

AMERICA THIS WEEK

America This Week Transcript: Durham, FBI Whistleblowers, and "The Great Loyalty Oath Crusade"

Walter and I discuss "The Great Loyalty Oath Crusade" from *Catch-22*, the paradigm-shifting satire of the original House Un-American Activities Committee, whose memory was sadly revived last week

MATT TAIBBI AND WALTER KIRN

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Left, FBI whistleblower Marcus Allen. Right, California's Linda Sanchez, who asked him, "Do you believe it's important for federal agents to have allegiance to the United States?"

[This week's episode](#) of *America This Week* went over familiar ground in *Catch-22*, but Walter Kirn and I can argue honestly, we had no choice. House hearings involving three FBI whistleblowers directly evoked the memory of one of the most celebrated parts of that that novel. Add the release of Special Prosecutor John Durham's report, and we had a lot to discuss.

The transcript, edited for length and clarity:

On the release of Special Prosecutor John Durham's long-awaited Report on the [origins](#) of the Trump-Russia investigations:

Matt Taibbi: There would've been a time, I think maybe three or four years ago, where all the information that's in this report would've been like *mana* from heaven, because we were lacking all those answers. How did this thing start? What actually is behind it? So for me there's a little bit of an anti-climax in reading some of this. At the same time, it fully exposed the entire Russiagate era as a fraud. And there was no response. It landed with a complete thud. Nobody acknowledged it. Nothing. What was your response to it?

Walter Kirn: Well, first of all, you called it long-awaited. For me, it was so long-awaited that I'd forgotten it was even coming. Secondly, though it would've been nice to have this information a long time ago, the truth is, we had almost all of the information a long time ago. What we didn't have was the certification of the information by a government authority, by a legal authority.

But Lee Smith wrote a book, [The Plot Against the President](#), which largely included most of these points and details, which come down to this for me: this was an investigation which led to the Crossfire Hurricane, which led to the Mueller investigation, predicated on really nothing.

Matt Taibbi: Which led to the New York case, by the way.

Walter Kirn: Which led to the New York case. And so what we found out was that there was no *there* there from the very beginning, that a misreported bar conversation with as low-level a Trump person as you could have found, was the basis for this great madness that the country went through, for every broadcast practically that Rachel Maddow did for headlines across the board, for a kind of preoccupation with the Russian threat that exists even today, really.

And it was also shown, I think, in the report that there were many, many points at which the whole thing was questioned internally and could have been ended, and wasn't. In terms of literature, it was a document about inertia and cognitive dissonance and doubling down and going on trooping on in a crusade that had no basis, but which developed its own logic, its own momentum and its own necessities.

Basically we had was a Hillary Clinton-generated attack on Trump, which became a legal and governmental initiative that grew and grew, and which couldn't be stopped. I think Durham did a job of showing reach to the highest levels of the government. Apparently everyone was briefed on the reality of this thing early on, very early on. All the highest authorities knew it was bullshit, and yet for some mysterious reason, it flowed like the mighty Mississippi.

Matt Taibbi: Well, mysterious is being generous, isn't it?

Walter Kirn: Yeah. Mysterious is being generous. It's being diplomatic. In a way, I guess it became necessary that the system vindicates itself by finding that which could not be found and asserting that which could not be proved, to the point that the moment where it mattered passed away. President Trump's no longer president. All of the harms that were done by this thing have been done. They changed our history, they changed our media. They changed our sense of information and why it's important.

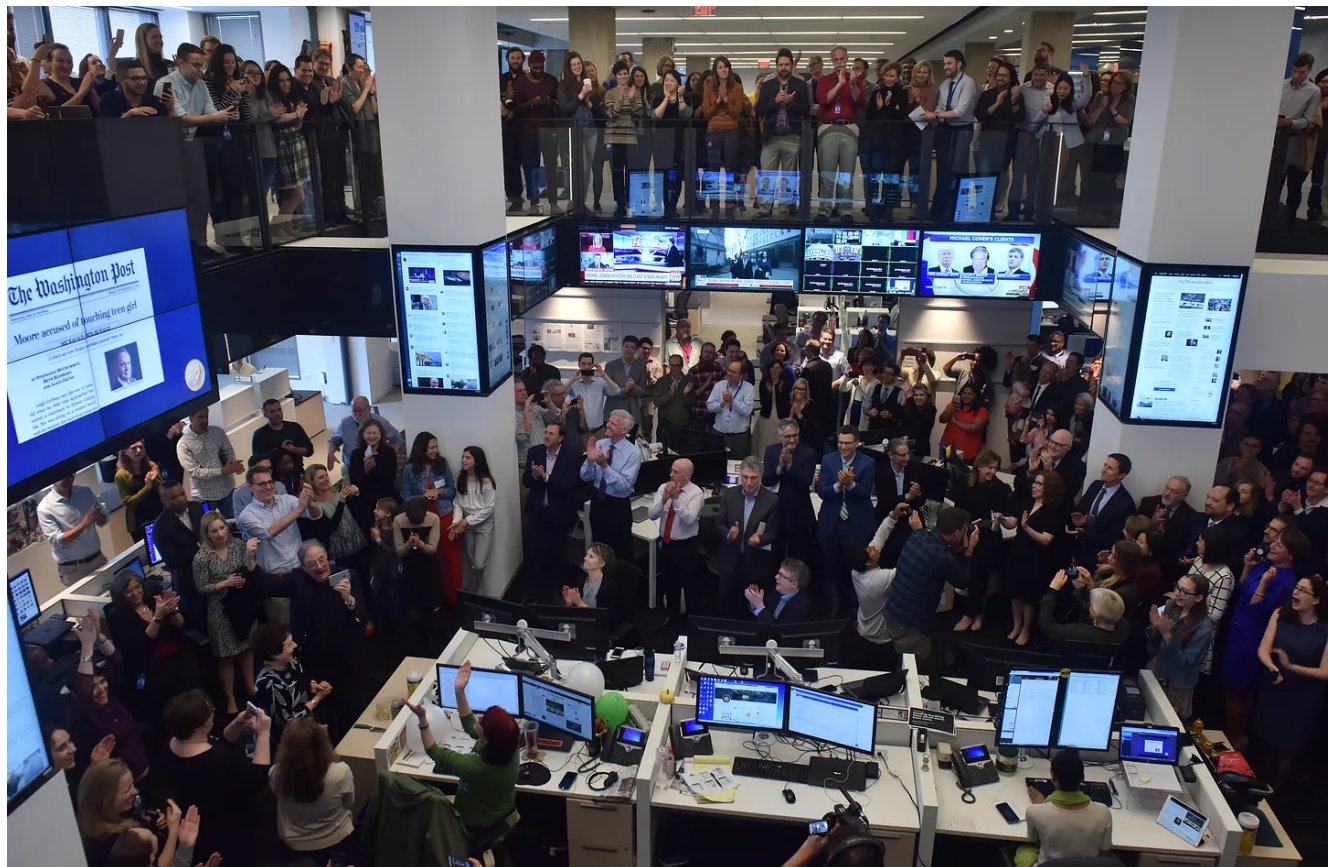
In other words, the disinformation complex that we talk about over and over on this show is in some ways predicated on the heinous act that goes back to 2016 in which the Russians allegedly penetrated not only the country, but the campaign of Donald Trump to such a level that we have to build all these defenses against it ever happening again. Except it never happened in the first place.

Matt Taibbi: We were speaking off-air. It's a little bit like going back in time to 2001 and changing one small fact...

Walter Kirn: It's though somebody put up their hand in 2009 or so and said, "We've just investigated 9/11, and found out it didn't happen. It was a video. It didn't actually occur, but all of the wars and affluent activities that came from it are still in place and we need to protect them."

It was the ultimate "Oh, that?"

And you talk about how the Durham report has landed to a silence. Well, what other option do people who've won [Pulitzers](#) for reporting on something that didn't happen have but to be quiet?



Washington Post staff celebrate two 2018 Pulitzer Prizes: for "investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election" and "coverage of the 2017 Senate race in Alabama."

I mean, they can't really argue that it did happen now. And they can't really argue that we should be able to report on things that didn't happen as though they did, because the issues themselves are important. Getting Donald Trump was such an overriding concern that making stuff up was called for.

So they're stuck. Everybody just has to troop on in this strange double-think way in which we know it didn't happen, but it was very important anyway, and we had to change our system and our values around to accommodate this thing that didn't happen.

Matt Taibbi: Even if they wanted to honestly, there would be no way logistically to handle this information. What would you do? Would you have have a special broadcast where Lawrence O'Donnell goes on the air and says, "In light of some new information, basically everything that we've talked about on this channel for the last seven years, we're going to have to retract..."