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SPECIAL REPORT:
PLAGIARISM

Four Academic Plagiarists You've Never Heard Of: How Many More Are Out There?

By THOMAS BARTLETT and SCOTT SMALLWOOD

Famous scholars get the ink in good times and bad. Stephen E. Ambrose's plagiarism would not have made the news were it not for the millions of books he sold. Few people would have cared about Doris Kearns Goodwin's borrowings had they not seen her on television.

It might seem that the only academic plagiarists are famous scholars with sloppy research assistants.

But a *Chronicle* investigation proves otherwise. Among the cases we found were a political scientist who swiped five pages of his book from a journal article, a historian who cribbed from an unpublished dissertation, and a geographer whose verbatim copying appears to span his lengthy career.

While this article delves into a few cases we uncovered, our reporting suggests that what we found is not exceptional. Indeed, an editor at History News Network receives so many tips about purported plagiarism that he now investigates only those involving well-known scholars. A professor at Texas A&M International University was bombarded with hundreds of e-mail messages after writing about being plagiarized. Many of them were from graduate students and professors who believed that they, too, had been victims.

In one of the rare surveys conducted about plagiarism, two University of Alabama economists this year asked 1,200 of their colleagues if they believed their work had ever been stolen. A startling 40 percent answered yes. While not a random sample, the responses still represent hundreds of cases of alleged plagiarism.

Very few of them will ever be dragged into the sunlight. That's because academe often discourages victims from seeking justice, and when they do, tends to ignore their complaints -- a kind of scholarly "don't ask, don't tell" policy. "It's like cockroaches," says Peter Charles Hoffer, a University of Georgia historian and author of a recent book about academic fraud. "For every one you see on the kitchen floor, there are a hundred behind the stove."

Again and Again

In some cases, plagiarism can be explained away as a simple slip-up. For George O. Carney, however, lifting the words of others seems to be second nature.

Mr. Carney, now 62, grew up in the Ozarks of southern Missouri before going to graduate school at Oklahoma State University's main campus. He earned a Ph.D. in geography in 1971 and landed a job on the faculty there. He never left. Over the years, he has built a career most professors would admire -- teaching awards, a long list of publications, and a lecture series named in his honor. He is a regents professor there, which means his research has gained national recognition. He loves baseball and country music, and his field, cultural geography, has allowed him to write about both over the years.

But over the last quarter-century, Mr. Carney has taken phrases, sentences, and even entire paragraphs from numerous authors without crediting them. A close examination of several of his papers and book chapters

reveals that the professor has plagiarized both frequently and brazenly. Compared with what Mr. Carney has done, the highly publicized missteps of scholars like Harvard's Laurence H. Tribe and Charles J. Ogletree Jr. seem almost trivial.

In 1979, for example, when he was an associate professor at Oklahoma State, Mr. Carney wrote a paper for the *Journal of Geography* titled "T for Texas, T for Tennessee: The Origins of American Country Music Notables." That paper is strikingly similar to "The Fertile Crescent of Country Music," by Richard A. Peterson and a co-author, published several years earlier in *The Journal of Country Music*.

The central purpose of both papers -- to examine where famous country-music performers were born -- is the same. The papers have the same structure and use the same research methods. Many of the same sources are cited in both papers, often using the same language. One of Mr. Carney's footnotes begins "For an example of this dire prediction, see ... ," which is exactly how one of the endnotes begins in Mr. Peterson's article.

In his conclusion, Mr. Carney offers five questions for further study, all of which can be found in Mr. Peterson's article. Among the most blatant borrowings is a 180-word passage that is appropriated almost verbatim, down to the random examples, the conjunctions, and the commas.

Mr. Carney never cites the "Fertile Crescent" paper. Not once.

This was not the end of his plagiarism. In a 1996 essay, Mr. Carney took several sentences from a book published a decade earlier by Bill C. Malone, a country-music historian at Tulane University. A 1999 article Mr. Carney wrote includes several paragraphs that appear to be copied from a Web site on surf music.

Last year the fourth edition of *The Sounds of People and Places*, a book on the geography of American music, was published by Rowman & Littlefield. Mr. Carney edited the book and contributed five essays. A blurb on the back cover dubs the professor "American geography's leading musicologist."

In the book, American geography's leading musicologist steals from no fewer than three authors. He even takes the very first sentence of his essay "Music and Place" from an essay a decade earlier by Salvatore J. Natoli, the former director of publications for the National Council for the Social Studies.

Mr. Carney doesn't stop there. On the following page, he takes more than 350 words from an introductory-geography textbook. Later in the same essay, along with copying still more sentences from Mr. Natoli, Mr. Carney pilfers a good-size paragraph from "Place and the Novelist," a 1980 essay by D.C.D. Pocock, then a senior lecturer at the University of Durham, in England.

The names of the three authors do not appear in the paper's list of sources. However, Mr. Carney manages to cite himself four times.

This is but a sampling of what was discovered when a handful of Mr. Carney's pieces were scrutinized. The professor has published numerous articles and book chapters over the years.

His long list of literary transgressions is troubling enough, but even more worrisome is his ability to get away with it for so long. The closest he has ever come to getting caught was when, in 1994, he lifted a couple of sentences from an essay by William W. Savage Jr., a professor of history at the University of Oklahoma. Mr. Savage complained to the editor of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, the journal that had published Mr. Carney's work. Mr. Carney wrote a letter, published in a subsequent issue, apologizing for the "oversight."

But Mr. Carney again plagiarized the very same two sentences in the very same journal in 2001. This time there was no public contrition, although he did write a personal apology to Mr. Savage at the request of the journal's editor. "It is not my intent to plagiarize research or wording from other authors," he wrote.

When confronted by a *Chronicle* reporter with evidence of his repeated acts of plagiarism, Mr. Carney at first defends his work. He says Mr. Savage's complaints may have been motivated by "academic jealousy" or even

in-state football rivalry. He also argues that claims of authorship can be difficult to sort out. "It's sort of like, 'Who had the idea first?'" Mr. Carney says.

But as more passages are read to Mr. Carney over the telephone, his hard-line stance begins to soften. "You've probably heard the old adage 'publish or perish'?" he says. "All academics are trying to get their research published. I'm not saying the ends justify the means, but maybe it's a shortcut, using someone else's words."

He goes on to say that he feels "guilty" and "professionally embarrassed."

While researching this case, we spoke to several people who knew of Mr. Carney's copying. For example, a book he had submitted to the University of Oklahoma Press was rejected because portions were obviously plagiarized, according to a source who reviewed the manuscript. Although the press turned the book down, the rejection letter made no mention of the reason for doing so.

One of Mr. Carney's victims, Richard A. Peterson, a "Fertile Crescent" author, remembers being told by a colleague that his essay had been plundered. He didn't follow up. "Then, I was thinking of my own career," says Mr. Peterson, 72, a professor emeritus of sociology at Vanderbilt University. "Now, thinking of the whole field and the ethics of the field, I would have taken the trouble."

Administrators at Oklahoma State had no inkling of Mr. Carney's numerous borrowings, according to Dale R. Lightfoot, the chairman of the geography department there. After being shown examples by *The Chronicle*, a university spokesman said officials would look into the matter.

As for Mr. Carney's motivation, he mentions that he was under a lot of pressure as a young professor. But why, after earning tenure, winning awards, and editing multiple books, would he steal the introduction to "Music and Place," an essay published just last year?

His answer is succinct: "Maybe it sounded good."

Heavy Lifting

If one scholar plagiarizes another, but everybody keeps quiet, did it really happen?

In 2002 Judy Tzu-Chun Wu came across a newly published anthology on the American West. Ms. Wu, then an assistant professor of history at Ohio State University's main campus, often wrote and taught about the American West, so she began flipping through the book. She was surprised when she saw a chapter on Margaret Chung, the first U.S.-born female Chinese doctor, who also happened to be the subject of Ms. Wu's 1998 dissertation.

"I remember thinking it was odd that someone else was working on Margaret Chung," says Ms. Wu. "I thought, How does this person's take compare to mine?"

This person -- Benson Tong, then an assistant professor of history at Wichita State University -- had a similar take. Very similar. In fact, as she read, Ms. Wu's curiosity turned into anger: The chapter was nothing more than a condensed version of her dissertation, she believed. There were phrases and descriptions that seem to have been lifted nearly verbatim, along with unattributed facts Ms. Wu had spent long hours pinning down.

It was not that Mr. Tong had simply claimed large blocks of Ms. Wu's dissertation as his own. He cited Ms. Wu's dissertation multiple times. Those citations, however, don't tell the whole story.

Ms. Wu went through Mr. Tong's chapter word by word. She highlighted in yellow those portions of the text that were borrowed directly or altered slightly. She highlighted in green those sections that were paraphrased versions of her arguments and research. When she was finished, only one paragraph of the 15-page essay had escaped the highlighter.

But the most damning evidence could be found in the footnotes. If Mr. Tong's list of sources was to be believed, he had gone to the same archives, reviewed the same unpublished manuscripts, oral histories, and newspaper articles as Ms. Wu and then chosen to quote identical passages from that material. "Almost all of the citations in Tong's essay exactly replicate the sources and page numbers that appear in my footnotes," Ms. Wu wrote in a complaint to the American Historical Association.

Despite the compelling evidence, some of her colleagues told her to forget the matter. Pursuing it could damage another scholar's career and would no doubt be a long, exhausting process.

Ms. Wu ignored their advice. She submitted a 21-page complaint to the association and wrote a letter to Scholarly Resources Inc., the publisher of Mr. Tong's book. Mr. Tong offered a rebuttal to Ms. Wu's charges, and Ms. Wu countered with a response of her own, again laying out the evidence against him. She describes the experience as "emotionally draining."

The process was difficult and tiresome, just as some of her colleagues had predicted. In the end, the historical association ruled in her favor, finding that Mr. Tong "appears to have borrowed most of his research and overall analytical framework from Ms. Wu's work without sufficiently indicating the extent of his indebtedness." The group concluded that Mr. Tong had indeed committed plagiarism. Not long after, the association stopped investigating plagiarism cases, saying it was not a good use of its resources.

As was the association's custom, it sent a letter to Ms. Wu and Mr. Tong informing them of its decision about Ms. Wu's complaint. There was no press release, no notice on the association's Web site. Today, more than a year afterward, the association won't even confirm that it conducted an investigation.

As a result, Ms. Wu felt it was her responsibility to publicize the findings. She had the chairman of her department fax the association's letter to the chairman of the history department at Wichita State.

That was particularly bad timing for Mr. Tong, who was coming up for tenure. He was turned down. After sticking around Wichita State for another year, he was hired by Gallaudet University.

When contacted recently at the university, Mr. Tong asks the caller to hold on while he closes his office door. He contends that he "didn't make any mistakes" in the essay and says he refuted Ms. Wu's allegations. When asked if he was guilty of plagiarism, he responds, "No, I don't think so at all."

However, he declined to discuss any details, saying the matter had already been put to rest. When asked whether his new employer was aware of the historical association's finding, he said: "I guess they know about it. The word does get around."

Apparently word had not gotten around to the chairman of the government and history department at Gallaudet, Russell Olson. Upon being told that a newly hired member of his department had been found guilty of plagiarism, Mr. Olson groans. When asked if this came as a surprise, Mr. Olson answers, "Total." He went on to say he would "do something" but declined to be more specific.

Except for acknowledging the receipt of her first letter, the publisher of Mr. Tong's book never responded to Ms. Wu's letters and e-mail messages. This year Scholarly Resources was acquired by Rowman & Littlefield. Kelly Rogers, the director of permissions at the publisher, was unaware of the plagiarism charge. "I would be the person who would know," she says.

As for Ms. Wu, she feels somewhat vindicated by the historical association's ruling. Still, she remains frustrated that Mr. Tong's book has never been retracted. "It's still out there," she says.

Her dissertation is scheduled to be published next year by the University of California Press. Ms. Wu worries that Mr. Tong might even be asked to review her book. After all, he's written on the same subject.

Keeping Quiet

As the Tong case illustrates, charges of blatant plagiarism often do not follow professors to their next job. Without a public outing, how could they? Donald Cuccioletta, a historian who taught at two universities, even managed to get caught by one institution but kept the news from the other.

In 2001 Mr. Cuccioletta edited a book called *L'Américanité et Les Amériques*. He also wrote a chapter for the book, which includes articles in both English and French. His begins: "The idea that the Americas -- North and South -- have a shared common historical experience is not a recent discourse."

That mirrors the first sentence of the introduction to *Do the Americas Have a Common History?*, a 1964 book written by Lewis Hanke, a Columbia University historian. Mr. Hanke began: "The idea that the Americas -- North and South -- have shared a common historical experience developed slowly in the nineteenth century."

Mr. Hanke follows that sentence with a long quote from a former president of the American Historical Association. Mr. Cuccioletta uses the same long quote.

Mr. Hanke then, in two sentences and 85 words, briefly summarizes contacts between burgeoning Western Hemisphere independence movements in the early 19th century. So does Mr. Cuccioletta -- with nearly the exact same 86 words (he uses an extra "that").

Mr. Hanke then quotes from what he calls a "blunt statement" from 1821 in the "influential" *North American Review*. Mr. Cuccioletta quotes from the same "influential" journal, although he describes it as a "blunt review." Mr. Cuccioletta uses the same 186 words from the same 1821 journal article, complete with two elisions in the exact same spots.

Mr. Cuccioletta does not directly cite Mr. Hanke, who died in 1993, although he does include his book among the 28 items listed in the bibliography.

A history professor at the University of Quebec, where Mr. Cuccioletta had taught as a part-time lecturer for 10 years, discovered the similarities in the two books in 2002, according to *Le Devoir*, a Montreal newspaper.

After the department chairman learned of the alleged plagiarism, according to the newspaper, Mr. Cuccioletta was not rehired. But the news did not travel 60 miles down the highway, where Mr. Cuccioletta was also teaching at the State University of New York at Plattsburgh.

Mr. Cuccioletta has taught at Plattsburgh off and on for the past seven years. This year -- two years after his borrowing was first caught at the University of Quebec -- he was named interim director of Plattsburgh's new Institute on Quebec Studies.

Then his secret got out. Officials at Plattsburgh learned of the purported plagiarism when it was briefly recounted in *Le Devoir* this fall.

Now an administrative committee has begun an investigation. And a college spokesman says Mr. Cuccioletta has been removed as interim director, although he is still teaching his courses for the semester.

Mr. Cuccioletta says the matter was dealt with at the University of Quebec and that he has admitted his mistake. "I'm still troubled by it," he says. "I just got confused. I was writing many articles at the time." Then he stops speaking, saying he is not going to discuss the incident any further. "To me, it's a closed subject."

A Surprising Discovery

Like many students at Harvard University last December, Todd Fine was frantically trying to finish the proposal for his senior thesis. Sitting on his futon with piles of books about Libya and foreign policy around

him, he began skimming *European Crisis Management in the 1980s*, a 1996 book by Neil Winn, a professor at the University of Leeds, in England.

Interested in some of its theoretical aspects, Mr. Fine found related articles in an online database. One of them, however -- a 1992 paper in the *International Studies Quarterly* -- seemed familiar.

Mr. Fine searched the two texts. Five pages -- more than 1,100 words -- of the introduction to Mr. Winn's book were essentially identical to the journal article. Mr. Winn did little more than switch to the occasional British spelling. For example, "crystallize" became "crystallise." With the exception of those and other extremely minor changes, the words were the same.

Discoveries of plagiarism often turn on this kind of happenstance. Seven years had passed since Mr. Winn wrote his monograph. Had a Harvard student not typed in just the right phrase and then been curious enough to compare the texts, seven more years might have passed without anyone noticing the copying.

Mr. Fine, the Harvard senior, told his father, a sociologist at Northwestern University, who then e-mailed the article's author, Steven G. Livingston, an associate professor of political science at Middle Tennessee State University.

Mr. Livingston calls it "weird and depressing" to read his words between the covers of someone else's book. He immediately contacted the International Studies Association, since the original article had appeared in one of its journals. Officials there said he should go to Blackwell Publishing, the company that produces the journal.

The runaround continued. Blackwell told him that the company stays out of such disputes. He was advised to go to a professional organization and get a finding of plagiarism. So he went back to the International Studies Association. "They were genuinely sympathetic," he says. "But they said, 'We don't want to get into judging issues of plagiarism.'"

Thomas J. Volgy, the association's executive director, declined to talk about the details of Mr. Livingston's case. He says the group did not have the money and could not take on the risk of adjudicating individual cases of plagiarism. Victims have a "whole range of other mechanisms" to use rather than turning to a professional association, Mr. Volgy says, pointing out that they can file a lawsuit or complain to the plagiarist's university.

Mr. Winn declined to talk about the copying. In the end he has had to face up to the incident, although to what degree is unclear. While a University of Leeds official declined to speak to *The Chronicle* about the case, administrators have told Mr. Livingston that Mr. Winn is being disciplined.

Mr. Livingston says he would be disappointed if all Mr. Winn received was a letter telling him not to plagiarize. "It took years for me to write that article," Mr. Livingston says. "And when it shows up sentence for sentence in someone else's book, I couldn't walk away from it."

Whatever the punishment, it stopped short of firing. Mr. Winn remains on the faculty at Leeds. And that book, the one with five plagiarized pages in the introduction, is still listed on his university Web page.

In the end, Mr. Livingston can't believe how difficult it was to persuade others to take action, even when the words -- all 1,100 of them -- were clearly stolen. Neither can Gary Alan Fine, whose son Todd first stumbled upon the plagiarism. "If a professional organization won't stand up and say that this is wrong," he says, "what message does this give to my son?"

Stealing someone's words isn't the same as stealing someone's television. The original author doesn't have to run to Best Buy to get a new paragraph.

But ideas and words are professors' stock and trade. Unlike the company president who steals sentences for a

Rotary Club speech, or the congressman who pilfers phrases for a campaign brochure, the professor who plagiarizes undermines his very profession.

Yet academe appears conflicted about what to do about the plagiarist. While they preach against the sin, many scholars seem wary of confronting the sinners. Even Mr. Hoffer, the Georgia professor who writes about academic fraud, is hesitant about naming names.

Indeed, several sources questioned whether *The Chronicle* really planned to identify those accused of plagiarism in this article. "You could ruin careers," they said. Yet isn't that the attitude that allows serial plagiarists like George Carney to go undetected for decades? Cases are permitted to hide in the shadows, shielded under the guise of "confidential personnel matters." If plagiarists are academe's cockroaches, as Mr. Hoffer put it, is everyone just too scared to look behind the stove?

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