



## John Halterman



### Dirty Money

Let's say you need someone to help you do something really important. Would you settle for someone who just Googled it? Would you look for someone with the right professional license? Or would you hold out for the guy who literally wrote the book on whatever it is you need to do? Expertise doesn't *guarantee* success: great surgeons still lose patients; great lawyers still lose cases; and Super Bowl-winning quarterbacks still throw into double coverage all the time. But sometimes professional prowess is well worth the extra cost.

This week's search for expertise takes us to the University of Miami in sunny Coral Gables, Florida. Bruce Bagley, 73, is a rumpled, jowly professor of International Relations. His field is Latin America, which seems appropriate for a university in a city that feels more like part of Latin America than the United States. His specialty is money laundering. And he's a card-carrying expert — in fact, he wrote the go-to book on the subject, *Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime, and Violence in the Americas Today*. He's even testified on it before Congress.

Back in 2016, some shady characters in Venezuela found themselves with some dirty money. They looked around for the guy who wrote the book, and they found Bagley. Maybe he wanted a little adventure that day. Maybe he'd just finished binge-watching *Ozark*. (If so, he really missed the point.) Maybe surrounding himself with all that criminality just eroded his moral compass. As Nietzsche said, "Beware that, when fighting monsters, you yourself do not become a monster. And if you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you."

Whatever the reason, Bagley found himself with a new side gig running a specialized sort of laundromat. It's an easy business to start — you don't need a website, or business cards, or slick brochures. He probably thought he was downright brilliant. What better way to disguise your money laundering business than by being a professor of money laundering? We can just picture him sitting by the phone, waiting for the MacArthur Foundation people to call him with his Genius Grant. Unfortunately, someone else came calling.

Last month, the Department of Justice unsealed an indictment alleging Bagley had opened bank accounts to launder cash from bribes and embezzling. Those accounts received \$200,000 in monthly deposits from overseas accounts owned by a Colombian national located in Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates. He passed 90% of the deposits on to a mysterious "Individual-1." Then he wired the remaining 10% into his personal account, which seems a fairly typical commission for fluffing and folding that sort of cash. That 10% added up to almost \$300,000 over the course of the scheme.

Bagley may have made a bad choice — but it makes for a *great* final exam question: "You've been indicted on two counts of money laundering and one count of conspiring to commit money laundering. Each count carries possible tenure of 20 years in a federal facility where most of the laundry consists of orange jumpsuits. What do you do now?" Get your blue books and pens ready!

Although to date the IRS isn't involved in Bagley's case, money laundering often involves tax fraud, too — so the IRS Criminal Investigation unit routinely pursues money laundering crimes. (And what are the odds Bagley reported his side gig, anyway?) Now, *we* don't have any expertise in that area. We had to Google that 10% commission, honest!

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