

Political Bookshelf

Review by Jeremy Jacobs

I Am Martin Eisenstadt

By Martin Eisenstadt (aka Dan Mirvish and Eitan Gorlin)

Faber and Faber

\$15.00

Remember Martin Eisenstadt? He's the senior fellow at the Harding Institute for Freedom and Democracy who was a senior adviser to John McCain's presidential campaign on foreign policy and served as a liaison to the Jewish community. And, according to him, he was the source of the post-election leak that Sarah Palin didn't know that Africa is a continent.

As most of us now know, Eisenstadt's punditry had one major problem: He never existed. Neither did the Harding Institute.

Shortly after the Palin leak story, Eisenstadt was outed as a hoax, notably by a November 12, 2008 *New York Times* article with the headline, "A Senior Fellow at the Institute of Nonexistence."

That didn't stop Eisenstadt from having an impact on last year's election. His antics, let's call them, were reported as fact by *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New Republic*, *The Times of India*, the Huffington Post, MSNBC and a host of other outlets.

Now, though, Eisenstadt has written a self-proclaimed tell-all that seeks to set the record straight and prove his existence. Aptly titled "I Am Martin Eisenstadt: One Man's (Wildly Inappropriate) Adventures with the Last Republicans," the book is part Washington D.C. parody and part chronology of what Eisenstadt—or, rather, his creators—accomplished during the election.

Eisenstadt is the creation of Dan Mirvish and Eitan Gorlin, two independent filmmakers. Originally, Eisenstadt was supposed to become a TV character, and the two began by filming a fake BBC documentary called "The Last Republican," parts of which are transcribed and appear in the book. After posting a few videos on YouTube, that plan got sidetracked when they launched Eisenstadt's blog: www.eisenstadtgroup.com.

What ensued—and what is chronicled in the book—is Eisenstadt's ride through the blogosphere where he spread rumors as a McCain campaign insider that became headline fodder for bloggers and news organizations. Among his most popular yarns were that Paris Hilton's family was fuming at the McCain team following their "Celebrity" ad, that Joe the Plumber was related to Charles Keating and, of course, that Eisenstadt was the source of the Palin-Africa leak.

Although well-written, it can be difficult to tell which parts of the Eisenstadt story are fact and which are fiction—though that is probably the point. When he isn't talking about the campaign, Eisenstadt is depicted as a narcissistic, half-witted, name-dropping pundit who is obsessed with scoring TV hits. What Stephen Colbert is to Bill O'Reilly, Martin Eisenstadt is to countless political pundits.



While those sections are hilarious, they also offer biting commentary on Washington, D.C. and the wider political world. In characterizing pundits, he writes: "We are oracles, soothsayers, sirens; we predict the future, and no one ever checks later to see if we got it right. Pundits give our own opinions (as paid for by whoever our benefactor may be at the time: think tanks, candidates, parties, or corporate clients). And we use every means of modern communication at our disposal to get the message—and our name—across America."

Eisenstadt also ruminates on why winning campaigns is important to consultants: So you can charge future clients more money. But, he also sees the silver lining in losing. "Ironically," he writes, "the bigger loser you are, the more TV appearances you're likely to make during the next election as a pundit. Just look at how many former Dukakis, Kerry, Dole, Dean and Edwards strategists there are on CNN."

The book, and Eisenstadt's rise to fame, do poke at a larger issue with today's hyperspeed, over-heated campaign environment. There are a lot of people talking, blogging, tweeting and pontificating during an election, but there is little accountability. "That's why it's essential that this book not just be about Martin Eisenstadt as victim, laughing stock, as creepy middle-aged man, but be about something more. About the media not checking their sources," Eisenstadt writes.

"I Am Martin Eisenstadt" will be published on November 3. (We checked our sources: The publisher has assured us the book does exist. Although they could be in on the joke, too...) 📖

