neither Colodny nor Liddy wanted to settle, however. Colodny had somehow used a rider on his homeowner’s policy to get the insurance company to pay for his defense in the litigation, though ultimately his insurer forced him to settle. Liddy, on the other hand, had nothing at risk, since all of his assets were in his wife’s name and St. Martin’s was paying for his attorney. After we settled with St. Martin’s and Colodny, U.S.

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District Court Judge Emmett Sullivan put an end to the litigation.⁵ While the final settlement agreement prohibits me from discussing its terms, I can say the Deans were satisfied.

Despite most of the news media's fitting dismissal of *Silent Coup's* baseless claims, the protracted litigation provided time for the book to gather a following, including an almost cultlike collection of high-profile right-wingers. Among them, for example, is Monica Crowley, a former aide to Richard Nixon after his presidency, and now a conservative personality on MSNBC, cohosting *Connected: Coast to Coast* with Ron Reagan. Other prominent media-based conservatives who have joined the glee club are James Rosen and Brit Hume of Fox News. How these seemingly intelligent people embraced this false account mystified me, and I wanted to know.

Throughout the prolonged *Silent Coup* controversy it had gradually become clear to me that St. Martin's, Colodny, and Gettlin were in it for the money. Had Phillip Bailley, or some other such source, claimed that Pat Nixon had ordered the break-in, they no doubt would have turned history upside down to try to sell that story as well. When we contested the bogus account, they all fought to save face. In addition, Colodny, who called himself a Democrat, had never been given much attention until he was embraced by the right wing, where he has found new friends. Liddy wanted revenge, even though *Silent Coup* showed him as a greater fool than history already had; promoting it did, however, provide an outlet for his aggression—not to mention that it also landed him his own talk-radio show, which has thrived. As for Colson, his reason for promoting *Silent Coup* remained a complete mystery for me, as did

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the motives of people like Monica Crowley, James Rosen, Brit Hume, and all the other hard-core conservatives who embraced this spurious history and made it a best seller. The only thing I could see that these people had in common was their conservatism.

As much as anything, the lawsuit made me realize that during the years I had been focused on business the Republican Party and conservatism had undergone drastic changes. The Republican Party had shifted to the extreme right, resulting in longtime hard-right conservatives like Liddy and Colson, who had once been at the fringe, finding themselves in vogue. That philosophical shift and its implications became even clearer to me when I returned to Washington for an extended period of time during the Clinton impeachment proceedings and experienced for myself the new conservative climate that has enveloped the nation's capital. Most of these conservatives had arrived after Nixon's fall, and in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

They were not good losers. So when they lost the White House in 1992 they began what would be an unrelenting and extended series of attacks on the Clinton presidency, which reached their peak when Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky was revealed in early 1998. At that time I began receiving an increasing number of requests for television interviews, and *Silent Coup* was all but forgotten publicly (and we were in settlement discussions). While I had no idea then whether the president was telling the truth about his relationship with Lewinsky, it was clear to me that the First Lady was correct in her contention that there was a vast right-wing conspiracy attempting to destroy the Clintons, for I still had a number of knowledgeable conservative contacts. Because each of

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the various scandals of the Clinton White House—the travel office firings, Whitewater, Vince Foster’s suicide, the Paula Jones lawsuit, and the Lewinsky affair—was predictably declared by Republicans to be “worse than Watergate,” I felt someone needed to set the record straight.⁶ In reality, these scandals, even collectively, did not come close to Watergate in their seriousness. So I began to speak out. I did not speak as a partisan, but rather as someone who understood the difference between the Clinton and Nixon scandals, as well as the gravity of impeachment. (I was well versed in this topic because I had once studied the impeachment and trial of Andrew Johnson, and, of course, had firsthand knowledge of the Nixon proceedings.)

During the time the independent counsel, Kenneth Starr, was building his case against Clinton for impeachment, I agreed to work exclusively for MSNBC in Washington as an on-camera consultant, or “anchor buddy,” beginning my assignment soon after Starr made a formal referral to the House Judiciary Committee on September 9, 1998, and sent the thirty-six boxes of damning evidence to the House of Representatives. Over the next several months, during Clinton’s impeachment and trial, I spent more time in Washington than I had, cumulatively, in the preceding twenty-five years, and it could not have been a more eventful time to be there. One did not need to be a knowledgeable Washington veteran, though, to perceive that conservatives in Congress were hell-bent on overturning the 1996 election and removing Clinton from office.

MSNBC’s studios in Washington are on Capitol Hill, not far from the Senate side of the Capitol building. A core group of on-air consultants were placed on various shows throughout the day, but

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during the impeachment hearings and the trial, a few of us were requested to stay on the set with the anchors as long as official proceedings continued. During the many hours I was in the studio or the green room, I probably spent more time talking with legal analyst Barbara Olson than anyone else. Barbara, who was tragically killed on the 9/11 flight that crashed into the Pentagon, was smart, savvy, engaging, and never shy, least of all in her opinion of the president and his wife. “I really hate the Clintons, and I want to run them out of town,” she told me. Barbara, who frequently made calls on her cell phone during breaks, made it impossible not to overhear her conversations, and she explained to me that she was receiving talking points from her network of conservative Republicans, who were observing all of the media’s coverage of the impeachment proceeding. “Do you really believe you can remove a popular president?” I asked her during the hearings. “Absolutely. It’s a done deal,” she said. “How about the Senate?” I asked. “We’re working on it,” she replied with a conspiratorial smile and a wink. I had little doubt, from the time I spent with Barbara, that votes had already been counted in the House of Representatives, and nothing was going to stop them from voting for impeachment. There were simply too many Democrats in the Senate, however, for the Republicans to muster the requisite two thirds for a guilty verdict and removal. The entire undertaking was designed to tarnish Clinton, and the Democrats.

During this period I was able to visit with members of the House and Senate, both Republicans and Democrats, who streamed through the MSNBC green room or the studios, often with key members of their staff. I had many fascinating, and informative,

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conversations that were invaluable to the education I received during this period. I learned, for instance, that Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-GA) and majority leader Tom DeLay (R-TX) were both exerting enormous control over the GOP. Some Republicans told me that Gingrich was betting his Speaker's seat on the impeachment drive's adding additional Republican members to the House. DeLay, it was clear, had influence because the rank-and-file House Republicans feared his wrath, and he was determined to impeach Clinton. Several Republicans told me that this was payback to the Democrats for what had been done to Nixon, and when I pointed out that Republicans had been part of that undertaking, a typical response was, "Yeah, but they weren't conservative." In fact, there were conservatives involved in the effort, but I was not looking for debates about Watergate.

Notwithstanding Clinton's soaring popularity, conservatives had become myopic; they were fixated on getting rid of him. Five days after the House Judiciary Committee voted along party lines to begin an impeachment inquiry (with all Republicans, who controlled the committee, voting for it, and all Democrats voting against), a Washington Post public opinion poll showed that 62 percent of Republicans dis-approved of impeaching the president. Knowledgeable Republicans passing through the MSNBC green room privately explained that House Republicans would pursue the impeachment anyway, on behalf of the 31 percent who wanted Clinton removed. (Seven percent of the Post poll of the GOP had no opinion.) The motive of the GOP leaders was simply to please the party's "base"; the wishes of the base were their command. That base was composed primarily of Christian conservatives, in

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particular evangelicals. Republicans with whom I spoke before the November 1998 midterm elections were convinced the party would be vindicated at the polls for its treatment of Clinton. As it turned out, however, they had misread the mood of the country, and they lost the great “impeachment election” when Americans refused to make the election a referendum on Bill Clinton’s behavior. Republicans, who controlled the House and the Senate, not only gained no seats in either body, but lost five seats in the House; Speaker Newt Gingrich resigned after his plan was defeated. What was even more stunning was that the election results did not stop these hard-core conservative Republicans from continuing to push for Clinton’s impeachment and, at the same time, issue increasingly stern demands for party loyalty. As someone who had previously spent over twenty years in Washington observing Congress up close, I found this new level of party discipline remarkable. I understood that DeLay scared them, but so badly that they would vote against their consciences? I was relieved that a few of the conservatives with whom I spoke believed the GOP leadership was going too far.

While not exactly naive to the ways of Washington, I was amazed, if not at times dumbfounded, by these events, and the remarkable hypocrisy displayed during them, as I watched from my ringside seat. Ostensibly, Clinton was impeached and being tried for lying about a sexual liaison. If truthfulness about extramarital affairs had been a requisite for everyone in Congress to hold their seats before they voted to oust Clinton, neither the House nor the Senate could have formed a quorum. While the people responsible for Clinton’s impeachment called themselves conservatives, this was

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not a conservatism with which I was familiar. In past years problems of this nature had been resolved without threatening the nation's well-being. During Watergate, for example, Barry Goldwater, Hugh Scott, and John Rhodes traveled to the White House to tell Nixon it was time to resign. And in 1987, notes Washington Post reporter Peter Baker, "Democratic leaders agreed to forgo impeachment proceedings against Ronald Reagan for the Iran-Contra affair once former senator Howard H. Baker, Jr. took over as White House chief of staff, pledging to put things back on track."⁷ In both these cases constitutional crises had been avoided. But now, so-called conservatives who controlled the House of Representatives had pushed the process for political spite and cheapened an extremely important constitutional check by using impeachment solely to attack a president of whom they did not approve. Conservative demagogues shamed themselves in ways far worse than Clinton had himself, and their behavior was certainly more threatening to the democratic process than anything the president had done.

At the height of Watergate, conservative historian Daniel J. Boorstin gave an extended interview to *Congressional Quarterly* in which he noted that radio and television enabled countless Americans to follow the proceedings. "We used to think of the conscience as being a private, intimate, still, small voice within," he said. "Now the conscience of democracy becomes the whole community sitting in their living room watching what has been done." The conscience of a democracy, Boorstin said, was "what could be called the conscience of the marketplace—the people's feeling of outrage at the violations of common decency, of legal and

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constitutional rules.” This, warned Boorstin, should be distinguished from “what might be called the judgment of the marketplace. The judgment of the marketplace is lynch law, and that is something we must beware of.”⁸ If Boorstin’s analysis was applied to Clinton’s impeachment, the House of Representatives would be seen as having rejected the “conscience of the marketplace,” and having imposed the judgment of a lynch mob.

Conservatives attracted to conspicuously false history, as occurred with *Silent Coup*, and conservatives with the mentality of a lynch mob, were foreign to me, but they certainly got my attention. In now writing about them, by myself, I am not proceeding as this project was initially conceived. It started as a joint undertaking with the late U.S. senator Barry M. Goldwater of Arizona, whom I had the good fortune of knowing almost his entire political career. His oldest son, Barry, Jr., has been my close friend since the early 1950s, when we were roommates at Staunton Military Academy in Virginia, which was also the senator’s high school alma mater. Senator Goldwater was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1952, resigned in 1964 to pursue an unsuccessful bid for the presidency as the Republican Party’s standard-bearer, and was reelected to the Senate in 1968, where he served until his retirement in 1985. After leaving the Senate he remained active and interested in Republican politics until his death in 1998.

I discovered Senator Goldwater’s political thinking during my college years, when, like countless other college students of the early 1960s I read his book *The Conscience of a Conservative* and experienced a political awakening. The senator made conservatism

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respectable, unlike the witch-hunting Senator Joe McCarthy and the screwball absurdities of the John Birch Society. Senator Goldwater's conservatism was sensible and straightforward, and therefore appealing. Given the influence he had on my thinking, as well as my admiration for him, it is not surprising that I still consider myself to be a "Goldwater conservative" on many issues. Be that as it may, while my core beliefs have not changed significantly in the past forty years, the Grand Old Party to which I once belonged has moved so far to the right, that on the contemporary political spectrum I now often fall to the left of the Republican center. Like many Republicans uncomfortable with the right-wing extremists who control the party, I reregistered as an Independent.

It was not Senator Goldwater's politics, however, that prompted me to call him after the 1994 midterm elections, when the Republicans won control of Congress for the first time in forty years. I called to solicit his thoughts about the *Silent Coup* lawsuit, and to talk to him about the conservatives who were so aggressively promoting, and buying into, this false history. Following the senator's unsuccessful bid for the presidency in 1964 he had filed a defamation lawsuit against the publisher of FACT magazine, Ralph Ginsberg, who had claimed during the 1964 presidential campaign that the senator was crazy, a judgment he based on a ludicrous and highly partisan poll of psychiatrists. Although it took years, Senator Goldwater eventually won. His case made new law, which I told him would help my wife and me, as public figures, prevail in our suit.⁹ He was aware of the attacks on Mo, and he immediately put our situation into a larger context, while counseling that we vigorously pursue the litigation.

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“I heard that jackass Liddy on one of the talk-radio shows,” the senator told me. “I don’t think anyone believes him, John. He’s a fool.” “Frankly, I find it offensive that he calls himself a conservative,” the senator added.

“Why’s that?” I asked.

“Why? I’ll tell you why. Because he thinks like a thug, not like a conservative. Conservatives seek the wisdom of the past, not the worst of it,” he snapped. He continued, “I was talking with [former Arizona Republican congressman and former minority leader of the House of Representatives] Johnny Rhodes, just a few days ago. He’s still got the ear of the House Republican leaders. I asked him to tell those fellows back in Washington that I don’t go along with their incivility. I told them they should back off on their attacks on Hillary Clinton. They’re acting like jerks too, not conservatives. If they don’t, I’m going to blast them. They’re driving decent people out of public service. And they’re turning off voters. It’s dirty politics, and it should end.”

“Why do you suppose that they do this?” I asked.

Without hesitation he said, “It’s these so-called social or cultural conservatives. And I don’t know what in hell possesses them. I’d like to find out.”*

Senator Goldwater had no tolerance for such politics, and had never attacked his own political opponents personally. He was tough as nails, yet courtly in his courtesy. During the 1964 presidential race against President Lyndon Johnson, for example, one of Johnson’s top aides and close friends, Walter Jenkins, was arrested in the men’s room of the YMCA near the White House for engaging in a homosexual activity. After the Johnson White House

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whisked Jenkins into a hospital and hushed up the story, the senator's campaign people learned of the incident and wanted to use it against LBJ. Senator Goldwater refused, despite the brutal campaign ads the Johnson people were running against him.

When I called Senator Goldwater I had only recently learned more about Chuck Colson's involvement with *Silent Coup*. I asked the senator for his thoughts on Christian conservatives like Colson, and their increasing presence in Republican politics, and he minced no words. "Goddamn it, John," he began, with a combination of anger, frustration, and sorrow, "the Republicans are selling their soul to win elections." He saw trouble coming. "Mark my word," he said, "if and when these preachers get control of the party, and they're sure trying to do so, it's going to be a terrible damn problem. Frankly, these people frighten me. Politics and governing demand compromise. The government won't work without it. But these Christians believe they are acting in the name of God, so they can't and won't compromise. I know, I've tried to deal with them." He had absolutely no doubt that these people had made Washington more divisive than it had ever been, and he was concerned that their divisiveness was spreading throughout the country.¹⁰

My conversations with Senator Goldwater evolved into a plan to write a book together about so-called social conservatives. We would attempt to understand their strident and intolerant politics by talking with people like Chuck Colson, Pat Robertson, and Jerry Falwell. We would learn more about their thinking, and try to determine whether they appreciated what they were doing to conservatism and to Republican politics. We would title our book *Conservatives Without Conscience*, an obvious allusion to Senator

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Goldwater's classic. But we had not progressed very deeply into our work before I realized it could become a burden for the senator, whose physical health was rapidly failing. I slowed the project down and soon had to place it on the shelf, hoping to resume when the senator felt better. Sadly, that did not happen, but because I wanted answers, I could not abandon our task. I wanted to understand why these so-called conservatives acted in such a conspicuously unattractive manner. What caused their aggression and the hostility that was changing the nature of politics? Our litigation and my experiences during the Clinton impeachment proceedings continued to provide insights into conservative thinking, and it was not attractive. But it was my even closer look at Washington after the 2000 election, when writing about Bush and Cheney, that convinced me I had to find answers. The serious deterioration and disintegration of conservative principles under Bush and Cheney, in all branches of the federal government, with the striking shift toward a very un-American-type of authoritarianism, compelled me to complete the project I had begun with Senator Goldwater.

Unfortunately, I no longer had the senator's experience, wisdom, or insights to draw upon. But I did have notes from our conversations, as well as access to his files, which he had pointed me to before his death. His personal political papers, housed at the Arizona Historical Foundation in Phoenix, are a treasure trove of raw material relating to American conservatism, and they served as an important resource for this book. While I have quoted from the senator's papers when appropriate, I have not taken the liberty of attempting to speak for him. I have also discovered, after reading a plethora of books on the subject, that nearly every question Senator

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Goldwater and I had discussed about the religious right has been answered in other works—all but one.¹¹ That remaining question is rather basic: Why do those in the religious right act as they do? Are they motivated by religion or conservatism? Stated a little differently, is this what happens when Christians become politically active? Or do their actions simply reflect one type of person who is drawn to conservatism? In the pages that follow I have set forth the answers I found to these and many other questions about the current conservative sensibility.

Conservatives without conscience do not have horns and tails; if they did they would be easier to identify. Many of them can be quite pleasant, but at heart they are tough, cold-blooded, ruthless authoritarians. They are limited in their ability to see the world from any point of view other than their own, and they are narrow in their outlook. George W. Bush and Dick Cheney are prototypical conservative leaders without conscience. The excessive secrecy of the Bush administration, in particular, was apparent even before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, but because the mainstream media ignored this issue, I wrote about it myself in *Worse Than Watergate: The Secret Presidency of George W. Bush*. Unlike the consequences of Nixon's secrecy, those of Bush and Cheney have been lethal. Realizing that only a partisan would remain silent, I wanted to make people aware of what was happening, for I recognized that this was a dangerous presidency. In *Worse Than Watergate* I did not analyze Bush and Cheney's behavior, because I was not sure then what was driving them. However, after studying the matter, I believe that one can reasonably conclude that how they think, their

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policies, and their style of governing are based to an alarming extent on their own authoritarian personalities, which tolerate no dissent, use dissembling as their standard modus operandi, and have pushed their governing authority beyond the law and the Constitution.

“In his landmark book, *Privacy and Freedom*, Alan Westin...defines democracy and authoritarianism in terms of information policy,” wrote Robert G. Vaughn, a professor at American University’s Washington College of Law. Summarizing Westin’s work, Professor Vaughn continued, “Authoritarian governments are identified by ready government access to information about the activities of citizens and by extensive limitations on the ability of citizens to obtain information about the government. In contrast, democratic governments are marked by significant restrictions on the ability of government to acquire information about its citizens and by ready access by citizens to information about the activities of government.”¹² I did not use that quote when writing about Bush and Cheney’s insistence on secrecy because I did not then really understand the true nature of authoritarianism, yet I was struck time and again by the authoritarian nature of the Bush/Cheney administration. Now I realize that Bush and Cheney have given authoritarianism a new legitimacy in Washington, and it is taking us where we should not want to go.

Conservatism is not inherently moralistic, negative, arrogant, condescending, and self-righteous. Nor is it authoritarian. Yet all of these are adjectives that best describe the political outlook of contemporary conservatism. I make these observations not as an

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outsider, but as a conservative who is deeply troubled by what has become of a treasured philosophy. Conservatism has been co-opted by authoritarians, a most dangerous type of political animal.

How do people—particularly those who have never put their life on the line for their country—engage in, or condone, attacks on Senator John McCain’s life-defining experiences as a Vietnam POW or question Senator Max Cleland’s courage in building a new life after his loss of three limbs in Vietnam? What causes them to dispute Senator John Kerry’s valor during voluntary combat duty in Vietnam or to contest Representative Jack Murtha’s war record in Vietnam? Do they believe that by belittling the competence of White House counsel Harriet Miers, by forcing her to withdraw as a nominee for the Supreme Court, they are engaged in legitimate political debate? Why do they remain silent, or even defend, a president who has shamed the nation forever by endorsing an unprecedented and unnecessary use of torture against our enemies? These questions have clear answers. My aim is to explain how and why these conservatives operate as they do, with the thought that others may realize that this current breed of authoritarian conservatism, the behavior of both authoritarian leaders and their credulous followers, constitute a hazardous way for politics and governing. In fact, these people cannot be trusted to exercise the powers of government responsibly.

I have not written this book with the slightest expectations of ending the vile attacks of these authoritarian conservatives or of changing their Machiavellian attitudes. They cannot be stopped because their behavior is simply a function of the way they are and how they think, their dispositions, and the way they deal with the

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world. However, they can be understood, exposed, and watched, and there is compelling reason to do so. While their attacks on me and my wife may be considered harmless in the scheme of things, their larger undertaking is of great concern.

Certainly, not all conservatives are the same, and not all of them are authoritarians or without conscience. In addition, many of them do not actually know very much about the belief system to which they supposedly subscribe. While some conservatives will take visceral offense at this book, for I have recast the dominant contemporary conservatism in its true light as “authoritarian conservatism,” my hope is that for others—particularly this movement’s “followers,” a category into which most conservatives fall—it will encourage reflection. As I see it, there are three kinds of conservatives: the good, the bad, and the evil. And this book is about the bad and evil ones. Many of my friends are conservatives, and they will remain my friends after reading this book, and some may even thank me for writing it. Moderates, progressives, and liberals may appreciate that someone with inside knowledge of conservatism has finally explained what the hell has happened to these people.

For those interested in learning more about the disposition, beliefs, and actions of those who presently dominate American politics, some understanding of conservatism is required. Providing this information is easier said than done, as contemporary conservatism is a jungle of twisted thoughts and strange growths. From earlier travels I know the terrain, but I know only a few of the people now occupying it. Now that I have explained how they got my attention, it is necessary to clarify what conservatism is and

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what it is not, which I believe will show why it has been so easily manipulated and corrupted by authoritarians.

In Chapter 1, I explain how conservatives think, and highlight the structural weaknesses that have allowed it to be pulled from its roots by authoritarian conservatives. Chapter 2 explores authoritarians, many of whom are conservatives without conscience. This material is derived from almost half a century of scientific study, which has been inexplicably ignored outside of academia and so has not been readily available to the general reader. In Chapter 3, I illustrate how authoritarians operate in their own images, when I examine neoconservatives and Christian conservatives, who currently dominate Republican politics and policy. And in Chapter 4, I conclude with examples of the ugly politics and evil policies resulting from current authoritarian rule, the work of people who are conservatives without conscience and who are taking America in an undemocratic direction. Finally, I have placed some additional information and analysis in appendices.

Much of what I have to report is bad news. But there is some good news, because while authoritarians have little self-awareness, a few of them, when they learn the nature of their behavior, seek to change their ways. Thus, by reporting the bad and the ugly, it may do some good. At least that is my hope.

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DEAN

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