Women of the Washington Press
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Traffic gridlock is a good metaphor for political gridlock; we can’t get anywhere because no one will give an inch. Combat is prized over conflict resolution, conflict over consensus. Masculinist dynamics prevail in the political dialogue and they are mirrored abundantly in the coverage of it.

—Judy Luce Mann, syndicated Washington Post columnist

As politics and journalism became increasingly inseparable in Washington in the last decades of the twentieth century, white men continued to dominate in both fields. While television cut into print and women made gains in both print and broadcasting, males held sway. In 1994 a study by Women, Men and Media, a monitoring project headed by Betty Friedan, found that at newspapers men continued to write the majority of front-page news stories and nearly three-quarters of the opinion pieces on the nation’s op-ed pages. While the number of women’s bylines inched up from an average of 33 to 34 percent the following year, the annual survey showed that the average percentage of stories reported
by women correspondents on nightly network news broadcasts dropped from 21 to 20 percent.

With the outstanding exception of Katharine Graham, the most powerful figures were men. In 1978 Stephen Hess of the Brookings Institution presented a picture of a press corps that was overwhelmingly male (80 percent), white (96 percent), and middle aged (63 percent between thirty and fifty years old). While the *Star* perished in 1981 and UPI fought to stay afloat, other news organizations thrived, with some making enormous profits.

Aside from Graham, most women in Washington journalism were not highly paid movers and shakers. An “insider’s” book on Washington in 1982 listed only four women among the top fifteen Washington media people, none of whom were minorities. Although Graham had been replaced by her son, Donald (she relinquished the title of publisher to him in 1979 but remained chair of the board), at the top of the list, columnist Mary McGrory took fifth place, praised for having stayed with the *Star* “to the bitter end” before heading for the *Post*; and Meg Greenfield, editorial page editor of the *Post*, appeared in the eighth slot. Helen Thomas of UPI, described as “past sixty” but able to “run for press buses and pool cars with the youngest,” was tenth, judged “probably the best-known Washington woman reporter” because she spoke frequently at colleges and professional meetings. Diana McClellan, who wrote “The Ear,” a popular gossip column for the *Star* that moved to the *Post* after the *Star* folded, got the fourteenth spot.

When the *Star* died, its reporters had relatively little difficulty finding other jobs. Barbara Cohen Cochran, named national editor of the *Star* in 1974 and managing editor in 1978, pursued broadcast management. She credited the transformation at the *Star*
spurred by the women’s movement for preparing her to move forward. “The Star went from a newsroom where women were few in number to a newsroom where women started at every position and had no limit on what they could aspire to. . . . Gender didn’t matter. . . . You were never told what you couldn’t do, only what you could,” she said.8

Going from the Star to radio, she launched the successful Morning Edition on NPR, but found her gender a handicap in budget-cutting sessions after being promoted to vice president of news in 1982. “I felt I was subjected to a much tougher standard because there was an assumption that I was just a feather-headed woman who really didn’t understand the budget or do what had to be done to get the budget in line,” she said.9

Switching to NBC as manager of its political unit in Washington, in 1985 Cochran took over as executive producer of Meet the Press. She criticized “traditional male-clubbiness” at the network, commenting, “For women to get into management positions, they generally have to be not only good, but better than the men with whom they compete for those positions.”10 As president of RTNDA, a post she took in 1997, she received awards for advocating First Amendment rights, including the use of cameras and microphones in courtrooms.

Other women staffers at the Star who made successful transitions to new jobs included Sheilah Kast, who covered financial news. She moved to ABC where she covered the White House during the Reagan administration. Kast was among a small group of Star journalists invited to try out for network positions because they appeared to be photogenic.

Ironically, the Star died at a time when the Washington media had become, in the words of columnist David Broder, a ubiquitous
“presence at the very heart of national political power.” The *Post*, which eagerly picked up notable *Star* staffers, dominated the scene with some 3,000 employees. A total of nearly 1,500 worked at two other daily newspapers, the *Washington Times* and *USA Today*, while some 1,180 had jobs at the Washington bureaus of ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN. More than 100 were employed at the AP, UPI, and Reuters, an international wire service, and some 700 at major news magazines, *Time, Newsweek*, and *U.S. News*, while scores of other print and broadcast operations also hired journalists.

Convinced that women journalists were willing to “try new things,” Jim Bellows, editor of the *Star* from 1975 to 1978, assigned Lynn Rosellini, who previously had written about gay athletes, to do a multipart profile of Katharine Graham, the “most powerful woman in Washington,” to boost his newspaper’s faltering circulation. The controversial series did not run until after Bellows had left the *Star* to become editor of the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*. It pictured Graham, who had a reputation for changing her male executives as often as some women change hairstyles, as likable and vulnerable but also callous and caustic.

In her reporting Rosellini encountered numerous individuals afraid to discuss Graham for fear of damaging their own careers. “Most people wouldn’t even call back. And if they did, it was usually to say, curtly, ‘I can’t talk,’ Rosellini recalled. “When I look back I am reminded of what a snake-pit that whole episode was. And what power does to people in this town and what fear does, too.” Apparently Rosellini’s career did not suffer. She moved to the Washington bureau of the *New York Times* and subsequently wrote fiction.

Bellows’s interest in Graham spurred a *Star* question-and-answer interview with Graham in 1975 by Mary Anne Dolan, the fea-
tures’ editor, who later followed Bellows to Los Angeles and became the editor of the Herald–Examiner, making history as the first woman editor of a major metropolitan newspaper. Dolan tried to draw out Graham on whether or not she acted as the center of a political–social set that made national policy “over chocolate mousse and cognac in Georgetown [the affluent section of Washington where Graham’s mansion was located].”

Graham denied this was the case but called Washington the “one remaining town where social life is of interest.” Asked if she felt a responsibility to help other women, Graham replied affirmatively, “As a manager in a company these days, any executive feels a responsibility toward women, and if you’re a woman in that role, you obviously feel it even more.”

A gap remained between Graham’s philosophical commitment and the actual situation of women in the Post newsroom, employees said. Post women coalesced from time to time to fight discrimination, stirred by perceptions of inequity in pay, assignments, and gender and racial bias in spite of the newspaper’s expressed commitment to equality. Although women at other news organizations in Washington faced similar situations, Post women, backed by their union, gained attention by actively filing complaints and approaching management directly. Minority women in particular felt lonely as trailblazers seeking to enlarge opportunities for themselves and others.

In 1975 Nancy Hicks Maynard, who had been the youngest reporter and the first African American woman on the metropolitan staff of the New York Times, moved to the Times’ Washington bureau. She resigned in 1977 to launch a nonprofit organization with her husband, Robert Maynard, a Post editorial writer, to encourage diversity in American newsrooms. The organization, now
the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education, initially known as the Institute for Journalism Education, was established in Berkeley, California, where the Maynards ran a summer program to train minority reporters.21

Dorothy Gilliam, who had come back to the Post as an assistant editor in the Style section in the 1970s, considered Nancy Maynard “a brilliant strategist” for efforts to bring minorities into newsrooms in face of covert hostility.22 Decades later Gilliam remembered how “long the walk” seemed in 1979 from Style to the office of editor Ben Bradlee to ask if she could write a column directed at residents of Washington, a predominantly African American city.23 She had proposed the column in a memo a year before but never received a response.

As she walked through the newsroom, Gilliam passed the desks of reporters coping with the paper’s highly charged competitive atmosphere, which Bradlee had characterized as “creative tension.”24 These were, she recalled, “a lot of smart people with high ambitions,” who keenly felt “the stress of these jobs.”25 Wary of approaching Bradlee face-to-face, she was still determined to present him with two options: that she be named editor of the newspaper’s Sunday magazine or given a column. Bradlee chose the second, telling her to write features for the Metro section “so we can see if you are ready to write a column.”26

Gilliam quickly produced stories on Washington that convinced editors to give her the go-ahead. For eighteen years, from 1979 until 1997, her column appeared in the Metro section, initially twice and later once a week, featured on the front page. Gilliam said she “approached the column like a “black woman out of the South.”27 While her picture did not run beside it, she said most readers knew that she was African American.28 Bradlee approved the column partly because Gilliam moved in Washington circles
where other Post staffers did not.\textsuperscript{29} “We had nobody talking for that segment of our audience,” he said.\textsuperscript{30}

By the time the column started, Gilliam no longer was the only black woman journalist at the newspaper. In 1972, Alice Bonner, a graduate of Howard University who had been a copy aide at the Post, became the first person selected for a two-year reporting internship to advance minorities and women. Set up after complaints of discrimination from Post minority journalists known as the Metro Seven, the affirmative action internship program offered Bonner and others a chance to attend a summer training program at Columbia University for minority journalists.\textsuperscript{31}

Bonner was one of the signers of two diversity petitions to Post management, the first in support of the Metro Seven in 1972, and the second a year later in support of improved newsroom opportunities for women.\textsuperscript{32} For the next ten years she worked as a Post reporter, first on the local, then on the national staff and covered a range of stories from West Africa as a special correspondent. She also spent two years as editor of a weekly section and one year as an assistant city editor.

Yet she did not find it easy to move forward at the Post, even though she had been a Nieman fellow at Harvard University in 1977. “I am grateful that in one instance when I was denied an opportunity on the basis of my race AND gender, the editor, for whatever reason, told me explicitly that those were the prohibitive factors,” Bonner said later.\textsuperscript{33} “Surely many of us have been unfairly treated in employment situations without benefit of such stupidly overt expressions of bias.”\textsuperscript{34}

In 1984 Bonner, at the time an assistant Maryland editor, left the Post to join the staff of USA Today, the flagship of the Gannett Company, as a cover story editor. Her departure prompted publisher Donald Graham and editor Ben Bradlee to commission
an in-house survey to determine why African American journalists were leaving the Post for other newspapers. The final report moved far beyond racial issues, airing perceptions of sexism, favoritism, and lack of career development opportunities. As one white male reporter put it, “The Post is a brutal, tough, often unforgiving place to work. There’s lots of fear about one’s standing here—fear brought to life by the seemingly arbitrary destruction of careers of some fine journalists among us.”

At Gannett, Bonner became a newsroom recruiter, working from 1986 to 1989 as part of a team “assigned to recruit and refer journalists of all ethnic backgrounds and genders for the company’s ninety newspapers,” she said. She later served as director of journalism education programs for the Freedom Forum, an outgrowth of the Gannett Foundation, which worked for First Amendment rights and more diversity in newsrooms. After receiving a doctorate in journalism and mass communications from the University of North Carolina in 1999, Bonner taught at the University of Southern California and the University of Maryland.

LaBarbara Bowman, one of the original Metro Seven, did not stay with the Post either. She moved to Gannett and became managing editor of its newspaper in Utica, New York, before being named diversity director of the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Reston, Virginia, in 1999. She held the post for ten years, coordinating efforts of the organization to increase racial and ethnic hiring in U.S. daily newspaper operations.

Gannett, the nation’s largest media corporation in the 1980s, started its daily newspaper, USA Today, in 1982. It reached a circulation figure of more than one million seven months later. Headquartered in Northern Virginia, the new publication aimed itself at a national audience via satellite printing technology and made
no attempt, like the Post, to serve as both a national and a local newspaper. Under Al Neuharth, the founder of USA Today and chairman of Gannett, the company had an expressed policy of hiring and promoting women and minorities.

By 1989 Gannett’s women publishers represented one-fourth, or twenty-one of the eighty-four women newspaper publishers in the United States, a fact that Neuharth, who had watched his widowed mother struggle with pay discrimination for years in South Dakota, reported with pride. Neuharth set affirmative action goals for Gannett executives tied to their annual bonuses. “Even the most chauvinistic of our male managers got the message when it hit their pocketbooks,” he contended.

In 1983 Neuharth made headlines by hiring Cathie Black, the publisher of New York magazine and a super advertising saleswoman with no experience in newspapers, as president of USA Today at a time when the newspaper was hemorrhaging money. She stayed for eight years with Neuharth, who called her a “good-looking blonde” and wrote that her “total annual take approaches a million dollars.” Named publisher of USA Today in 1984, the charismatic Black put the newspaper on the track to success. She left to become head of the American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA), soon renamed the Newspaper Association of America, and in 1995 the president of the magazine division of the Hearst Corporation, amassing a personal fortune while showing what a woman could do.

Black joked that “Gannett was one of the few companies where, at management meetings, there was a line outside the ladies’ room.” She praised Neuharth’s interest in diversity as “smart business sense.” Years later, in 2010, Black was chosen by New York’s Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg to be the new head of the city’s troubled public school system, although she had no ex-
perience in education, fueling speculation she might have political ambitions. She left the position five months later.

Gannett and the Washington Post, whose executives feuded publicly, did not always see eye-to-eye on diversity matters. An annual study of ten major U.S. newspapers from around the country—begun in 1989 by the Women, Men and Media group, set up by Betty Friedan and Nancy Woodhull, a Gannett executive—showed that USA Today had the highest average of women’s bylines on the front page, 41 percent. The feature-oriented USA Today assigned far more stories to women than the New York Times, which had only 5 percent front-page female bylines, leading Max Frankel, the Times’ executive editor, to comment sarcastically, “If you are covering local teas, you’ve got more women [on the front page] than if you’re the Wall Street Journal.”

Although the Post came out better in the survey than the Times, ranking ahead of USA Today in the number of women featured in front-page photographs (42 percent in 1990 compared to 41 percent for USA Today the previous year), Bradlee agreed with Frankel. “I am damned if I can see what conclusions should be drawn from your findings,” Bradlee wrote the sponsoring group, adding, “The wisdom of the ages appears to cry out for silence.”

Neuharth did not practice reticence. He claimed that he “maneuvered” Katharine Graham into a position to become the first woman chairman and president of the ANPA, but that she did not push hard enough to ensure that other women would follow her. “Her example of leadership should have been enough [but] it wasn’t,” Neuharth said.

To many mainstream journalists, USA Today, with its mixture of colorful news and graphics in a smooth, slick package sold in machines that looked like television sets, resembled fast food rather than weighty fare. It acquired the nickname of McPaper, first be-
stowed by the Post.\textsuperscript{50} Quoting this term of derision as shorthand for his aim of informing and entertaining the public, Neuharth boosted confidence in his staff, including Woodhull, who previously had been managing editor of the Gannett newspaper at Rochester, New York. “He knew we were hanging the world of journalism and laughed at the critics,” she said.\textsuperscript{51}

At \textit{USA Today} Woodhull had more extensive responsibilities than a typical managing editor because of the novel nature of a newspaper geared to a television generation.\textsuperscript{52} As one of the top planning editors, she helped design the publication and subsequently took charge of story selection for page one. Having dropped out of Trenton State College after only one year to pursue a career in journalism, Woodhull was determined to succeed as managing editor, even though “she felt that some people did not trust her in that position,” according to the official history of \textit{USA Today}.\textsuperscript{53}

The demands of launching the new newspaper led to long hours and a pressure-cooker office atmosphere that did not fit well with family life. Woodhull had an infant daughter whom she rarely saw because she left home early in the morning and did not return until 11:00 P.M. or later. Finally she arranged to have the child brought to the \textit{USA Today} building at 6:00 P.M. every evening so she could spend forty-five minutes with her in a restaurant.\textsuperscript{54} She was afraid to tell Ron Martin, the executive editor, what she was doing, so she instructed an assistant to run down and get her if Martin wanted to see her while she was with her daughter.\textsuperscript{55}

At the age of thirty-seven Woodhull developed cancer and had to leave her job temporarily. She returned in 1983 and three years later was named president of Gannett News Service, the company’s national wire service for the eighty-three newspapers it
owned at that time. She stood out as Gannett’s highest-ranking woman news executive when she left the company in 1990 to become editor in chief of Southern Progress, a Time Warner magazine division. At the time of her death from lung cancer in 1997, a tribute in the *American Journalism Review* paid homage to her mentoring of other women, citing her efforts to “Do something to help another woman every day.” This was not an easy matter in the hurly-burly of the *USA Today* newsroom.

Another woman, Nancy Monaghan, who also had been a star at the Gannett newspaper in Rochester, New York, found it hard to deal with the demands of being the dayside news editor of *USA Today*. Every morning before she came to work, she threw up. “Nerves,” she explained. Constant office turmoil and second-guessing from superiors wore some staff members down. One reporter crashed under the pressure, breaking down in tears in front of her supervisor, who sent her home to rest. She returned the next day and then disappeared, spending four hours riding the subway because she felt physically unable to stay in the *USA Today* building. The newspaper kept her on but in a less taxing job.

Meanwhile, the competitive atmosphere at the *Washington Post* continued to spawn office discord. As a black woman columnist, Gilliam discovered that her perspective did not always meet with approval. “I got a lot of hate mail,” she said, along with a “negative reaction from white colleagues.” Some *Post* staffers “thought I wrote about race too much,” she explained, and gave her the silent treatment when she entered the newsroom. In writing her column she said she tried to be scrupulously fair, citing her coverage of Washington’s controversial African American mayor in the 1980s, Marion Barry. She criticized the *Post* when it based stories about the mayor’s drug use and womanizing on rumors, but changed her views when evidence of his misconduct came to
light. “I was the first one to call for him to resign,” she pointed out.63

Gilliam sought to avoid the trap of homogenization that led some African American journalists to be absorbed into the mainstream.64 She wanted her column to reflect the different experiences of a separate group. Although she often touched on controversial issues, only once did Bradlee question what she wrote. Based on reaction to a Ku Klux Klan rally, she justified violence on one occasion. Looking backward, Gilliam said she should not have taken that position. “As I have learned more about white culture, I’ve learned you don’t ever condone any damage to personal property,” she told an interviewer.65

Her themes, which often addressed politics, education, racial diversity, and youth, dealt with what it meant to be African American in a white society. Writing about Patricia R. Harris, a railroad waiter’s daughter who became the first woman to hold two cabinet posts, Gilliam asked why Harris’s commitment to the cause of African American equality had been questioned by some of her peers on the grounds that she was “acting white.”66 Gilliam wrote that Harris believed “blacks could achieve anything they wanted if they didn’t buy society’s low opinion of them, and, in turn, attempt to hold each other back based on that opinion.”67 Gilliam concluded that “until more black people begin to define themselves, black children will be faced with two subtly conflicting messages from the world: one will say, ‘Strive for excellence,’ and the other says, ‘But only whites are excellent.’”68

To Gilliam, who served as president of the National Association of Black Journalists from 1993 to 1995, “The waves of history influenced what I did. I have been part of the diversity movement in media.”69 A former fellow at the Freedom Forum Center at Columbia University and the John F. Kennedy School of Gov-
ernment at Harvard University, she became director of the Young Journalists Development Program after her column ended. This effort was funded by the Post to prepare minority high school and college students to go into journalism. Following retirement in 2003, she moved to George Washington University as project director for Prime Movers Media, a similar program to interest disadvantaged young people in media careers.

As Bradlee recognized in his comments on Gilliam’s column, the Post lacked substantial knowledge of the African American community in Washington, a city that was 70 percent black in the late twentieth century. Top editors failed to recognize the fabrication of a feature story, Jimmy’s World, that purportedly described an eight-year-old black addict in Southeast Washington given heroin by his mother’s boyfriend. The writer, Janet Cooke, had been hired on the strength of a résumé that said she had graduated magna cum laude from Vassar College, held a master’s degree, and had studied languages at the Sorbonne. She falsified these accomplishments, just as she made up the story about “Jimmy,” but the Post, seeking promising minorities, had not bothered to check her credentials.70

Cooke’s falsehoods came to light, to the mortification of the Post, when she won the Pulitzer Prize for feature writing in 1981. The newspaper returned the prize and apologized, but was castigated by the public, particularly after Roger Wilkins, a well-known African American journalist, wrote that many blacks in Washington, including Mayor Barry, who ordered police to look for “Jimmy,” had expressed doubts about Cooke’s story.71 Graham, then president of the ANPA, denied the incident resulted from “pressures on papers to recruit and promote minorities.”72

Within the Post newsroom itself, Vivian Aplin-Brownlee, an experienced African American journalist who edited the Post’s
A graduate of Ohio University, Aplin-Brownlee had been the first African American woman reporter at the Cleveland Plain Dealer. In 1978 she moved to the San Diego Union as an assistant editor. A year later Gilliam recruited her for the Post, where she helped train inexperienced reporters like Cooke on the District Weekly staff. When Cooke’s story was exposed, Aplin-Brownlee said, “I never believed it. . . . In her eagerness to make a name she [Cooke] would write farther than the truth would allow. When challenged on facts on other stories, Janet would reverse herself, but without dismay or consternation with herself.”77 Refusing to comment further on the Cooke incident, Aplin-Brownlee later moved to the Post national staff. She left the newspaper in 1985 to become a full-time mother and homemaker.78

After resigning from the Post, Cooke attempted to exonerate herself in part by blaming the atmosphere at the Post. Appearing on the Today show, Cooke said, “Certainly there is an undercurrent [in journalism] of this kind of competitiveness and of the
need to be first, flashiest, be sensational. And I think there is more of it in a place like the *Post*.”

In her autobiographical look at the *Post*, another African American journalist, Jill Nelson, who was hired in 1986 as the first woman and the first African American to work on the *Post* magazine, endeavored to explain Cooke’s actions. Nelson wrote that Cooke “had some severe ethical, moral and psychological problems that caused her to mistake fiction for journalism, and self-hating journalism at that.” But, she continued, as an African American woman at the newspaper, Cooke “knew she would be outshone, discarded, and forgotten unless she did something—quick—to earn the notice and approval of the powers that be. What better than following the honored tradition of writing an expose of pathological Negroes?”

At the *Post*, Nelson, a graduate of Columbia University, described herself as caught between a paternalistic white ownership and a desire to identify with African Americans who protested for three months against the debut of the newspaper’s million-dollar revamped magazine. The first issue created an uproar by featuring a cover story on a black rapper and a column warning storekeepers to lock their doors to keep out black males who might rob them. Led by Cathy Hughes, owner of a radio station and talk show host, some forty-seven organizations formed the Washington Post Magazine Recall Committee and organized demonstrations in front of the *Post* building to throw copies of the magazine on its steps.

Part of a black women’s caucus organized after her arrival at the *Post*, Nelson became the first black woman chair of the Baltimore–Washington Newspaper Guild unit at the newspaper. In 1987 a dozen black women signed a letter to management complaining of disparities in salaries. It used as evidence a Guild report
that showed black female reporters earned an average weekly salary of $791.33, white females $859.37, black males $920.46, and white males $988.68. Of the seventeen black women journalists at the Post, only two, Gilliam and Nelson, made more than $50,000 annually, the amount Donald Graham had stated publicly was the average for a Post reporter. In 1988 the unit filed a complaint with the D.C. Office of Human Rights charging the Post with discrimination.

Among those signing the letter along with Gilliam and Nelson was Gwen Ifill, then one of the lowest-paid African American reporters. She worked for the Post from 1984 to 1991, when she left for the New York Times and subsequently went into broadcasting. Since 1999 she has been the moderator of the PBS program Washington Week in Review and senior correspondent for PBS’s NewsHour.

As a student at Simmons College, Ifill, the daughter of a Methodist minister of Barbadian descent who had immigrated to the United States from Panama, interned for the Boston Herald-American. A coworker there left her a note that read, “nigger go home.” She put the ugly incident behind her in a career that has been praised for objectivity in political reporting. At the Post, Ifill covered what she called “sandpaper politics,” the power shift from white to black political leadership in Prince George’s County, a Maryland suburb where the African American population soared while the white population declined.

While African American women journalists at the Post were fighting pay discrimination and Gilliam’s column appeared in its Metro section, USA Today featured an outspoken black woman columnist, Barbara Reynolds, on its op-ed page as a member of its editorial board. From 1981 until 1996, when she was abruptly dismissed, Reynolds played what she called “a historic role in
American journalism, after being hired by John Seigenthaler, USA Today’s first editorial page editor.” Reynolds, one of the first African American women to be awarded a Nieman fellowship at Harvard University, previously had worked for the Chicago Tribune’s Washington bureau, where she said she was “excoriated daily” as the only African American and woman on a staff of “twelve white men all of whom treated me with disdain for even thinking I should sit in the same office with them.” In contrast, at USA Today she initially ranked high in the newspaper’s firmament, flying on Neuharth’s private plane to interview celebrities and going to the White House to interview presidents.

Her downward trajectory began in 1994, when, as she explained it, Seigenthaler was replaced by a “white woman, who I had heard did not believe in God and who intimated that I must rid myself of so much God-talk and Third World radicalism in my writing.” By this time USA Today had geared itself to upscale demographics, she explained in her autobiography: “Journalism INC, the age of the big corporation had swallowed up the promises of inclusion and diversity. The nineties and beyond would be devoted to money, mergers and mediocrity.”

When Reynolds raised issues of corporate greed or unjust war in her column, she was “pressured more and more not to offend advertisers or corporations.” Having become a Christian minister, she insisted, “I could not and would not write and think like privileged white males, which most of my colleagues were.” According to Reynolds, “after Seigenthaler left, I was warned to shut up, to be silent, to just fall in line and collect my pay check. But I couldn’t. When I wrote about the need for poor children to have health insurance . . . I was told to stop ‘whining.’ ”

In 1996 Reynolds was handed severance papers, told her job had been abolished, and escorted out of the building. “No more
was I a founding editor, who had worked day and night, travelling thousands of miles to help start the paper,” she said, but “being treated like a criminal, busted, kicked to the curb all for having an opinion unlike those of my white comrades.”94 She subsequently concentrated on a ministry called Harriet’s Children to reach women struggling with addictions.

During the years that Reynolds expressed minority opinions at USA Today, Jill Nelson left the Post. Convinced that she would never fit in there, Nelson quit in 1990 after her feature story on black community reaction to the conviction of Marion Barry on drug charges was buried in the Style section. Resuming her career as a freelance writer, she published Volunteer Slavery, the story of her unhappy experiences at the newspaper. In her book she referred to “caucasian women” at the Post “who perceived themselves as abused, wronged, and worst of all, trapped,” painting a picture of a group of women journalists whose careers had not flourished.95 Regardless of the accuracy of her description, the Guild figures on salaries showed that the women as a group were paid less than men reporters as a group.

Karlyn Barker, a reporter and editor at the Post for more than thirty years, witnessed opportunities for women at the newspaper increase significantly over the decades, but more so for white women than for minorities, whom Barker thought were more likely to leave the Post.96 Barker, who obtained her bachelor’s degree at the University of California, Berkeley, and her master’s degree at Columbia University, had worked for UPI before being hired by the Post in 1971, when there were only seven women on the Metro staff out of about sixty journalists.

“My Metro boss went three years without hiring any women as regular reporters (as opposed to interns) and then made passes at many of those he eventually hired. . . . [He] paid way too much
attention to whom I was dating on the paper and once propositioned me over lunch,” she continued. After she declined his advances, he eventually sent her to cover the legislature in Annapolis, saying, “I was getting the job because he knew he could trust me not to fool around.” He apparently had in mind a couple of married men previously assigned there who had squabbled over the affections of a woman lobbyist.

A year before Barker arrived at the Post, an energetic young news aide observed the office scene and saw it as a reflection of both gender and class issues. “When I was in Washington, there was a lot of shall we say socializing among the older journalists and the younger members of the staff,” Susan Fleming Morgans commented. “We wouldn’t have recognized sexual harassment if it hit us in the face. But that was back in the days when people had two or three drinks with lunch.”

As an aspiring young journalist, she found that most women reporters “had some sort of connection to get their jobs—goddaughter of an ambassador or something like that,” she said. “Even the men were well connected—mostly Ivy League or the son of the owner of a chain of newspapers or something like that.” Mentors played critical roles, she continued, “and if I had had one I would probably be working in Washington or New York City today.” Instead she pursued a career teaching and editing in the Pittsburgh area.

Even when women started to be hired in more numbers in the 1970s, Post editors did not perceive them to be as competent as men on important breaking stories, remembered Barker—one of the first women who filed a discrimination complaint against the newspaper—decades later. “When [presidential candidate] George Wallace was shot in 1972, I watched as editors first went to the men on the Metro staff to jump on this story. I watched
an editor look right past me and grab a guy who hadn’t been out of the office in so long he had cobwebs on his chair.” Having recently been told by Bradlee that men got high-profile assignments because they were more aggressive than women, she and another woman reporter, Claudia Levy, “tested this out by grabbing our notebooks and standing near the assignment editor. But, as I said, he looked right past me to find a male reporter,” Barker continued.

Levy, who started on the Post in the 1960s, recalled a half century later the different treatment of men and women reporters. “One of my favorite early memories is the time in 1966 the night world editor sent a stylish New York–bred reporter home to change her clothes because she was wearing a PANTS SUIT . . . None of us [women] were allowed to leave the building when the riots [after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.] broke out in 1968,” she said.

During her years on the Post, Barker said she saw unfairness abate “because women have repeatedly proved themselves AND because there are now too many of us on staffs to permit this kind of discrimination.” In Barker’s view “the sex/race discrimination suits opened up more doors for women and minorities.”

She remained on the Metro staff until 1993, when she left for three years to work for newspapers in California, returning in 1996 when the Post’s first woman Metro editor, Jo-Ann Armao, asked her to help with presidential inaugural coverage. Barker took a buyout a decade later. At the time she still saw “a glass ceiling for women and minorities at the very top of the food chain.”

Martha Hamilton, who remained at the Post for nearly four decades, including a period of writing guild newsletters outlining pay discrimination, observed enormous changes over the years. In 2008 she explained, “When I came to work in 1972, virtu-
ally no one had a picture of children or spouse on desks. Now it is common, and management no longer lauds people who skip [being present for the] delivery of their child to stay at work as management once did. Also there is much less blatant sexism than there once was in terms of guys in the newsroom commenting on women’s physical attributes.”

But, appearance still remained more important for women than men into the twenty-first century, Hamilton continued. “No woman in the newsroom would dare be as sloppy as some of the men. I also know of one overweight journalist of the first class being rejected out of hand as a possible financial reporter because ‘she doesn’t look like a financial reporter.’ Janet Cooke would have never gotten away with her deceit if she hadn’t been so good-looking.” She said the Post story on how Cooke was forced to admit her guilt ended with a phrase “something like ‘In the end, she was still beautiful.’”

A financial news reporter for much of her Post career, Hamilton, who is white, donated a kidney to her colleague, Warren Brown, who is African American, in 2001, in a lifesaving operation featured in the newspaper. “Did Martha give you her kidney because you are black?” asked Courtland Milloy, an African American columnist. Hamilton and Brown, both of whom grew up in the segregated South, answered no. “The newsroom was our community, and we were next-door neighbors who looked out for each other,” they wrote. “Affirmative action had changed the nature of the workplace.” But it did not necessarily lead to an easier working environment. As a 1975 article in the Washington Monthly put it, the Post Metro staff “is crammed with people who would be stars on most other papers and who are desperate to show their talents.”

Even in the early 1970s, however, a few women held jobs on the Post’s prestigious national staff. One, Marilyn Berger, performed
a bit player role in the Post’s coverage of the Watergate scandal that led to the resignation of President Nixon. Berger, a Columbia graduate, arrived at the newspaper in 1970 as a diplomatic correspondent after serving as a United Nations correspondent for Newsday. She remained for six years before moving to NBC. Berger told Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein that Ken Clawson, a former Post reporter working at the Nixon White House, had written the bogus “Canuck letter” accusing Sen. Edmund S. Muskie of Maine, a leading Democratic presidential hopeful, of insulting Americans of French Canadian descent. Woodward and Bernstein reported this in October 1972 as one instance of political sabotage connected to bugging the Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate complex.

In 1973 Susanna McBee returned to the Post as a reporter on the national staff and was promoted to assistant national editor. But in 1978, when she asked to cover the Middle East, the foreign editor told her, “No woman could go to Saudi Arabia and get a story because the Saudis wouldn’t deal with one.” She resigned the next year after President Carter appointed her assistant secretary for public affairs in what was then the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Of her Post tenure, she said, “It was never easy but I figured that was the way the world was.”

Mary Lou Beatty, another woman holding a significant position at the Post, followed the convolutions of Nixon’s search for a vice presidential candidate in 1968. She recognized that Nixon was serious about choosing Maryland governor Spiro Agnew, even though David Broder thought it so unlikely he buried the idea in his story. Beatty, political editor at the time, rescued the news by pulling it up into the lead. In 1974 she followed Elsie Carper into the ranks of the assistant managing editors, making her the second woman to reach this position at the Post.
Beatty joined the Post in 1963 after working for the Chicago Tribune and remained there twenty years, directing stories on politics, civil rights, the space program, the Pentagon Papers, and Watergate. She launched the Weekend section in 1977, a popular tabloid listing of events around Washington. According to Hank Burchard, a feature writer, she “specialized in rehabilitation of wounded writers and turning secretaries into reporters.”

Leaving the Post in 1983, Beatty cofounded a monthly magazine, Washington Woman, which folded four years later. She then became publications director of the National Endowment for the Humanities. At the time of Beatty’s death in 2007, Ron Sarro—a former Star journalist who like Beatty had served as president of the WPC—called her a “leader of people who wanted to make a change in the way women were treated in the profession. And she succeeded.”

By the 1980s more and more women had attained responsible positions in Washington journalism. Ann McFeatters, for example, was a White House correspondent and national politics reporter for the Scripps Howard News Service from 1986 until 1999, when she was named bureau chief for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette and the Toledo Blade. As a teenage girl, she had gone to her local newspaper editor in Springfield, Ohio, to ask for advice on a career in journalism. “But, you’re a girl!” he replied. Not willing to be deterred from her goal, she majored in journalism at Marquette University, graduating in 1966 and finding a job on the Evansville (Ind.) Press.

As a White House correspondent, McFeatters said she no longer had to fight the rampant battles of discrimination that had affected the women who came before her. Before taking this prize assignment, she had proven herself as an environmental and consumer reporter for the Scripps Howard Washington bureau,
which she joined in 1970. “I suppose you could say it was a woman’s beat, but I didn’t look at it that way,” she said. Reporting on the activities of Ralph Nader and other consumer advocates who were pushing for governmental action. “I remember strapping my little baby into the back seat of a rental car and taking off across Pennsylvania looking for acid rain.”

What was difficult, she said, was the lack of role models for combining her career with marriage and motherhood. Married to Dale McFeatters, a Scripps Howard editorial writer and columnist, she is the mother of three children. “I continued to work all the time,” she said. “There were some tough times, trying to find good baby-sitters and good day-care. My youngest was three years old when I was traveling [with the president]. I went to Russia five times and China five times.” Looking back, McFeatters said there were “very few” other women correspondents who had families when she covered the White House. “It was harder than I admitted to myself at the time. You have to have a lot of energy and be pretty well-organized and have good spouses.”

In 1980 McFeatters was elected president of the WPC, brought into the group by Wauhillau La Hay, a witty woman proud of her Cherokee Indian background. After a career in New York radio, La Hay had been recruited by Scripps Howard during the Nixon administration to cover the First Lady. “It was a good club and had wonderful parties,” McFeatters said. “I still miss it,” she added, noting the strong women who played major roles in the club: La Hay, Bonnie Angelo of Time magazine, and Elsie Carper of the Washington Post.

As women became more integrated into the reportorial scene, McFeatters was chosen to join the Gridiron Club and to be a member of the board of the White House Correspondents’ As-
sociation. She joined the NPC and became chair of the NPC Foundation. Launched in 1986, her weekly syndicated column, “White House Watch,” has appeared in four hundred newspapers for more than two decades. “Covering government in Washington, D.C., is just like covering it in any small town,” McFeatters contended. “The most powerful men in American government put their pants on one leg at a time, and the most powerful women have cluttered purses.”

Starting in 1978, Judy Luce Mann emerged as the Washington Post’s feminist columnist, continuing to speak up for women’s equality until her retirement in 2001. At the time of her death four years later, Leonard Downie Jr., the Post executive editor, commented, “Her column was widely read, especially by women like herself who believed strongly in expanding the rights of women.” Her corps of devoted readers kept the Post from canceling her column in the 1990s on grounds that it predictably followed a feminist line. Supporters called and wrote letters to urge the column’s continuance. Their pressure resulted in the column remaining a feature of the newspaper, but being moved from the Metro section to the Style section, first adjacent to the comic strips and later to the bottom of a nearby page.

The period of the column coincided with what some considered a backlash against women as efforts mounted to stop passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. Mann’s column became a platform for women to advocate for it. During the election of 1980, Mann caught the frustration of Republican women who backed the ERA by quoting one who said, “If he [Reagan] chooses to send a signal that the party is going to reverse a historic trend, that will be truly upsetting. . . . If he wants to keep it [the ERA plank] in, it would be in his interest to send a back channel signal soon before the visibility of the issue is raised.”
Unhappily for ERA supporters, Reagan did not signal in their direction. According to Mann, who wrote at a time when the New Right was coalescing, her topics were “frequently unpopular and very often at odds with mainstream orthodoxy.”\textsuperscript{136} She staunchly supported women’s rights, world population control, and child welfare as affirmative action and abortion rights came under heavy attack. In 1984 she was among women columnists who floated the idea of nominating a woman for vice president on the Democratic ticket, which resulted in Geraldine Ferraro running with Walter Mondale in his unsuccessful presidential bid.\textsuperscript{137} Her treatment of Ferraro contrasted with that given by the news media to an earlier effort by a woman to campaign for a spot on the Democratic ticket. After Rep. Shirley Chisholm of New York announced her candidacy in 1972, a \textit{Post} feature writer, Myra MacPherson, wrote that Chisholm had been “kissed off as a member of the lunatic fringe . . . politicians narrowly viewed her only as a woman’s or black candidate.”\textsuperscript{138}

The increased presence of women journalists in Washington enhanced the political career of at least one woman, Harriet Woods, a Democrat who narrowly lost a well-publicized, although unsuccessful, race for the U.S. Senate from Missouri in 1982. As Woods recalled the campaign two decades later, “It was hard to gain credibility running against a well-entrenched incumbent like Jack [John] Danforth—particularly [to be taken seriously] in D.C. I wasn’t on the map. Male reporters dominated political coverage and I didn’t look important.”

In Woods’s view she gained attention because “it just so happened there was a group of aspiring women journalists also seeking major opportunities. One was Elisabeth Bumiller at \textit{The Washington Post}. She talked her editor into assigning her a feature on my race at a time when no one else was covering it.” After Bu-
miller’s story “filled a full page of the ‘Style’ section, with a huge picture, I instantaneously was on the map in D.C. It made a huge difference,” Woods said. She saw the story as stemming from the desire of Bumiller, a recent Columbia University journalism graduate, to get a good assignment at the Post.

Bumiller, who had worked at the Miami Herald before entering Columbia, was hired at the Post to assist Sally Quinn in covering the Washington social scene. Going beyond parties, Bumiller introduced profiles of political figures such as Woods. “It was a win–win,” Woods said. “She [Bumiller] was able to do it because of her gender awareness that there was a story there, and the editor’s stereotypical assumption that a woman reporter was especially suitable to write about a woman candidate.”

According to Woods, “The same combination worked for the new women reporters at NPR (Cokie [Roberts], Linda [Wertheimer], Nina [Totenberg], etc.), who were trying to get more air time.” As Woods analyzed her 1982 campaign, she said that the NPR women “were established figures, but I suspect it was a big help to them to have major women candidates emerging who drew coverage—again with the assumption that this was an appropriate assignment for women reporters.” She said she recalled having “coffee or lunch in DC with the NPR women after my loss. . . . We shared war stories of working with male power figures. . . . Without any suggestion of favoritism in personal coverage.” To Woods the camaraderie between her and the women reporters resembled the interaction between Eleanor Roosevelt and the women who covered her press conferences.

Political experts attributed Woods’s narrow defeat in part to the fact that she was outspent in the campaign and forced to pull her television ads for a week late in the campaign. Publicity over her loss led to the creation of the political action committee called
Emily’s List to back liberal women candidates in 1985. A year earlier Woods won election as lieutenant governor of Missouri, drawing on her name recognition from the Senate race. The first woman elected to statewide office in Missouri, Woods remained in that position until 1989, losing a second bid for U.S. senator from Missouri in another tight race in 1986.

After leaving office, Woods, who had worked as a television producer in the St. Louis area before her political career, served as president of the National Women’s Political Caucus from 1991 until 1995. “As a candidate who has been covered by both male and female reporters, I can say firmly that I want GOOD, ACCURATE coverage—gender is secondary. I could cite some horrific coverage by women—but I won’t,” Woods said. Nevertheless, she said she had observed that “there was much more coverage by women reporters [than by men reporters] at press conferences regarding reports on political women. . . . Interest or opportunity or assignment editor assumptions?”

Woods emphasized that the issues that women most often advocate as legislators “touch women journalists as people: family and medical leave, child care, pay equity, health coverage, breast cancer research. And women politicians are heartened by women’s success as journalists and editors. . . . It’s equally important to have women’s life experiences included among journalists as . . . among legislators.”

At the *Washington Post* Mann frequently wrote on the topics that Woods named. Mann’s background helped propel her to liberal feminism. Born in Washington, as a child she lived in Paris where her father worked for the Marshall plan. Back in the United States she dropped out of Barnard College to organize protests against the Vietnam War and rent strikes to benefit low-income tenants in New York. In 1964 she defied U.S. law by traveling to
Cuba. Prior to joining the Post staff in 1972, she worked for the Washington Daily News for four years.

Married three times, Mann was the mother of three children, whom she often referred to in her column with humorous anecdotes. In a collection of columns published in 1990, she said that when she began her career, “the newspapers I worked for presumed that women were cut from the same cloth newspapermen were, and that they put their careers first [ahead of their children]. I never did, and I never had any questions about which gave me more reward and more fulfillment.”

“I look at news coverage of women, and I think I’ve wandered into the fun house at the circus,” Mann contended at a 1990 journalism conference. “Women are distorted by the media. We are too tall in our aspirations, too short in our accomplishments, too thin in our talents, too heavy in our personal burdens. And a good deal of the time we simply don’t show up in the [media] mirror at all.”

When Al Neuharth, following his retirement as chairman of the Gannett Company, wrote a column criticizing commercial airlines for replacing young “sky girls” with aging females and “flighty young men” as flight attendants, Mann accused him of being a “male chauvinist pig.” She enumerated his progressive policy at Gannett to court women readers and to promote women to high-ranking positions, but wrote off these efforts as “a cynical ploy to grab circulation, not a genuine personal commitment to enhance the status of women.” Neuharth replied in USA Today that Mann’s “chauvinistic boss, Ben Bradlee, [had] sicked her to ‘get’ me,” but Mann retorted that “I never discussed the column I wrote with Ben or anybody else.”

Mann also took after a Post columnist, Richard Cohen, for writing in the newspaper’s Sunday magazine that feminism had
prompted men to “pretend to listen [to women] all the time, lest they be ‘accused of not being sensitive.’” To Mann, Cohen’s column insulted women and illustrated the kind of male bias that caused women to stop reading newspapers. “From 1982 to 1987 the number of women who read a newspaper four days out of five declined by 26 percent, according to the Newspaper Advertising Bureau,” Mann wrote. “Women have money now and they need information. What has happened is that their need for newspapers has declined, and insulting them is not the way to bring them back.”

In her last column on December 28, 2001, Mann expressed regret that “there are so few liberal columnists left in the media and so few women writing serious commentary. I have always felt that the media mirror society and that a society in which women are invisible in the media is one in which they are invisible, period.” The end of her column made it harder for feminist groups to serve as sources for reporters, according to Martha Burk, former chair of the National Council of Women’s Organizations.

“When Judy Mann was writing for the Post, she would often talk to us about our agenda and often enough write about our issues,” Burk said in 2003. “Our groups intervened on Judy’s behalf to keep her from getting fired at least once and I think a couple of times. We really have NO ONE to go to in the way of columnists [now]. . . . Some of us talk to Helen Thomas in social settings, and she is very good about questioning [officials] when she can,” Burk added.

While a growing conservative mood in Washington may have limited options for feminist commentators as the twentieth century ended, some women continued to have extremely successful careers. A Post staff writer for twenty-five years, Judith Martin, left the newspaper in 1983 to devote full time to her popular fea-
ture, “Miss Manners,” a tongue-in-cheek etiquette column, syndicated three times a week in more than two hundred newspapers worldwide in 2011.163 It covers not only matters of behavior but also romance, changing patterns of marriage and relationships, and philosophical and moral dilemmas in a wryly humorous way. A graduate of Wellesley College, Martin covered the White House and diplomatic missions for the women’s section of the Post in the 1960s and was one of the original staff members assigned to the Style section.

George Will, one of the nation’s best-known conservative political columnists, once said Martin actually offered political commentary, particularly in her Sunday column, written in essay form unlike the question-and-answer format of her other work.164 Martin did not disagree. “In a larger sense of restructuring society, there could hardly be a more political idea than changing our concept of the workplace,” she said.165

In one of the dozen nonfiction books she has written, Common Courtesy, she called for redesigning the workplace to allow both men and women to have time for professional and personal lives. She told an interviewer that writing a column was easier than bucking social norms in the early 1960s and going to work as a married woman with two young children.166 “What has happened in our time is that the woman has taken over the male pattern, and nobody makes up the slack,” she said.167

In her autobiography Graham called attention to Martin’s work as a reporter for the women’s section before she became “Miss Manners.” She described an embarrassing telephone conversation with H. R. Haldeman, one of Nixon’s top aides, after Martin was banned from covering Tricia Nixon’s White House wedding to Edward Cox in 1971 for breaking rules governing the reporting of Julie Nixon’s wedding. Concerned about some of the
“stiletto” coverage in Style and “how sharp Judith’s pen could be,” Graham wrote, she found it hard to defend Martin: “I wasn’t sure I’d want her to cover my own daughter’s wedding. She had, for instance, already compared Tricia to a vanilla ice-cream cone.”168 Reporters from other newspapers, however, all gave Martin their notes on the Nixon–Cox wedding so the Post ended up “with the finest pool of material available to any reporter in town,” Graham concluded.169

While women at the Post were endeavoring to break gender barriers, women at the Washington Times experienced a different kind of office climate. That daily newspaper was founded in 1982, less than a year after the demise of the Star. Funded by the Unification Church, the Times provided a conservative voice in the capital, although it trailed the Post badly in circulation, advertising, and prestige. Women employees, some of whom previously had worked for the Star, enjoyed lively camaraderie with their male colleagues, but they did not think they were paid as much as men doing similar work.170

One former staff member recalled that most women did not seem to know how to negotiate for top salaries, whereas most men did.171 Since there was no union at the newspaper, uniform starting salaries did not exist. Some of the top journalistic jobs were held by men and women who were members of the Unification Church.

In offering a conservative woman’s voice, Mary Lou Forbes, who became the commentary editor of the Times after the Star folded, featured the syndicated columns of Mona Charen, which began in 1987. An honors graduate of Barnard College, Charen earned a law degree at George Washington University. She developed political expertise and close links with the Republican Party as a speechwriter for First Lady Nancy Reagan and Rep.
Jack Kemp during his unsuccessful 1988 bid for the Republican presidential nomination. By 2011 her column ran in about two hundred newspapers, covering various topics such as governmental policy, terrorism, and culture. Writing about her Jewish faith, Charen is seen as offering pro-Israel views.

Charen started her syndicated column after writing a semi-monthly column for the Republican Study Committee Bulletin, read by Republican members of Congress. Forbes called Charen “very representative of the new young visionaries who came along during the Reagan years.” She also praised her as “an extremely lucid writer, always on top of issues, never afraid to take a strong stand.”

Writing from her home in Falls Church, a Northern Virginia suburb of Washington, Charen told an interviewer she wanted to change people’s minds: “There is still a view that women aren’t as serious as men, are somehow a lesser sex. That is a struggle, and I’ve been on the ramparts as far as that goes, but I think the feminist movement has been a disaster.” Her perception of disintegration of family life and moral values gave her a following among conservative women’s groups and pro-life adherents. Married and the mother of three children, when she announced her decision in her column to adopt her first child, she received hundreds of letters of support, but two were hurtful, including one from a reader who wrote, “God knows what he’s doing and chose to make you infertile for a reason.”

In a typical column in 1992, Charen took on what she named the “liberal agenda” for glorifying the use of condoms. She wrote disapprovingly of a report from the House Select Committee on Children, Youth, and Families in which the Democratic majority recommended more “federal dollars for AIDS education and school-based health clinics (read condom dispensaries).” By
contrast she praised the Republican minority report that urged more emphasis in high schools on the importance of abstinence and family values. “Women need to see their perspective on the world presented,” Charen said, criticizing feminists who support the sexual revolution and “claim to speak for women, but don’t.”

Forbes also praised another syndicated woman columnist whose articles appeared in the *Times*, Georgie Anne Geyer, whose background as a foreign correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News* had led to her making her own headlines. In the 1960s, when most women journalists still were relegated to writing society notes, Geyer, a graduate of Northwestern University, covered revolutions in Latin America and roamed the world, witnessing change in the Soviet Union, Middle East, and Far East. As an attractive young woman who met with world leaders, she coped with gossip—usually of the sort that accused her of sleeping with sources—but she learned to laugh it off. In 1973 she was the first Western reporter to interview Saddam Hussein, then vice president of Iraq. She also interviewed Yasser Arafat, Anwar Sadat, King Hussein of Jordan, Muammar al-Qaddafi, and Ayatollah Khomeini.

In 1974 Geyer felt the strain of ceaseless travel and decided to write a column, carried by more than 120 newspapers, from an apartment base in Washington. In 1991 she published a biography of Fidel Castro, based in part on personal interaction with him. Although sometimes described as a conservative, Geyer decried that label. “I’m not ideological and I’m not partisan,” she said. “I don’t identify with one party or with one type of leader.” Forbes called Geyer “extremely knowledgeable about the Middle East and South and Central America,” and said she had “achieved a knowledge that few columnists—male or female—have.”

Geyer also commented on current domestic politics in her column. In the 1980s she criticized the media for overzealous re-
porting in its efforts to “get” presidential aspirant Gary Hart in 1987 by tracking his interludes with a girlfriend. In her opinion, by 1989 the press had become prosecutor, judge, and executioner of political candidates by emphasizing so-called character issues.186

At the Post, Helen Dewar established herself as an outstanding political reporter for four decades, proving that a woman of exceptional ability could win respect from colleagues and news sources alike. A graduate of Stanford University, Dewar joined the Post in 1961, covering Northern Virginia suburbs before being assigned to Virginia State government in 1965. Promoted to the national staff a decade later, she tracked Jimmy Carter’s presidential campaign in 1976. Three years later she moved to the U.S. Senate, where she stayed until 2005. Through a combination of ceaseless work, scrupulous fairness, and determination to get all sides of a story, Dewar became a Post legend. At the time of her death in 2006, David Broder called her “one of the best reporters I ever knew.”187

A self-effacing individual who devoted herself to her work, Dewar perfected what became known as the “Dewar walk” during the 1990s when congressional leaders tried to bar reporters from waiting for senators outside the doors of their chambers.188 Aware that she could not be chased away as long as she kept moving, “Dewar would shuffle and amble around the corridors, ready to pounce when senators answered a call to a vote,” according to her obituary.189

As a woman who personally had worked extremely hard to succeed in a man’s occupation, Dewar did not see herself as part of a procession of women who had fought for the right to be journalists. Clearly, Dewar, who won the 1984 Everett McKinley Dirksen Award for distinguished reporting of Congress from the NPC Foundation, did not want to be identified with a historical figure, Anne Royall, the first woman to cover Congress, who symbolized
society’s ridicule of pioneering women journalists. Dewar boycotted a 1990 ceremony recognizing Royall after trying to block the event by attempting to get the Senate Historical Office to say that Royall had not been the first newspaperwoman at the Capitol.190

Dewar, however, was conscious of gender barriers in her own career. She made no secret of the fact that she had started at the Post in a temporary job, filling paste pots in the women’s department, before working her way up the career ladder. She told a colleague there was no reason a woman could not get ahead at the newspaper—all she had to do was to “be twice as good as a man and work twice as hard.”191

Unlike Dewar, UPI’s Helen Thomas readily spoke at the ceremony honoring Royall and made it an occasion to comment on women’s political status. “Women in journalism of our vintage have risen above outrageous prejudice,” Thomas emphasized.192 She said women had advanced “from the blatant—‘we don’t hire women’ pronouncements of editors in an earlier day—to the more subtle forms of discrimination today.”193 Reviewing years of past discrimination against women journalists in Washington, Thomas noted, “Today women are high profile” in professions, but she added that there are “no women top policy makers in the White House where it is a man’s world [and only] twenty-nine women out of five hundred and thirty-five members of Congress.”194 She ended, “Yes, we’ve come a long way but we have miles to go before we sleep.”195

Interviewed in the White House press room a few months later, Thomas elaborated on her contention that women in the United States still faced gender bias. “As for discrimination, I think that none of us have overcome sex discrimination,” she said.196 “I think it is still blatant in this country and I think that we should never rest until we have equality, true equality.”197
Looking back, she said, “I felt that I should walk right in and open the door for others, even though sometimes I’ve been faulted for that,” a reference to her becoming the first woman member of the Gridiron Club. “I don’t mind being a token if I can just walk in through that door and then open it wider for others.” Thomas held the same view toward being one of the first women members of the NPC. Even though “many women reporters who had fought the good fight for equality and for getting into the [National] press club said no, no soap, no dice, that they were not interested anymore after having been shunned,” she said, “I didn’t think that was the right attitude, frankly.”

Thomas equated prejudice against women in general with the lack of women in high political places. “Anybody who thinks that women have reached the top in this country [is wrong]. Every day I walk into the oval office or the cabinet room and the issues of war and peace are being discussed [I see] there is not one woman there,” she continued. Linking the general status of women in society, including journalism, to their position in the American political system, she said, “I think in the next century we will have a woman as President.”

“Probably we will have [a] black [African American] first, though, I imagine, because they [African Americans] seem to have made bigger strides in politics,” she added, offering a prediction that came true in 2008 when Barack Obama was elected president of the United States. In Thomas’s view women have to overcome more barriers than men to succeed because “men talk to men and men help men.” As she saw it in 1990, women still had to struggle for equality.

Besides Thomas herself, only a few other women were perceived as leaders of Washington journalism during the last decade of the twentieth century. In Washingtonian magazine in 1989, Bar-
bara Matusow, drawing on interviews with Washington opinion makers, identified the capital’s top fifty journalists. She noted that the number of women had increased since 1983 when the leading fifty last had been picked, but women had hardly broken through the male ranks. In 1989, seven women made the list compared to the four who were named five years previously. They were Meg Greenfield, Mary Hagar, Andrea Mitchell, Cokie Roberts, Lesley Stahl, Helen Thomas, and Judy Woodruff.

The newcomers included Hagar, editor of the Washington Post’s Style section, and three broadcast reporters—Mitchell of NBC News, Roberts of ABC News and NPR, and Woodruff of PBS—indicating that television was trumping print in giving recognition to women journalists. Hagar was identified as one of the seven Post editors included because “there is no way to overestimate the influence the paper has over the life of the capital.” The list had only two minority journalists, neither female: William Raspberry of the Washington Post and Bernard Shaw of CNN.

Calling attention to the primacy of television, Matusow wrote, “Television is the great big honey pot, dripping promises of lecture fees, book contracts, and invitations to small, off-the-record briefings at the White House.” She continued, “Politicians and journalists alike tend to equate visibility with influence, so we have reporters lobbying to get on the TV talk shows.”

Washington reporting no longer consisted simply of news stories dispatched from Capitol Hill and the White House by a group of moderately paid journalists. Matusow lamented that Capitol Hill coverage had shrunk while television networks overemphasized the White House. “Perhaps because it’s no longer such a desirable beat, many women have made names for themselves covering the Hill,” she commented, citing Roberts, Dewar, Sara
Fritz of the *Los Angeles Times*, and Janet Hook of *Congressional Quarterly*.⁸⁸

In 1992 women made up almost half of the White House press corps, aspiring to cover the president as well as the First Lady. For example, Maureen Santana covered the White House from 1978 until the end of 1992, first for the Associated Press, then for the *New York Daily News*. As a recent graduate of the University of Wisconsin, Santana considered herself fortunate during the Reagan years to get the “unofficial AP spot for women at the White House,” reporting on Nancy Reagan.⁹⁹

After Santana moved to the *New York Daily News* in 1987, she advanced professionally, covering the president as well as his wife. Obviously, she pointed out, the president has much more “obligation to be in the regular view of the press,” making him far more newsworthy.¹⁰⁰ Jodi Edna, who was assigned to the White House in 1993 by the Knight Ridder newspaper chain, put it this way: “I didn’t want to be known as the ‘woman’s beat’ first lady reporter, I wanted to be known as the White House reporter who covered the president.”¹¹¹

Indicative of women’s increasing stature in Washington reporting, during Bill Clinton’s 1992 presidential campaign, Robin Toner, the first woman to be named the national political correspondent of the *New York Times*, led her newspaper’s coverage of the election.¹² She subsequently became chief of correspondents on the *Times’* national desk in New York before returning to the Washington bureau as a senior writer.¹³ Prior to joining the *Times* in 1985, Toner, an honors graduate of Syracuse University, worked for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.¹⁴ She died of cancer in 2008 at the age of fifty-four.

By 1993 the *Washingtonian* increased the number of women in its top fifty list of journalists to thirteen. Newcomers included
Gloria Borger, *U.S. News*, considered an authority on Congress; Eleanor Clift, *Newsweek*, praised for original insights on politics; Ann Devroy, who covered the White House for the *Washington Post*; Maureen Dowd, *New York Times*; Gwen Ifill, then also of the *New York Times* and the first woman of color to make the list; Diane Rehm, WAMU-FM; Susan Spencer, CBS; and Totenberg and Wertheimer, both of NPR. Thomas had been dropped along with Lesley Stahl and Mary Hador. Most of the women who worked on print publications also appeared on television news shows. IT HELPS TO HAVE A TV DEAL AND AN ATTITUDE, the article’s subhead said.

Five years later, however, there were fewer women on the list—only eleven—and three different names: Jill Abramson, *Wall Street Journal*; Linda Greenhouse, *New York Times*; and Ann McDaniel, *Newsweek*. Ifill now was with NBC; Borger, Clift, Mitchell, Spencer, and Totenberg had been dropped. As Matusow put it, “Washington is a fickle place.” Most of the powerful journalists remained white males—although a younger, more skeptical and conservative group than their predecessors.

In 1997 the *New York Times* recruited Abramson from the *Wall Street Journal* for its Washington bureau. Described as a “short, droll woman who draws out her words as she speaks,” she was known as a “ferocious political reporter.” Her best friend at the newspaper was Maureen Dowd, the waspish op-ed columnist who won a Pulitzer Prize for Commentary in 1999, particularly focusing on the impeachment of Bill Clinton for his affair with Monica Lewinsky.

A native Washingtonian and daughter of a police inspector, Dowd, a graduate of Catholic University, joined the Times’ Washington bureau in 1983 after an interlude at *Time* magazine following the demise of the *Star*. She advanced to being an op-ed columnist in 1995. According to her, when she started as a White
House correspondent, “There was a lot of criticism from guys saying, ‘She focuses too much on the person but not enough on policy.’ I never understood that argument at all. . . . All the great traumatizing events of American history—Watergate, Vietnam, the Iran/contra stuff—have always been about the president’s personal demons and gremlins.”

Dowd said she thought “that criticism was just silly—as if it was a girlish thing to be focused on the person.” Writing columns compared to irreverent political cartoons, Dowd, pictured in feature stories as a glamorous redhead who is appealing to men, frequently referred to gender-related topics.

Before the 2000 presidential election, Dowd described Al Gore, the Democratic candidate, as “so feminized and diversified and ecologically correct that he’s practically lactating,” and called the Democratic Party the “mommy party.” Describing gendered implications as factors in Washington politics and political coverage in a lecture at Harvard University, she pointed to presidents who merged personal drives with political policy. “One [Lyndon B. Johnson] aide told [Arthur M.] Schlesinger,” she said, “that Vietnam was all about LBJ proving his manhood and [Henry] Kissinger described a scene in 1968, in the Cabinet room, when Johnson harangued [Defense Secretary] Robert McNamara, growling about the North Vietnamese, ‘how can I hit them in the nuts?’” To her the Iraq war “was about W. [President George W. Bush] proving his manhood.”

In 2001 Abramson, a Harvard graduate who grew up in New York City, was named the chief of the Washington bureau of the New York Times. She became the first woman to hold that rarified position. In addition to her and Dowd, the Washingtonian list of the top fifty that year included only six other women. The magazine singled out Roberts for offering “reason and modera-
tion on television,” Jane Mayer for describing the “nexus between New York and Washington power players” in the New Yorker, and Katherine Boo of the Washington Post for winning a Pulitzer Prize after exposing shoddy treatment of the mentally ill.

Jackie Judd of ABC was cited for having taken “more heat during the Monica Lewinsky affair (which she was one of the first journalists to reveal) than any honest reporter should have to.”226 The remaining two: Jonetta Rose Barras, a reporter for the Washington Afro-American and the Washington Times before moving to the City Paper, a free distribution weekly, cited for outstanding political coverage of the capital; and veteran Mary McGrory of the Post, called a reflection of “the old traditional liberalism of a generation gone.”227

The small number of women recognized as outstanding, even though a growing number of Washington correspondents were female, reflected the continuation of conflict between family life and careers. Penny Bender Fuchs, for example, left the Gannett Washington bureau in 1999 after a “tumultuous year, politically and personally,” covering the Clinton-Gore administration.228 The previous year, just after the Lewinsky scandal broke, she returned from taking maternity leave for the birth of her second child, Jonathan, who was unwell, so “I missed work frequently to take him to the doctor,” she said.229

Even without medical appointments, a typical day generated stress. She recalled, “I dropped John off at the babysitter’s home and Katie [his sister] off at her preschool and arrived at work by 8:30 a.m. I worked feverishly to get as much accomplished before I had to pick them both up at 5 p.m.”230 Once at home, she often worked from there, although two or three nights a week she waited for her husband, Michael, a lawyer, to come home at 7:00 p.m. so that she could turn around and go back to the office until 10:00
or 11:00 p.m., or even midnight. “I was working so incredibly hard
and it seemed to make little difference to my editors who said I
was ‘less committed’ than I had been a few years earlier. It also was
a terrible strain on my marriage,” she continued. She quit after
covering the Clinton impeachment vote—“because what reason-
able, self-respecting reporter walks away from that?”—to pursue
graduate work at the University of Maryland where she joined the
journalism faculty.

Fuchs, who graduated with a journalism degree from Virginia
Commonwealth University in 1984, “thought of myself as part of
the generation of women who could do it all.” She worked her
way up to being a Washington correspondent after proving her
abilities on small newspapers in Virginia, not finding it difficult to
keep up with male colleagues until she had children. “The men I
worked with scratched their heads over this; they interpreted my
inability to balance the job with the kids as me making a choice,
my children over my career . . . that should not have been the
case.”

Abramson also struggled for gender equality. In mid-2001 she
told Gerald Boyd, the Times’ managing editor, that she thought
both he and Howell Raines, the paper’s executive editor, were
“especially disrespectful to the women managers in the news-
room.” When Raines designated Pat Tyler, an old fishing buddy,
as the next bureau chief, Abramson found herself in an unten-
able position. “I went from [being] the first woman ever to be
Washington bureau chief of the Times to going to book parties in
Washington and having people ask me, ‘How are you?’ Like I had
cancer,” she said. She considered leaving the Times and moving
to the Post, although Boyd counseled Abramson to “fight Pat
Tyler for your job.”

After Arthur Sulzberger Jr., the Times’ publisher, asked Abram-
son to stay at the paper, she told Raines that she intended to remain as bureau chief. An angry Raines told her to make sure Tyler was a star. Following the forced resignations of both Raines and Boyd in the wake of a scandal caused by the fabricated reports of Jayson Blair, a young African American reporter, the *Times* appointed Abramson as a comanaging editor in 2003. She was the first woman named to this position, a symbol of the fight to the top waged by determined Washington women journalists. In 2011 she attained the distinction of being the first woman to be named executive editor of the newspaper.

During the first years of the twenty-first century it appeared easier, or at least more possible than in the past, for women to move ahead in journalism after years of discrimination, but ironically journalism itself was in jeopardy. Newspaper circulations and advertising were falling off as new technologies threatened the future of journalism as it had traditionally been defined. Women had worked hard to achieve a pinnacle that seemed to be collapsing.