



President Kennedy
with scientists Glenn
Seaborg (left) and
Edward Teller.

entity, and the Energy Department is now considered just as mendacious as the AEC. In August 2001, for instance, a report by the U.S. Justice Department found Energy had misled the FBI in the famous bungled investigation of scientist Wen Ho Lee, who was unjustly accused of espionage by Energy.

Stassen would later become something of a national joke for his repeated presidential candidacies, but Stone always had a good word for him: “Stassen tried very, very hard as Eisenhower’s chief disarmament negotiator—he’s a real unsung hero—to get something, but

Teller was making the test ban seem unilateral, like some sort of giveaway. As we got close to an agreement, Teller starts to say, ‘How can we enforce it? Suppose they go underground. Suppose they go out into space? Suppose they go to the dark side of the moon? We’ll never be able to detect them.’”

Teller was a consultant at Lawrence Livermore until his death in 2003. He once said, “We must overcome the popular notion that nuclear weapons are more immoral than conventional weapons.” He has been immortalized in popular culture by Bad Religion’s song “The Biggest Killer in American History.” Part of the lyric reads, “I think of Edward

Teller and his moribund reprise/ Then I look to Nevada and I can’t believe my eyes.”

A ban on underground testing finally materialized, but not until the 1990s, and it is not a legal treaty, merely an informal moratorium that has been breached, notably by India and Pakistan. In 1999, the Senate rejected a comprehensive ban.

Stone published *I.F. Stone’s Weekly* until Dec. 14, 1971, when he discontinued publication and began writing for the *New York Review of Books*. By then, he had been discovered by a

mainstream press, which guiltily lionized him as an honest reporter. Many of his books came back into print. (Some copies of his early books sell for hundreds of dollars.) “I’m getting so damn respectable,” he told Nat Hentoff in 1971. “Am I doing something wrong?”

His Nevada scoop became a legend in journalism circles, the classic example of I.F. Stone journalism, taught in journalism classes.

In 1974, the *Columbia Journalism Review* carried an unforgettable description of the Rainier exclusive: “Very simple, and what all of us expect all of the time from newsmen. But really not so simple. For one thing, it takes energy (Stone actually got in his car and went over to Commerce, and had actually to *copy down* the seismological figures), and it takes a commitment to be suspicious of whatever government—any government—says.”

This is one of the constructive outcomes of the Rainier incident—it happened at a time when citizens unwisely believed the U.S. government told them the truth, and it foreshadowed a series of episodes that dispelled that unhealthy attitude. After Rainier came the U-2 incident, the Gulf of Tonkin, Watergate, Iran Contra. Unfortunately, while the public has learned a healthy skepticism toward the government credibility, it is one that vanishes in times of tension, such as the aftermath of September 11.

Many published collections of quotations contain one from Stone about assumptions

reporters should make: “The first is that every government is run by liars, and nothing they say should be believed. That’s a *prima facie* assumption, unless proven to the contrary.”

In his later years, Stone learned classical Greek so he could investigate the trial of Socrates and in 1988 published a book on the trial that became his first best seller. That year, a good friend took me to I.F. Stone’s 80th birthday appearance at the auditorium in San Francisco where he had once covered the founding of the United Nations. This gnarled, elderly little man seated on the stage had once disrupted the operations of Republican and Democratic administrations alike, and he became such an admired figure that right wingers began smearing him as a Soviet agent. It’s an accusation that has been discredited repeatedly, but it lived on—much like the myth about the undetectability of underground atomic tests.

Stone died on June 18, 1989. His *New York Times* obituary cited the Nevada scoop as a sample of the “important exclusive reports” the *Weekly* produced. A decade later, the body of work in *I.F. Stone’s Weekly* was voted number 16 on a list of the 100 best works of U.S. journalism of the 1900s.

Ralph Nader: “If I.F. Stone had been born in ancient Athens over 2000 years ago, there would now be statues of him in front of major newspaper buildings.” □

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