In summary, Washington journalism has owed more than it has recognized to the women who have sought to enter its ranks in spite of overwhelming discrimination that marked most of the decades in which they attempted to establish careers. As the governing center of the nation—and in the view of some—the most significant force on the international scene, Washington has been attuned chiefly to politics. Its most important journalists to date have been those with the best political contacts. Until recently most women and minorities in journalism faced extraordinary challenges in establishing reportorial relationships with political leaders, most of whom were white males accustomed to dealing with those most like themselves. The same challenges confronted women and minorities in news organizations headed with white male superiors. The fact that women and minorities succeeded to the extent they did stands as a tribute to their intelligence and perseverance in response to changing political and social conditions, which they themselves helped to bring about.

While seeking to be accepted as objective professionals competing on an even field with men, for more than a century women journalists fought against gender subordination. True, their individual opinions varied widely on the extent of their commitment to feminist issues. Sometimes they promoted political causes such as suffrage and an active role for First Ladies as illustrated by their championing of Eleanor Roosevelt. Sometimes they attempted to showcase through women’s and society pages construction of
a social culture with a significant political dimension. Sometimes they fought to gain access to professional organizations. Sometimes they used their own good looks and personalities, along with keen intelligence, to move into broadcasting. Sometimes they took advantage of legal redress to seek employment and promotion opportunities under the federal Civil Rights Act. One woman, Katharine Graham, displayed her innate strength by inheriting a good newspaper and leaving it a much stronger one while she turned her company into a media empire. But most of all women as a group simply insisted on their rights to work as journalists like men in the center of national power. Their story needs to be told as part of the American experience.

Whatever the future holds in new media for Washington journalism, women can be expected to play a vital part at a time when a technological revolution has enormously expanded opportunities for individuals to make their voices heard. Old structures for news may have changed, but the determination of women, now estimated to make up at least half of the Washington press corps, to move ahead remains, even though solutions to issues of family versus career still need to be worked out. Women may have arrived in a field at a time when it is losing its well-defined perimeters, but based on their history they have the ingenuity and forward thinking to create new ones. Although they may not agree on political goals, they are worthy successors to their foremother, Anne Royall, who was determined to earn her living as a journalist in the nation’s capital.