Women of the Washington Press

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Few Washingtonian newswomen could be called fashion plates, but by and large they are trimmer, slimmer, and better dressed today than thirty years ago when members of the corps sloshed around in raincoats and Aunt-Jennie-type shoes. Credit for changing the appearance of women in the press, making it better looking and younger looking goes to the newcomers in the media, the television girls.

—Winzola McLendon and Scottie Smith in Don’t Quote Me!

In their 1970 account of Washington women journalists, McLendon and Smith called attention to the importance of good looks for women who moved into television as barriers fell following passage of the Civil Rights Act. For years women had faced limited opportunities in broadcasting. With the advent of commercial broadcasting in the 1920s, men took charge of almost all newscasting, contending that women’s voices did not convey authority and believability. Women who claimed a place behind the microphone faced restrictions on subject matter—generally they presided over homemaking shows, sandwiching household
hints in between interviews with persons deemed interesting for a feminine audience.

Women’s programming paid less than sports programming and other shows aimed at male listeners. It received less respect from male broadcasters. “I think a phenomenon of the early days of both radio and TV . . . was that the women’s director who had her own shows was inescapably considered a character by her station associates,” commented Ruth Crane Schaefer, who spent twenty-seven years in broadcasting, from 1929 to 1956, in Detroit and Washington, D.C.1

“And the jokes directed at her were not always innocent,” she continued. “Later on in TV it became almost the practice . . . for the floorman, the cameraman and others to make away ahead of time with the food she had prepared . . . she opens the oven door or the refrigerator door and ha–ha nothing is inside.”2 She added, “We tried putting locks on the refrigerator and all, but they’d [the male staff would] break it open. And the management didn’t do anything about it.”3

Few women were taken seriously as news broadcasters for decades, although some managed to have successful careers. Among them: Eleanor Roosevelt, who gave paid commentaries over network radio while First Lady from 1933 to 1945. Women like Schaefer took part in daytime radio, but as her experiences illustrated, they sometimes encountered covert hostility. As announcers, women were thought to be less appealing to listeners than men, based in part on a poll taken by WJZ in New York in 1926 that claimed to show listeners preferred men’s voices over women’s voices by a ratio of one hundred to one.4 Prime-time, or nighttime radio, circumscribed women’s roles and offered them little opportunity to move into news in most areas, including Washington.

Schaefer worked for WMAL, a station owned by the Star. Its
rival, WTOP, was owned by the *Washington Post*. Newspapers originally acquired radio stations, which later turned into television stations, for prestige and experimentation. Publishers initially viewed radio as entertainment, although its reports on World War II showed its strength in news transmission. Not surprisingly, women, as well as men, were drawn to the new medium, seeking opportunities in an expanding field that depended on women’s voices for daytime programming.

According to one radio historian, the “real-life world of radio itself—the world of writing, producing, and performing—provided a host of new careers for women,” allowing some to succeed behind, if not in front of, the microphone. One producer was Martha Rountree, creator and moderator for six years of the durable public affairs program, *Meet the Press*. It started on radio in 1945, moved to NBC television two years later, and is still being broadcast, making it the longest-running network show in the world. Rountree sold out to cofounder Lawrence Spivak in 1954. The two first staged the program, which featured reporters asking questions of noteworthy guests, for the Mutual Broadcasting Company. Previously Mutual carried Rountree’s successful show *Leave It to the Girls*, billed as a “battle of wits between the sexes” and “a roundtable of romance featuring glamorous career girls.”

One noteworthy broadcast of *Meet the Press* moderated by Rountree took place on December 10, 1949, when male journalists were attending the Gridiron dinner. Rountree presented an all-woman program, featuring journalists Doris Fleeson, May Craig, Judy Spivak (Lawrence Spivak’s daughter), and Ruth Montgomery, who interviewed India Edwards, a Democratic political leader. Generally, few women reporters with the exception of Craig appeared on the show, since most women journalists were not considered knowledgeable about the political issues discussed.
A native of South Carolina, Rountree maintained homes in both New York and Washington, where she stood out as an influential hostess. She relinquished her interest in Meet the Press a year after her marriage to an advertising executive, Oliver Presbrey. She and Presbrey then coproduced the program Press Conference, first on NBC and then on ABC, that soon faded from the scene.9 In 1959, with another woman, Lucy Jarvis, Rountree launched Capital Close-Ups, a daily news show for Mutual radio, broadcast from her home on R Street in Washington’s embassy section.10 The program attracted notable guests like President Eisenhower, but by 1965 Rountree had left broadcasting. She started an organization called the Leadership Foundation to educate the public on current issues, which she ran until 1988.11

Beginning with the Eisenhower era, televised presidential press conferences afforded a chance for a few Washington newswomen to make fledging appearances on camera. Clearly recognizable with her trademark hats, diminutive May Craig drew on her radio and television experience on Meet the Press. Her short, peppery questions and “down East” accent gave her a distinctive air. “I would rather be grim than giggly,” she said.12 Sarah McClendon may have encountered ridicule, but she got attention. “I jumped up quicker, spoke louder, and was more determined than other reporters, so I was recognized regularly,” she wrote in her autobiography.13 Wearing bright red dresses, Helen Thomas stood out among the male reporters at the press conferences.

Broadcasting initially was seen as a perilous field for young women. When Patty Cavin, a journalism graduate of Stanford University who wrote women’s political features for the Washington Post, chose to leave the newspaper in 1956 to work full time for the NBC affiliate in Washington, she received discouraging advice.
Cavin had moved to the Post after it purchased the Times-Herald, where she had been fashion and beauty editor. Asked to substitute on a noontime women’s program on WRC, the NBC affiliate in Washington, she interviewed interesting people on the show while continuing to work for the Post until she was offered a full-time job at the radio station for twice her newspaper pay.

When she told Philip Graham, the Post publisher, she was leaving, he said something “rather nasty,” implying she was not a professional journalist. He said, ‘You know those radio types do nothing but pick pretty girls’ brains and then throw them to the fishes,’” she recalled. “And with that I put on my white gloves and I looked him straight in the eye and I said, ‘Mr. Graham, you may own WTOP but you’ll always have an ambassadress in me at NBC. Good-bye.’ And I walked out.”

Avoiding being “thrown to the fishes,” Cavin specialized in live interviews, portions of which often were used on a weekend network program, Monitor. Among her subjects: Gandhi, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Danny Kaye. “It was great fun,” she continued in an oral history. “I used to feel that I should pay NBC for the joy of spending eight hours there.”

Taking “three or four weeks off for each child,” she had two children, adding, “if I were to do it over again, I probably would have had the children earlier, but God knows what would have happened to my career.” At WRC, Cavin and Ingrid Rundel, the only other woman at the station, “were like baby stars, except we were much too down to earth [to take ourselves seriously] and we were busy constantly doing our own research. They never gave us enough secretarial help,” she said.

Not comfortable with the network’s move to television, Cavin left NBC in 1963, joining the corporate staff of RCA as manager.
of news and information at double her salary. Her original title was manager of public affairs. She insisted it be changed after she received a note from an old friend, New York Sen. Kenneth Keating, who joked that “from here on in may all your affairs be public.”

Gender considerations greatly influenced the career of Nancy Hanschman (later Dickerson), the first woman television correspondent for CBS News. She became a popular subject for magazine articles with titles like “A Correspondent Who Could Be a Fashion Model” and “TV’s Prettiest Reporter.” She gained her correspondent’s status after six years of producing current affairs talk shows for CBS, including Face the Nation, taking the off-air job because radio and television news were virtually closed to women in the 1950s.

True, Pauline Frederick had managed to move into radio in Washington and then television in New York in the 1940s, covering the United Nations, first for ABC and then for NBC. After obtaining a master’s degree in international law in 1931 from American University in Washington, she wrote for the Star and the United States Daily (which became U.S. News & World Report). When she could not get interviews with male politicians because she was a woman, she specialized in interviewing diplomats’ wives. During World War II Frederick broadcast women’s features for NBC, but worked mainly as a researcher for a male radio commentator, having tried unsuccessfully to get a network broadcasting job. Edward R. Murrow, the best-known newsman of his day, turned her down, writing in a CBS staff memo, “I would not call her material or manner particularly distinguished.”

While freelancing for ABC radio in 1948, Frederick was sent to cover the United Nations. She frantically dug up original stories after a desk editor told her secretly that, although some executives objected to her being on the air, if she turned in an exclusive story,
he would have to use it. ABC assigned her to the first televised national political conventions in 1948, expecting her not only to interview political women and wives of candidates in front of the camera, but to do their makeup as well. Finally offered an ABC contract, she became the first full-time staff newswoman for a U.S. network. In 1953 she moved to NBC, where she distinguished herself by covering the United Nations until compulsory retirement due to her age in 1975.

Her dignified, serious demeanor personified the career woman of the day. Frederick’s hard-driving approach to her work masked feelings of feminine inadequacy stemming from a hysterectomy performed without her consent at the age of seventeen when she suffered stomach cramps. “For a long time I felt like a freak,” she told a graduate student years later. Explaining her pursuit of news, she said, “When I have been busy at the United Nations during crises, it has meant working day and night. You can’t very well take care of a home when you do something like that, or children.” She did not marry until the age of sixty-one. As a curious comment on her times, her first network assignment in television had been “How to Get a Husband.”

Hanschman followed a different type of career trajectory. A graduate of the University of Wisconsin, she sought more exciting work than teaching school in Milwaukee and moved to Washington in 1951. An attractive, green-eyed young woman working as an aide for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, she met and sometimes dated influential men on Capitol Hill. Acting on a tip from a reporter friend that CBS was looking for a “man who knew Capitol Hill,” she maneuvered herself into a job there in 1954, although her previous experience in journalism had been limited to her junior high school newspaper.

She produced two radio public affairs programs before becom-
ing associate producer of *Face the Nation*, which competed with *Meet the Press* on television. In 1957 she rose to being an assistant to Murrow, then at the apex of broadcast news. At the same time she got so involved in a relationship with Kenneth Keating that she called herself his “secret campaign manager,” although after his election to the Senate in 1958 their closeness ended. Her association with him and friendship with other prominent politicians helped her obtain guests for her shows.

Hanschman was determined to follow Frederick and actually get on the air. After convincing network officials to let her broadcast from Europe, where she interviewed the pope in 1959, she became the first woman correspondent for CBS, covering political conventions and the presidential election in 1960. Murrow admonished her to dress conservatively because “frilly clothes might suggest frivolity.” Newspapers and magazines dwelled on her wardrobe, apparently more fascinated by what she wore than by what she did. Publicity photos posed her in stylish garb with accessories ranging from kid gloves to feather boas.

In 1962 Hanschman married a real estate magnate, C. Wyatt Dickerson, a widower with three children, and took his name. The couple had two sons, Michael in 1963 and John in 1968; she took only two weeks off work after each was born. Convinced that men at CBS were jealous of her success and sidetracked her reports to daytime television and radio, Dickerson left CBS for NBC in 1963. At the same time she achieved a reputation as a notable hostess at Merrywood, the Dickerson estate in Northern Virginia, which had been the girlhood home of Jackie Kennedy. Her son John recalled in a memoir of his mother that her dressing room contained “twenty feet of suits and gowns and silk shirts puffed with tissue paper to keep their shape,” along with a wall of shoes, “at attention in their shoe trees.” In the back of the
house she had “three more closets of colorful Dior, Cardin and St. Laurent outfits.”

Dickerson zealously covered the Kennedy administration. In her autobiography she described dating John F. Kennedy before either one was married, commenting, “Kennedy had great sex appeal.” Her son, also a network correspondent, said she “seemed to delight in having people think she might have had [an affair] with Kennedy.” Dickerson had a strong ally in Lyndon Johnson, who would spot her as the only woman in a crowd of newsmen, and drawl, “Hello, Nancy.” No doubt, she gained professionally from her friendship with both Kennedy and Johnson. She claimed in her autobiography that Johnson “only really propositioned me once.”

Dickerson’s network career ended in 1970 when she in effect was fired from NBC. According to her son, “She was high maintenance, too close to her sources and she was expensive, the second highest-paid correspondent behind [David] Brinkley.” The network replaced her daily news show with Dinah Shore’s entertainment program that brought in more advertising revenue. Reflecting on her ouster, Dickerson said, “I was raising five children, working a full day and often at night and on Sundays, and I simply did not have time to waste. As a result, I could be excessively abrupt, even arrogant, which naturally prompted retribution.”

Ironically, Dickerson left NBC shortly after she anchored a program on the fiftieth anniversary of woman suffrage, which she said her colleagues “giggled about.” After leaving NBC, she became an independent producer of documentaries. Her son discovered that her fan mail showed she was an inspiration for young women who “wanted to know how to train for a career like hers.”

By the time Dickerson left NBC, the rules of the broadcast
game were changing for women due to passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Dickerson contended that the women’s movement actually impeded her career by causing men to retaliate against her.45 Other women saw the situation differently.

In 1964 Storer Broadcasting, which owned seven radio stations, employed Fay Gillis Wells as the first woman broadcaster to cover the White House exclusively, a job she held until retirement in 1977. Fifty-five years old in 1964, Wells, one of the first women pilots, had covered news around the world for decades with her journalist husband, Linton Wells. Fay Wells said male colleagues at the White House treated her well, perhaps because of her age and the fact that “I wasn’t vying with anybody for time on the air.”46 Her most memorable assignment: accompanying President Richard M. Nixon on his historic trip to China in 1972.47

Some women sought redress under the Civil Rights Act to advance in broadcasting. Catherine Mackin was one of twenty-seven women who brought a discrimination complaint with the federal EEOC against WRC-TV, the NBC-owned station in Washington in 1971.48 The complaint was based on a petition filed with the Federal Communications Commission by NOW seeking to require that station operators include women, as well as minorities, in counts of employees submitted as part of license renewal applications.49 The rule, soon adopted, raised the specter of license challenges if stations did not hire women and minorities. The EEOC upheld the class action complaint and ruled that WRC had discriminated.

Even though Mackin, a journalism graduate of the University of Maryland, was a leader in the discrimination complaint, her career blossomed. Still, Mackin had doubts about being promoted due to gender. “I’m being used,” she said at the time.50 Made a network correspondent for NBC in 1971, she remained there until
she joined ABC in 1977, where she stayed as a congressional correspondent until her death in 1982. Apparently NBC had nothing to gain by retaliation against Mackin, since CBS was making overtures to her. Her promising career, which included anchoring the NBC Sunday news, was cut short by death from cancer.

While Mackin was covering Capitol Hill for NBC in 1974, Ann Compton of ABC became the first television newswoman to be named a full-time White House correspondent. The wife of a physician and mother of four children, Compton decided the White House beat demanded too much travel and gave it up to work on Capitol Hill so she could be home more regularly. Assigned as a floor reporter at national political party conventions in 1976, Compton went on to have one of the longest-standing network careers, covering eight presidential campaigns. In 2011 she was the national correspondent for ABC News Radio and president of the White House Correspondents’ Association.

The federal government’s stand on equal employment advanced the careers of other notable broadcasters during the 1970s: watching the legal actions against NBC, its biggest rival, CBS reached out to hire more women in 1971 and 1972. Within six months it went from one woman reporter, Marya McLaughlin, to five newswomen on the air: Sylvia Chase; Lesley Stahl; Michele Clark, an African American; and Connie Chung, who is Asian. Chase worked in New York, and Clark was killed in a plane crash in 1972 shortly after she had been made the anchor for the CBS morning newscast from Washington. This left Stahl and Chung, along with Bernard Shaw, an African American, to stand out as what Stahl called the “affirmative action babies” in Washington.

At the time, CBS, with its highly rated evening news featuring Walter Cronkite, represented the apex of the “Golden Age of Television News,” according to Roger Mudd, one of its primary
Mudd called the Washington bureau “the heart of the CBS news operation.” With twenty-one correspondents and reporters, more than other networks, it thrived on competition. Rita Braver, who started out in the early 1970s as a desk editor and eventually worked her way up to being a national correspondent specializing in legal issues, said she learned from the bureau personnel who gathered nightly around newsroom monitors to critique newscasts on other networks: “You got to know what people who were good thought was good.”

McLaughlin, hired as an associate producer in 1963, became the only CBS woman reporter in 1965 and was made a correspondent—CBS’s title for superior reporters—in 1971. She scored an exclusive that made worldwide headlines when she interviewed Martha Mitchell, wife of Nixon’s attorney general, who suggested that America’s anti–Vietnam War protestors should be sent to Russia. McLaughlin appeared on camera less and less frequently during the 1980s, when she was CBS’s oldest woman correspondent.

Mudd described her as a journalist with a sharp wit and mind but a lack of sharp elbows, “never body-slamming her way past a competitor,” and surviving through “her sense of the absurd.” Like other “second- and third-stringers” in the bureau, she lacked an office, he noted, but she “brought in some miniature doll furniture and arranged it in her mail tray so that it looked like a dwarfed office.” Other employees thought it was funny, but the chief, Bill Small, was not amused. In Mudd’s view, McLaughlin, having been the only woman for years, “decided she would not be a threat to anyone.”

The advent of Chung and Stahl changed bureau dynamics with the women routinely assigned to the “predawn stakeouts, minor congressional hearings, press conferences of little consequence—
which threw them into the all-male rough-and-tumble world of camera crews and courier corps,” Mudd said. He added, “Most of the men got along with Chung because she had a robust sense of humor and was not afraid to play their game,” once calmly reaching out of a telephone booth on deadline to unzip the flies of a couple of male journalists who were teasing her.68

By contrast Stahl, whose father was a wealthy businessman in Massachusetts, initially had a “rougher time,” Mudd noted, encountering difficulties with both an assignment editor who she thought had “little use for women and minorities” and camera crews who ridiculed her until she convinced them of her competence.69 She had been a television producer and reporter for NBC in New York and London and a reporter for the Boston CBS affiliate before being hired by the network when a memo was floating around mandating “the next reporter we hire will be a woman.”70 Assigned to the Watergate hearings on Capitol Hill in 1974, she sat next to the venerable Mary McGrory and said she “squirmed” when McGrory “told me she resented the young women who had gotten their jobs through affirmative action.”71

By this time all three major networks had added about a dozen newswomen and were looking for more.72 But CBS still considered it an event when any of the three women in the Washington bureau, McLaughlin, Chung, or Stahl, each nicknamed Brenda Starr for their career orientation, appeared on the evening news.73 When Stahl took part in a CBS Watergate roundup with correspondents Dan Rather and Daniel Schorr, a question was asked about Washington gossip. An investigative reporter famed for his role in leaking the Pentagon Papers—which detailed the futility of the Vietnam War—Schorr, who gave Stahl what she considered a “terrible hazing” when she joined the network, piped up to say, “If it’s gossip you want, that’s why we have a woman here.”74
This comment represented continued friction between the two. Schorr resigned in 1976 after acknowledging he had been the source of a classified intelligence report on illegal activities of the CIA that appeared in New York’s liberal weekly, the Village Voice. It ran under the byline of Aaron Latham, Stahl’s boyfriend and later husband. Stahl contended that Schorr tried to pin the CIA leak on her before admitting his own responsibility. After Schorr’s departure, Stahl moved into his old office in the front row of CBS Washington correspondents.

In 1977 Stahl replaced Sally Quinn after Quinn failed as a coanchor for the CBS Morning News. Quinn had been hired away from the Washington Post for the coanchor job in spite of having no television experience, partly because of pressure to put more women on the air and partly because CBS executives reportedly thought she could be promoted as a “blonde bombshell who used sex to get stories.” Quinn became furious after learning that a comment she had made as a joke actually was used on the air with the approval of CBS executives—“A senator will tell you more over a martini at midnight than he will over a microphone at noon.”

Within six months Quinn returned to newspapers, smarting from criticism of her inexperience. Stahl successfully stepped into the coanchor role, although women anchors faced a chilly reception during this period. In 1976 Barbara Walters made history when ABC, hoping to improve the ratings of its evening news program, paired her with Harry Reasoner as the first woman to coanchor a nightly newscast. Her $1 million annual salary, huge by the standard of that day, sparked speculation that news broadcasts would turn into “showbiz,” since Walters had appeared for fifteen years on NBC’s Today program that featured entertainment more than news.

A hysterical outcry greeted her move to ABC with headlines
like this one from the *New York Daily News*: DOLL BARBIE TO LEARN HER ABC’S.\(^7\) Accused of flaunting her femininity while interview-\(ing\) men, Walters wrote, “I love to flirt and be flirted with.”\(^8\) Beset by negative press criticism and faced with an unwilling partner in Reasoner, she was eased out of the coanchor role within a year and a half.

In 1979 Stahl, who had taken three weeks of maternity leave in 1977 to give birth to a daughter, becoming the first on-air network woman reporter to show her pregnancy, gained a major promotion. She was named CBS’s chief White House correspondent, reportedly chosen for “her blond appeal,” although she encountered some hostility.\(^9\) One CBS executive asked her if she could manage the job and motherhood, too. Stahl interpreted the question as a how-could-you-leave-your-child guilt-trip, designed to make her bow out in response to presidential pressure, since the Carter administration was angry over a magazine article written by her husband about a key presidential aide.\(^10\) She recognized that she was promoted over Bob Pierpoint, a veteran correspondent far “more qualified than I.”\(^11\) Pierpoint wanted to resign, but Cronkite asked him to remain to help Stahl, and CBS gave him a 40 percent raise. To Stahl “they damn near bribed him to stay.”\(^12\)

Almost forty-two in 1983, the “age past which newswomen weren’t supposed to survive on television,” Stahl came out in support of Christine Craft, a television news anchor in Kansas City who sued for sexual discrimination after being demoted for allegedly being “too old, unattractive, and not deferential enough to men.”\(^13\) At the same time, Stahl said, she “spent as much time as I could spare on my appearance,” getting “my hair done twice a week” and “buying and using enough makeup to open my own boutique.”\(^14\) Both her mother and her boss monitored her appearance; her mother told her not to wear glasses on television
and both of them objected to her being seen in her fur coat. She followed their advice.

Stahl was embarrassed when her bosses told her to counsel another CBS White House reporter, Deborah Potter, one of the few brunettes in television news, to look better if she wanted to remain in front of the camera. Stahl suggested Potter get a new haircut and pluck her eyebrows. Considered an excellent journalist and writer, Potter initially refused and was transferred to radio, but eventually hired a coach and returned to television.

The White House assignment pitted Stahl against Judy Woodruff of NBC to the glee of male colleagues. They insisted the two women “stand back-to-back to see who was taller,” Stahl recalled, calling the incident a “weigh-in for what the men saw as the inevitable catfight between the two network ladies.” The two became friends, even though Stahl admitted she once stole a story from Woodruff by overhearing her record a news segment on a key appointment. Both blonds, Stahl and Woodruff, the latter a beauty contest winner from Georgia, were addressed as “young lady” by President Ronald Reagan, who could not tell them apart. Covering three administrations, those of Carter, Reagan, and Bush, Stahl revitalized Face the Nation, a public affairs program similar to Meet the Press. She subsequently became cohost of 60 Minutes, the network’s premier news magazine, which is produced in Washington.

Woodruff was not a chief network White House correspondent by herself, but shared the title with a man, John Palmer. “I’m not sure that the men running [NBC] thought that a woman could do the job by herself,” commented Andrea Mitchell, an NBC White House correspondent passed over for her network’s top slot there in 1988. “It was considered the most authoritative beat among the correspondent jobs, and there was still a reluctance to
assume that women could handle it.”\textsuperscript{92} A University of Pennsylvania graduate who began her television career in Philadelphia, Mitchell surmised NBC executives in the late 1980s remained wary of “the image of a woman standing on the White House lawn, giving the nation the view from the Oval Office.”\textsuperscript{93}

During her own White House assignment, which began in 1981, Mitchell, a blond like Stahl and Woodruff, said, “Sometimes I think women get criticized in subtle and not so subtle ways for being aggressive or ambitious. We’re called pushy, bitchy, if we pursue a line of questioning at the White House aggressively. . . . It’s really a matter of male expectations that we behave in a certain way.”\textsuperscript{94}

In place of moving up at the White House, Mitchell was dispatched to Capitol Hill, which turned into the “best decision that anyone had ever made for me,” she said later, calling her years there “some of the most interesting and fulfilling of my career.”\textsuperscript{95} Looking back to days when “reporters had the freedom to roam the corridors, with few if any security restrictions,” she said she covered foreign policy debates, budget hearings, disputes over energy policy—“the kind of substantive reporting I loved.”\textsuperscript{96} Mitchell returned to the White House as chief correspondent for NBC in 1993. The following year she was named chief foreign affairs correspondent, a position she continued to hold after her marriage in 1997 to Alan Greenspan, chairman of the board of governors of the Federal Reserve system.

Woodruff, the wife of Al Hunt, longtime Washington bureau chief of the \textit{Wall Street Journal}, left NBC after the birth of her first child, who has spina bifida. She moved to PBS in 1983 as the first Washington correspondent for the \textit{MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour}, returning to commercial television in 1993 as a news anchor for CNN after having two more children. During her PBS decade, a
contemporary broadcaster commented, “She rarely travels. Many network women envy her lengthy interviews and long reports on issues, as well as her control of her hours, and time for a personal life.” Woodruff left CNN in 2005 and took a visiting fellowship at Harvard University’s Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy before returning to the PBS nightly *NewsHour*.

In 1971 Chung, then a twenty-five-year-old journalism graduate of the University of Maryland, made news herself as the first Asian American network reporter when she went from Channel 5, WTTG–TV, in Washington, to the CBS bureau there. Assigned to George McGovern’s presidential campaign in 1972, Chung reported mainly for CBS radio, establishing a reputation for hard work. In his study of the campaign Crouse referred to her as the “pretty Chinese CBS correspondent, always in her hotel room at midnight, reciting a final sixty-second radio spot into her Sony or absorbing one late press release before getting a good night’s sleep.” After substituting frequently as an anchor for the *CBS Morning News*, Chung left the network for its Los Angeles affiliate in 1976, becoming television’s highest-paid local newswoman by 1983 with an estimated salary between $600,000 and $700,000 annually. In 1993 she was named coanchor of the *CBS Evening News* with Dan Rather, but the two did not click as a team and she was dismissed from that position and released from her contract in 1995.

After returning to CBS, Chung, who married television personality Maury Povich in 1984, curtailed her broadcasting commitments and announced she wanted to have a baby at the age of forty-four. Yet, the announcement upset her: “I never wanted to be seen differently from a man [employee],” she said. She did not become pregnant and the couple adopted a baby boy.
In part CBS wanted Chung back because Diane Sawyer, another blond television star, had decided to leave that network for more money at ABC. Kentucky-born Sawyer, whose father had been a judge and mother a schoolteacher, reigned as America’s Junior Miss in 1963. A graduate of Wellesley College, she worked for eight years for President Richard Nixon, first as a writer in his White House press office and, after he was forced to resign, in California, where she assisted in the preparation of his memoirs. When he finished the manuscript, she returned to Washington in 1978 as a general assignment reporter in the CBS bureau at the age of thirty-two. In 1981 she became coanchor on the network’s morning news program.

Three years later she became the first woman staff correspondent for the highly rated 60 Minutes news magazine. Impressed with her abilities, Don Hewitt, the producer, said he would have hired her if her name had been Tom Sawyer. “She is one of the girls who is one of the boys,” he commented.

Sawyer, who married Mike Nichols, a film director, in 1988, has expressed mixed feelings about not having a child, although Nichols has three from a previous marriage. “I cannot imagine having this job and having to pick up and go to Russia and then go straight on to Zaire and then come back here, and having a child at home. You would have to be so unfeeling and selfish to do it happily,” she told an interviewer. Describing conflict between career and family, Sawyer said, “It will always be a woman’s problem.” At ABC Sawyer coanchored news programs and Good Morning America before being named anchor of ABC’s World News Tonight in 2009.

As such, Sawyer competed directly with Katie Couric of the CBS Evening News, who in 2006 became the first solo woman anchor of a nightly network newscast. Although nightly news
programs originate in New York, both are broadcast intermittently from Washington. In testimony to the glamour attached to the news anchor post in the twenty-first century, Couric’s annual salary was $15 million, with Sawyer believed to get as much or more. Neither Couric nor Sawyer, however, was able to stop a steady drain of viewers from network evening news. Couric’s contract was not renewed in 2011.

After graduating from the University of Virginia in 1979, Couric, who had been a high school cheerleader, started her broadcast career as a low-level assistant in the ABC Washington bureau where she brewed coffee, answered phones, and fetched sandwiches. She left for an assignment editor/field reporter’s job at the fledging CNN, where she was let go because of a “squeaky voice.” Following stints in Miami and at WRC-TV, Channel Four, in Washington, she joined NBC News in 1989. When NBC replaced the popular but aging Jane Pauley with a younger and prettier coanchor, Deborah Norville, on the Today show in 1991, the audience reacted negatively.

Couric, known for her friendly, peppy personality, proved a hit when she was brought in to substitute for Norville and got the job permanently, winning high ratings that led to her nickname as “America’s Sweetheart.” After her husband, Jay Monahan, a lawyer, died of colon cancer in 1998, Couric, the mother of two children, broadcast her own colonoscopy on the air in 2000 in a successful effort to encourage others to have the test to combat cancer.

When Couric broke gender barriers to become the first solo woman anchor on a nightly news program, observers wondered whether she would trade in her sexy wardrobe on the Today show for more serious-looking “power” suits. To some extent she did, but network publicity pictured both her and Sawyer as glam-
orious celebrities. CBS admitted to doctoring a photo of Couric in its company magazine to make her appear thinner, blaming an overzealous employee in the photo department.\textsuperscript{111} ABC happily publicized the fact that viewers emailed questions about the shade of Sawyer’s lipstick.\textsuperscript{112}

As the careers of Couric and Sawyer illustrate, opportunities emerged for women in broadcasting after a federally mandated push for equality in hiring in the early 1970s. In 1971, for example, Betsy Ashton, an art teacher from Fairfax County, Virginia, outside Washington, heard Nicholas Johnson, an FCC commissioner, encourage citizens unhappy with television programming to present alternative ideas to local stations. Ashton did just that—a chance comment from a journalist friend prompted her to prepare a series of interviews on the women’s movement that led to an interview for a job as the first woman reporter for WWDC radio in Washington in 1972.

She never forgot her first sight of the station’s “tiny, smoke-shrouded newsroom, filled with the clackety-clack of a dozen machines and the noise of two typewriters being pounded by reporters sitting at a U-shaped desk. . . . Loud cackling came from a corner where the sports reporter undressed me with his eyes while sharing a joke with someone on the phone.”\textsuperscript{113}

In the midst of this cacophony, heightened by a young man who “yelled into a two-way radio to Captain Dan, the traffic reporter in a helicopter,” Ashton was instructed to write a sample five-minute newscast in an hour on a typewriter with a broken $E$ key.\textsuperscript{114} Telling herself this was “no worse than teaching high school with a crazy student,” she ignored the noise and the leering sportscaster to concentrate on writing her first newscast.\textsuperscript{115} She soon was hired, but the news director still wanted to see if she could do a “man’s job.”
For a story on business conditions during a mild recession, he sent her to a strip club in Washington’s then-seamy Fourteenth Street area. Ashton discovered a “young woman was dancing naked on a table but most of the few men inside were watching a football game on a big screen.” Picking up “unmemorable quotes” from the owner, she felt sorry for the dancer who had “taken it all off, and was being totally ignored.” Next, she was told to go by herself down Washington’s blighted Seventh Street corridor and check on stores there. “They [station personnel] thought I would refuse to go,” she said. “They laughed about how one new woman reporter for another station had refused to cover a tough story and gotten herself ‘justly’ fired.”

Ashton proved them wrong. Driving right down Seventh Street, she parked in front of one of the few remaining businesses, and interviewed the owner and men who were hanging around the place. “They were actually glad that someone in the news media was interested in hearing their opinions,” she said. She soon moved to WMAL, the Washington station with the strongest news operation, switching from radio to television before the station changed its name to WJLA-TV in 1974. In 1982 she left Washington for WCBS-TV in New York, and wound up working for both that station and the CBS Morning News.

During the early 1970s Connie Lawn, a vivacious young woman who had worked briefly for an all-news radio station in the Washington area before becoming a television reporter in Massachusetts, set up her own syndicated radio service from Washington. She ran ads in Broadcasting magazine offering to cover congressional delegations and other local news events for stations around the country. “Soon I had a string of stations stretching from Canada to New York, south to Florida, and west to St. Louis and California,” she wrote in her autobiography.
working eighteen-hour days, six days a week, with a few hours on Sunday.”

Lawn picked up international clients, particularly the Canadian Broadcasting Company, which she said “paid me quite well, for which I am grateful, [but] often treated me like a hired hand rather than a colleague.” She recalled that the male bureau chief grudgingly introduced her as someone “who occasionally does stories for us,” whereas a man who reported far fewer stories was introduced as “one of our top free-lancers in Washington.”

Today the most senior freelance correspondent accredited to the White House, Lawn refused to give up her career when she was married and had children. At her wedding to Steven Rapaport, an accountant, in 1974 in New York’s Plaza Hotel, she said she set up her tape recorder on the “virginal white bridal table” in order to do some broadcasts “a few hours before and after the ceremony.” When David, her first child, was born four years later, she “even filed a report on the Sunday interview shows for Israeli Radio moments before my labor began.”

She made it to the hospital two hours before her son David was delivered. A few hours later she watched the evening newscasts so she could phone in stories on a train crash and explosion to “my newly acquired stations in New Zealand and Australia.” Only months later did she let the stations know she had a baby. “I’d worked for years to get New Zealand as a client, and had just landed the Australian station, and was afraid both would fire me if they learned they had to share my time with a brand-new infant,” she explained.

Ten days later when her babysitter failed to appear, she “loaded David into his little plastic bed and set off on my rounds,” placing him on a table in front of the secretary of transportation during a news conference.Fortunately, David did not even gurgle. Her
second son was born during the Mideast peace negotiations of the Carter administration. Two hours later, “determined to maintain my record,” she said she broadcast a story in spite of difficulty in “getting an outside line from the recovery room.”

Antidiscrimination suits that were filed against network-owned-and-operated stations had led to a requirement by the Federal Communications Commission in 1971 that stations file affirmative action plans as part of their license renewal applications. By the start of 1974 all three major networks had committees in place to improve the status of women. Although set up in New York, they had an impact on network operations in Washington, but change did not happen immediately.

According to Stahl, “sexual harassment hadn’t hit the radar screen” in the 1970s. “Yet I can remember going to Capitol Hill and being warned by the other women reporters to stay away from certain senators. . . . We relied on our ability to run faster (we were generally younger); complaining about advances was seen as futile or, worse, self-destructive,” she said.

In 1986, seven women employees of Nightwatch, a CBS overnight news program from Washington, sued the network, charging the executive producer with “sexual assault” and “international infliction of emotional distress” involving unwanted sexual advances in violation of the District of Columbia Civil Rights Act. The producer left the program. The women, who had asked for $14 million in damages, settled the case out of court in 1987, but neither side would discuss the amount involved.

Government regulations made it obvious to station managers that it was advantageous to employ minority women because they could be counted in two Equal Employment Opportunity categories, a phenomenon referred to as “twofer” hiring. A 1977 study found that a quarter of the women in television news were minor-
ities, as were 16 percent of the women in radio news. Frequently, minority women did not receive the same kind of “hard news” assignments as their masculine colleagues, yet a determined group persevered and established themselves as well-known figures in Washington, sometimes covering national stories because of their proximity to the Capitol.

J. C. Hayward, an African American who graduated from Howard University, became the first female news anchor in Washington in 1972 when she joined WUSA, Channel 9, the CBS affiliate, where she anchors the noon newscast today. Over the years Hayward set a national record for a woman anchoring the same evening newscast at the same station. “Women were excited, but there were some diehards who said, ‘What is this woman doing anchoring? She needs to be at home in the kitchen,’ ” she recalled. Hayward became the first consumer reporter on the air in Washington. She also produced documentaries about world issues, including one on Somalia, which was broadcast on PBS and in other countries.

Maureen Bunyan, who was born in Aruba, arrived in Washington in 1973 and joined Channel 9 as a reporter. Two years later she helped found the National Association of Black Journalists. Becoming coanchor for the 6:00 p.m. Channel 9 news in 1978, Bunyan remained at the station for more than twenty years, winning numerous awards. Faced with demotion in 1995, she resigned and ran her own public relations firm before returning to broadcasting in 1999 as an anchor at WJLA, Channel 7, Washington’s ABC affiliate. Bunyan is a founder and board member of the International Women’s Media Foundation, set up in Washington in 1990 to cultivate women’s leadership in media globally. She holds a master’s degree from the Harvard University Graduate School of Education.
In 1978 Renee Poussaint, a graduate of Sarah Lawrence College who held a master’s degree in African studies from the University of California, Los Angeles, left the CBS Washington bureau to become a coanchor for evening newscasts at Channel 7. She told CBS she was frustrated and restless because the size of the Washington bureau made it difficult for her and other reporters to get on the air. “Washington is a one-industry town, government,” she said. “Most of the reporting involves standing around talking to men in three-piece suits about the government.”

Asked if she would like to become a network anchor, she replied that the odds against her were tremendous. “Watch network news on the weekends,” she told an interviewer. “That’s where you’ll see all the blacks and the women. But each network has a weekday blonde.” She attributed this phenomenon to men who did the hiring, suggesting “blondes are what they fantasize about.”

Previously Poussaint had worked for the CBS bureau in Chicago after a successful stint at the CBS-owned station there, where she had faced the difficulties of being a black woman covering racist activities. Sent to a meeting of the Chicago Firefighters Association, where the agenda centered on how to keep women and blacks out of the union, Poussaint kept calm and poker-faced. As she tried to exit, one firefighter, who watched her on television, rushed up and said, “Renee, we don’t want you to leave thinking we’re racist and sexists. But, well, it’s just that the broads and the niggers are taking over the world!”

His bigoted remark left a mixed impression. “As a black woman, I’m insulted that he could have said such a thing to me,” Poussaint said. “But as a reporter, I almost felt flattered. He saw me as a professional and thought he could level with me.” At the same time, she recognized that many women in her audience gravitated
toward her on the basis of style, not substance. “I envy men reporters because they don’t have to worry about looking nice all the time,” she said. “Women viewers can get very fixed on the accouterments. When I wore glasses, people called me up all the time to ask why I’d changed the frames.”

Poussaint gave up anchoring and became a correspondent for ABC’s *Primetime Live*, but she did not remain in network television. She left in 1997, tired of “trying to make commercial broadcasting care about the issues I care about—poor people, education, women’s issues, black people—and I got tired of having story ideas turned down.” She subsequently cofounded the National Visionary Leadership Project to preserve and distribute the stories of older African Americans as a way of inspiring the younger generation.

At the network level, Lee Thornton joined the CBS Washington bureau in 1975 and stayed there until 1982, when she left for an anchor job in Detroit. Thornton was the first CBS African American woman correspondent to cover the White House, although she did not report major stories. “I was fourth in line” in the network’s correspondent hierarchy, she recalled years later. “I was definitely going to get weekends . . . but I was not going to be the evening news reporter.” Frequently assigned to the president’s wife, she said, “I learned in covering the first lady how to make a lot out of it.”

During her years at CBS, Thornton saw women bringing a special touch to television—“good hard news judgment plus human interest. A terrific combination. Are we the gentler sex? Innately softer . . . more loving . . . thank God. But the job of the journalist takes aggressiveness and tenacity, although that does not mean hard-edged rudeness.” She said it also took “physical health and stamina to meet unbelievable demands, such as working six
nights a week for six months with two overnights (midnight to 8:00 A.M.) each week.”

Reflecting on her experiences, Thornton, a native of Washington who holds a doctorate in communications from Northwestern University, commented, “It’s difficult for me to speak of women and minorities in one breath.” In her view, “broadcasting has allowed a far greater infl ow of women, especially white women, since the early 1970s,” but minorities have not fared as well as whites. “I always fit into two categories and the old, unattractive, name for me was ‘twofer,’ two for one,” she said. “But black women haven’t made the same kinds of gains as white women in the business. In general, ethnic minorities have not made the same gains or had the same kind of success.”

After leaving full-time television news, Thornton taught broadcasting at Howard University. She also became the first African American to host NPR’s All Things Considered program, which she did on Fridays and weekends. Later she was a Washington reporter for the American Business Network, which aired on cable channels, and produced a public affairs program at CNN’s Washington bureau.

To Thornton “there’s a male dominated corporate culture in newsrooms that leaves women and minorities and minority women at a distinct disadvantage. I tried appeasing it, fighting with it, bargaining with it and in the end resigning myself to it. But newsrooms aren’t alone in this—by a long shot. I’ve found the same thing to be true in academics and in government,” she said.

Thornton moved to the University of Maryland, College Park, in 1997 as the first holder of the Eaton Chair in Broadcasting at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism. She served as interim dean at Merrill in 2009–10 and subsequently as the interim associate provost for equity and diversity at Maryland. “I am absolutely
convinced that there exists an ‘old boys’ network. Sometimes it’s a middle aged boys network, or, sorry to have to put it this way, a white ‘boys’ network,” Thornton stated. “It exists and I have no doubt about it. And it is at the root of many things that result in inequality in journalism and in American society.”158

The mainstream news culture offended Ethel Payne, who in 1972 became the first black woman commentator on network television. She commented on public affairs for six years on the CBS radio and television series *Spectrum*. The chauvinism of white male reporters irritated her. “There was always that haughty air about males in the press corps,” she said in an oral history interview. “They had names and reputations. It was almost like they were holier than thou.”159

When Eric Sevareid, a well-known CBS commentator, rebuked Sarah McClendon in public for alleged aggressiveness, Payne criticized his attitude. “I took him to task about his treatment of Sarah. I said, ‘Let him drown in his own pomposity.’ I got volumes of letters about that,” she recalled.160 Not all of them supported her.

During her CBS years Payne continued with the *Chicago Defender*, remaining with it until 1978 when she established herself as a Washington-based syndicated columnist for several African American newspapers.161 A leader in the campaign to free Nelson Mandela in South Africa, Payne was arrested at the South African Embassy in 1985 during an antiapartheid demonstration there.162 Seeing herself as an agent of change, she advised young journalists to “agitate, agitate, agitate.”163

No doubt, the journalistic scene changed as the presence of women and minorities became accepted and expected by members of the audience. According to Cokie Roberts, a broadcast journalist and author, “At some point, being a woman became an advantage, at last for some of us.”164 She continued, “We went into
the workplace as a group, an entire generation of educated women that was determined to break down barriers for ourselves and the women who came after us, and we have the scratches and bruises to show for it. But it mattered."

Broadcasting represented a field in which intelligent, attractive women could stand out when given a chance. As Thornton put it, “We know that television, like film and advertising, is a cosmetic business. Physical appearance counts... A well-kept appearance probably helps quite a bit in broadcasting. On air, definitely. But I honestly... believe that if you don’t know the journalism, this won’t carry you.” Women had to fight to show that they were competent journalists.

Despite her privileged background as the fourth child of Hale Boggs, a Democratic congressman from Louisiana, and his wife, Lindy Boggs, who succeeded him in Congress after his death in a plane crash, Roberts had difficulty launching her career. When she entered broadcasting in Washington in the 1960s, she received encouragement from Nancy Dickerson, who extended a hand to new colleagues. Following marriage to Steve Roberts, a New York Times reporter, two years after her graduation from Wellesley College, Roberts left an anchor job at WRC-TV in Washington to go with her husband to New York, where she encountered gender-based prejudice. “For eight months I job-hunted at various New York magazines and television stations, and wherever I went I was asked how many words I could type,” she told an interviewer.

Eventually, Roberts and two other women, Nina Totenberg and Linda Wertheimer, became known as the three musketeers of National Public Radio (NPR), when they found opportunities at the Washington-based operation during the 1970s and 80s that they developed into notable careers.
the 1967 Public Broadcasting Act, which was primarily designed to deal with public television, NPR proved more hospitable to women than many other news organizations. In an interview with the three women in 1994, the New York Times credited them with “revolutionizing political reporting.” According to the Times, they had shown themselves to be “gutsy, witty, informed reporters who break stories from inside the Washington political machine,” which twenty years ago had been “pretty much a male game, like football and foreign policy.”

The trio had struggled to get to a foothold in their field. Accompanying her husband to Greece, Roberts worked as a reporter for CBS there before returning to the United States. Totenberg encouraged her to apply to NPR. “When I came in for an interview, Linda and Nina were there, greeting me and encouraging me. And it just made all the difference in the world. NPR was a place where I wanted to work because they were there,” Roberts said.

To Totenberg, for many years NPR’s legal affairs correspondent, “It [NPR] was, and still is, a shop where a woman could get considerable visibility and responsibility. NPR’s wages were at least a third lower than elsewhere in the industry, and for what they paid, they couldn’t find men.” Today considered the dean of Supreme Court reporters, Totenberg has won numerous awards for her reporting.

In the 1980s Roberts made a name for herself as congressional correspondent for NPR. Asked by Judy Woodruff, who coanchored PBS’s gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Iran-Contra joint congressional hearings in 1987, to secure interviews from members of the bipartisan committee conducting the hearings, Roberts won a prize for her reporting. The coverage, which also featured coanchor Elizabeth Drew, longtime political reporter for the New
Yorker, drew compliments from women viewers who wrote to PBS that “they were bursting with pride,” as one television insider put it, to see outstanding performance by three female correspondents. Marlene Sanders of ABC, who had been named the first woman vice president for a major network news division, said it was “unlikely network executives [outside of PBS] would have dared to give such responsibility and star billing to their staff newswomen.” Roberts also hosted a weekly public affairs program on Congress on PBS from 1981 to 1984.

Joining ABC News as a political commentator in 1988, Roberts coanchored ABC News’ Sunday morning broadcast, This Week with Sam Donaldson and Cokie Roberts, from 1996 to 2002. She also became the first woman panelist to appear regularly on ABC’s This Week news program. She drew criticism in 1994, however, when a news broadcast showed her standing in front of the U.S. Capitol on ABC’s World News Tonight. In actuality, she had donned an overcoat and stood in front of an image of the Capitol in ABC’s Washington studio on her way to give a speech.

Another controversy occurred two years later when Roberts insisted in an interview that Sister Dianna Ortiz, a Catholic nun, was lying about being raped and tortured by a death squad in Guatemala until an American who observed the attack realized that the nun was from the United States and ordered that she be freed. Considerable evidence supported the nun’s account, and critics noted that Roberts’s brother, Tom Boggs, one of Washington’s most prominent lawyer-lobbyists, had been hired by the Guatemalan military to improve the image of its actions during bloody conflict.

A senior news analysis for NPR and bestselling author of books on women in American history, Roberts marketed herself as a celebrity along with her husband. The couple started a weekly
syndicated newspaper column in 1994 intended to merge the personal and the political. During the same period, Jim Warren of the Chicago Tribune lambasted her as a “journalistic cash machine” for receiving $20,000 or more for speaking appearances before business groups and for-profit organizations. He cited such examples as a Chicago bank reportedly paying the couple $45,000 for three joint appearances during one weekend. Warren ran a “Cokie Watch” feature in his Sunday column, prompting Steve Roberts to charge Warren with a “crusade to make his own reputation by tearing down others.” Steve Roberts declared no evidence existed that the couple’s journalistic output had been influenced by money received from speeches.

Wertheimer has been less controversial. The director of NPR’s first program, All Things Considered, a daily news program that made its debut in 1971 on a hundred public television stations, she became its host in 1989. Her audience expanded from 6 million to nearly 10 million listeners by 2001, making it one of the top five shows in U.S. radio. At the same time, Wertheimer also appeared on CBS’s Sunday morning news program, Face the Nation.

According to Wertheimer, “In the very beginning we had Susan Stamberg clearing a path for the rest of us, inventing her own kind of radio and ensuring that women would play an unprecedented role on the new network.” Stamberg, the first woman to anchor a national daily news program, influenced the novel development of All Things Considered, Wertheimer said, noting it was “difficult to overstate Susan’s personal impact on the way NPR sounds now. . . . The opportunities that NPR has offered to women, to people of color, to very young people, to people who refuse to retire, to all sorts of voices and commentators have been unique.”

A native of Newark, Stamberg became program director and
then station manager of WAMU-FM, a public radio station located at American University in Washington, D.C., in the mid-1960s.186 As cohost of *All Things Considered* from 1971 to 1986, she gave the program a personal touch, as illustrated by the fact that each Thanksgiving since 1971 she has provided NPR listeners with her mother-in-law’s recipe for an unusual cranberry relish sauce.187 In 1972 she referred to the infamous Watergate burglary as the “Caper of the Bungled Bugging.”188

Over the years Stamberg reported on subjects as varied as the Carter administration, the AIDS epidemic, and white South Africa with an eye for human interest elements. When she interviewed Gloria Steinem in 1982 on the tenth anniversary of her feminist magazine, *Ms.*, Stamberg spoke of the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment. She said she was struck by the “stiff upper lipped-ness that was so publicly demonstrated by the official speakers, by you and so many others. . . . Women are always talking about making room for feelings. . . . Why wasn’t that kind of space made?”189 Steinem agreed that perhaps she was right.

Born in New Mexico, Wertheimer became NPR’s first senior national correspondent in 2002. Like Roberts, she graduated from Wellesley College. She began her career at the BBC in England. Returning to the United States, she applied for a job at NBC in New York. As she recounted the experience, “this ‘gentleman’ informed me that ‘women are not credible on the air.’ He then offered to introduce me to a woman at NBC whose career he thought I should emulate—she’d been a researcher for ten years—and I just started yelling at him.”190 Wertheimer added, “It was in neon: ‘This Is the Only Job a Woman Can Have!’”191

After joining NPR, Wertheimer scored several firsts. In 1976 she became the first woman to anchor network coverage of both a presidential nomination convention and an election night. Two years
later she also became the first person to broadcast live from the U.S. Senate chamber, providing thirty-seven days of live coverage of the debate over the Panama Canal Treaty. “Our audience was fascinated and horrified, in about equal parts, to hear for themselves how the self-styled ‘world’s greatest deliberative body’ actually sounds,” she recalled. She remembered “with great affection the late Senator James Allen of Alabama . . . who habitually addressed me as ‘little lady,’ remembering not to do it only when I called him ‘big senator.’”

In 1987 Wertheimer won an award from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting for anchoring a special report on the Iran-Contra Affair. This series of forty-one half-hour programs looked into the claim of White House officials that they had proceeded without permission from President Ronald Reagan to act outside the law. “Whatever the real story, the Iran-contra affair had the effect of making the president a less significant figure in his last years in office,” Wertheimer commented. On occasion Wertheimer offered personal observations on the news. She noted during coverage of a ban on federal funding for abortions in 1977 that male decision makers had “an imperfect understanding of female sexuality and physiology,” quoting a male Senate staffer who asked a female colleague, “Is ovulation the same as orgasm?”

In 1997 she was named one of the top fifty journalists in Washington by Washingtonian magazine. The next year Vanity Fair cited her as one of the nation’s two hundred most influential women. She is married to Fred Wertheimer, past president of Common Cause, a prime advocate of campaign finance reform; she does not report on the subject to avoid conflict of interest.

Totenberg joined NPR in 1973 after a decade in print journalism. The daughter of a professional violinist, Roman Totenberg, and Melanie Totenberg, executive vice president of the Massachu-
setts chapter of the liberal Americans for Democratic Action, Totenberg dropped out of Boston University to work for the Boston Record American, where she edited recipes and wedding announcements. When she tried to get a job on a newspaper in Quincy, Massachusetts, in 1965, she recalled that “this male editor said to me, ‘Oh, we don’t hire women.’ ... It was so much the way things were that I wasn’t outraged.”197 In contrast a decade later she felt “rage well up through my gullet” when a bureau chief of a newspaper chain reacted to her inquiry about a job by saying, “But, Nina, we already have our woman.”198

After working for the Peabody Times in Massachusetts, Totenberg moved to Roll Call in Washington, D.C., and then on to another newspaper in the capital, the National Observer, where she developed a legal beat because “no one else was doing it.”199 In 1971 she broke a story about a secret list of candidates President Nixon was considering for the Supreme Court, all of whom later were rejected as unqualified.200 After she wrote a profile of FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, he demanded that she be fired. The Observer responded simply by printing Hoover’s letter along with an answer to his accusations of unfairness.

In 1972 Totenberg was fired for plagiarism after writing an article on Rep. Tip O’Neill, soon to be named Speaker of the House, which included without attribution quotes from members of Congress that previously had appeared in the Washington Post.201 Some journalists, however, defended her on the grounds that the practice of using unattributed quotes was common in the 1970s. In 1995 she told the Columbia Journalism Review, “I have a strong feeling that a young reporter is entitled to one mistake and to have the holy bejeezus scared out of her to never do it again.”202 Totenberg also alleged that sexual harassment at the Observer figured into her firing. After she left the Observer, she worked for a short-lived
Washington magazine, *New Times*, where she wrote an article called *The Ten Dumbest Members of Congress*. It prompted Sen. William L. Scott, whose name stood at the top of the list, to call a press conference to rebut allegations of his stupidity.  

At NPR Totenberg’s work continued to generate controversy. In 1977 she reported on private Supreme Court deliberations for the first time when she aired a story that the high court had voted secretly five to three against reviewing the case of three former Nixon administration officials convicted in the Watergate scandal. The story led to speculation that Totenberg had gained the story from a sitting justice, which she denied. Subsequently she broke a story that a Supreme Court nominee, Douglas H. Ginsburg, had used marijuana. As a result Ginsburg withdrew his name from consideration.  

Totenberg attained national prominence in 1991 when she disclosed sexual harassment charges by Anita Hill, a law professor, against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas. Totenberg revealed on NPR’s *Morning Edition* that Hill had told the committee Thomas had harassed her while she had worked for him in two federal agencies. The disclosure forced the Senate Judiciary Committee to reopen Thomas’s confirmation hearings and sparked widespread public debate on the issue of sexual harassment in general, although Thomas eventually was confirmed.  

Totenberg herself was investigated by Congress in an unsuccessful effort to find out how she obtained the information. The hearings also resulted in Totenberg’s firing from the *National Observer* being rehashed by Al Hunt of the conservative *Wall Street Journal*, which supported Thomas. As she covered the committee hearing and coanchored its public broadcasting coverage, Totenberg herself became the subject of news stories—particularly after participating in a verbal shoving match involving Sen.
Alan Simpson, a Republican from Wyoming. The two engaged in a heated exchange following a joint appearance on the ABC Nightline program during which Simpson accused her of failing to be objective.207 Totenberg also did commentary and reporting for ABC.

“I think there clearly was an attempt by some to switch the focus from the Thomas hearings and the charges to the so-called leak,” Totenberg said. “Sen. Simpson has since said that I was just doing my job, and that I’m a fine journalist. He has backed off entirely. You can’t do good investigative work without making some people mad.”208

She added, “I just keep my head down and do my job. Whether liberals or conservatives like or dislike it is of no importance to me whatsoever.”209 Conservatives have targeted her for disapproval, especially in the wake of her 1995 comment about Rep. Sen. Jesse Helms of North Carolina, an opponent of funding for AIDS research: “I think he ought to be worried about what’s going on in the Good Lord’s mind, because if there is retributive justice, he’ll get AIDS from a transfusion, or one of his grandchildren will.”210 NPR did not discipline Totenberg for her remark, a fact brought up by Juan Williams as an example of the network’s proliberal bias after NPR fired him in October 2010 for unfavorable comments made about Muslims on Fox News.211 The NRA also has criticized Totenberg’s reporting on Second Amendment issues as skewed against gun rights.

Totenberg is the widow of Sen. Floyd Haskell, a Colorado Democrat, whom she married in 1979. She is also a personal friend of some persons in high places, including Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who officiated in 2000 at Toтенberg’s marriage to Dr. David Reiner, a surgeon. He treated her for se-
vere injuries sustained when she was hit by a boat propeller while swimming on their honeymoon.212

Diane Rehm, another woman whose career has flourished in public broadcasting, hosts a two-hour morning talk show that draws more than 2 million listeners across the country. She got her start in 1973 as a volunteer at WAMU-FM. The daughter of immigrants from Turkey who owned a Washington grocery store, she grew up in a Christian Arab household, subjected to beatings by her unstable mother. When she was nine years old, a congressman attempted to sexually abuse her, telling her family he wanted to make her a child movie star.213

Lacking money to attend college, she worked as a secretary after graduation from high school. After an early marriage ended in divorce, she wed John Rehm, a lawyer, and had two children. Finding herself “restless and edgy” as a suburban housewife in the early 1970s, she tried modeling swimsuits but felt like she “was part of a strip show” and “wasn’t really comfortable with this kind of work.”214 Enrolling in a noncredit class at George Washington University to assess possibilities for a career, she was steered toward broadcasting. “It was a time of growth and experimentation [in public radio], a time when an inexperienced person like me could venture onto the airwaves without training, as long as she had something to say,” she recalled.215 On her first day at WAMU-FM, which had only a few full-time staff members, she filled in for an absent host, interviewing a representative from the dairy industry.

“At the end of the ninety-minute program [which included call-ins from listeners], I was exhilarated,” Rehm recalled. “At the age of thirty-seven, without even realizing what had happened, I had embarked on my career in radio.”216 After volun-
teering for ten months, she became a paid assistant producer and hosted health-oriented programs. Leaving WAMU in 1976 for a try at television, she worked for Physicians Radio Network, a closed-circuit broadcasting service for doctors, for two years before returning to the station in 1979. Taking over Kaleidoscope, aimed primarily at women at home, she broadened the content to interest men.

Renamed the Diane Rehm Show, the program featured a weekly news roundup and interviews with guests as varied as former presidents of the United States, Nobel laureate authors, leading politicians, scientists, and reformed criminals. By 1999 her audience had grown from a few thousand listeners in the Washington area to more than seven hundred thousand NPR listeners around the country.217

Although she made forays into television, which included acting as the last host of CBS’s Nightwatch before it left the air, radio remained more satisfying, she concluded, because it required the audience to concentrate on words. As Rehm expressed it, “With television, the image becomes an intense focal point, one that can, to a degree, get in the way of what’s being said and done.”218 One of the pioneers of talk radio, she abhorred the biased, opinionated spectacle offered by ideologically oriented radio hosts, seeking instead to provide listeners with rational conversation. Occasionally she found herself subjected to offensive language because she was a woman. When she questioned actor Tony Randall about possible interview topics, he smirked and suggested she ask “about the size of my cock,” while her youthful staff “burst into loud guffaws.”219 Livid with anger, she proceeded with the interview but refused to air it.

In 1998, after her program had achieved national distribution, Rehm feared that her career was over. Her voice became ex-
tremely hoarse and she was diagnosed with a rare neurological disorder, spasmodic dysphonia, which gave her tremors and forced her off the air briefly in 1999. She managed to treat the ailment with some success and returned to public radio. “There will always be a need, indeed a desire, for good, straightforward, honest dialogue,” she insisted.\textsuperscript{220} She interviewed President Bill Clinton in the Oval Office in 2000, marking the first time a radio talk show host had broadcast from the White House.\textsuperscript{221}

Rehm has received numerous honors and awards, along with honorary degrees from several universities—including American University, which continues to host her show on WAMU. As the university’s commencement speaker in 2007, she emphasized that public broadcasting and the university had the same goals—“to expand horizons, and to promote a deeper understanding of the world around us.”\textsuperscript{222}

Yet for some women broadcasting represented a contested field involving personal and professional turmoil. Jessica Savitch, considered a hot prospect in network news in the 1970s, died in a car accident in 1983 at a time when her career seemed to have leveled off. As one of the few women majoring in communications at Ithaca College in New York in the 1960s, she received a curt rebuke from a faculty adviser to a campus radio station. She said he told her, “There is no place for broads in broadcasting.”\textsuperscript{223} Determined not to give up, she protested and won the right to do a solo newscast.\textsuperscript{224} Aided by a boyfriend, she did commercials on radio and television and on weekends broadcast on a Rochester, New York, rock-and-roll radio station as its first woman deejay.

After graduation in 1968 she sought a job in New York City. Hired as an assistant at WCBS-AM, she sought professional mentoring from correspondent Ed Bradley, with whom she also had a romantic relationship, and produced an audition tape that re-
sulted in a television broadcasting job in Houston. Moving on to Philadelphia in 1972, her blond good looks resulted in “incredible viewer response” and a “magical” relationship with the camera, according to broadcast historians.\footnote{225} Her frantic pursuit of success led coworkers to call her “Jessica Savage,” but it impressed the networks, which launched a bidding war for her services, eager to promote her mesmerizing qualities.\footnote{226} NBC won out in 1977, offering the thirty-year-old Savitch a salary greater than that of any of its other newswomen. From a base in Washington she covered the U.S. Senate and occupied a weekend anchor chair on the network’s *Nightly News*, as well as doing sixty-second news updates.\footnote{227} Far from welcoming Savitch, NBC staffers saw her as a personification of their fears that performers were taking over for journalists, and they were taken aback by the personal hairdresser she paraded into the building.\footnote{228} Lacking a Washington background and strong writing skills, she was taken off the Senate beat in 1978 and assigned to NBC’s prime-time weekend news magazine.

During this period her first marriage failed after only ten months. For years she had been using drugs; now their use intensified and she threw fits at the office. In 1981 she married a Washington gynecologist, who committed suicide less than six months later, shortly after Savitch had ended a pregnancy.\footnote{229} Devastated, she poured herself into her career along with writing her autobiography, *Anchorwoman*.\footnote{230} “People look at my business and see it as all gloss and glamour, but the glamour is the tip of the iceberg,” she told an interviewer, adding that she feared it might be “impossible” to attain success in both her professional and personal life.\footnote{231} Savitch took a leave from NBC to appear on PBS’s new series *Frontline*, a move that she hoped would give her more credibility in news. Nevertheless, NBC announced that Connie Chung would
replace her as the Saturday anchor of *Nightly News*, although it did renew her contract. Tragically both she and her new romantic interest, Martin Fischbein, a New York newspaper executive, drowned in 1983 when he made a wrong turn on a Pennsylvania road during a rainstorm and their car landed upside down in a canal. Her biographer called her story “a nightmare, hung in the fragile balance of truth and illusion that is television.”

For women journalists in Washington, broadcasting offered both huge rewards and crushing disappointment. Network stars turned into glamorous role models that were far removed from the lives of many women viewers. Women at the top became well entrenched in the nation’s power structure, themselves greater celebrities than most of the figures they covered. When they spoke with a voice different from that of their male colleagues, which they did on occasion, they brought up subjects that attacked the face of American politics—such as Totenberg’s reporting on the sexual harassment charges against Clarence Thomas.