Women of the Washington Press
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I quickly learned that it was easier to talk my way into some place I didn’t belong, grab the President of the United States, and ask him some awful question no one else would dare to, than it was to go back and have to admit to Miss Sauer (we never called her anything else) that I hadn’t done it.

—Judith Martin (as quoted in Roberts, In the Shadow of Power, 400)

For many Washington newspaperwomen, the women’s and society pages of the capital’s three major newspapers, the Washington Post, Star, and Daily News, represented their professional homes in the mid-twentieth century, whether or not they wanted to be there. For example, at the start of the 1960s some 18 percent of editorial employees at the Washington Post were women, most of whom toiled under the dominating gaze of Marie Sauer, the formidable editor of the For and About Women section. Nationally, Time reported in 1971 that women accounted for 35 percent of all editorial personnel, with most found working on women’s
sections or women’s magazines. By this time the Post had turned its women’s pages into a lifestyle section, but other newspapers followed more slowly.

Flush with advertising aimed at women, the standard women’s section catered to businesses who cultivated “the domestic consciousness of women in order to boost the consumer sector of a postwar economy,” according to one researcher. Regardless of their commercial aspects, the women’s pages took seriously the efforts of their reporters, as Martin’s recollection of her encounters with Sauer illustrated. Hot-tempered and shorthanded, Sauer dominated her department, cutting off one young woman who tried to say “good morning” with a curt, “We don’t have time for that around here.” Her reporters, like their counterparts on other newspapers, covered what had been nicknamed the four F’s—family, food, fashion, and furnishing. Their beat included the four F’s at the White House itself, occasionally giving them an opportunity to question the president himself on a fine point related to entertainment of notable guests.

Ahead of her times, Sauer disagreed with the assumption that men and women had separate news interests divided between “hard” subjects and “soft” subjects. This ideology corresponded roughly to the Victorian idea of the public sphere for men, equated with power and politics, and the private sphere for women, equated with family responsibilities, personal relationships, and social life. In a letter to a journalism student, she wrote that she had objected to the segregation of news at midcentury: “Even though at that time, they [women] weren’t ready to be president, the most important issues to them were peace, budget balancing, honesty and efficiency in government, equal pay for equal work. . . . Hard news or soft news? I felt that women wanted both.”

Post editors dismissed Sauer’s ideas of presenting general news
in women’s sections because they delivered a targeted audience of consumers to advertisers. Directed to separate, but clearly unequal, audiences, the sections brought in a growing stream of revenue. As sizeable segments of the population forsook the core city of Washington after World War II, advertisers sought to reach women consumers in the new suburbs. *Post* management, like that of other daily newspapers, eagerly provided content geared to advertisers’ needs.

When Philip Graham took over the *Post* in 1946 from Eugene Meyer, one of his first acts was to pursue food advertisers by instituting a Friday food page in the women’s section. Editors at the *Star* and *Daily News* also favored news centered on traditional feminine pursuits, perceiving women readers as housewives and club members with limited horizons. This content supplied social signifiers of appropriate feminine behaviors. An analysis of the *Post’s* women’s section, for example, showed homemaking features jumped from 0.8 percent to 15.6 percent of the total content from 1945 to 1952, while child-care material increased 3.6 percent.

As a result of advertising and editorial strategy, women’s sections were restricted in what they wrote about and generally looked down on by male reporters. Men were not wanted as readers. Reporters for the *Post* women’s section could cover Coretta King but not Martin Luther King Jr., the Women’s Strike for Peace but not student protests. But, because of close ties between Washington’s party and political circles, the women’s staff sometimes stumbled onto juicy news items as reporters chronicled the capital’s dominant social and cultural activities, almost all of which were lily white. Sauer insisted that stories reported by her staff be printed in the women’s section, giving rise to an inside joke that if the president resigned while speaking to a women’s club, the news would lead the women’s pages, not the front page.
Luminaries of society reporting were led by Betty Beale of the *Star*, who promoted her column as “politics after six” and claimed the distinction of being the only syndicated society columnist in Washington. She began her autobiography by noting “for over forty years I spent more time in the White House than in any house but my own.” A graduate of Smith College, Beale, a member of a prominent Washington family and the granddaughter of a Tennessee congressman, attended an estimated fifteen thousand parties from the Truman to the Reagan administration, chronicling in her words “the manners, customs and personalities of our times.” At the height of her career in the mid-1960s, about ninety newspapers bought her column that specialized in the human-interest aspects of society gatherings, including political comments overheard at parties.

She began her lengthy career at the *Star* in 1945, continuing there until the paper’s demise in 1981. At first she wrote who “poured,” giving the names of guests honored by being asked to serve coffee or tea at receptions. When she started reporting what people actually said, editors told her “to cool it for a while,” convinced that “real news—that is comments by politicos on topics of national or international interest—should not fall into the delicate hands of genteel ladies who wrote for the ‘Women’s Section,’” Beale recalled. Gradually she won out, becoming a recognized writer of social chit-chat that included political tidbits. She entertained presidents in her home and mingled with monarchs, enjoying a “special bond” with Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie because of “the love we shared for Chihuahuas.”

At the 1952 Democratic convention Beale met Adlai E. Stevenson, the Illinois governor running for president. The two later engaged in a love affair that lasted until his death in 1965, according to her 1993 memoir, *Power at Play*. She announced her
engagement to George Graeber, whom she married in 1969, in her column, calling herself “Washington’s biggest party trotter”; the couple soon was feted at a White House luncheon. While Beale’s column rarely criticized those she wrote about, during the Eisenhower years Beale raised White House ire by reporting as a “pleasant surprise” that “Ike” served hard liquor at an afternoon diplomatic reception in contrast to the traditional bourbon-laced fruit punch. This disclosure created storms of protest from non-drinkers, and hard liquor never appeared again at functions where reporters were present, Beale, herself a nondrinker, noted.

Beale’s greatest rival, Maxine Cheshire, an investigative reporter from Kentucky, became a society reporter for the Post in 1954 because it was the only job she could get. Like Sauer’s other reporters, she looked for links between parties and politics, eventually writing a VIP (Very Important People) column loaded with political gossip. Cheshire faulted the Washington press for failing to raise questions about Mamie Eisenhower’s acceptance of gifts from foreign governments, criticizing what she called the “Emily Post approach to reporting about the occupants of the White House.” Cheshire lamented she was limited to writing “scoops” about a discount factory where the First Lady bought evening slippers to dye to match her gowns.

At the same time, Cheshire appreciated the professionalism that Sauer brought to the Post’s women’s section and relished the insights into Washington power provided by careful study of its social scene. She said, “If a reader was sufficiently sophisticated, knew enough about the way this city operated, then the women’s pages of the Washington Post held more inside information than any other section . . . a close reading of who went where and with whom generally proved quite instructive.”

While Beale enjoyed the prestige of high-level social contacts
and Cheshire chafed at constrains, another woman reporter encountered outright hostility. Ethel Payne, the granddaughter of slaves, arrived in the capital in 1954 to take over the one-person bureau of the Chicago Defender, an African American newspaper. A native of Chicago, Payne had stumbled into journalism during the Korean War when she worked as a hostess in an Army Special Services club in Japan, organizing recreation for African American troops. After she showed her diary to a visiting Defender reporter, he arranged for his newspaper to print excerpts about discrimination faced by black soldiers. Readers wanted more, although the U.S. government complained that Payne disrupted troop morale.25 The Defender editor called Payne in Japan and offered her a job, which she accepted.

In Washington Payne recognized that the battle for civil rights constituted the biggest story of the era for African Americans. As an accredited correspondent, she attended President Eisenhower’s press conferences and raised pointed questions. When the Interstate Commerce Commission ruled against segregation in interstate travel, Payne asked the president, “When can we expect that you will issue an executive order ending segregation in interstate travel?”26 Eisenhower barked back, “What makes you think I’m going to do anything for any special-interest group?”27 Instead of dealing with the issue involved, the press pictured the exchange as a slap at Payne. The Star headlined it in a front-page box, captioned, “Negro Woman Reporter Angers Ike.”28 The Defender applauded her efforts, but other newspapers did not. “I was pilloried by the black press as being over-assertive,” Payne said later.29 “They wrote columns about it, that I was an embarrassment, that I had gone down and I was showboating, just disturbing the President.”30 Eisenhower retaliated by refusing to call on her at press confer-
ences. His press secretary, James Hagerty, threatened to withdraw her credentials on grounds she worked part time for the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), violating a rule against accredited correspondents engaging in political activities.\textsuperscript{31} Payne countered that she was a full-time correspondent and no longer worked for the CIO.\textsuperscript{32} Hagerty stopped his attack only after Drew Pearson reported in his syndicated column that the press secretary had harassed Payne by attempting to investigate her income tax returns.\textsuperscript{33}

Although it was not until 1961 that segregation was outlawed on buses and trains, Payne felt that her controversial question aided integration. “Suddenly, civil rights began to be the big issue,” she said.\textsuperscript{34} From her Washington base she subsequently traveled throughout the South, covering the Montgomery bus boycott and desegregation efforts at public schools and universities, profiling Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., and writing a notable \textit{Defender} series on “The South at the Crossroads.” She also traveled to Africa to report on liberation movements there, gaining the title, “First lady of the black press.”\textsuperscript{35}

Following John F. Kennedy’s election as president in 1960, most Washington women reporters, unlike Payne, had little to do with civil rights issues, although they increasingly dominated the national agenda. One who did, both personally and professionally, was Dorothy Gilliam, the first African American woman journalist hired by the \textit{Post}. Gilliam, one of two African Americans in the class of 1961 at the Columbia University School of Journalism, impressed Ben Gilbert, the \textit{Post} city editor, who routinely interviewed Columbia graduates for jobs.\textsuperscript{36} After she wrote reports for the \textit{Post} from Africa, where she went on a fellowship following Columbia, Gilbert offered her a job.

Gilliam, whose maiden name was Butler, was the eighth of ten
children (only five of whom survived), the daughter of an African Methodist Episcopal Church minister. When he became ill, the family struggled economically, moving from Louisville to rural Kentucky and existing as sharecroppers. After graduation from a segregated rural high school, she won a scholarship to help integrate Ursuline College, a women’s school in Louisville, which she attended for two years. Gaining initial journalistic experience on the *Louisville Defender*, an African American newspaper, she obtained a bachelor’s degree in journalism in 1957 from Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri, a historically black institution. She worked two years for an African American company, Johnson Publications in Chicago, becoming an editor of *Jet* magazine before enrolling at Columbia.37

No stranger to inequality, she nevertheless found it taxing to keep a calm demeanor at the *Post*. Washington itself, still a segregated city, raised barriers against her. As one of three African American reporters working for the *Post*, she experienced countless indignities. “There were lots of restaurants around here [the *Post* building] that I couldn’t eat at,” she said. “Remember, the Civil Rights Act didn’t pass until 1964.”38 To make her feel more at home, Gilbert asked Elsie Carper to go to lunch with her. The two ate at a YWCA cafeteria, one of the few integrated restaurants nearby.39 When Gilliam was assigned to stories in all-white neighborhoods, doormen tried to steer her from front doors to servants’ entrances. Taxicabs passed her by, unwilling to stop for a black woman who drivers assumed wanted to go to black neighborhoods where they had little chance of getting return fares to downtown.

In addition, after she married an artist—Sam Gilliam, who later won acclaim for his work—in 1962 and had a daughter the next year, she found her working environment uncongenial: “It was a place that was very kind of overwhelmingly white male
and relatively few women,” she said a half century later. “Not the kinds of women you have in newsrooms today . . . women who are in active numbers, pursuing their career, having children and families. I don’t know of any woman in the newsroom—I don’t know about the women’s section (that’s what it was called in those days)—who really had any children.” After her daughter’s birth, Gilliam received permission to work less than full time, but it was withdrawn after other reporters complained that she was getting special treatment, an objection she considered “very typical of attitudes toward women and children.”

Gilliam gained recognition for her articles on Junior Village, an appalling facility for homeless children controlled by District of Columbia committees in Congress. In a late stage of pregnancy she covered a visit to the institution by Virginia Sen. William F. Byrd, one of its congressional overseers and a well-known segregationist. “He reached back and helped me across—I don’t know if it was a ditch or a divide or something,” she said. “I remember remarking to somebody, ‘I bet I was the first black woman he had ever held his hand out to help or escort,’ ” she told an oral history interviewer.

When the Post sent Gilliam to Oxford, Mississippi, to cover the riots stemming from James Meredith’s integration of the University of Mississippi in 1962, she stayed at a black funeral home because there were no accommodations for African Americans, while the white Post reporter also sent to Oxford checked into a motel. At the funeral home, she learned that two African Americans had been killed “during the night, and we figured out that these [murders] were the warning to the local black community . . . this is to let you know who’s still boss, who still runs things.” Expecting her second child, she left the newspaper in 1965, although she returned to the Post in the years ahead.
White women reporters had relatively little opportunity to cover civil rights stories. One who did, Susanna McBee, was among the few women on the Post’s city staff in the late 1950s and early 1960s. McBee, who had been the first nonwartime woman editor of the University of Southern California’s Daily Trojan, was hired as a Post news aide in 1956. She advanced to the rank of reporter the following year after writing book reviews and volunteering to take night assignments. She covered school desegregation cases in Northern Virginia and a lunch counter sit-in demonstration there in June 1960. Taken off the sit-in story when the Post city editor told her it was “too dangerous” for a woman to handle, she used her reportorial contacts to find out by telephone when the lunch counter event would happen and was the only reporter to cover it, scooping the rest of the press corps with a page one story.

After taking a leave in 1961–62 to earn a master’s degree in political science at the University of Chicago, McBee went back to the Post planning to cover the massive civil rights march on Washington in August 1963 but was suddenly taken off that story. “I had spent months as the only reporter going to New York nearly every weekend with a D.C. local delegation making plans for the demonstration with national civil rights leaders including Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.” she said.45 This time the city editor told her he did not want her to endure the hassles she would face attending a press conference by A. Philip Randolph, one of the march organizers, at the National Press Club, since she would be confined to the balcony and forbidden from asking questions.

McBee was outraged that the Post would not fight the NPC discrimination. “My career was suffering,” she said.46 The incident angered Elsie Carper, who had just been installed as president of the WNPC, propelling her to intensify the club’s campaign to
persuade political figures not to speak at the NPC. After persisting in following civil rights cases and covering Senate passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, McBee left the Post in 1965 for Life magazine’s Washington bureau, where she won awards for disclosing dangerous practices of the diet pill industry.

In contrast to Gilliam, many women reporters received traditional assignments in the 1960s. Those assigned to the White House followed the photogenic activities of Jackie Kennedy and her children, who were prominently featured in women’s sections nationally. Helen Thomas of UPI and her rival, Frances Lewine of the AP, matched wits with the First Lady, who wanted press coverage on her own terms, while they sought to feed public appetite for endless detail about the First Family. “She’s such a good reporter everyone forgets she’s a woman,” a male broadcaster said of Lewine.47

A virtual godsend to the women’s press corps, Jackie furnished copious amounts of copy. Her elaborate parties, White House redecorating, trend-setting fashions, youthful glamour, jet-set lifestyle, appealing small children, and even their pets—all made news—some of which the First Lady resented. Dorothy McCardle, a Post social writer, incurred Jackie’s enmity for reporting that the White House curator had slapped the hands of little Caroline Kennedy when she touched antiques on display.48 A grandmotherly looking woman, married to Carl McCardle, a journalist who served as an assistant secretary of state during the Eisenhower administration, McCardle, who joined the Post in 1960, saw herself as a reporter, not a guest, at the White House. She had a background in journalism that dated back to her first job at the Philadelphia Inquirer in 1924, where she covered crime.

As Thomas noted, “The irony is that Jackie Kennedy unwittingly gave a tremendous lift to me and many other women re-
Porters in Washington by escalating our beat . . . to instantaneous front-age news.” Eleanor Roosevelt’s liberal good works had drawn headlines, but Jackie’s celebrity looks and status offered even more. “One biting quip from Jackie or a spill from a horse could launch a thousand headlines,” Thomas said.50

Jackie offered little cooperation, informing her inexperienced press secretary, Pamela Turnure, rumored to have been one of Jack Kennedy’s numerous romantic interests, “My press relations will be minimum information given with maximum politeness.”51 Yet, Jackie was the first president’s wife to name a press secretary. In spite of her hostility to the press except when she wanted to publicize specific activities, she made the White House such a magnet for reporters that “a lot of women started going there every day learning on the job what to do,” according to Winzola McLendon, a social reporter for the Post.52

Privately, Jackie referred to female reporters as “harpies,” whose obtrusive presence marred her elegant entertaining.53 In a memo seen by Esther Van Wagoner Tufty, Jackie, who preferred that reporters stay out of sight behind pillars and potted palms, caustically suggested “keeping the harpies at bay by stationing a couple of guards with bayonets near them.”54 President Kennedy on the other hand recognized the importance of the women on the political scene. Tufty claimed that on one occasion he took hold of his wife “very hard” and told her to “say hello to the girls, darling,” referring to the social reporters, leaving “the imprint of his hand in her flesh.”55

Jackie particularly disliked Thomas and Lewine, whose wire service jobs required them to keep close tabs on her movements. One Sunday she took revenge on the women as they stood watch outside while she attended a church service in Florida, reporting to the Secret Service that she was being followed by “two strange
Spanish-looking women.”56 As a result the two were briefly arrested. Thomas noted this as “a brilliant carom shot since Fran is Jewish and I’m of Arab descent.”57 Both women gained professionally from their assiduous coverage of the First Lady. Each moved up in her news organizations and won the opportunity to cover the president as well as his wife.

President Kennedy befriended women reporters when Bonnie Angelo, president of the WNPC in 1961–62, fought to open the annual all-male White House Correspondents’ Association Dinner to women members of the organization. Angelo’s career in the capital dated back to the 1950s when she worked in the Washington bureau of Newsday alongside her husband, Hal Levy, the bureau chief. Impressed with Angelo’s feature-writing skills, Alicia Patterson, the founder of Newsday, had assigned the couple to the capital after employing both in Newsday’s home office on Long Island. The two had married after a newsroom romance while working on the Winston-Salem Journal (N.C.).

In her WNPC role, Angelo campaigned against the scheduling of speakers at the NPC in spite of its discriminatory policy against women reporters as well as battling for their right to attend the White House Correspondents’ Association Dinner. She was one of a small group of reporters who took up the dinner issue with Pierre Salinger, President Kennedy’s press secretary. “He got President Kennedy to say, to let it be known, not to announce but to let it be known that he was not going to the dinner if women members were not allowed,” she said.58

The club changed its policy, and Angelo found herself sitting at the head table with Kennedy for the “jolliest of all nights.”59 But, she added, “I was assailed by men reporters; some of them who I thought were friends.”60 Clark Mollenhoff, an investigative reporter, told her that his secretary did not think women
should go to the dinner. “I said, Clark, we’re not concerned with your secretary; we’re concerned with women who are journalists and who have the qualifications to be White House correspon-
dents. . . . This was a rough time,” Angelo said.⁶¹

After the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963, women journalists found themselves covering a far different kind of White House presided over by a First Lady who herself had a degree in journalism. Lady Bird Johnson, a graduate of the University of Texas, and her husband, Lyndon Johnson, recognized the value of the women’s press corps in publicizing administration activities. Far from talking about “harpies,” Lady Bird patterned herself after Eleanor Roosevelt and became an advocate for causes, particularly those related to increased environmental awareness.

Under the direction of Liz Carpenter, who served as her ca-
pable press secretary, Lady Bird staged event after event and trip af-
ter trip that engaged her press corps. As Thomas recalled, “Climb-
ing mountains pursued by gnats, riding Snake River Rapids in Wyoming, watching from the beaches as she—not I—snorkeled in the barracuda-filled Caribbean, bobbing in a flotilla of rubber rafts down the Rio Grande . . . no newswoman wanted to be left behind when Lady Bird set out on her adventures.”⁶² Some seventy reporters joined the First Lady for a raft trip down the Rio Grande in Texas as part of her campaign to promote environment issues.

Her efforts received the trivializing name of beautification. Ac-
cording to Lewis Gould, a historian of first ladies, use of the term showed the constraints on women in public life in the 1960s, since Lady Bird Johnson had no real choice except to accept the “at-
tribution of inferiority toward women that the word beautifi-
cation implied.”⁶³ Newspapers shortened the term to beauty to fit into headlines, further diluting her advocacy of conservation.
The *Star*, for example, headlined a typical beautification story by Betty Beale, *A PLEA FOR U.S. BEAUTY*, and ran it on the front page of its society/home section, with the headline *FIRST LADY DISCUSSES BEAUTY* marking the continuation of the story on an inside page. Lady Bird’s campaign, which resulted in flower- and tree-planting projects in the city of Washington, paid for by private funds, also involved backing federal legislation, the Highway Beautification Act of 1965, to regulate billboards along highways.

By the time Lyndon Johnson left office in 1969, women’s sections, where most of the beautification coverage was centered, were coming under increasing attack for failing to do serious reporting on women’s lives. Whether focused on the White House or on the parties of famous hostesses, Washington’s women’s and society pages pictured aspects of life removed from the experiences of most women. In 1961, for example, the ANWC with its large contingent of society and women’s page reporters as well as socially prominent hostesses, held a “Gala Garden Party” on July 11 at Hillwood, the grand Washington estate owned by Marjorie Merriweather Post, one of the world’s richest women.

Other club events that year included a reception for opera stars and a festive Christmas party in the eighth-floor lounge of the State Department, an impressive area usually reserved for important foreign dignitaries. In addition, the club held parties for authors and a reception for Letitia Baldridge, Jackie Kennedy’s social secretary, at its stately headquarters, a turn-of-the-century townhouse near fashionable Dupont Circle. It entertained the women members of Congress at a reception at the U.S. Capitol and put on a “Fashion Spectacular” at the historic Willard Hotel.

Some members oriented to general news complained that the club was unprofessional in its pursuits, but it continued to plan events featuring celebrities and political figures, which it publi-
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cized in women’s and society sections. In 1964–65 it counted 420 members, with one associate member for every two working professionals. Associate members included wives of current and former diplomats and current and former members of Congress, as well as congresswomen themselves and the highest-ranking women in the military. Sarah McClendon, who as president in 1960 had overseen purchase of the club’s handsome clubhouse, expressed concern in 1969 over the club’s image as a social organization and called for more attention to professional achievement. The heyday of Washington social coverage was about to end, in response to women’s changing roles.

Newspapers were slow to recognize that an increasing number of women, mothers as well as wives, were working outside the home. Nationally women workers increased from 24 percent of the total employed in 1940 to 32 percent in 1960, with both husband and wife working in more than 10 million homes by 1960, although women often worked part time. Widespread use of the birth control pill and other forms of contraception altered women’s lives at the same time life expectancy was increasing. Betty Friedan’s best-selling book, The Feminine Mystique, published in 1963, tapped into anxieties of middle-class life, charging that mainstream media, particularly magazines, brainwashed women into accepting a narrow world of housewifery, subordination, and stifled ambitions. The two major Washington newspapers, the Post and the Star, as well as the New York Times, did not even review the book.

The social movement that culminated with passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 directly fueled protest activities known as women’s liberation, which included criticism of women’s and society sections. Ironically, a Virginia congressman, eighty-one-year-old Howard W. Smith, tried to block the act’s passage by adding the
word “sex” to Title VII, which outlawed employment discrimination on the basis of “race, color, religion, or national origin.” Smith hoped to ridicule and defeat the legislation by including women. His attempt, which insiders tagged the “May Craig Amendment,” in honor of Craig’s well-known views on equal rights, backfired. Sen. Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota assured Craig, a regular panelist on Meet the Press, by then a televised press conference program, that the Democratic leadership in Congress backed the legislation.73

Even though initial coverage of women’s liberation activities took place in women’s sections, the National Organization of Women (NOW), founded in 1966 by Friedan and others as the nation’s largest feminist organization, complained that these sections ghettoized news of women. NOW’s campaign against employment discrimination struck at the wage differential common between men and women reporters, particularly pronounced on women’s section staffs. As part of women’s liberation, feminists attacked the assumption that men and women should occupy separate, and unequal, spheres within journalism.

In 1962 Katharine Graham, described as a shy housewife, took over as head of the Post following her husband’s suicide, becoming the most prominent woman in journalism, not only in Washington but in the United States. As a publisher, Graham, like Patterson before her, made crucial decisions but left implementation to key male editors. As she felt her way forward, she aimed to enhance the renown of the Post as a watchdog of the political scene, including its social side. “In most places in America nobody cares what the upper crust does anymore,” she said. “Here, because the upper crust is basically political, everyone cares.”74

Nevertheless, the Post’s women’s section was transformed into a trend-setting feature section, Style, in 1969, after Graham hired a brash, innovative editor, Ben Bradlee. He joined the newspaper
in 1965, pushing Sauer into retirement. Bradlee was convinced that “traditional women’s news bored the ass off all of us.”75 He envisioned Style as featuring profiles, cultural trends, the arts, and reviews.

The shift to Style represented only one of the major decisions taken at the Post under Graham’s leadership. In 1971 she boldly decided to publish the Pentagon Papers, a secret account of how the United States became involved in the Vietnam War. It had been appearing in the New York Times in spite of legal efforts by the Nixon administration to restrict publication on grounds of national security. The Post’s lawyers argued against publication, especially since the company was getting ready to sell its stock publicly, while its editors wanted to proceed. Graham recalled herself being frightened and tense as she “took a big gulp” and said, “Go ahead.”76 Fortunately, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of the newspapers.

The next year Graham committed the newspaper to controversial coverage of the Watergate scandal, a saga of political corruption that ended with the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon in 1974. The scandal unraveled after burglars were arrested for breaking into the Democratic National Committee headquarters at Washington’s posh Watergate complex in 1972. Due partly to the exhaustive work of two Post reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, the burglars were tied to the White House. Investigation of the break-in, part of a widespread scheme to reelect Nixon, led to Attorney General John Mitchell making threats against Graham herself. He screamed at Bernstein that if he printed a story on a secret campaign fund, “Katie Graham’s gonna get her tit caught in a big fat wringer.”77

The Nixon administration put intense pressure, economic and psychological, on the Post to cease its coverage, resulting in a de-
cline in its stock value. Even social news was affected. The White House cut off Dorothy McCardle’s access to evening entertainment for twenty-eight days in 1972 in retaliation for Post reporting about Watergate. The ban was lifted only after Isabelle Shelton, McCardle’s counterpart at the Star, decided to boycott any event that McCardle could not attend in a show of solidarity. While it was in effect, McCardle, in the words of Graham, was left “cooling her heels in her evening dress all alone in the White House press room while parties went on without her.”

As Graham described it, “Of all the threats to the company during Watergate—the attempts to undermine our credibility, the petty slights, and the favoring of the competition—the most effective were the challenges to the licenses of our two Florida television stations.” Eventually, the challenges failed. Although Nixon easily won reelection, he resigned rather than be impeached after the disclosure of White House tapes that revealed his complicity in illegal activities, including a cover-up of the Watergate burglary. The Post won a Pulitzer Prize in 1973 for public service in exposing Watergate-linked corruption. A Hollywood movie, All the President’s Men, based on Woodward and Bernstein’s book about Watergate, further publicized the Post’s role in Watergate and dramatized investigative reporting.

Except for Graham, all the leading characters were men, showing the male domination of reporting and editing in Washington during the Watergate period. In her autobiography Graham said her relationship with Bradlee “was solidified forever by Watergate,” in spite of “numerous sexist comments.” She wrote that she had complained to the editor of the Boston Globe about a news article on Bradlee, asking, “Why is it if a female publisher and a male editor get along, he is accused of stroking and she of being susceptible to manipulation?”
Graham’s ascension to power initially made little difference to most women journalists in the capital. A count of women at the Post in 1970 revealed 33 women among 272 reporters, columnists, and editors, while of the 14 editors and 22 reporters on the national desk, only 2 were women. The Daily News had a little better percentage—10 women out of a staff of 54, while the Star counted 63 women out of an editorial staff of 256, but the numbers included secretaries, aides, and others not actually employed as reporters or editors.

In 1969, when the Post became the first newspaper to actually eliminate its women’s section, it struck some readers as odd that its new Style section, which at first almost ignored women’s news, appeared in a newspaper controlled by a woman. Bradlee, former Washington bureau chief of Newsweek, thought differently. “I don’t think in this day and age that women’s interests are different from men’s,” he said. “I think it’s insulting to infer that they are interested only in recipes, lovelorn problems, and where Mrs. Merriweather Post danced last night.” The counterculture of the 1960s as well as the women’s movement influenced the change. It was illustrated by the lead story on the front page of the first issue of Style, an account of a twenty-six-year-old woman kidnapper written by a youthful woman staff writer who used unisex initials, B. J. Phillips.

The first renditions of Style featured male editors except for Elsie Carper, who had a short unsuccessful tenure, and a colorful male columnist, Nicholas von Hoffman. Described as “an aging flower child,” he favored the “groovy, sexy, beautiful, swinging, mellow, hip and hep.” His voice did not appeal to the multitude. Graham said she was willing to stand by him because he interested the “young and black whom we need to attract,” but she did not want Style to appeal only to minority readers. As a woman
herself, she missed some of the content of the old women’s pages, writing to Bradlee, “Clothes, fashions, interiors and the frothy side . . . are all taking a hosing . . . I am quite fed up with the really heedless eggheadedness of Style.”90 Bradlee retorted, “I can’t edit this section unless you get your finger out of my eye.”91

Eventually Style settled down, in part by covering social activities from a sharp-edged perspective offered by Sally Quinn. Bradlee hired Quinn, the young, unemployed daughter of a general, on the strength of her family connections. Her only previous journalistic venture was the article how to woo washington men in the Washington Post magazine, written with the help of New York Post reporter Warren Hoge, to whom she was engaged at one point.92 Far from flattering her hosts with what she called the “sycophantic, fawning” social reporting of the past, Quinn saw society and celebrities through a critical lens.93

“I covered parties the way they were, not the way the hostess wanted them to be covered. I covered them the way someone on the ‘Metro’ section covers a crime,” Quinn commented.94 Soon she was no longer welcome at embassy and socialite affairs, but her stories, allowed to run longer than those of many other Style staffers, attracted an audience. Quinn became Bradlee’s third wife in 1978.

Style continued to have some women columnists and reporters, including those who had worked under Sauer, but typical social fare almost disappeared to the glee of the Star. Gwen Dobson, the Star’s women’s editor who headed a staff of nineteen, claimed the Star’s circulation jumped markedly.95 Under the direction of a male editor, Tom Kendrick, and an assistant editor, Mary Wiegers, described as a bright, pretty young reporter, Style resumed some society news in the early 1970s to compete with the Star, which, as two social reporters expressed it, “informed the reader right along every afternoon which parties would have been the right
Jacqueline Trescott, one observer said, in an effort to gain African American readers for Style, “ground out frequent dull stories on such subjects as black society parties and sorority balls.” Most journalists working for Style, however, showed little interest in being typecast as traditional social reporters.

Less willing to be in awe of president’s wives than in the past, some women reporters detected false notes in the performance of Richard Nixon’s wife, Pat. Helen Thomas saw the First Lady reach out for a glass of sherry, then pull her hand back when she realized that newswomen were watching her. Thomas wanted to tell her to take the drink, but realized that Pat Nixon “had been brought up in the old school that first ladies have NO ‘bad habits.’” When Beale interviewed Pat Nixon on “the real Richard Nixon,” the First Lady pictured her husband as “considerate, kind and gentle,” dismaying Beale, who had hoped that “she would find some fault with him” for the sake of both credibility and, one assumes, an interesting column.

In addition to Beale, the Star featured columnist Ymelda Dixon, the widow of George Dixon, a political humorist. She reported on embassy parties, refusing to drop in for cocktails before any dinner to which she was not invited. “I’d feel like a servant if I did,” she said. Another prominent staff member, Eleni, the fashion editor, was the wife of the Star’s managing editor, Sidney Epstein. Because the newspaper had a policy against staff members marrying, the two had to get special permission from management to proceed with the wedding. As a fashion arbiter, Eleni protested the cliché that Washington women looked dowdy, insisting that political transplants usually sharpened their appearances and wardrobes “once their figures and faces start appearing in the newspapers.” She said she gave them six months “to get the message.”
And that they usually did, rising to their new status with new wardrobes that made copy for the women’s pages.

Another well-known *Star* stalwart on Dobson’s staff, Isabelle Shelton, gained an exclusive interview with President Lyndon Johnson on the same day as her daughter celebrated her fourteenth birthday. Unfortunately for Shelton, the president insisted that she accompany him to a wedding in Maryland and complete the interview in his limousine while en route back to the White House.103 Frantic to get home to oversee preparations for her daughter’s birthday party, Shelton begged Johnson to let her out as his motorcade neared her neighborhood, making her, according to the rest of the press corps, “the only reporter in history who voluntarily broke off an interview with the President.”104 The incident underscored the difficulties in combining reporting with motherhood, an issue that was to get more attention in the decades ahead.

By the time Style was well established, the *Star*’s glory days were numbered. In 1970 it failed to make a profit for the first time, impelling it to buy out its afternoon competitor, the *Daily News*, in 1972. The combined *Star-News* continued to lose millions, prompting its family owners, principally the Noyes and Kauffmann families, to sell the property to Joe L. Allbritton, a Texas millionaire in 1974. Afternoon newspapers in general were declining due to competition from television and suburban development that complicated delivery problems.

For all of its quirks, Style attracted the attention of other newspaper editors who transformed their women’s pages into lifestyle sections, hoping to attract male as well as female readers while responding to the women’s movement. For example, The *Los Angeles Times* replaced its women’s pages with View, while the *New York Times* renamed its Food, Fashion, Family and Furnishings
section into Family/Style. The Star itself followed the trend, introducing its Portfolio section to counter Style.

The change from women’s pages to lifestyle sections did not necessarily mean a gain for women in terms of coverage. News of the women’s movement tended to be squeezed out of lifestyle sections, yet not printed in general news columns. At the Post Bradlee showed little interest in the women’s movement, although Sauer’s For and About Women carefully followed federal policy on the status of women.105

Reflecting on the change in 1979, Peggy Simpson, a longtime AP staffer, commented, “Many veterans of the women’s movement credit Elizabeth Shelton of The Washington Post [no kin to Isabelle Shelton] with having written the most comprehensive and thoroughly researched articles on the mid-1960s’s emergence of the Status of Women commissions . . . in every state of the country.”106 With Style on the scene, the Post “literally abandoned any systematic coverage of the women’s movement.”

Quinn, the controversial Style star, blamed women for their own problems. “There are so many jealous bitches,” she told an interviewer for Editor and Publisher, a trade magazine.107 “Just let one woman rise from the crowd and other women delight in tearing her down. Those Libbers who make the most noise get nowhere. And those of us who rise above them are the quietest.”108

By no means did the creation of lifestyle sections mean more jobs for women journalists and editors, some of whom were forced into retirement, like Sauer, or pushed aside. Style cost women four jobs in two years, according to a group of women who organized to protest sex discrimination at the Post in 1972.109 They noted that there had not been a compensating increase in women hired for other sections of the newspaper.110 Feminist critics complained also that the focus on entertainment in lifestyle sections resulted
in bland content that shied away from serious discussion of sexual and reproductive controversies, lesbian issues, alternatives to conventional marriage, and feminism as it affected women of color. While the front pages depended mainly on official sources for news, usually white males, lifestyle sections, like their predecessors, were not above using press releases from corporations seeking women consumers.111

As professionals who subscribed to the ideology of keeping themselves out of the stories and simply reporting what others were saying and doing, Washington women journalists themselves had a difficult time with the women’s movement. Women’s liberation, with its emphasis on careers outside the home, equal employment opportunities, and an end to a subordinate status to men, puzzled the news media in general, according to David Broder, the Post’s Pulitzer Prize–winning political columnist. While it was a political movement, it did not fit within the confines of routine newspaper beats: politics, education, police, courts, labor, etc. “We remain trapped in the assumptions and parochial limitations of our regular beats and the conventional thinking of the institutions and people we regularly cover,” Broder wrote.112

Coverage of the movement eventually centered on the fight for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and political stories that showed women flexing political muscle. These included attention to new political organizations that pushed female candidates such as NOW and the National Women’s Political Caucus. Kay Mills, at the time a reporter in the Newhouse Washington bureau, wrote later that reporting on these groups and the women candidates they backed allowed her to get into political coverage, since “male reporters wrote all the key campaign stories on male candidates,” and “politics was the only language my bureau chief understood.”113
While concerned about maintaining their objectivity as professional journalists, a handful of Washington women reporters were pivotal in publicizing the women’s movement. Mills said they “were at the seat of political power and they worked for news organizations with power.” She recalled that the group included Eileen Shanahan at the New York Times bureau, Shelton at the Star, Frances Lewine and Peggy Simpson at the AP, Marlene Cimons at the Los Angeles Times bureau, Sara Fritz at UPI, and Barbara Katz at the National Journal.

It was not easy to push Washington news aimed at women, as press secretaries for First Ladies discovered after the conversion of women’s pages into lifestyle sections. Instead of having a reserved spot on women’s pages, stories vied for space based on the standard elements of political intrigue—conflict, controversy, criticism, gossip, use of unnamed sources, human nature oddities. During President Jimmy Carter’s administration, Rosalynn Carter described herself as “crushed” when the Washington Post did not cover the formation of the President’s Commission on Mental Health, which she headed. Instead, it featured her decision as First Lady to omit hard liquor at state dinners and compared her to “Lemonade Lucy,” the nickname given to the pious Lucy Hayes, wife of President Rutherford B. Hayes, who refused to serve alcoholic beverages in 1877.

None of the women identified by Mills were political columnists per se like Fleeson and Higgins, but all very likely had personal experiences that attuned them to the subject of discrimination. Cimons, for instance, came to Washington in 1969 to cover Southern Californians for the Los Angeles Times. As the first woman in the Times’ bureau, Cimons, a graduate of Syracuse University, was assigned generally to social reporting. “I really found
it a rather tedious and shallow field mostly because I wanted to be doing more substantive reporting,” she said.\textsuperscript{117}

Although she produced an award-winning series on the post-traumatic stress disorder afflicting Vietnam veterans, her editors in Los Angeles “still were gripped by traditional values of partying and socializing,” she said.\textsuperscript{118} “I had to prove that I could cover what the guys were covering.”\textsuperscript{119} On one occasion she answered the telephone in the bureau and told a caller that the reporter he wanted to speak to was not there. The caller then asked for another journalist, who also was absent, and ended up with, “Well, is anybody there?” to which she replied, “Sure, can I help you? I’m here,” and he said, “No, I mean a reporter.”\textsuperscript{120} Had she been a male, the caller would have assumed she was a reporter. Cimons was not promoted to covering national news until the 1980s.\textsuperscript{121}

Only a few Washington women journalists, primarily Marianne Means and Mary McGrory, occupied the political columnist category in the 1960s and 1970s, paying varying amounts of attention to the feminist movement as they pursued national stories on male political figures. Marianne Means worked for Hearst’s King Features syndicate, while Mary McGrory’s column for the \textit{Star} also was sold to other newspapers. Means viewed the small number of women columnists as evidence of discrimination, but McGrory displayed a different attitude, contending that it was up to each individual to prove herself a capable journalist.\textsuperscript{122}

Means, said by some peers to look “like the actress a casting agency would pick to play a glamorous girl columnist in Washington,” decided to come to the capital after giving Sen. John F. Kennedy a ride to the airport when he campaigned for the presidency in Lincoln, Nebraska.\textsuperscript{123} A journalism graduate of the University of Nebraska, Means landed a job as women’s editor of the \textit{Northern
Virginia Sun, a suburban newspaper owned by prominent individuals with good political connections. Eventually she moved to the Hearst Washington bureau, explaining to readers five decades later in her final column for Hearst, “Luckily, I was assigned to cover the 1960 campaign of Sen. John F. Kennedy—the bureau was very short-staffed at the time, and my salary was peanuts. . . . The betting in the press corps was that the more experienced Vice President Richard Nixon would win.”

Contemporaries said Means incurred the envy of other journalists when Kennedy got off his boat while vacationing at Cape Cod and addressed only her by name out of a crowd of a hundred waiting reporters and photographers. As she looked back over her career, she said that when Kennedy actually won the presidency, “the startled Hearst bureau looked around and decided to take a chance on a young woman who could write and who knew some of Kennedy’s aides and the president himself.”

Remaining a White House correspondent during the Johnson years before becoming a political columnist, Means, accompanied by her husband, visited the Johnsons at their Texas ranch, and she joined them at Camp David for several weekends without her presence being announced. One of a group of journalists whom the president took for a car ride on his ranch, Means said accounts of her drinking beer while “batting my blue eyes” at Johnson were fabrications because she hated beer and was “sitting in the back seat.” According to Means, she did not use her proximity to presidents to gain information for news stories aside from anecdotes and background material.

In the early 1960s, Means said, “I was usually the only woman in press gatherings and news events [involving the president].” “The upside was that they all knew who I was.” But, she continued, “The downside was all the unwelcome late night telephone
calls from married Big Deal males seeking companionship on the cheap for an hour.”

Lamenting the fact that the Hearst organization had no Washington outlet, which meant that her work did not necessarily reach government officials, Means, whose column appeared in some 129 newspapers by 1970, hoped that the Post would pick up its weight, but that did not happen. At the time Means said that editors had “a hard time taking a young woman seriously.” She told an interviewer, “All I want is to have access to the same sources the men do.” She specifically referred to a series of breakfast meetings with cabinet members and other dignitaries organized by a reporter for the Christian Science Monitor who said “to my face he simply doesn’t want a woman there, and that’s unfair.”

She added, “I wish I could remember who first said, ‘You have to act like a lady, look like a girl, think like a man, and work like a dog.” She continued her column until her retirement in 2008.

Mary McGrory occupied a special place in Washington journalism for two decades before gaining national recognition with a Pulitzer Prize for Commentary in 1975. Her column appeared in some forty newspapers and many considered her Washington’s top woman reporter. Following the direction of her Star editor to write her column “like a letter to your favorite aunt,” McGrory captivated readers with her “lovely flow of prose,” as John Hohenberg, the administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes, commented, while praising McGrory for her “gift of language.” Contending that “the admiration that has come to her professionally has nothing to do with her womanhood,” Hohenberg noted that her colleagues “seldom admit privately, whatever they may say in public, that a woman journalist can be as good as a man.”

According to McGrory, it was only during the unsuccessful Democratic presidential campaign of 1968 by Sen. Eugene Mc-
Carthy that she felt accepted as a political columnist. She said McCarthy’s young aides took her work seriously, although they considered her a substitute mother figure and began any complaints with, “My mother didn’t like what you said about . . .”\textsuperscript{139}

In 1970 she was quoted as saying that men politicians “of the old school still regard the woman political reporter as a contradiction in terms,” bowing politely, then rushing off “to tell the story to the men.”\textsuperscript{140} Political figures tended to tell her their troubles rather than to leak stories. “I’ve heard more than I care to know about unhappy wives and wayward children,” she groaned.\textsuperscript{141}

By 1970 there were an estimated three hundred full-time women journalists in Washington, assigned to various beats, according to two veteran social journalists, Winzola McLendon, a former social reporter for the \textit{Post}, and Scottie Smith, the daughter of F. Scott Fitzgerald. Less than one-half of the women’s press group was accredited to Congress. McLendon and Smith divided the group into three categories: (1) those covering chiefly women’s news, including charity events, food, fashion, the First Family, and what Beale referred to as “politics after six”; (2) those holding traditionally male reporting jobs, such as Eileen Shanahan of the \textit{New York Times}, who won a Times’ Publisher Award for reporting on the 1969 tax bill, and Helen Dewar, who covered Northern Virginia politics for the \textit{Post} and predicted the election of the first Republican governor since Reconstruction; (3) those who gathered news for both women’s and general news sections, including White House wire service reporters, Lewine of the AP and Thomas of UPI, as well as Barbara Fulow of \textit{U.S. News & World Report}, since all three covered both the president and the First Lady.\textsuperscript{142} They also pointed to Lillian Wiggins of the \textit{Afro-American}, a black newspaper, as a reporter assigned to both women’s “soft” news and men’s “hard news.”
Wiggins, while called the society editor, covered a war between Nigeria and Biafra in Africa for three months in 1969 and did a series on conditions in Barbados. She was attending a seated dinner at the Ivory Coast Embassy when riots broke out in Washington in 1968 following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. She rushed home and changed from an evening dress to slacks and leather jacket, not daring to show a reporter’s notebook as she moved to the center of the riots on Fourteenth Street.\textsuperscript{143}

McLendon and Smith concluded that many of the women reporters made relatively little for their labors. They gave the women an average salary of about $250 a week—but wrote that their reward was “a ringside seat at the best show on earth.”\textsuperscript{144} Seeing reporting as a way of getting close to power, they noted enthusiastically that women journalists might lunch with the wives of ambassadors, have cocktails with senators, and dine at the White House all in the same day. A growing number of women journalists, however, did not view such assignments as producing meaningful careers, but sought to have more latitude to compete directly with men in the wake of the women’s liberation movement. While Beale saw power in being associated with those who held it, the newer crop of women journalists wanted more than the opportunity to observe those who made decisions; they wanted to report on the decision making themselves.

In 1972 \textit{Cosmopolitan} magazine looked at the women’s press corps from another angle. It spotlighted ten white Washington women journalists complete with a picture of the group smiling and striding down the street in business attire. Far from flattering the women, however, the article was titled \textit{The Witches of Washington}, with the subhead, \textit{Get to Know a Coven of News-Women Who Cast Spells, Exhume Stories, and, Brrrr! Meet Their Deadlines.} \textsuperscript{145}
The ten featured: Cheshire and Judith Martin, both of the Post; Sarah McClendon; Hearst’s Marianne Means; Vera Glaser of Knight Newspapers Inc. and at the time president of the Washington Press Club, an outgrowth of the old WNPC; Wauhillau La Hay, a columnist for Scripps Howard newspapers; Kandy Stroud of Women’s Wear Daily; television commentator Nancy Dickerson; and the two wire service rivals, Lewine and Thomas. Curiously, no representative from the Star was pictured, but Beale was quoted as saying, “We all protect the President.”

Quinn was absent from the group, too, although she was named as the author of a Style story on Lady Esme Cromer, wife of the British ambassador, that led to the title of the Cosmopolitan article. It stated that Lord Cromer had been so displeased by the “ill-mannered publication” of his wife’s comments on the Vietnam War that he had exploded on the subject of women journalists, telling another man, “Witches of Washington? My dear fellow, I think you’ve misspelled it.” Lady Cromer was quoted in Quinn’s story hoping that the United States won in Vietnam because to Asians “life means nothing.”

According to Cosmopolitan, any one of the three hundred women journalists in Washington would be pleased to be “considered a ‘witch,’” since this term put a journalist in an elite “coven” with a national audience. As evidence it pointed to a Glaser column on a clash between the White House and State Department over a State Department employees’ petition protesting Vietnam policy. First relegated to the Star’s women’s section, the story was picked up by AP and UPI for national distribution, which made it front-page news.

Stoud, described as a “pert and girlish” mother of two, was pictured as “neither sweet nor harmless.” It was she who had asked Lady Cromer her views on the Vietnam War, precipitat-
ing Quinn’s offending news story. Stroud could not break the story herself because her newspaper was not published the day of Cromer’s comments.

Stressing the competitiveness among the women, the article told of McClendon’s fury when President Nixon invited nine favored women reporters into his office for an informal chat. She led other uninvited women reporters “in a noisy demonstration outside the President’s Oval Office, ending with an off-key rendition of ‘We Shall Overcome.’” McClendon also appeared as a mistreated member of the press in The Boys on the Bus, Timothy Crouse’s attention-getting book on the political reporters who covered Nixon’s second presidential campaign in 1972.

While generally sympathetic to her, Crouse described McClendon as “a frumpish woman in a purple pants suit and star-in-circle earrings, with tousled platinum hair, and a sweet, toothy smile.” He called her the “comic relief at presidential news conferences,” and contended: “Whenever they were in a tight spot, Kennedy, Johnson and now Nixon would point to her with an indulgent smile and wait for her to ask some stupid, irrelevant question, which, it was true, she sometimes did. But no matter what she asked, all the male reporters laughed.”

Presidents, however, did not always welcome her questions. Recalling his first press presidential press conference in 1962, Sam Donaldson, veteran White House correspondent for ABC, remembered years later, “A woman got up—yes, a WOMAN—and said, ‘Mr. President, two well known security risks have recently been put on a task force in the State Department...’ and Kennedy began sputtering, got red in the face and started looking for cover. I knew at that moment I had found a role model.”

In Crouse’s view McClendon did not receive fair treatment in the 1960s and 70s, first, because she was a woman, and second,
because she represented relatively inconsequential newspapers. While Crouse saw McClendon as a victim of gender bias, the *Cosmopolitan* article saw her and other women as competitive vixens. As an example of their “witchiness,” it quoted La Hay as remembering, “At the first Congressional party I covered I didn’t know who some of the people were, so I asked Maxine Cheshire to help me. She said, ‘You must be out of your mind,’ and walked away.”

As a put-down to women’s liberation, the article concluded that “sisterhood, it seems, will never have the egoistic appeal of the front-page exclusive.” *Cosmopolitan* only begrudgingly admitted that the news women had banded together sufficiently to press for admission to the NPC, which had finally allowed them to join the previous year with Thomas and McClendon among the first twenty-four women inducted. It did not say that sometimes “sisterhood” did make headlines.

Simpson noted in her recollections that Glaser, then Washington chief of the North American Newspaper Alliance bureau, asked President Nixon at a 1969 press conference “whether we can expect a more equitable recognition of women’s abilities or are we going to remain a lost sex?” This referred to the fact that he had named only three women while filling some two hundred top-level jobs, as Glaser well knew since she was the former head of publicity for the women’s division of the Republican Party. Her political connections forced Nixon to take her question seriously and prompted creation of a White House task force on women. Her question led to a five-part NANA series on the status of women that ran in some fifty newspapers. It covered women’s lack of economic and political power, court rulings that held women were not equal under the Constitution, and lobbying efforts by national women’s organizations seeking change.

From the mid-century pages of both Crouse’s book and *Cos-*
mopolitan, one obvious point emerged, although perhaps unwittingly in the magazine article—newswomen remained apart from the cozy world of male-oriented political journalism in Washington during the Cold War and civil rights eras. In Crouse’s opinion some of the “toughest pieces on the 1972 Nixon campaign came from McClendon, Thomas, Cassie Mackin of NBC, Marilyn Berger of the Washington Post, and Mary McGrory,” whom he called “outsiders.” He argued that discrimination against them had toughened the women, giving them an uncompromising detachment and “bold independence of thought that often put the men to shame.”

With the exception of Thomas, these women were not among the small group of Washington national news reporters credited by Simpson and Mills with developing the expertise needed to cover feminist issues. Like Mills, Simpson pointed to Shanahan, Lewine, Isabelle Shelton, Katz of the National Journal, Cimons, and UPI’s Fritz, along with Mills herself. Simpson referred to Shanahan’s surprise when she received a telephone call in 1971 from an unknown woman attorney who told her that the ERA was scheduled to be voted on in the House of Representatives within a week but that the New York Times had run only one story on it. Shanahan launched her coverage of the ERA debate in Congress when Marjorie Hunter, who was assigned to the House of Representatives and the only other woman in the Times bureau, declined to do so, telling Shanahan that she preferred to concentrate on an education bill.
Shanahan, who covered economics for the *New York Times* from 1966 to 1977, was no stranger to sex discrimination and harassment. In an oral history interview in 1994, Shanahan gave concrete examples of the harassment that she faced as a woman reporter on Capitol Hill. She said she did not report it to her superiors because it was such a common occurrence that women “just sort of pretended it hadn’t happened in those days.” She said Sen. John Sparkman, chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, whom she considered one of the “worst ones [members of Congress] in terms of making ‘crude lunges,’” once directed her to his “hideaway office” to get a copy of an important committee report.

“He actually tore a button off my blouse, trying to get at me,” Shanahan continued, “and I remember saying to him, ‘You do one thing more and I will file charges of attempted rape, and I’m not kidding.’ And he said, ‘Oh, don’t be like that,’ and so forth.” She managed to get herself together “as best I could—and remembered to pick up the report—and walked out,” she said, seeking future news from Sparkman “only when I was desperate to get some information . . . I never went to that hideaway office again . . . [sexual harassment] was just a hazard of life.”

So was lack of opportunities to advance, which Shanahan fought by becoming a plaintiff in a class action sex discrimination suit brought by women at the *New York Times*. She was the only plaintiff from the Washington bureau of the *Times* and the best known of the group of women who accused the newspaper of gender unfairness in hiring, promotion, and pay. A contemporary on the *Times*, Nan Robertson, described Shanahan as a “superstar” who had “endless energy, enthusiasm, and an intellect of singular clarity.”

Before being hired by the *Times* in 1962, Shanahan had experienced numerous instances of discrimination. She gave up her
job with the United Press in 1947 to have her first child, but after eighteen months at home with her baby daughter she became so depressed that her husband insisted she go back to work. After numerous rejections, she was hired by Walter Cronkite, then a Washington correspondent for radio stations, in 1949, but he moved on in less than two years, leaving her jobless again. A stint on a newsletter led her to specialize in business news, but she was turned down for the staff of a premier business publication, the *Kiplinger Letter*. Its founder, William Kiplinger, told her that “a respectable woman, the only kind we would want here,” would be unable to get “inside information.”

Shanahan also was turned away from the *Post* by an editor who said an economics story with a woman’s byline would lack credibility, but she finally found employment with the *Journal of Commerce* in 1956. After she wrote an acclaimed ten-part series on the economic policy of the Kennedy administration in 1961, she became the spokesperson for Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon. One year later she joined the *Times* as its star economics reporter.

Her colleague, Hunter, was hired in 1961 to cover First Ladies and Congress, replacing Bess Furman, who had left for the public affairs section of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Bill Kovach, a former *Times* bureau chief, said Hunter and Shanahan were “pigeonholed” at the *Times* because of their gender. “Maggie Hunter was on Congress her entire career in Washington,” he said. “She was interested in the Pentagon . . . interested in other assignments, but the *New York Times* did not see fit to allow Maggie to develop in broader ways the way any man in the bureau [would have been allowed]. It just was not done.”

Kovach continued, “Either one of them could have competed head to head, toe to toe, with any man in Washington. [Editors
thought] it was just too much risk to make a major assignment to a woman. They figured that the natural prejudice of the old boy network would freeze the women out.”

Gender operated against women reporters, he added. “If a woman succeeded on a story that no one else had gotten, someone was always certain to say that she probably went to bed with [the source]. The idea that a woman could beat a man on a story fairly was inconceivable to a lot of journalists in Washington.”

Events leading to the *Times* suit started in 1972, when women employees in New York formed a caucus and met with Arthur Ochs Sulzberger Jr., known as Punch, the newspaper’s publisher, to point out major inequities, including a fifty-nine-dollar weekly gap in the pay of male and female reporters. After the women received little satisfaction from management in addressing their concerns, they went to federal court in 1974. The seven named plaintiffs, including Shanahan, the last to add her name and the only Washington staff member, gained the right from a federal judge to represent other women at the newspaper in 1977. Shanahan added her name shortly before she resigned, after having been passed over for a promotion at the *Times*, to become press secretary for Joseph Califano, secretary of health, education, and welfare under President Carter. Hunter, who continued at the *Times* until her retirement in 1986, was not involved in the suit. To Robertson, “Maggie, a Southern lady and a thorough professional, was no feminist firebrand.”

In 1978 the *Times* settled the sex discrimination case out of court for $385,000, specifying timetables for hiring and promoting women. Women in the news and business departments received $223,500 in back pay. According to Linda Greenhouse, who later covered the U.S. Supreme Court for the *Times*, the suit forced editors “to scan the horizon and promote women.”
The *Times* suit represented one of a score of legal actions brought by women and minorities against major news organizations under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Class-action discrimination complaints named some of the most respected names in the news business, including the AP, *Newsday*, *Detroit News*, the *Baltimore Evening Sun*, and the *Post*, as well as NBC and other broadcasters. After years of negotiating contracts that called for women’s page staff members to be paid less than general news or sports reporters, the Newspaper Guild, the chief union of news and business employees, reversed its stand in 1970 and set goals for equality. As Kay Mills put it, “the women were clearly successful, not so much for themselves as for the women who came after them.”

After dragging on for a decade, for example, the AP suit, backed by the Wire Service Guild, ended in 1983 with a $2 million out-of-court settlement. It set up affirmative action plans for women and minorities and gave $850,000 in back pay to more than eight hundred women who had worked for the wire service since 1972. Among plaintiffs in the suit were Simpson and Fran Lewine, who keenly perceived lack of equality at the wire service.

Long before the settlement was reached, both women had left the AP. The wire service took Lewine off the White House beat after twelve years in 1977. She spent the next four years at the U.S. Department of Transportation, leaving as deputy director of public affairs, a job that paid her much more than the AP. In 1981 she moved on to CNN as an assignment editor, holding that job until her death in 2008. Simpson, who transferred to the AP Washington bureau in 1968 after covering the Texas legislature, left the AP ten years later to work for the Hearst bureau in the capital, to help develop more coverage of women.

Recalling her years at the AP, Lewine complained of a double
standard in which women were praised for filling in for men but not seen as capable as their masculine colleagues.\textsuperscript{185} She once asked President Gerald Ford at a televised news conference if he agreed with his own administration guidelines against federal officials patronizing segregated facilities. When he said he did, she inquired why he played golf weekly at the Burning Tree Country Club, which refused to admit women. Some AP editors were upset that she raised the issue, and Ford’s press secretary, Ronald Nessen, declared that her question “was the worse misuse of a question at a presidential news conference to advocate a personal point of view.”\textsuperscript{186}

In an oral history interview, Lewine pointed to a general pattern of discrimination, noting there were only ten women out of a hundred AP employees in Washington in 1968.\textsuperscript{187} “We never got paid as much as the men. We had discrimination of women who were mandatorily retired at age fifty-five versus sixty-five for the men; and the whole idea that the reason you were covering the White House was basically to cover first ladies and the put-down of that role,” she said.\textsuperscript{188} “There was basic discrimination in the entire profession. . . . The AP was an organization that was looked up to by other newspapers and they set the pace, more or less, for the profession and news gathering.”\textsuperscript{189}

As other groups of women journalists became increasingly restive, Katharine Graham found herself dismayed in her role as head of the Washington Post Company. The Post had long treated women differently than men. For example, when Susan Jacoby applied to the Post for an entry-level reporting job in 1962, she was required to submit an essay on how she planned to combine motherhood with journalism. She insisted that the combination “would pose absolutely no problem.”\textsuperscript{190} She added, “If the person-
nel head had told me to produce an essay on my method of birth control, I probably would have done that too.”

Graham became an ally of women’s liberation due in part to her friendship with Gloria Steinem, a leading feminist figure, but it took years for her personal interest to filter down to the level of the individual employer. To her discomfort in 1970, forty-six women at *Newsweek*, owned by the Post Company but published in New York, filed a discrimination complaint with the federal Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC) set up by the Civil Rights Act. The complaint came after the women were passed over by male editors who hired a freelance journalist to write a cover story on women’s liberation. Graham’s reaction, when informed of the complaint: “Which side am I supposed to be on?” The company offered *Newsweek* women—who previously had been confined to the role of researchers, not writers, at the magazine—more opportunity, but two years later women complained male editors had not lived up to their promises.

Interested in the women’s movement as the result of the “many rooms into which I walked, boards on which I sat, meetings I attended, as the only woman,” Graham gave Steinem $20,000 for her feminist publication, *Ms.* magazine. Yet Graham wrote in her autobiography that she continued to back male management “as the way the world worked.” Her closest female confidant at the *Post*, Meg Greenfield, deputy editorial page editor and eventual Pulitzer Prize winner, had succeeded in her career before the women’s movement. Greenfield posted a sign on her office door, “If liberated, I will not serve,” although she later warmed to feminist ideas.

In 1970 Graham and Bradlee called for nonsexist language in the *Post*, with Bradlee responding to the concerns of a commit-
tee of women reporters by issuing a memo cautioning against use of “words like ‘divorcee,’ ‘grandmother,’ or ‘housewife’” if corresponding words were not used for men. Graham became one of the first five women initiated into the Washington chapter of the formerly all-male Sigma Delta Chi, a professional journalism fraternity, in 1970, along with Mary Lou Forbes. In her remarks Graham joked that the Post might run the story under the heading newsmen’s frat taps working grandma. She and Bradlee chose the dependable Elsie Carper to become head of personnel “to hire more women and minorities,” and Graham credited her with making “a big impact with her hires.”

Efforts to widen hiring practices did not stop accusations of discrimination brought against the Post by both women and African American journalists. Women at both the Post and the Star held consciousness-raising sessions to talk about their inferior status, while male colleagues scoffed. One prime example occurred in 1970, when a group of eleven women reporters from both newspapers met at the Capitol Hill apartment of Nancy Beckham, who worked for the Star.

For two years as an entry-level newsroom employee, Beckham, a graduate of Hollins College, had diligently typed stories in triplicate called in by reporters, while covering civic meetings and other assignments at night on a freelance basis. Unlike men who also had started on the dictation bank, she was not promoted to being a reporter because Epstein, the city editor, contended he was uncomfortable sending women out on Washington streets at night. Finally Forbes “volunteered to put me on the state staff,” Beckham (later Ferris) said. She reported on the suburb of Arlington and won promotion to the position of assistant metro editor, staffing the night shift, but at that point, no issues were raised “about my being a woman,” she said.
Although she advanced in her career, a consciousness-raising session at Beckham’s apartment in 1970 turned into a terrifying event. As women on both newspapers were sharing accounts of lack of deserved assignments, to their horror three armed men from the neighborhood entered the premises. They forced the women to lie on the floor and robbed them of their valuables, and two of the men threatened to rape one of the women. The incident received only semiserious treatment from the city desks at both newspapers, according to Ferris, who recalled that male colleagues sniggered and made snide comments about it. She said that the group did not meet again, although both newspapers eventually took steps to deal more equitably with women and minorities.

Newsrooms remained inhospitable places for women in the 1960s and 70s, when they began to hire women in larger numbers. At the Star, Epstein, a former marine, barked orders amid the clank of typewriters, clouds of cigarette smoke, and wads of torn copy paper thrown on desks dirty from stacks of carbon paper. Grizzled veterans still occasionally drank on the job.

“It was really tough on us broads back then,” Myra McPherson, a feature writer from Detroit who started at the Star in 1960 and later moved to the Post, recalled a half century later, paying homage to Betty Miles James. One of the first women on the news staff at the Star, James had been hired during World War II and kept on after the war, writing features on subjects like the newspaper’s “Send a Kid to Camp Fund.” In the face of male coolness to new women employees, James welcomed them warmly.

Nevertheless, women at the Star considered working conditions there generally more accommodating than at the rival Post, according to Ferris, a Star employee from 1967 to 1980 noted. This stemmed partly from the presence of women stars like Ottenberg,
Forbes, and McGrory, as well as another woman, Shirley Elder, who covered the House of Representatives. Star staffers also attributed it to the fact that the Post had more competitive young journalists seen as “grim careerists” intent on getting ahead in an atmosphere of “creative tension” promoted by Bradlee. Ferris said that the Star had a paternalistic style of management; she believed the city editor’s refusal to make her a reporter was motivated by concern for her safety.

As the Star lost money in the 1970s, concern for saving jobs dominated the agenda for employees, said Ferris, who served as chair of the Guild unit. Beset by declines in advertising and circulation, the paper only made money when the Post experienced a crippling pressmen’s strike in 1975 that ended four and a half months later after Graham had broken the pressmen’s union and weakened the Guild. The Star’s gains did not last. In 1978, Allbritton sold the Star to Time Inc., which failed to reverse the losses.

By contrast the Post enhanced its profits and reputation, but some women and minority journalists increasingly protested unequal opportunities at the newspaper. In early 1972 a group of African American reporters handed Bradlee a list of questions, such as, “Why are there no black originating editors on the foreign, national, sports, financial and Style desks, and only one . . . on the metropolitan desk?” Bradlee responded by saying the Post “now employs more black editors, reporters and photographers than any newspaper in America,” a total of twenty-one in all. Not satisfied, the protestors, known as the Metro Seven, filed discrimination charges with the EEOC. Similar protests from women soon followed. Acting through the Guild, women filed their own sex discrimination complaint against the Post. Both groups found support for their charges. The EEOC issued a finding of discrimination against the Post on the basis of race, but Post attorneys fought
the finding and the commission finally voted, three to two, not to prosecute the newspaper.211

In 1974 the commission concluded that the newspaper “restricts the opportunities of female employees to occupy its higher paying positions.”212 The findings referred to evidence that married women employees “experience greater difficulty in getting hired or promoted into higher paying positions than single females and that such considerations do not affect the opportunities of male employees.”213 Two examples were given, one of a women turned down for a correspondent’s job because she had a child, and another of a woman who said she was harassed and denied assignments because of her plans to marry another staff member.214

The Post moved to address these issues. In 1976, the newspaper reported, 46 percent of those hired during the preceding year were minorities, while nearly 20 percent of all news employees were women.215 But tension remained. Katharine Graham took a philosophical approach: “My own reactions to these suits were mixed; I felt that some [charges] were unfair and some were not. But you always get pushed when things become confrontational, and that is often to the good,” she wrote in her autobiography.216

Graham also got caught up in the furor over ending gender discrimination by the prestigious Gridiron Club. Composed of fifty high-level Washington newsmen, the Gridiron existed to lampoon the current president at an annual black-tie dinner attended by him and the cream of the political establishment. In 1971 about thirty women reporters picketed the dinner led by Rachel Scott, a freelance environmental writer, who carried a sign saying, “Gridiron Studs are Sexist Bigots” and was arrested for disorderly conduct.217

When the club tried to counter protests against its male-only policy by inviting a few women to its 1972 dinner, Graham
first accepted, then declined the invitation. She backed out after women at the *Post*, some of whom were among journalists who picketed the event wearing evening dresses, urged her to stay away. The women were part of an ad hoc group called Journalists for Professional Equality organized by Ann Wood, a *New York Daily News* correspondent, and others who pressed leading political figures not to attend.\(^{218}\) In addition to Graham, most of the invited women, including Coretta Scott King, Sen. Margaret Chase Smith, and anthropologist Mary Mead, declined with Rep. Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman to serve in Congress, stating, “Guess who’s not coming to dinner.”\(^{219}\)

“I couldn’t bring myself to picket, however,” Graham told an audience at the NPC.\(^{220}\) With Greenfield playing chauffeur, the wealthy publisher hunched down to avoid being recognized, as the two drove around the hotel where the dinner took place, watching the picketers. They included Judith Martin, later the *Post*’s “Miss Manners” columnist, who pushed her baby in a carriage on the picket line. Observers were afforded “a hilarious perspective on this scene of limousines, white tie and tails, the baby buggy, and the picketers,” Graham said.\(^{221}\) She ended the evening by joining the picketers at the home of Eileen Shanahan for a buffet supper.\(^{222}\)

While the Gridiron admitted its first African American member, columnist Carl T. Rowan, in 1972, it voted against taking in women members in 1973. This prompted the 1974 staging of a successful counter-Gridiron party in a college gymnasium. Billed as a carnival with celebrity auctioneers, it attracted a bigger crowd of more prominent people than the Gridiron itself.

Marlene Cimons of the *Los Angeles Times* was one of the organizers of the annual protests. She saw the effort change from symbolic picketing gestures, “where my publisher Otis Chandler . . . came over to me on the line and said, ‘Hi, Marlene, are you
having fun?’” to counter parties, which nailed the Gridiron members where it hurt—in their dinner guest list,” she recalled. “As professional discrimination against women became less ‘fashionable’ and officials began to take it more seriously, they recognized—finally—that attending the Gridiron was not in their best interests.”

In 1975 the Gridiron capitulated, voting to admit Helen Thomas as its first woman member. She was followed the next year by Fran Lewine. The counter-Gridiron event for 1975 turned into a celebration, with Sen. Ed Muskie of Maine calling bingo games and Steinem signing pardons for “past male chauvinist sins.” Protests continued at the club’s slow pace of integration. Finally, in 1993, Thomas was elected its first woman president. Similarly she won election as president of the White House Correspondents’ Association.

No suits charging discrimination were filed at the Star. “I think the Star had a large enough core of women, saw the lawsuits going on elsewhere, and dropped most restrictions and tried to advance women’s careers,” Jody Beck, now director of the Scripps Howard Foundation Semester in Washington program, said. Beck started working at the Star in 1973 before women were allowed to take the night police beat, one of the first assignments given reporter trainees, although that soon changed, she recalled. Beck remained on the staff until the newspaper folded in 1981, covering almost all beats given to local reporters—police, courts, schools, legislature, local, and statewide politics.

Beck considered Forbes and other women in the office to have been her mentors. When former Star employees held annual reunions, Ferris said they retrospectively concluded, “We never worked in a better place.” No doubt, the newspaper served as a training ground for a group of accomplished women who went
on to distinguished careers at other newspapers and in broadcasting. Whether at the Star, the Post, or other news organizations, however, it took dedicated, determined individuals to counter the sexist prejudices that infused Washington journalism in the middle of the twentieth century. Their success depended not only on themselves but, in many cases, on the impact of federal legislation to require equal employment opportunity. Along with the women’s movement, it effectively ended formal segregation of women in news operations, based on ideas of separate spheres for men and women, but numerous challenges remained for women journalists in a male-dominated capital.