DAVID MARANISS INTERVIEW
THE NEWSPAPERMAN: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BEN BRADLEE
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

DAVID MARANISS
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Interviewed by: John Maggio
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START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

The Newspaperman

Kunhardt Film Foundation

ON SCREEN TEXT:

David Maraniss

Associate Editor, *The Washington Post*

Wanting to work at *The Washington Post*

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DAVID MARANISS:

Well, I was lucky. I was hired by its farm club, *The Trenton Times*. *The Post* had bought it in 1974 and I was one of the first people that was hired by Dick Harwood, who Bradlee had sent up to Trenton to run that paper, a paper that Mrs. Graham later called her "Vietnam," because it was a financial disaster. I was one of many reporters who came out of that. I had already been incredibly familiar with *The Washington Post* because I grew up in the

newspaper business. My father was a newspaperman. He ran a progressive paper in Madison, Wisconsin that would strip the Woodward and Bernstein Watergate stories on the front page every time they ran. I was then working for a radio station, Radio Free Madison, in Wisconsin. And on weekends I would write my own fifteen-minute newscasts and I'd take the Woodward and Bernstein reports and rewrite them. So when I finally met Woodward I said, "I've been rewriting you for years."

All the President's Men

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DAVID MARANISS:

It came out when I was in Trenton, and the whole staff in Trenton went to see it. It was the place to be. I was really lucky that I got to *The Washington Post* at the time I did. It would've been greater if I'd been there earlier, but I felt I got there in time, and it was really magnetic to arrive. I think that *All the President's Men* (1976) definitely made journalism sexy. It didn't really have that effect on me because I grew up in the old-school front page journalism. I loved the smell of the ink and the paste pots and the copy editors wearing suspenders. All of that was really deeply in my blood, and when *All the President's Men* came along it added another dimension to that feeling, but I already had it very deeply in me.

Getting into journalism

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DAVID MARANISS:

To be honest with you my interest in journalism is because it was the only thing I was any good at. I couldn't change a light bulb, like a lot of reporters, but I loved to write. My father was a newspaperman, my mother was a book editor, so I grew up in that milieu.

The *Post*

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DAVID MARANISS:

Yeah, there was an energy, and it intimidated me immensely. I almost had a mental breakdown when I got there because of the pressures of the place. I didn't realize what was going on with me, but I had some kind of retinal degeneration that probably was psychosomatic. Along with that, I truly felt that energy and it lifted my own reporting to another level right away. *The Post*, when I got there, was chock-full of the best reporters in the world, and to live up to that standard was part of the stress. The other part for me was I came from the Midwest. I wasn't one of Ben Bradlee's Ivy League guys. I remember when he interviewed me he said, "Well, I guess I'm not going to blackball you just because you went to Wisconsin, or came from Wisconsin." That was a little bit of stress too, although I was fairly self-confident I still realized that this was the big leagues. I'd been in their farm club for a couple of years and now here I was.

First impressions of Ben Bradlee

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DAVID MARANISS:

Well, the first impression was also the last impression. He was the coolest cat I'd ever seen walk through a newsroom. Everything about him. It was his—sure, you start with the superficial impressions. His voice, nobody had a voice quite like Ben's, not even Jason Robards. The way he walked, the way he dressed. Most reporters like me are slobs who have their food on their tie or their shirt, and Bradlee was always pretty immaculate. He had his hair slicked back, and just the twinkle in his eyes, it was something I've never seen in anyone else before.

Ben Bradlee's ethos

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DAVID MARANISS:

You know, I don't know that he had an ethos. I think that all he was looking for was something that was damn good, whether it was the writing or the reporting, but something that lifted the paper and his spirits and wasn't boring. I think it was as simple as that. I think when you try to add more to it, it's really myth making, but that was enough for a newspaper guy.

Ben Bradlee trusted his gut

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DAVID MARANISS:

Well he—yeah, I think Joe Garosa said he had the attention span of a bicentennial minute. That was back when the bicentennial was something. He did have the gut for good stories, but his gut was sometimes wrong. I remember for years in the– in the news story conferences he would make fun of the ozone layer and global warming, so he wasn't always right, but he was

usually right and he did have a gut for what was phony or what was real. He did have a good bullshit detector, and my father was like that, too. I think the reason that some people have good bullshit detectors is because they're bullshitters themselves to a certain degree.

Working at the *Post*

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DAVID MARANISS:

Well, it is, they call it "the daily miracle," and for each one of us in different ways it was. When I worked with Ben Bradlee it was before the era of computers, so we had six-ply carbon paper and you had editors on the desk and copy editors, all these things that are sort of archaic now, but it was a lot of work. You'd start the day off not knowing what the story was, and by six or seven o'clock at night you had your story. There was no extra staff; you did it on your own. You had an editor to talk to. You had the top editors making the decisions on what went on the front page and what went elsewhere in the paper. You didn't want to get buried on B6 or something. You were always striving to get to A1. But it was—Bradlee had—one of the great things about him was he said that the government lies, and they're lies told every day. We were always conscious of that when I worked at the newspaper. It's something that's held all of us in good stead who came up under Bradlee. We weren't just regurgitating the press releases, or what the government officials were saying. We're trying to dig beneath that, and that was part of the daily endeavor.

Writing for Ben Bradlee

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DAVID MARANISS:

I don't think that any good journalist should be writing for someone else but writing for the truth. So I think in a general sense I was writing for Ben, because I think he appreciated good writing, solid reporting, and something that was not just the norm. That's what any good reporter is striving for. So in that sense, I was. I wasn't thinking, what do I have to do to hype up this paragraph to get Ben Bradlee to like it.

Working for Ben Bradlee

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DAVID MARANISS:

I don't want to exaggerate Ben Bradlee's role in my own journalism career. I think my father had a larger influence, so I don't want to hype it. But I do think that– that Bradlee liked the kind of stories that I was inherently interested in. It wasn't only the Bob Woodward, Watergate type of story that he wanted to read. He wanted to read something that made him laugh, or made him think about something in a new way. Or the writing itself shined. A new way of looking at things. So that's what I was always trying to do anyway. It usually corresponded with what Bradlee was interested in.

The rise of The *Post*

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DAVID MARANISS:

I didn't really know *The Washington Post* before the era that rose it into international prominence. My father's paper in Madison subscribed to *The*

Washington Post Daily Times news service. So all of the great old reporters of *The Washington Post* were in the paper I was reading every day. Whether it was Don Oberdorf or George Wilson covering the Pentagon, or Woodward and Bernstein, it was always something that I was familiar with. From that point where it started to rise, and that was around the time of the Pentagon Papers and Watergate.

Ben Bradlee was not a cynical

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DAVID MARANISS:

Well, I think that even though he had some blind spots, what carried him through all of that was curiosity, and a love of the story, and a love of something new. So, you know, that's what any journalist needs, is to not be—He was skeptical, he did have that bullshit meter, but he wasn't cynical. That made all the difference and that's what carried him through. So many journalists grow cynical and that's a deadening experience. Ben Bradlee never really was. What's next? That's what Bradlee wanted to know. What's the next story, what do you got? Yeah, he was always looking forward.

Ben Bradlee at the office

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DAVID MARANISS:

Oh, definitely, I was chewed out more than once. The glass office—what was it the north wall? I'm trying to remember. I think it was called the north wall, but that might be wrong. Anyway, you always saw him in there, it was a little bit of a fishbowl experience. You could see those walled offices from virtually

anywhere on that 5th floor. When I'd go in there he was always doing the crossword puzzle. Which he did throughout his years, you know, from the time he was busiest to after he'd retired from being editor and moved upstairs. He was always doing crossword puzzles. He wasn't mad at me, but he was passing along Mrs. Graham's wrath. When I was the Metro editor, there was a rash of shootings in Washington. I decided to devote the entire Metro page - much like *Life Magazine* did during the Vietnam era - to just photos of every person who had been shot and killed in Washington DC that year. So Mrs. Graham didn't like it. She thought it was too much of sort of advocacy journalism, I guess. So Bradlee called me in and said, "The lady upstairs doesn't really like this. Goddammit! Why didn't I know more about it?" I don't know why he didn't know more about it. He was pretty pissed off. But he also forgave me within minutes, and that was that.

Newspapers are built on trust

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DAVID MARANISS:

Well, I mean newspapers are built on trust. So yes. Which explains some other things that happened *at The Washington Post*. But yeah, there was always a deep level of trust. You have to trust your reporters. The editors can't go out and interview everybody that a reporter talked to. It all depends on the quality of the people you hire and your communications with them.

Ben Bradlee's trust in Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein

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DAVID MARANISS:

You know, it's easy in retrospect to say that that was foolish. Like everything else in life you learn as you make mistakes. So I think that he did deeply trust Woodward and Bernstein. He knew that one editor at *The Post* did know the names. He was sort of a father figure to Woodward and Bernstein and he– I think he just totally trusted them and didn't need to know that, at that point.

Washington D.C.

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DAVID MARANISS:

One of the key stories of that period was about drugs. You know, the police department was always doing raids on different areas of the city, sometimes irresponsibly, you know, as though that was going to stop the problem. Just locking people up and then releasing them. But it was a constant battleground in several neighborhoods in Washington during that period. No it wasn't unique, this was just the nation's capital. It was only a mile or two from the White House. There was nothing else unique about it. It was going on in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and every other big city in the country.

Ben Bradlee cared more about national news

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DAVID MARANISS:

Well that could always be a sore point between the metro staff and the national staff. Clearly, *The Post* made its reputation with its national coverage. Don Graham, who was the publisher, was very committed to metro coverage. He would read it, I think, more closely than Ben would. It was Don who was known for his Graham Grams. He'd read every story in the paper, just about,

and if he liked it he'd send you a little note. They came less frequently from Ben, and especially in the Metro section. That's not to say that he ignored it, but it wasn't his top priority.

Janet Cooke and the story that never happened

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DAVID MARANISS:

Janet Cooke was a African American, young reporter who looked like Diana Ross and had some writing skill. She came to the Post in the early 80s, I don't know the exact date. She worked on the weeklies, which we had then, which were zoned editions. She was very ambitious and wanted to work her way out of that into stardom. You know, she was a fairly fluid writer. Not a particularly impressive reporter. She had— I wouldn't call it a magic, but she had a way about her that was appealing to many people. She had done some reporting, interviewing psychologists and social workers and others about the heroin epidemic - if you want to call it that - in DC during that period. That's what got her interested in developing some personal aspect to the story.

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DAVID MARANISS:

It was a story that people were talking about. The larger issue of heroin on the streets of Washington then. I was not her editor. And I only knew about it a few weeks before it ran. I didn't think it was plausible. There was one small part of the story that I didn't believe. And that was, that she said that Jimmy was a Baltimore Orioles fan. There was no baseball team in Washington then.

A young Black kid in that part of Washington was not going to be an Orioles baseball fan. He would have been a Washington Redskins football fan. As somebody who's steeped in sports, it just rang so wrong to me that it made me question everything else about the story. I wasn't the only one. Courtland Milloy was suspicious of it, two of the investigative reporters, Jonathan Newman and Ted Gupp were. We all had questions about it right as it was running. Unfortunately, you know, my only sense of guilt about it is that I allowed it to get caught up in internal newspaper politics.

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DAVID MARANISS:

There was another reporter who was one of my reporters, named Neil Henry, who was brilliant. He had spent that same period writing a series called 'Down and Out in Baltimore and Washington', which I had thought of as inspired by Orwell. It was just so much better and deeper than Janet Cooke's piece that later, I was upset that Janet Cooke's piece was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and Neil's wasn't. That caught everything up in the internal politics. Even before the piece ran, and as it was running, I wasn't involved in any of the decisions, but I was the deputy Metro editor and I told Bob Woodward that I had questions about it. We've talked about it a lot over the years because it obviously had an effect on both of us. It didn't in any way affect our relationship, but it was an unforgettable few weeks.

Integrating the *Post*

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DAVID MARANISS:

He had started that long before I got there. But, like most newspapers, *The Washington Post* was miserable at bringing in women and African-Americans in the old days. Ben did bring in the first wave of African-American reporters and was fairly well committed to that. You know, I think that his instincts were good on issues of race. But there was a lot that he didn't know.

The aftermath of the Janet Cooke incident

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DAVID MARANISS:

You know, it was explosive. The city went nuts. The mayor denied that this could have happened and challenged *The Post.* Many other people in the city in the African-American community were curious about whether this really could have happened. I was considered an embarrassment if it were true. Which, I think, led to some of the skepticism at *The Post*, as newspapers tend to do. At least in the public face, responded standing by the reporter and the story. Although there started to be some more internal questioning. Not perhaps as deeply as there should have been. You know a little bit is foggy to me but I remember that *The Post* lawyers had her notebooks in a safe, I think. And it was only after the scandal broke, when it turned out to be fake. Or, when the first questions about it, the day that the Pulitzer Prizes were announced, that the lawyer came to *The Post* with those notebooks. I was one of the people that started leafing through them.

The *Post* protecting its stories

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DAVID MARANISS:

Luckily it didn't come to that. That would've been even more of a trauma and scandal, in a way, If they'd gone to jail to protect a phony story. That's an unanswerable question. Generally speaking, the history of *The Post* is, they'll go pretty far. Including to jail if need be. You know, that's another way to look at it: what would Janet Cooke have done herself, in that situation? I think she probably would have folded. In that sense, who knows?

Janet Cooke winning the Pulitzer

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DAVID MARANISS:

I didn't think it was a great story. I thought something else should have been nominated. I was pretty upset about the whole situation. But I didn't want to make it look like an internal political dispute, so I bit my tongue to some degree about it. But I was not happy about it. Well when it won, immediately it was a disaster. First came a report from one of the schools she claimed she went to, that had no record of her. Then from that point it was a blur for me. I was deeply involved in the unraveling of the story.

Exposing Janet Cooke

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DAVID MARANISS:

Ben took her first. Maybe to lunch or something and started talking to her in French. Her French was barely passable, if even that. At the same time, Woodward and I and a few others were going through her notebooks and

examining some other things. And I was already skeptical, but the notebooks made it clear to me that I could see things in them where a—I think it was a psychologist that she'd interviewed and talked about the possibility of a youngster being addicted to heroin. And just the clues started adding up. So it didn't take long for us to realize that it was a fraud. It was just a question of getting her to fess up to it. Well eventually, after Bradlee had gone through the French quiz with her, several of us went into the story conference room, and Woodward was pounding away at her, as was Tom Wilkinson who was one of the editors, and a few others.

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DAVID MARANISS:

No. She was holding strong in her lie. Everybody left, except me. I knew she was going to spill the beans as soon as I was alone with her. I was waiting for everybody to leave. And it had nothing to do with anything between the two of us, I barely knew her. I knew that just by showing the slightest bit of empathy for a person in a situation where they're completely fucked and their life is over—And I had that empathy. I had no empathy for what she'd done, but I have an empathy for every human being. So, you know, I just turned to her and said something like, "Janet, I admire how you held up against that, in the face of…" I don't know if I said 'admire' but, I made it clear to her that I knew. That I wasn't being judgmental about her as a human being, but about what she had done. Just by that, that she would collapse. Because she was ready to. I don't take full credit for it. I think she was ready to in any case.

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DAVID MARANISS:

It was both a strategy on my part, and a real emotion that I had. Which was, you know, I'm watching somebody who was a pathological liar in an impossible situation. I wouldn't want to be there. And also just holding up to Woodward. That's not easy! And she did. Not particularly well, but she never caved. There was a bit of 'good cop/bad cop' I suppose between the two of us. Which is kind of partly reflective of our personalities in any case. Also it was part of what we were doing there.

Moving on after Janet Cooke

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DAVID MARANISS:

I think as journalists, you deal with pathological liars once in a while. You have a whole scale of - when you interviewed hundreds and hundreds of people who are lying or telling a little bit of the truth, more of the truth, and then the ones you can almost totally trust. So, I had never dealt with a colleague in that situation before, but I'd certainly dealt with people who were liars. I tended to be a little different from most of the staff in reaction to it. There was a lot of feeling that the world was crashing down and *The Post* would never be the same, and it was a blight on all of our reputations. That last one I agreed with to a certain extent. It wasn't going to change our worlds, it was going to change her world forever. *The Post* would recover from it. It would be a learning experience for a couple of years, something that people would constantly bring up. And it would be something for—For Ben Bradlee, it would be part of a documentary, you know, decades later.

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DAVID MARANISS:

I hope it's not in my obituary but it could be, I don't know. I played a pretty small role in it. But in any case, all of our lives went on, and hers didn't, in a sense. And so, there was part of me that was always feeling that. There was kind of a lynch mob mentality in the paper. At once I understood it, but I also have a deep aversion to lynch mobs of any sort. So even if it's something that's justified, it makes me really uneasy. And that was sort of my reaction to the whole thing.

Ben Bradlee's reaction to the Janet Cooke scandal

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DAVID MARANISS:

That was Ben at his best. I mean, he acknowledged that he's screwed up, that we'd all screwed up, and let's get the truth out. That is Ben Bradlee. He wants the truth, so there was no holding back, there was no cover up, there was no attempts to do anything but give the ombudsman, which *The Post* had a tradition of allowing ombudsmen do whatever the heck they wanted anyway. In this case, he said, "Talk to everybody, write it the way you want. We're not going to edit it for content. We'll publish the whole thing." That was terrific, I thought, that Ben did that. It was as long as some of my stories. It was really long, but I think that it was very well read. One of those stories that people did read to the end, if they had any interest in newspapers and what had happened.

Janet Cooke and creative tension at the *Post*

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DAVID MARANISS:

Well, you know, things are never 100% one way or the other. So she was a pathological liar, that's at the root of everything. There are such liars in every profession. They come along every once in a while. I think that the conditions at *The Post* then undeniably made it a little easier for her to get away with it. I think that part of it was her personality and attraction as this beautiful, young, African-American woman, in a period where the paper was trying to promote diversity. She showed some talent. She also wrote a story that qualified in that horrible cliché of *The Post* as a 'holy shit' story. I never really liked that phrase. I think it demeans stories. But that story sort of fit into the superficial definition of that. All of that made it easier for her. And that was part of— You know, *The Post* also had this other cliché that was 'creative tension'. That you'd have this competition between talented people who could hate each other's guts but it would make everybody better, or competing. Whether *The Post* had more of that than any other major institution, I don't think so. I always felt very collegial there.

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DAVID MARANISS:

But, nonetheless, I think that Janet felt that she had to do something extra to rise. And so, I think all of that made it somewhat easier for a pathological liar to get that story in the paper. And the other thing was, it hadn't happened before. It's the same as when people talk about Vietnam. Vietnam in some sense happened because there had been no Vietnams before that. The paper

really hadn't experienced a trauma of a pathological liar before Janet Cooke. So once that happened, the odds of it happening again diminished enormously. But it happened once. Watergate was incremental, it was hard reporting, drip by drip by drip. They did make a few mistakes, even in their reporting of Watergate. It developed as *All the President's Men* as this sexy, glorious story. But the work itself was just hard work, day after day, by these two young reporters. Completely different.

Trusting your reporters

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DAVID MARANISS:

After it ran—Bob can speak to that better than I can, but sure there's a—I think that goes beyond Watergate. I think that any newspaper … If you don't trust your reporters and stand by them, you've got nothing. Yes, maybe the Watergates and the effect of trying to defend that controversial story that the government was denying is similar. Perhaps that's the way he was thinking of it. But, I wasn't.

Janet Cooke brought shame to the *Post*

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DAVID MARANISS:

Well there was a week or so of anger. I would say anger more than anything else. Part of it seeped over to what I described as the lynch mob mentality. That was at the extreme. There was a depression and anger about this great newspaper that had been taken down several notches by something that

shouldn't have happened, but did happen. There was introspection, anger. I can't get inside Ben Bradlee's head, but I know that it wounded him. It wounded Bob Woodward. I think those two in particular, the two who had made the paper in so many ways.

Janet Cooke wounded Ben Bradlee

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DAVID MARANISS:

Yeah – I think that what happened did wound Ben Bradlee. He'd gone through such glorious times. This was the real first difficult mark on his career, I would say, in many ways. One that he knew would have some effect, over the course of decades, on him. And would be part of any story about him, to some degree. Not long after the scandal broke, there was a meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington. And my father, who was the editor of the *Capital Times* in Madison, came out for that. I remember him coming back to our house afterwards and saying he'd had a talk with Ben Bradlee. And how much he admired him for holding his head high during that whole experience, with all of the other editors there. Some of whom certainly were gloating about bringing the *Washington Post* down a notch. He admired Ben more at that moment than at any time before that, for the way he dealt with it honestly.

Don Graham's reaction to the Janet Cooke scandal

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DAVID MARANISS:

Ben offered to resign. Yeah, Don Graham backed him completely. That was another important moment in *The Post's* history. I thank God he didn't fire Ben Bradlee. He didn't –no one fired Bob Woodward either, although I think it did have an effect on Bob as an editor. His future sort of went in another direction.

The *Post* and the African American community

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DAVID MARANISS:

I mean, I think that we had some terrific reporters who understood that community deeply. I'd say Courtland Milloy was at the center of that, but there were others who understood it. But I think that, you know, it was a predominantly White male culture then, so most of the top editors were White males who had very little experience with the African-American culture. With a few exceptions, including the editor of the piece itself, Vivian Aplin-Brownlee, and the Metro editor, Milton Coleman. So I can't speak for either of them, in terms of the dynamics of how they understood the story. But the larger editorial guidance of the paper was White males, and they had no clue. Ben Bradlee was an amazing human being but he had flaws like all of us. I would say that his understanding of the nuances of Black culture, when the Janet Cooke scandal broke, was one of his flaws. But a lot of people are like that.

Race and the Pugwash Conference

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DAVID MARANISS:

Pugwash was an annual gathering of the top editors of the newspaper. The—you know, for Style, Metro, National, Sports; and the deputies for each of those. The AMEs, and the deputy AMEs for the whole paper, plus Ben and Don Graham. You'd go away for a few days and, I don't know how productive they were, to be honest with you. I guess it was a bonding experience and it was largely White male. I know there was one experience at one of those that Ben said something that rubbed some people the wrong way. He called, I think it was Tom Wilkinson, the hardest working White man he'd ever met or something. And Milton took offense to it. I don't think Ben understood what that would mean to an African-American, to hear it that way.

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DAVID MARANISS:

I think it was benign, in a sense, but also reflective of a lack of awareness of Black culture. Ben was totally aware of race and its importance. I think all of his instincts were progressive in that regard. But, you know, he came out of a, you know, Boston Brahmin culture. The newspaper industry was heavily male. He was a macho guy. I think that he– he liked a lot of what he saw, and believed deeply in improving race relations and improving everything at *The Post*. I just think, you know, some… like most White males, he was unaware of some things and how it would look, or play, or sound.

Ben Bradlee's relationship with JFK

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DAVID MARANISS:

I don't think it was unprecedented. I mean if you study Joseph Kennedy and Arthur Crock at *The New York Times*, Crock wrote his press releases for the guy. There's a long history that's much less benign than Ben's relationship with Jack Kennedy. I mean, they— Their friendship grew out of coming out of a similar culture, similar geography, similar ages, similar sensibilities. WWII experiences. They both had this charisma. So I don't think that Ben really carried the water for JFK so much as a friendship. Perhaps he was somewhat protective. Although he would say in his own books that there were a lot of things he didn't know about what JFK was doing. But I do remember Bradlee saying, "It's okay for a journalist to fall in love with a politician once in their life." Maybe that was his rationalization for what happened with him.

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DAVID MARANISS:

It's also an acknowledgment that we're all human. There are certain people we like and certain people we don't like. As long as you keep your journalistic integrity through that, it's okay. So I've never followed that pattern myself, but I never really held it against Ben Bradlee. And I also think that the times changed. For better or worse, you know. There was less of that small town Washington atmosphere where journalists and politicians would schmooze that much together. The culture changed. Human nature doesn't really change but the culture changes around it. That's my philosophy about almost everything. So I don't think that Ben Bradlee and JFK are any different than a reporter today, at least a reporter with Barack Obama. But the culture changed around it, in so many different ways.

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DAVID MARANISS:

I mean, first of all, there's no secrets anymore. You can't keep anything out of the public realm. In those days there were a few big newspapers and wire services, and the three networks. Now there are millions of Twitterers. Everything is public today. Or possibly, or probably. So that's changed. The ethics have changed somewhat. For serious journalism there's more of a sense that you, you know,for better or worse, can't get too close to sources, particularly the politicians. And so, I think it's a combination of both journalistic ethics and the culture changing that made that difference.

Publicizing politicians' private lives

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DAVID MARANISS:

Well in my experience, it was Gary Hart. Again, it was *The Washington Post* and *The Miami Herald*. It was one of our reporters who, at a press conference, asked Gary Hart whether he'd ever had an affair. That question had never been asked before at a public press conference of a presidential candidate. It was the *Miami Herald* that, when Gary Hart said, "You can tail me if you don't believe me, that I'm not fooling around." And they did, and they discovered Donna Rice. And that blew up. Perhaps that was an inevitable part of the changing modern culture. I think that to some degree we've progressed past that, but it was a new Puritanism along with the misconceptions of what Watergate meant in terms of investigative reporting. Whether it meant you look into people's sex lives or not, and whether that's relevant. Then from

Gary Hart it intensified tenfold with Bill Clinton, who ended up getting impeached for his personal affairs.

The public's distrust of the government

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DAVID MARANISS:

Well I think that Vietnam and Watergate combined led to a long period of—somewhere in the fine line between skepticism and cynicism about politicians. You know, that they were liars, that you couldn't trust the government. That what they said was reality was not the reality. And that you constantly had to look deeper to get toward reality. But I don't blame those two events, or the response to them, for the irresponsibility of some reporting after that. In other words, you can't say that because of Watergate, that justifies looking into the sex lives of somebody if it has no bearing on their public performance. That's a slippery slope. So I think that the culture did change because of Watergate, and Vietnam before it.

David Remnick called Ben Bradlee a "dangerous editor"

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DAVID MARANISS:

Well I think Remnick meant that in the best possible sense. Which is that, for all of – you go back to Bradlee and JFK and the closeness of their relationship. But Ben Bradlee basically wanted the press to be independent, not beholden to any other institutions, a voice that was essential to searching for the truth. And if that meant dangerous, that meant fearless, is the way I would put it. I

think that is Ben Bradlee's legacy, that he created an atmosphere of fearlessness among his staff. And also pride in what they were doing. And I think that lifted the entire industry of journalism for all the period that he was around.

Ben Bradlee was fearless

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DAVID MARANISS:

He always told me it came from that period when he had polio when he was a kid. He was alone for a year, lifting weights and building up his upper body. And that somehow changed him and gave him this light inside of him to be fearless. That he overcame that. I don't know whether that's the reality or not, but that's what he told me and that's what I always thought.

Ben Bradlee made his own luck

00:43:11:00

DAVID MARANISS:

I'm a baseball guy, and Branch Rickey said, "Luck is the residue of design." So of course there was luck. He used to say of Woodward that Woodward was born with a horseshoe up his ass. So was Ben, to that degree. But you also make your luck, and he made it through his accomplishments.

Ben Bradlee's persona at the office

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DAVID MARANISS:

I mean everybody wanted Ben's adulation. There was a whole crop of young editors who wore the same shirts that Bradlee wore. Which was kind of odd for journalists to wear fancy shirts like that with the white collar and the striped… And you know, of course, I think that any great editor should walk through a newsroom all the time and Ben did it, and he taught a lot of us how to do that. And the twinkle in his eye, the gleam if you had a good story. The question of what's next, what are you doing - all of that. You fed off it. Journalists need that, and he knew how to do it.

The style section

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DAVID MARANISS:

Oh, he loved gossip! Most journalists do. Ben as much, or more, than anyone. So—but it was more than gossip; it was part of the progressive side of Ben to take a woman's page and say, "That's old school. We're going to do something new." He wanted a section that was well-written and dealt with the world in all of its many aspects. And he helped create that. It was his baby. He loved the Style section. You know, some part of it was gossip with reliable source or whatever. There was always some measure of gossip in it. It was also some of the best writing in the newspaper there. I've always thought of *The Washington Post* as a writer's newspaper. And so Style was just one of the many places you could write. And yes, it was his creation and some of the best writing was there. But there was great writing in Metro, Sports, and in the National staff. And Ben encouraged that. And so any journalist who didn't want to just be, you know, a nuts and bolts reporter, but wanted to lift it

somehow, would've rather worked at *The Washington Post* than any newspaper in the country. And certainly more than *The New York Times.*

Sally Quinn and the style section

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DAVID MARANISS:

You know, Sally Quinn, Ben's wife, was the master of that, and he helped create the atmosphere for her to do that. Where you're combining gossip, serious journalism, and the Washington society subculture all in one, in ways that are impossible not to read. Certainly that's part of his legacy. When you talk about *The Post* as a writer's paper it's broader than the Style section.

Ben Bradlee made journalism fun

00:46:33:00

DAVID MARANISS:

Bradlee was the panache. Woodward wasn't panache, you know, as much as I love Bob. Carl wasn't. It was Bradlee. But he helped create this bubble for all of us. Yeah, it was part of his swagger, it was that it was fun. You can't overstate how he made journalism fun. I don't think that most of the average reporters at *The New York Times* felt that way. So, you know, even when you talk about creative tension and the pressures of *The Post* and all the great reporters, still Bradlee allowed you to think of this as how lucky we are to be doing this. You know, people don't go into journalism for the money. *The Post* paid better than the average newspaper, but it's still not where you get rich.

The psychic pay reward was great. And Bradlee helped make it that way. So it wasn't drudgery.

The rivalry between the *Post* and the *Times*

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DAVID MARANISS:

Well, there are a lot of levels to that tension between *The Post* and *The Times*. *The Times* was the global newspaper. It was the national newspaper. It had a longer, deeper reputation than *The Washington Post. The Post* was like the younger, little brother, in some ways. Also, Bradlee was not a New York guy. He'd come from Boston and Washington, not New York. And both Boston and Washington feel this - not necessarily animosity - but that everybody in New York thinks they're the best at everything, whether they are or not. Then the 'Old Gray Lady' vs. this young, vibrant place. I know for all the years I worked at *The Post*, I liked many of the reporters at the *New York Times* and I hated *The New York Times*. I got no better joy than beating it, drubbing it. And out-writing it, and out-reporting it. Bradlee was at the heart of that. He's a very competitive guy. His best friend in the world was Edward Bennett Williams who lived off competition, fed off it. In everything in life. Ben Bradlee was pretty much the same way. Who do you want to beat? You want to beat *The New York Times*. And that's the way we felt.

All the President's Men

00:49:14:00

DAVID MARANISS:

Jason Robards is a great actor, but nobody's Ben Bradlee. I mean, I wouldn't want to try to play Ben Bradlee. Bradlee's better than Robards. Compared with Redford and Dustin Hoffman. You know, even a great actor like Jason Robards doesn't quite have the panache of Bradlee. But what I mostly think about when I see the movie, is a love of the pursuit of journalism. Some of it is very close to the reality, some of it is a little more mythological, but all of it has the sensibility of reminding me why I wanted to be a journalist. That's the newsroom that I came into in 1977. It's pretty much the same, where you had operators who answered the phones, and left you paper messages. It was even before answering machines. Where you heard the clickety clack of typewriters.

00:50:15:00

DAVID MARANISS:

The place was a mess, and there were cigarette butts on the floor. That's the Washington Post that I came to. I've probably watched *All the President's Men* 20 times in my life. I get a thrill every time. It evokes mostly the love of the pursuit of a story. That's what I get most out of it. So I never get tired of seeing that. It reminds me of why I wanted to be a journalist in the first place.

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