CARL BERNSTEIN INTERVIEW
THE NEWSPAPERMAN: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF BEN BRADLEE
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

CARL BERNSTEIN
Reporter, *The Washington Post*
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ON SCREEN TEXT:

The Newspaperman

Kunhardt Film Foundation

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Carl Bernstein

Journalist, *The Washington Post*

Getting into journalism

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

I was a terrible, terrible student who was doubtful that I was going to graduate from high school. I spent most of my time at the pool hall and my father could sense that I at least could write a little bit and pass essay exams though nothing else. He got me an interview for a job as a copy boy at T*he Washington Star*, the towns afternoon paper, and I took one look at that

newsroom and I said that's the most amazing thing I have ever seen and this is what I want to do, and it took me about four more, well I was still growing, and it took me about four more months of knocking on the door there to get hired until I got a little taller. I went to work in August of 1960.

The newsroom

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

First there was this commotion the likes of which I had never seen. It was purposeful chaos and you could see the purpose of it when five times a day, and the first visit that I had, and I was being shown the newsroom by the guy who was interviewing me, and the paper had just come off the press and it was warm, and it was on a dolly and he handed me one with a red streak down the side, the final edition. And I as a kid had served, I had a paper route with *The Washington Star,* and here was the other end of it and I had read newspapers since I was a little kid, and it was just uh that was it.

The Washington Star

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

The Washington Star, it was a better newspaper than *The Washington Post* at the time. It also was an old fashioned newspaper in terms that *The Post* wasn't, in terms of having great characters who, you know, hung over from World War II as well as some of the greatest reporters in the country. David Broder covered politics, Mary McGrory, I was her favorite paperboy, Hanes

Johnson, great, great reporters. So, what I got right away was they allowed copy boys to cover local civic meetings. And the local civic meetings turned out if you went to cover the La Droit Part Civic Association, you quickly discovered that was the Black civic association, and if you went to cover the La Droit Part Citizens Association that was the White one. And so right away this is my 5 years at *The Star* bracket to Civil War by exactly 100 years, so the question of race and the legacy of the Civil War was very much a part of the news and everything we did. I think that too figured in the way I looked at journalism and at reporting; almost everything we were covering unless it was watching a nun kick a football for some kind of back to school feature.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

Race was an element and it was compelling, but also *The Star* was interesting because the way I got the job my father had been the organizer for a left wing government workers union that had been red-baited during the McCarthy era. The reason that he had me go to *The Washington Star* and interview there, was his contact there had covered a strike by his union with great fairness whereas *The Washington Post* coverage by its government columnist had red-baited the union. *The Star* had a sense of truth and accuracy and regard for real fact that *The Post* did not have at the time. That's when Bradlee came, when Bradlee came to *The Post* one of the first things that you could see, it was like a cleanup operation of this legacy of *The Post* which had great things like Herblock, great writers, great reporters, but the management of the paper, it skewed politically in a way that the beliefs of the

publisher and the management bled into the reporting of the paper in a way that was noticeable.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

At *The Star* it was an article of faith that we didn't do that, and we regarded *The Post* as infected and almost toxic with this politicized, even though it was politicized in a way that we probably all agreed with.

Uncovering the truth

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

So, there came very early these great reporters who had a regard for getting to the—Woodward and I both, I don't know if your interview with Woodward if you used this, but both he and I have used this expression, "the best obtainable version of the truth." This notion of "the best obtainable version of the truth," I don't know which one of us first said it, but it goes back to what I learned at *The Star*, and that was the difference between the two papers and I think your question is what I got right away from these people when I was sixteen years old and these folks, you know, the youngest of them were 22 and 23, and most of them were in their forties, but this was a part of their being and their makeup, and I don't think I romanticize it.

Starting at *The Washington Post*

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

I did 5 years at *The Star*, they made me a reporter in the summers. I dropped out of college and they insisted that I finish college to stay a reporter, and there was no way I was going to finish college. So, I left *The Star* a failure because they would not let me — I did not want to stay a dictationist, which I was and a kind of part-time reporter, half a reporter and half a dictationist, didn't want to finish college and I went to New Jersey, the assistant city editor of *The Star* became the editor of the paper in Elizabeth, New Jersey. I went up there for a year with him and I won a bunch of prizes, and got hired by *The Post* the next year in 1966.

Ben Bradlee's appointment to the *Post*

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

That was one of the reasons I wanted to go to *The Post* because of what Ben was starting to do with the paper. You could see it, and again, *The Star* wasn't going to hire me even with whatever prizes I had won or whatever because they wanted me to graduate from college, and when I got hired at *The Post* I believe I was the only non-college graduate to have been hired there, certainly in the 1960's.

First impressions of Ben Bradlee

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

First it's important to understand that he wasn't totally in charge of the paper yet, he was struggling to get total control of it, especially from those who

were responsible for this continuing slant or bleeding of, particularly on local news. The news just wasn't straight enough yet in *The Washington Post* and at the same time it was becoming and had become a better paper than *The Star*. You gotta look at all kinds of things including the sclerotic management of *The Star*, the diminution of afternoon newspapers, and *The Post* had a bigger staff. But my first impression for *The Post*—of *The Post*, and I don't know how much of this had to do with Bradlee, but it was like a goddamn insurance company.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

I couldn't believe it. Cohen knows this story. There was a moment. I'd started as a copy boy and I worked in a place where… I mean, it was a little bit like the front-page thing. People hollering "copy" all the time, and copy boys running, me included, to grab a piece of copy. There was a night during Watergate, and I think it was maybe during the Agnew story that you and I were doing together. A guy named Jack Lemon, who I'd been with at *The Star*, was the news editor, is that right? He hollered "copy," and I jumped up instinctively to — I was the only person in the place that even recognized, I think, what that was. Nobody ever hollered "copy" in *The Washington Post* newsroom.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

There was decorum to the place that was foreign to me. The editor of the paper, a guy named Russ Wiggins, who had been a favorite of the Meyer family, was still the editor and was still holding on. Also, the local news was

still under the control of a guy named Ben Gilbert, who I'd known from my childhood. He was the city editor during my childhood and a friend of my parents until my parents testified before an Un-American committee, and then he wasn't our friend anymore. But his son had been my closest friend growing up for a while. Gilbert was probably the person responsible more than anyone else for this bleeding of… into the news columns of opinion, or point of view.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

That's not to say that the most important thing in some ways that a reporter or editor does is to decide what is news, and I think *The Post* might have been better than *The Star* in some ways about what was news, but how they covered it locally was something else again. But there also was—Gilbert had become the Assistant Managing Editor or something for local news, and so there was a guy named Steve Isaacs who was the City Editor and hired a whole bunch of us. Then he hired Len, he hired, I don't know, ten, fifteen of us. And we were kind of known, and I was the last of the pack, maybe, as "Isaacs' boys." So, there was… I really didn't see Bradlee. I didn't meet him when I was hired.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

I was hired by Isaacs and then I came in for a meeting with Ben Gilbert, who assented to my being hired. Asked about my parents. And… But then, it was clear within a day or two, I can't remember it all exactly, but that striding through the newsroom, short sleeves, you know, rolled up, the famous look,

the hair slicked back. I guess Ben must have been in his mid-forties in 1966—was this galvanizing figure whom you sensed was shaking this place up.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

But there was also a kind of magnetism about him on the newsroom floor that was unlike anything I had seen. At *The Star*, I was kind of mentored by an amazing City Editor named Sid Epstein, who also had a physicality and a thing with dress. And he and Bradlee couldn't be more different in many regards and yet they both had this kind of magnetism that drew everybody in the newsroom to them. They dominated the newsroom, and Bradlee did this in a way that was just extraordinary. I have to say, there was a glamor to Bradlee you knew partly from the tale of his life, but you also sensed it with this physicality and his hands-on way of running the newsroom, which was apparent already.

Ben Bradlee's intimidating presence

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

Never forget that fear also enters into the picture, and I think it's true of particularly reporters in their twenties who have this huge regard for this towering figure, but I definitely think a healthy fear was part of it. Only after Watergate, I believe, did Bradlee begin to socialize with and integrate his life with members of the staff. And he was very much like Sid Epstein before in that regard. Sid never had really anything to do outside the office with

members of the staff. I don't think Ben had very much to do, certainly not with people on the local staff, a few people on the national staff, but even there I don't think socially there was an integration. I think that that came with Watergate and after Watergate.

Ben Bradlee's persona

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

I think it's part Brahman, part sailor, and part theatrical. I think that he consciously developed a persona that was real, but I also think that– that he was smart enough to know that this wasn't all his– his natural bent. That there was a theatricality to some of it, but it became who he was and it was a natural evolution for him and particularly, I think … I don't know what he was like at *Newsweek*. I think more and more as his dominance and role in the journalistic culture of the city and the country became greater, that forcefulness that came not just from intellect but also from instinct, principle, physicality, theatricality. I think it all had this kind of perfect meld that was really unlike anything that I'd ever seen.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

The principle part of it is really important. Simple fear is much too simple a concept for what he did. He loved news. He loved the news, but rooted in that was a regard for the truth that was absolutely extraordinary. And I don't know how naturally he came to that, given the history, which he wrote about and talked about himself with his closeness to the Kennedys, with the way

Newsweek covered news, with his role in the Paris Embassy as a spokesman, so I don't know the evolution. And I think his time at *The Post* from the first days that he got here, and maybe partly because of what I described about this bleeding that was apparent. Some of this bleeding came from Phil Graham.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:
I don't think there's any question about that, and it came from the Meyer family as well, this remarkable family, but I don't think this was their strong suit. It's funny when you think of Don Graham. Don Graham eventually went there in spades off to the other side. That's neither here nor there but—Don took non-advocacy to an extreme that I don't think Ben would have embraced. I think there was a different understanding of what kind of advocacy Ben came to stand for because it was an advocacy, but it was a journalistic advocacy based on this idea, the best obtainable version of the truth. I mean, he was the perfect extension of that ethic and ethos and belief.

Ben Bradlee's friendship with JFK

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CARL BERNSTEIN:
I think too much of historical revisionism about Ben is based on a mis-assumption that, in his relationship with the Kennedys, he knew of Jack Kennedy's affairs. I don't believe he did. He said he did not, including the affair with his sister-in-law. I'm prepared to believe that partly because at *The Star*, at the time, we didn't know about it either and we were doing all kinds

of investigations of Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson at the paper at the time of the assassination of Kennedy. Certainly, nobody at *The Star* – Sure, we knew about Kennedy when he was single and ran around town with George Smathers, but I'd take Ben at his word.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:
So that I think, of all things, there has grown up a myth about Ben that goes maybe too far to the other side. But yes, he was close to the Kennedys, and it was impossible, even in 1966 to separate his glamor, in some ways, from Kennedy glamor. I think it was impossible. That came gradually, but there was still…He was wearing some clothes figuratively and literally from that experience. I also think that what he first saw at *The Washington Post* and this thing I'm describing about this bleeding of news and opinion, and I might be exaggerating it a little bit. You should talk to some other people about it. But I think he was mightily affected by it, and I think it probably led to some introspection, either conscious or unconscious.

Ben Bradlee's intuition

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CARL BERNSTEIN:
The other thing we haven't mentioned is Bradlee had the best bullshit detector or anybody I've ever met, period, whether it's personal, whether it had to do with the news, he got it. Every once in a while, Woodward and I would have a story, and we really knew we had it. His bullshit detector was a little too sensitive. We would fight him, but–but he had this sensitivity, both

about people bullshitting him and reportorial information that was bullshit that he was damn near unerring about, and it also—it was like a mechanism in him. I mean, he'd go like this. You'd be talking to him, and you'd be 15 seconds into the conversation, and he says, "Come on, Bernstein. That's it." "Ah, fuck. He's got me."

The *Post* newsroom

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

In terms of Bradlee, I felt maybe a sense of outsider-ness, certainly, and the people that were hired in the Bradlee era were almost all Ivy leaguers. They are a few that were not, but by and large, they went to Ivy League schools. Some of that preceded Bradlee actually at *The Post* too. I've got to think about my self-perception at the time in terms of … One of the things about *The Post* newsroom that was different than *The Star, The Star* had a kind of camaraderie that transcended age, position. I mean, every Saturday night after the Sunday paper had been put to bed, 25, 30 of us would go to somebody's house. And we would stay there drinking and talking and having the time of our lives until 2:00, 3:00, 4:00 in the morning.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

Nothing like that went on at *The Washington Post*, but what did go on among Issac's boys and the younger reporters on the local staff at *The Post* was deep friendships developed… among about 10 or 12 people. My friends might have been two or three I was really closer with than the others, but

nonetheless, there was a sense of this group of us that. In that sense, I did not feel apart. Whatever the Peck's bad boy reputation came from, it probably was justified in the sense of a kind of erratic performance in some ways, which is that I kind of wanted to do what I wanted to do.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

And if I didn't think the assignment was something that I really wanted to do, I would try to get rid of that assignment, do it in as perfunctory a way covering a meaningless court hearing and then get back to the long feature I was working on that I really cared about. So I kind of had my own agenda, in a way that I did not at the start, because I… By then I'd become known a little bit as a kind of writer, a kind of stylist. There were certain things I was interested in covering, and I did not want to do as many of the duty coverage assignments with the kind of energy and time that others might have wanted. There also was, I'll say in my own defense here, there is a myth attached in some way which is, I had migraine headaches, up until from the period till I was 24, and I had them in the first years at *The Post* still.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

And one day when I covered the district building, it happened not infrequently, I'd lay down (because I got a migraine, it was terrible), and the city editor came down, Isaacs came down that day and I was on the couch like this, you know, and I think, maybe, you have to ask other people, but that incident I think became mythologized, perhaps. I'm probably the worst judge of my own reputation in terms of the reality of what was going on at the time.

But I was—Peck's boy, if I was, I was good enough to have gotten the top assignments. You know, within a couple years I was covering the district building. I covered the courts, doing investigative series, was—but in terms of an erratic aspect, absolutely. Erratic meaning, I want to do what I — what motivates me and I didn't necessarily agree with the agenda of the duty coverage. And I'm sure that that contributed to whatever view of me there was by the management.

The Vietnam anti-war movement

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

He liked holy shit stories. He liked attention. He had a great weakness, journalistically, and that was that he later confessed to, and that was not understanding the power or the importance of the anti-war movement. And those of us who covered the anti-war movement, both sensed it and resented it. It came to a head several times probably with the great demonstration at the pentagon that Norman Mailer wrote *Armies of the Night* about. Bob Kaiser and myself, and there was a group of us, I'd say six, eight of us that covered demonstrations together. The chief demonstration reporter was local side covered them was a guy named Paul Valentine. He would put together the main – he would write the main story, there'd be six of us listed at the bottom who had contributed to the story, but it often would carry Valentine's name.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

And those of us who covered these demonstrations understood both the dynamic, the texture, I think the effect in some ways of these demonstrations, culturally, that Ben was really, not blind to, but he didn't really get it. And so, the march on the pentagon, which turned violent and was the first of the really violent demonstrations. Bob Kaiser and I were in the front. And we got pushed back by the bayonets, soldiers, and marshals, and it really turned bloody, and we retreated into the pentagon.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

And I guess it was into, I don't know if it was the pressroom, and we were literally like under tables, you know, because people were rushing the building, and we were inside and we were dictating back this scene that was unlike anything that we had observed. And Bradlee thought we were exaggerating. I mean, it was apparent from the story what was used and what wasn't. And he thought we were somehow wearing it on our sleeves or that we were exaggerating what was happening, and level of violence and the provocations, and particularly the behavior of the marshals. And the next day, Bradlee saw it on television, and he said, "You guys were right." But then it –and I can't remember the chronology of all this, but it sort of kept happening.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

And finally, when— and the other great demonstration that was so different than the others, was the one where the Vietnam vets threw their medals over the wall, John Carey leading them, actually. The first time I met - or saw John

Carey. And it was moving, and beyond belief. And again, I think there was a sense Ben had that we were wearing this thing on our sleeves a little too much. But what really changed him was that Dick Harwood's wife, Bea, got involved in some of the demonstrations as I recall.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

But those demonstrations—and finally, either it was the wives or a bunch of us that told Bradlee and the managing editor, Eugene Patterson, that they ought to go down and look at these demonstrations and get a better handle on them. And they did. And I think they came back somewhat changed, but it took a long, long time. What Ben might have had more of a problem embracing, and this is all speculation, is the notion that really, what was essentially a new left movement that was anathema to where he came from.

Ben Bradlee and the New Left

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

It was not Washington-centric in the way that most political movements are or have been in our time, that really a lot of it came from elsewhere in the country. The radical elements of it particularly came from elsewhere in the country, Weller, man SDS, those. And there was a violent element that would be very hard for anybody to embrace, that was fused in some way with the mainstream movement, that you couldn't totally separate everything. And I think that was repellent to Bradlee and his experience.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

There were plenty of older people who were involved in this movement, and it became a mainstream movement. That's the importance. He didn't get that it became a mainstream movement that was changing the culture of the country, as well as the politics of the country. I think he was slow to recognize that. I mean, I don't know what Ben thought or wrote later, or talked about in terms of that demonstration of the Vietnam Vets. Because I'm trying to remember … because I remember coming back from … I remember this gray wall and I remember these guys throwing these medals up there and I remember those of us covering and breaking down.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

And I wonder how Ben internalized that, I have no idea. Ben had a notion of—citizenship… That… and conduct that perhaps was not consistent with his rather isolated view from inside the newsroom of what was going on in the streets. I mean, I think he was isolated until people in his family and others started saying, "We're going out there in the streets."

The *Post*'s coverage of the race riots

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

What's so strange about that episode is that he once told me … I can't remember if it was after Watergate and we had become close or if it was earlier, about covering that demonstration. And I said, "Bradlee, I was in the pool," and the reason was my parents were left-wing activists and most of

their activities were about desegregating the public accommodations in the District of Columbia including the restaurants, which downtown were segregated by local law, and the swimming pools, which were run by the DC Recreation Department. So we had these wade-ins, we called them, where White and Black kids, especially in Anacostia—where we would go on—a Black kid and a White kid, as I remember it, we would hold hands and we would go into the pool and then they closed the pools down, they drained the pools.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

In fact, when I was a kid in Washington, you couldn't go swimming in the summers because either they'd drain the pools because they didn't want Black kids to swim with White kids or there was Polio. So you couldn't swim in the summers. Ben Gilbert, who would have been the city editor then, actually… Yeah, he would have been a city editor. He became a city editor during the war I think. And, yeah, Gilbert must have been Bradlee's boss, actually. The way *The Washington Post* saw itself on great moral questions. And we mustn't … *The Post's* point of view wasn't wrong, and *The Post* had these incredible, great editorials. Whereas *The Star*, we used to say at *The Star*, we'd look at our own editorial page and we'd go, you know, because we used to call it the view with alarm page. "We view with alarm."

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

That was about as strong as anything got in terms of *The Star* really having the kind of advocacy for the kind of—in desegregation matters, the kind of

really active advocacy that should have been on the editorial page. But in the case of *The Post*, it flipped over into the news in a way, again, that was unnecessary. You could cover these demonstrations, you could cover these events without abrogating journalistic principle simply by—if one of the reasons that the reporting form the south in the Civil Rights Movement was so powerful, is that the great reporters sitting at *The Times*, people at *The Washington Post*, Haynes Johnson at the Washington Star, others, that the reporting was so great and so powerful, was because it was descriptive, but it was not advocacy in the sense than an editorial would have been.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

There was too much in *The Washington Post*, as I was saying earlier, that was a kind of— and particularly if you'd grown up in *The Washington Star*, you just looked at it and you were taken aback. And I think maybe Ben was… I keep coming back to that… That was partly his mission, was to get *The Post* past that.

The bond between Ben Bradlee and JFK

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

New England, Massachusetts, war, women, a kind of swaggering glamor that both had. Intellect and advantage from class, money. That would be the list off the top of my head. And fun. Fun would be a real part of it. A kind of joy about doing vocationally what you loved. Now I went to Kennedy's, almost all of Kennedy's press conferences when I was a copy boy and a dictationist, and

one of the things I could see about Bradlee and about Kennedy was the joy of the experience.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

When you watched Kennedy at the state department auditorium in those press conferences and the use of words, and the fun he was having, and tweaking the press a little bit, you could see the same when you watch Bradlee on the floor. You also got a sense of both… Both these guys liked being on a big stage, they enjoyed it. They were thespians as well as naturals.

Maintaining a professional distance from sources

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

One thing Sid Epstein said to me once, I was surprised. He sent me up to The National Press Club to pick up some picture up there or something. He said, "Kid, don't ever join that thing," said, "I'm not a member. Take it from me, no one ever-" You know, it was about don't get too close. Bradlee, also as I recall, had not joined the National Press Club. That there was this idea, don't get too close. Again, I think Bradlee came to realize he had been too close. It also was pretty easy, temperamentally, intellectually, for him not to be too close to the Lyndon Johnson people. If you look at the dynamic and who they were and who he was and what had happened and all the rest. I think the circumstance also made it easier in the Johnson years, which is what we're talking about here.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

But the closeness…You know, there was an elite of, you know, the gridiron crowd, of senior national reporters in the town, and maybe a dozen of them were, if you include figures like Joe Alsop, who were columnists or 15 of them, who kind of were insiders in a way that– in a way that was obvious and un-journalistic. I don't know that I ever regarded Ben quite that way. Because he had never come to my attention when he was the bureau chief, for instance, at *Newsweek*. When he came to my attention was when…after Phil Graham died and Katharine chose him, and I could see what he was doing.

Ben Bradlee at *Newsweek*

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

When Ben was at *Newsweek*. Am I right in thinking that *Time* was so much bigger and more important? Let me go there. In the world that I knew, as a teenaged apprentice in the newspaper business, learning it was that *Time Magazine* was the big deal. *Newsweek* was not. *Newsweek* became big after Bradlee had left. It was not in the same league of importance in the pecking order of national journalism. The pecking order of national journalism, as I saw it as a kid growing up at *The Star, was*: *The New York Times*, *The Washington Star*, *The Washington Post*, yes, with an asterisk, *The Chicago Tribune*. And every morning when I was a copy boy we would get the bundles of papers and we would dole them out.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

It was pretty obvious what counted in journalism. News Week was not at the top of that list in the way that *The Times, The Post, The Star, The Chicago Tribune*, *The Los Angeles Times* were. I think in the telling of the Bradlee narrative, the popular narrative, some of that may have been forgotten. That *Newsweek* and being a Bureau Chief of *Newsweek* it might have had a kind of cache in official Washington. But it was not a player on the scale of the daily newspapers or even close to *Time Magazine*. So, I think there is a famous quote from Bradlee, "I'd give my left one." Is that right? Well, he sure would. Because *Newsweek* was— I wouldn't call it an “also ran,” but Bradlee was the figure there. *Newsweek* was not the Holy Grail by any means. He transcended that bureau.

Establishing a relationship with sources

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

You can make too much of a reporter not going to lunch or dinner with the people he's covering. Yeah, you can get too close, but I would highly recommend, sometimes, going to lunch or dinner with the people you're covering and getting to know them. My experience as a reporter has always been to let the person you are dealing with tell you his or her story, and to do that requires an established intimacy, actually. Not necessarily great distance and the intimacy comes from respecting that person telling you his or her story.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

When you see it's an obvious lie then say, "You know, my understanding is X, Y & Z, and you're not telling the truth here." But give that person a chance to tell that story because you learn more by letting that happen then running in and firing off a bunch of hostile questions. Other reporters do it different, but that's always been my approach. And so I think that the notion of instinctive immediate adversarial opposition to the person you are covering—look Woodward and I did not have sources in Watergate among Democrats who knew anything. The people we talked to and established the kind of—you see it in the movie of *All the President's Men*, a kind of intimacy even with those sources came from respecting them.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

They worked for Nixon. Some of them remained very devoted to his politics. They might have been horrified by what they eventually came to see. But back to that best obtainable version of the truth notion. That's what you are trying to get from people. So I'm not sure that I subscribe to—I think that the Ben Bradlee 'Tale of Closeness' may have been, I don't know enough, may have been exaggerated. Whatever the case, he got a lot of very good stories. And so did he miss the biggest story of all, which were Kennedy's Secrets?

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

And I also don't think he got all these stories just from Jack Kennedy, incidentally. Did he miss the biggest story of all, which were Jack Kennedy's Secrets because he was close? I don't know. It's a really great question. And what were the secrets? Obviously, the women were the secrets—were part of

the secrets, and his physical health was the other part of it. And then comes the question of, was Kennedy waiting in his presidency for re-election to do the things that he should have done or wanted to do in a first term and that was part of the story. You'd have to look at Bradlee's coverage to see whether it reflected any of that doubt.

Trusting your gut

00:51:56:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

I think you know when you don't do the story and you know the story is there. And I think with both Bob and myself in Watergate and in the years since, we have each wrestled with those questions at various times. And there's something in your gut that you just know, you know, I need to go with this story or I gotta talk to my colleagues about it and see what they say. I can't just hold on to this myself. It's tricky, it's very very tricky. You know, one of the things—and it's part of Bradlee's greatness is—back to this question of what is news and going with it, he made a lot of courageous decisions about what is news. Maybe some of that I keep suggesting goes back to looking at some of his earlier decisions and doing a gut check, I don't know.

JFK's personal life

00:53:23:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

The fact that I didn't know when we had a team of five people at *The Washington Star* at the time of the assassination looking at all kinds of stuff

going on involving women. Because of Bobby Baker, because of Lyndon Johnson, because of what was going on, and Smathers who had been involved with Kennedy and women early on. I gotta tell you, and I knew a lot of what this team was doing. Jack Kennedy and women, no suggestion of it in the White House, and look at Clinton who had this reputation, deservedly so, beyond womanizing—I mean, a compulsive disorder, which perhaps Kennedy also had. And listen to what Hilary Clinton was saying that she thought that him being locked up in the White House golden cage would make it impossible. When you think about it, it's pretty extraordinary what was going on at the White House, and I don't know who knew about it.

Ben Bradlee transforming the *Post*

00:54:52:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

Bradlee with this incredible sense of the possibilities of this newspaper in perhaps ways that the Grahams and the Myers had never really envisioned in journalistic terms of breaking out of a certain journalistic mold, and the kind of journalistic mold that other papers— other great papers were still inhibited by, and I'm thinking now the Style section, for instance. I mean, that particular piece of genius goes to Bradlee every bit as much as Watergate or the Pentagon Papers do. The decision to go ahead on the Pentagon Papers is a kind of no-brainer if you're an editor. I think Bradlee had a sense, an editor's sense, of a modern newspaper that no editor of his time had, with the possible exception of the people at *The Herald Tribune* in New York before Bradlee.

00:56:12:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

That thereto-magazine journalism had come to define a newspaper and create a nontraditional newspaper and expanded the boundaries of daily journalism. And so the invention of the Style section was a huge contribution to expanding the notion of what a daily newspaper could be, and that came from Bradlee, not from the Grahams or the Myers. Pentagon Papers was a no-brainer for an editor. You go with the story. Watergate required incredible decision-making on all kinds of levels including how do we edit this story? How much can we say? How do we respond to the pressures we are under? And that required great collaboration between Ben and Katharine.

00:57:26:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

An unusual kind of collaboration between editor and publisher, I think, but their relationship, I think you need to go to their respective autobiographies and memoirs. That their— Katharine had a very girlish side. I got to see it when I was married to Nora, and we would see Katharine socially, and Katharine would talk about her days at *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and being a young female reporter there, and it was like a whole other person. A side of which you did not get when you were at that mansion on R Street and around four tables were the likes of Henry Kissinger and Joe Alsop, and this one and that one.

00:58:30:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

This was something else, and this girlish side of Katharine, which I don't think too many people got a chance to see, was really fabulous. And I think Bradlee picked up on that. I think that– that they both were able to exhibit part of their youthful side in what they brought professionally and what they brought intellectually to their respective positions, and somehow there was some free zone there. Not sexual. Male female, yes. But great admiration for the persona and the life experience of the other. And I think that Ben's recognition of what Katharine had been through with Phil Graham was profound, and he probably got as good or better look at her transition into being a publisher and a world figure, because she was a publisher and publisher of this particular newspaper, and the Pentagon Papers is the crucible in terms of that experience between them.

The Pentagon Papers

01:00:30:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

There are perhaps heroics in, putting out an APB of how do we get hold of these papers. But any editor would've given his left one, to use a Bradleeism, to get hold of the papers and follow *The New York Times*, once that injunction was in place. Etcetera, etcetera. That's an easy decision from the point of view of an editor. In terms of the pressure that the publisher was under, it was enormous. Absolutely enormous. And particularly because *The Times* had already taken the big risk. Now this was about solidarity, it was about principle, *The Post* was never gonna get credit for breaking the story, the way *The Times* had.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

But it was defining. It was defining for her as a publisher, and it was defining for *The Post* as a kind of news organization that was committed to a set of principles that met the test of the day. This was a new test. This was not about tradition, necessarily. This was a new place of the rubber hitting the road. And it was a declaration that *The Post* was gonna, next cliché, put the pedal to the metal, whatever. And go forward here and get out quickly as they could, and once that decision was made, and she wrestled with it. I have no idea except what I've read in, I've never discussed the Pentagon Papers really with Katharine.

01:02:30:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

I think what she wrote about it is pretty good. Bradlee is a pretty convincing guy. And there's also an upside to this, to be cynical. And the upside is you do the right thing and you come out on the winning side of this thing, and you have established something for what you believe in and the future foundation of this newspaper as a pillar of certain values in the country and business. And I cannot imagine that Ben would not have made some sort of presentation that included those points.

01:03:35:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

And I think that, that sensibility and the understanding of risk and at the same time I know Ben Bradlee could not have walked down the street and lifted his head high knowing he had those papers and his newspaper

wouldn't publish them. And I know there is no way that he would not have conveyed that to Katharine Graham. And does she write it quite that way in her memoir? No. But I'll betcha that somehow he conveyed that for him to walk down the street, and you too Katharine, somehow that— I can't believe that wasn't conveyed, knowing both of them.

The Watergate break-in

01:04:40:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

I was the chief, one of two, chief Virginia correspondents for *The Post*, meaning that I traveled around the state, I covered the legislature, I lived in Richmond, the capitol, during the legislative session. It was a wonderful, wonderful job. And that day, the Saturday morning, I had come into the paper because I was writing a profile of a great, progressive politician, Lieutenant Governor Henry Howl of Virginia, who was running for governor. And I was probably a little late with handing it in, which is why I was there on a Saturday morning. And there was this commotion over on the city desk, and I went over to see what it was, and it was about this story that five guys had been arrested at the Watergate, wearing rubber gloves and business suits.

01:05:49:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

And I said to myself, "Jesus, looks like a much better story to me for right now than Henry Howl. Henry Howl can wait." So I went into Harry Rosenfeld, the city editor and said, "Harry, I'd like to, how bout I make some calls on this?" And I was kinda known as somebody who can get information on the phones

pretty good. And he sorta shrugged his acceptance, I think in the movie *All the President's Men* he might say something about, where's this other story? I don't think that, I don't remember that happening, I think he just sorta said, "Go ahead." So, I started—and I heard that Woodward was down at the courthouse for the arraignment of these guys. And then I started making calls based on their identifications down to Florida where several of them lived.

01:06:52:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

And I also called the Watergate and talked to some people there, in a hotel. And started to come up with some information. And then the next day, Woodward and I were told to come into the office and continue work on the story.

First impressions of Bob Woodward

01:07:27:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

What you see in the movie of *All the President's Men,* and it comes from the book, about the way Woodward and I looked at each other and viewed each other at the time is accurate. He hadn't been at *The Post* very long. There was a view of him that I shared in the newsroom that he was a kind of brown-noser who… There also was a kind of split in the newsroom at the time among those who were really active in The Newspaper Guild, of which I was one, and those who weren't. I think Woodward was distinctly in the latter category, and all of us worked… If you're gonna do something in this business, you gotta work 10, 12, 14, 16 hours a day, and we all did that. Any

of us who wanted to get ahead knew you did this, but you also put in for some overtime.

01:08:33:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

I don't think Woodward put in for the overtime. We wouldn't put in for eight hours overtime a day, but we still had a sense of "the management" and "us." I think that was part of the coloration, but also that Woodward hadn't been there very long, that he was being treated favorably in a way that the rest of the troops were not. We would sometimes go to lunch in the park in McPherson Square, a bunch of us, and we would sit and eat our lunch together outside. And I remember in the previous week or two a bunch of us talking about Woodward, and with a kind of, "What's this all about that this guy is? He's writing about these rat droppings in restaurants, and they're not those great stories anyhow, and they're on the front page."

01:09:42:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

Just a sense that—and he sure as hell wasn't out there in the park with us having lunch. So I think there was a kind of… He had established himself very early as different from the rest, and that included people like Downie, Hoagland, you know, were considered great reporters, but there was something different in the way he conducted himself that we didn't know about or something, and something different in the way he certainly was viewed by the city editor, or by Harry Rosenfeld, and maybe by Bradlee. I don't know if there was a sense of that or not, but something was conveyed that was different.

01:10:52:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

And it was not—Whatever the difference was, it was not widely considered admirable. That's not about the dynamic between the two of us. That is the …Let me think of the word. That's the predetermined assumption that I and some others made, and Woodward had made the assumption about me that is written in *All the President's Men*, and he wrote that particular paragraph about long hair, and maybe kind of a hippie, and counter-cultural, et cetera. It turned out very quickly, really quick, that the predetermined caricature that each of us had of the other was woefully inadequate. So very quickly, the dynamic between us developed of using our respective strengths, complementary skills, but very often surprisingly reversing roles from the predetermined, accepted, cartoonish notion of either of us. We would flip it.

01:12:18:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

I'm supposed to be the really terrific writer where Woodward would come up with a phrase that I couldn't have invented. He's supposed to be the guy that gets up at five in the morning and goes knocking on the door, while I got up at four one morning and waited for somebody to come outside the house. So, there's this constant reversal of roles, and the movie does it fairly brilliantly actually, more perhaps than the book expresses it. And I think that that has a lot to do with why things worked, but very quickly, we developed enormous respect for the abilities of the other as well as very quickly a sense, because we didn't understand the management of the paper. They were way above our pay grade. We understood a little bit about Harry Rosenfeld and the level

of the city editor, and Barry Sussman who made enormous contributions to our work.

01:13:32:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

Bradlee, certainly early on, you know, the functioning—even him and Simons early on, that was above our pay grade. In fact, what Woodward and I shared early on was a view that we were coming up with this information, and we had to be sure that we could get it into the paper, and in a fashion, make a presentation to the editors even before we wrote the story that would get into the paper what we wanted and thought the story was. And sometimes we got sat on a little bit, and so we would become a little more determined. Sometimes we'd use a good-cop/bad-cop routine. I was not usually the good cop. Then, again as recounted in the book, you begin to see the interaction of us at the level not just of Rosenfeld, but of Simons and Bradlee in a way that was very different than it had happened with local reporters before on a running story.

Uncovering the Watergate scandal

01:15:02:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

There are two things to remember. You have to look at a chronology of the stories to see what's happening. In the first days of the story, certainly my belief was that this was not necessarily about the Nixon White House, but that it might well go to the CIA. I think I wrote a memo or I said that. And then, here's where the book, the movie is absolutely fabulous in terms of

showing the larger picture of how reporters work, and you really see it visually. Knocking on the doors and everything takes place at night, and the role of the editors and of the larger institution. But in terms of the progression of the story and our reaction to it, the book is invaluable on this.

01:16:06:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

I'm just saying this to you to take a look at. Because one, it's much more incremental and gradual than the movie conveys. In those first days, a few crucial things happened that are not, I believe, in the movie. One is, there was a conventional— you know, they called it a third rate burglary and there was I think an almost conventional belief that perhaps we—why would they do this? Why were the Nixon White House and these smart folks over there, why would they have anything to do with this kind of thing? And I went to David Broder, who was the political reporter. I had been at *The Star* with him. I said, "David, is there somebody … " I don't know anything about the Nixon White House, "Is there somebody you know who I can call that would have some idea of how this might relate, because I can't imagine it then."

01:17:16:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

So he gave me the name of a guy named Ody Fish. The name is not in *All The President's Men*. He was a National Committeeman for the Republican Party from Wisconsin, I believe. I called this guy and he said, "You know, I was just talking to Bob Dole about this, and I said this must have been one of those 10 cent generals at the White House." I went whoa, what is that about? Then I had the name of somebody who I knew had been, maybe Ody Fish gave me

the name I can't remember, who had been associated with Nixon. During the sweepstakes was among those thought to be Deep Throat perhaps, but who was an invaluable source throughout.

01:18:17:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

Partly because of his great understanding of the White House and the people there. I got him on the phone. And he too said something akin to that. So, that gave us a sense that it was not impossible that somehow, not at the level of the president of the United States, but at the level of the ten-cent general. We had some ideas who the ten-cent generals might be, as we learned more about the White House structure. And that—the role that Deep Throat later plays, also goes in that direction. The movie overdoes the role of Deep Throat in the sense it gives the idea that somehow we were the beneficiaries of these leaks. That, that was the basis of our coverage.

01:19:24:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

The movie doesn't really do it, but the mythology that follows from it. When in fact, mostly what Deep Throat did was confirm information that we had obtained elsewhere, which was invaluable but invaluable also the same way as those two people, of yeah this is what they did, this is who they are. So very quickly— and again one of the great things about the way Bradlee handled this, and Rosenfeld and Simons and Sussman, was allowing a kind—we didn't know where the story was going to go. Again, maybe it would go to a ten-cent general. We didn't know. What was this break-in about

in the first place? What were they looking for? Who knew? There is an incremental-ism to the coverage of this story.

01:20:33:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

All through what we were doing, I'm not sure if you would have that incremental-ism today at most news institutions. I don't know. The sense that if you're dealing with a big investigative kind of thing you gotta wait until you get the whole thing and put it all together. That's not what happened. We didn't know what one story meant in relation to the other, necessarily. We were just, oh here's this GAO report. It's got these people that we know there's a check. This is about money. Let's go with the story of this GAO report. Maybe it's relevant, maybe it will lead somewhere, maybe it won't. So, what's bubbling is very early the White House begins to make the conduct of *The Washington Post* and Woodward and me and Bradlee, and eventually Katharine.

01:21:35:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

But–but really, these two reporters, what do they know? They're local reporters. Most of our colleagues in the Washington Press Core were skeptical or didn't believe what we were writing, including a good number of them in the newsroom, including especially Dick Harwood whom I revered. So, what you talk about, the bubbling up, the denials told us more in some regards than some of the information we were getting. As did the secrecy. When we got hold of that list of employees of the Committee for the Re-election of the president, getting that document was like getting a

classified thing out of the Pentagon. It was held in that kind of awe and secrecy and difficulty to get. We got it.

01:22:45:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

Then we found out about the secret fund. And that started to make some sense about something. That there were projects, whatever these projects were, and that Gordon Liddy had. We found out that Mitchell was among those, John M. Mitchell the Attorney General, former Attorney General, of the United States and Nixon's former law partner and manager of his campaign, that he was among those who controlled that fund. That's about eight weeks in. You'll have to double check the date. Bradlee said to us before we did that story, "You know there's never been a story like this. You're about to say the Attorney General of the United States is a crook," or something like that. Each morning, Woodward and I would meet. By this time we would go to the vending machine room that had a coffee machine and sit down and try to see where we were and what we were going to present to the editors that day.

01:23:57:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

We'd get in before they got there and I think it was about 8:30 in the morning usually. And sometimes we would have talked the previous night or we'd gone out together the previous night to knock on doors or whatever. On this occasion the day of the Mitchell story, and Bradlee had already said there's never been a story like this, blah, blah, blah. I put a dime in the coffee machine, which is what it cost for a cup of coffee then, and I literally felt a chill. Literally, like you hear about, going down the back of my neck. And I

turned to Woodward and I said, "Oh my God, this president is going to be impeached." Woodward looked at me and said, "Oh my God, you're right, and we can never use that word 'impeach' or 'impeachment' around this newsroom, because somebody might believe we have an agenda and we don't."

01:24:57:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

This was months and months before anybody thought of the idea. The fact of what we—back to the ten-cent generals becoming Mitchell and we thought by then that Haldeman controlled it. Whatever this was, something produced that reaction, and we left it out of *All the President's Men*. Rightly or wrongly, it's the one thing we did, maybe a little questionable. We left it out because we knew that *All the President's Men* was going to be published while Nixon was still in office. Even then we didn't want to give in the last lines of the book or something, about Nixon had vowed to stay in office, and that last lines quote Nixon about vowing to stay in office. He said this to the members of the Congress, blah, blah, blah. Even then we kept that out of the book. I don't know where that story goes, but it fits with your question about bubbling. But what we then, even though we had that instinctive moment, then we ceased to believe it was likely because it looked like the cover-up was working.

01:26:24:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

Until the tapes were revealed, it really looked, even up until the Irvin Committee the White House horrors, up until then it really looked like the

cover-up was working. I don't think either Woodward or I thought this was going to result in impeachment then, and in fact we had contracted for a book. And what the book was going to be was to try and unravel this cover-up that was persisting. That was our idea of a book, so that whatever the truth of all this was, maybe we could do some things in a book that we couldn't do in a newspaper. As well as we didn't know where the story was gonna go. But writing *All the President's Men* about ourselves resulted from not having anything substantive to write about, about the story because all the facts had come out during the Watergate hearings.

Attacks on the press during Watergate

01:27:30:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

Very early, the pattern was established that the White House was making the conduct of the press the issue in Watergate, rather than the conduct of the President and his men. And the conduct of the press was also a shorthand for me, Woodward, often a lot of these young guys who were local police reporters know, and in the case of Bradlee, a friend of Kennedy's, etcetera. And that was the mantra. But when we did the Mitchell story, the response was, you know, we always try to get a response from the White House. So I called the white house on that Mitchell story that night. And I got a hold of—I called the committee for reelect, I guess. I got a hold of a guy name Van Shumway who was a communications director. And I read him the story about Mitchell controlling the fund, and said, "What's your response?" And he said "Let me get back to you with that." And he called back a few minutes

later and he said, "The sources at *The Washington Post* are a fountain of misinformations."

01:28:46:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

So I typed that out and I said, "Yes, go ahead", and he said, "That's it! That's our response." I said, "Well aside from this guise you are going off, in our backyard here, this fountain of misinformation, is this story true? Did Mr. Mitchell control those funds, or did those funds exist?" "The Sources of *The Washington Post* are a fountain of misinformation." By then we were really frustrated by it, because it was working, and indeed our conduct was every bit as up for grabs as anybody in the White House. So I had a phone number for Mitchell, who was living at the Essex House in New York. And I called him and he answered the phone, and I told him why I was calling, there was a story in the next day's paper. I started to read it to him, and I got as far as John and Mitchell while the Attorney General of the United States control the secret fund. And Mitchell said, "Jeeeeeeesus!" Just like that.

01:29:47:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

And I got out and read a few more words, and Mitchell said, "Jeeeeeeeeeeesus," like that. Then I got to the end of the first paragraph ... You see, the only thing in *All the President's Men* is this scene that is not as it happened, because it doesn't convey what Mitchell was conveying. That's when the attacks on The Post and the TV licenses and all the rest began. And it was … and again, in eight, nine weeks we'll have to look it up. But from

there on in the level and intensity was what correctly has become the narrative.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

It was one of the few times it got really scared a little bit. And both Woodward and I lived alone. And I decided I didn't want— and we knew that Liddy, by this time somehow I knew that Liddy had threatened to kill Jack Anderson. And I didn't want to stay at home, so I called this girl in my neighborhood who I had seen occasionally, and said, "Can I come over for the night?" And she said, "Okay." and I came over, and she said, "But I have to leave really early in the morning." And I said, "That's okay." And I walked up the street to where she lived, and I said, "Where are you going in the morning?" And she said, "I'm going to Cuba to cut cane with the Venceremos brigade." And I said, "Jesus Christ! That's going to do me a lot of good."

Ben Bradlee backing the Watergate story

01:31:36:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

The real thing that Bradlee is doing at this point is saying, "Get some more stories." And that's really what he's saying. And then you get to the October 10th story that finally makes sense out of the Watergate break-in. That it was just part of a vast campaign of political espionage and sabotage directed from the White House, and the people under the President of The United States to actually determine who the nominee of the Democratic Party for President will be is the tail end of what that is about. The great thing about it was, is

that we were really shaky. And he, I am sure, sensed it. The day— First of all, it was raining like crazy. And we'd had a meeting that morning with Dick Snyder, the head of Simon and Schuster. To sign the agreement for the book, we did not tell Bradlee that part of it.

01:32:45:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

And that's where we were part of the morning. And…We didn't know what to—we knew we made a mistake, but we couldn't figure out what it was. Because they would never have reacted the way they did and denied it. And not a non-denial, but a real vociferous absolutely never before the grand jury. And it took us a couple of days to actually figure out what the mistake was. And we really thought we might well have to resign from the paper. I mean, we talked about it, you know. If this thing goes south any farther and you know, we might have to quit. And to speak of what this means to the paper if— But at the same time it didn't make sense because of what Hugh Sloan has told us. So, Bradlee's instinct was brilliant, which was to stand by the story.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

And when you think about it, it was more than bravado because the story was right. That we had fucked up. We had made an error in the story. But the substance of the story was right. And what I think Bradlee understood was something in here is wrong, but all the stuff is right. And you guys better figure out what the hell it is that's wrong. And let's figure this out. His instinct was so brilliant and to very quickly say *The Washington Post* stands by the

story. It gave us time to figure out what had happened. It was brilliant. And I have no—I can't remember what is in Katharine's autobiography about what the two of them were saying to each other at that moment.

01:34:51:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

We had no appreciation even when we wrote *All the President's Men*. Woodward and I had almost no real appreciation for what Bradlee and Katharine had to go through. We really didn't. It was only later that we began to get a sense of the enormity of— We were fairly egocentric as well as perhaps myopic. You know, we think he's the editor, he knows he's got to go with the story, he's going to protect us because we're right. But there was an incredible and fabulous moment that did convey to us. And that was when the subpoena server came to *The Washington Post*. I got a call from the guard at the desk saying that he has a subpoena for notes and I said just keep him down there, don't let him upstairs.

01:35:50:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

I called Bradlee, Bradlee said, "Hold on a minute, let me get back to you." And he called Katharine and he called me back and he said, "Okay. First thing is, get out of the office. Get the hell out." And I actually went to see the movie *Deep Throat* (1972) that afternoon. And when I got out of the office and he said, "They're not your notes. Katharine says they're her notes. And if anybody is going to go to jail for withholding their notes and not turning them over it's going to be her." That's amazing. I mean, even today. That's an

amazing woman. That's the time, I guess, we most got the sense of how they were really…you know, we had, you know, they really protected us.

01:36:53:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

But I don't think we appreciated it enough. At the time, I mean and Bob probably told you about that meeting he had with Katharine where she says, "Don't tell me never," which is the other and that was on October 10th. That was the day of that story, I think, because I was up at a funeral somewhere. But Bradlee, look … let's not pretend that reporters don't love great stories, so to think that this was some kind of hardship duty that Woodward and I were on is wrong. We were energized. Yeah, two years without a day off or a couple days off and working 18 hour days or whatever it is. But that was no hardship. Let me tell you. And I think Bradlee understood that. Both he and Simons had this sense of energy that we have and they got it.

01:38:01:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

And I suspected extrapolating that Bradlee saw something of himself on a great story here. And—then he did what he was so great at, which was to motivate, protect, deal with a publisher, and the editors in the place. The internal dynamic of the newsroom, which went from what are these guys doing over here to, by the end of it, we got movie stars running around the newsroom. You know, Redford and all of that. It's a long progression over several years that he presided over this thing. And really that's what he did. By the time of the Watergate hearings, he was presiding, not micromanaging.

The micromanaging came from—on the story, came from Sussman, Rosenfeld, some.

01:39:13:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

And managing us more directly. But Bradlee then became the director of all these elements, including — remember, by the time of Watergate hearings, you then have a— it's not just the investigative "story" that Woodward and I are doing to try and advance what's going on. And you are going to talk to John Dean today because at that point a lot of it is me talking to Dean's lawyers, but it's also got 15 reporters in the newsroom covering the breaking story. There was no breaking story to cover at the beginning. There was just what Woodward and I were writing. Now the dynamic of the story itself, the White House, its response, the Ervin hearings that, you know, you literally have 15 reporters on it. Then you've got the National Editor involved deeply. So, Bradlee is doing all of this at once. Is it in *All the President's Men*? No, but is it happening, yes and are we aware of it at this point, very much so.

All the President's Men

01:40:40:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

Howard is not treated well enough in the movie and—and Sussman. We were all together wrong not to insist that Sussman's role be in there. And at the same time Bradlee is Bradlee. And he's not just the beneficiary of Jason Robards. It's the fact that Robards got him. When Robards got the script, he said I can't play Bradlee, he doesn't do anything. And somebody says what do

you mean? And Robards says, all he does is go around and says, "Where's the fucking story?" And of course that's what Bradlee did. And he had fifty ways of saying, "Where's the fucking story?" And fifty ways of beating you over your head. And saying, "where's the fucking story?" And that is the essence of what Robards got.

01:41:48:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

The first great moment of corroboration is Sirica in his courtroom getting the burglars to say they're being paid for their assignments. That's the first great moment, again, because that is the cover up to the White House. Yes, they're covering up, they're being paid to keep their mouth shut as we have implied and reported, and Sy Hirsch also, etcetera. So that's the first of those moments.

Watergate and Nixon's downfall

01:42:27:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

One of the things to keep in mind about Watergate, and I don't know how it figures in this, and I don't know what Ben has said about it, but Watergate is really about the system working. And I think Ben—you go back to Ben as a patriot or whatever. I think we all became patriots because of this experience of seeing the American System work. And I think Bradlee sensed this, that here was the press, doing what we were supposed to do. Here is this Republican appointed judge by Eisenhower, using the— reading our stories, using the courtroom to extract this information. Here is the Senate of the

United States, 77-0 voting to create an investigation on the campaign activities of the president of the United States. Well you can imagine what would happen today. You could never get a 77 vote to the Senate for anything, much less to investigate—the campaign activities of the president of the United States.

01:43:25:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

Then you get Ervin, a Democrat, constitutionalist and a Republican vice chairman saying what did the president know and when did he know it. The tapes, the firing of the special prosecutor and the response, once again, of the system. Nixon won't give up the tapes. He thinks that the chief justice of the United States that he's appointed, Warren Berger, an undistinguished judge on a court of appeals is gonna save his ass, and telling them he'd never have to give up those tapes. And what happens? The Supreme Court decides it has to have a unanimous decision, so there can be absolutely no mistaking that no one in this country is above the law including the president of the United States. And Nixon is made—ordered to give up his tapes. And then you have that leads— what's on the tapes leads to the impeachment investigation, in which the key votes are cast for impeachment, articles of impeachment by Republicans. Really courageous votes by Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee.

01:44:29:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

So it's the whole system coming together, and then Nixon won't resign. And what happens? Barry Goldwater, a great conservative, nominee of his party to

be president in 1964, leads a delegation of Republicans through the White House to talk to Nixon and Nixon says, thinking that he's going to be able to prevail with more than a third of the senate to acquit, which you need 2/3 vote of the Senate to be convicted of high crimes and misdemeanor. And Nixon says to Goldwater: "Barry, how many votes do I have in the Senate?" Expecting that Goldwater is going to bail him out. Goldwater says, "Maybe four, Mr. President, at this point, and you don't have mine." And that's when Nixon decided to resign and he was out 48 hours later.

01:45:18:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

So you were asking about the finality. It wasn't so sure there was going to be a finality, is my point, until Barry Goldwater went down there. It looked like this thing really might get played out in a Senate vote. And — And then when we did the final days, and even that week, we knew some stuff that was going on in the White House about Nixon's instability at the time. Not that it's perfectly reasonable to think that somebody—that his own personal tragedy may be somewhat unstable in that kind of moment. But no, the finality actually came suddenly after Goldwater. You would have thought that he would resign, but he wasn't going to, and we knew he was resisting. We knew that by this point, that maybe Haig was trying to convince him to resign, but it was no sure thing. And then "boom." So that's when the finality came, but no it was not— It was sudden.

Watergate's lasting impact

01:46:37:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

I think it changed all of us. And we all handled it differently. Me, probably the worst for a while there. And—At the same time, there was, I think, we had an understanding, particularly the three of us, of why this thing had worked. I really believe that. And then we —by then Bob and I started more and more to appreciate the role of Bradlee and what had happened, and Katharine. There had never been anything in journalism like this. And in fact, the movie has a lot to do with it, even though *All the President's Men* came out, was a huge number one bestseller, and told this tale that– that we weren't even sure was a tale. I mean, believe it or not. I don't say that to be sounding humble or something. We didn't know that this tale was going to capture the imagination the way it did. We really didn't. I guess by the time the book came out we had a sense of it because of the serialization and– and, you know, a lot of attention.

01:48:15:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

You know, one of the things about Watergate is, I said earlier that everything was incremental in the story. Happily, pretty much everything was incremental, institutionally, and I think with the three of us, and our colleagues, that you got used to it a little bit like getting in a warm bath. You don't get into scalding water. And it– it was tepid when we got in and got hotter and hotter and hotter and hotter and hotter. And the same happened with the… fame stuff or whatever you want to call it. And– and you're able to at some point, and with some of us more difficulty than the others, but you're

able to absorb it. It becomes part of your familiar environment. It's part of who you are.

01:29:15:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

The good parts of it, the bad parts of it, excessive parts of it. The other thing is *The Washington Post*. That Bob and I felt very strongly that *The Washington Post* ought to become a national newspaper to compete with *The Times* on a national basis. And we went to Bradlee, meaning circulation and everything. And maybe we were—This is probably the first time we really were bigger than our britches, or whatever, that we had done anything like this. We went to Ben, and thought this really was nailing it. To have the Pentagon papers you have this. We beat *The Times*. We had this amazing thing happen and there are movies and all of that. Let's be a national newspaper and Ben wanted to do it. Katharine, and I don't know who else, finally said "No." And I think we thought that was a regrettable decision. And I think Ben, am I right? That Ben thought it was a regrettable decision? I think Ben regretted that decision and Bob and I regretted that decision in a major way.

Leaving the *Post*

01:50:49:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

I left January 1st, 1977. Ben was really unhappy about that, angered by it. Those are other tales that don't have too much to do with Ben I don't think, but also the dynamic between Bob and myself at the time. Between Nora,

Bob, myself, etcetera. etcetera. But Bradlee wanted me to write a local column and I didn't want to do that.

President Nixon

01:51:31:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

Nixon, first of all, what we were able to establish and what the Watergate hearings and the White House horrors of John Mitchell's term, showed was an abuse of power on a scale that had never occurred in our history and hopefully never will again. Though the portents are certainly there now. And there's one thing I didn't say in terms of Bradlee and that is my own background. Coming from a left-wing family, parents before the un-American committee, took the fifth amendment, there's a record of that. Early on, I went to Bradlee and said, "Look, you got to understand that my parents have this history. It's liable to come up, and I just want to tell you about it and I want you to know about it. You can look it up in Eclipse or whatever." He said, "Fine, I'm glad you told me." That was that.

01:52:41:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

And–and I might have said something about that—you know, obviously Nixon had a role in the McCarthy period and one thing or another. And so, of all things, it never came up until around the time John Dean was going to testify. A guy who was a source of mine in Lowell Weicker's office called and said, "You're not going to believe this, but somebody came in here from the White House today and told Weicker that the reason for *The Washington Post's*

vendetta is that Bernstein's parents were fingered by Nixon." I said, "That tale is so convoluted because what happened with my parents did not have to do with anything directly by Nixon and yes there are FBI files and all the rest," and I wrote a book about this. What I'm getting at is that Bradlee did not take a minute, said “I'm glad you told me.”

01:53:50:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

Nixon is a tragic figure in that… notwithstanding the fact that he was a criminal president from the day he became President of the United States and even before as we now know because of what he did to undermine the Paris Peace Talks until the day he left. The scale of his criminality as a President of the United States, and what we know of the scale of that criminality because of the tapes. And his view and conduct in the Oval Office. Think about this, one year before the break-in at Watergate to the day, June 17th, 1971, there's a meeting in the oval office. Nixon, Haldeman and Kissinger and they're talking about some documents in the safe at the Brookings Institution that would show that Lyndon Johnson's conducted a war was even more outrageous perhaps than Nixon's.

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CARL BERNSTEIN:

And that Nixon thinks if he could only have those documents out there, they could then blackmail to use the word of the discussion and that what they mean is smear. Lyndon Johnson if only they have those documents. Nixon says, "I don't care what you have to do to get those documents. Firebomb the Goddamn place, break in, crack the safe. I want those documents." And he

then does this over the course of the next thirteen days. He keeps coming back to it. "Did you get those God damn documents? Crack the safe. Crack the God damn safe." The president of the United States one year before Watergate. Haldeman and Kissinger say not a word such as, "Mr. President, this might be a bad idea. This might be wrong." Not a word. So that's what you're dealing with. Yes, Nixon had a remarkable intellect. He had a victim's psychology, and I often thought through the years that really the future of looking at Nixon has to be through perhaps some kind of psychobiography but responsible psychobiography.

01:56:19:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

I remember when I first went to the Nixon Library being very moved by his childhood and awful circumstances of his family, and the loss of a sibling and being in that tiny little cottage. The other thing I've thought about Nixon, this probably has nothing to do with this, but we now know that Nixon was right about the Hiss case. What the left and indeed, his reputation as… being a fabricator and of abusing his authority in some ways before Watergate. It was because of his conduct in the Hiss case. He was right about Hiss, it turns out. It has given me a lot of thought sense. Nixon knew he was right about Hiss. He says on those tapes, "They've been after me ever since the Hiss case." Just something to think about.

Ben Bradlee's legacy

01:57:33:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

Well, it couldn't be more relevant now. Partly because of what I said about the system working. Because what you see now is how broken the system is, how impossibly dismantled even the system seems to have become in terms of the various institutions involved, including the press to some extent. There's an awful lot of great reporting that's going on and has gone on since Watergate including great investigative reporting. I would make an argument that we live in the golden age of investigative reporting. If you went online and you looked at all investigative reporting organizations that are out there in the United States and in countries where despots rule, including in Russia. Great investigative reporting that's been done in Russia.

01:58:29:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

But the big difference to me is, you know, often I ask what if—could this story be replicated today? Obviously, it was a different time but the reporters are there, and the editors are there. The only reasons editors are there are because they've seen Ben Bradlee up there on the screen and they've read about this. If you look at the *Spotlight*, which is like *All the President's Men,* the great thing about *All the President's Men* the movie is, it's not about Woodward and me. The personality in it is Bradlee. He's the only real personality. Woodward and I—What you see through Woodward and me in that movie is the process of reporting. It's not about our private lives, it's not about our personas, it's about our reportorial personas and what I said earlier about the complimentary and flipping roles and all of that. It's really, that movie is about knocking on doors. McDonald's wrappers piling up,

establishing relationships with sources and then Bradlee presiding over all of it brilliantly.

01:59:48:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

So I think that the legacy of Bradlee is there and you see that legacy in *Spotlight,* which is the modern great reporting film, which is about one of the greatest pieces of reporting ever. Again, a powerful institution and abusing its power hideously in the Catholic Church. So—but what is so different today and there's no metric for this. I can't cite a pew trust study to give you numbers but I know I'm right about this. That is that interest in this country by its citizens in the best obtainable version of truth is nothing like it was at the time of Watergate. People in this country, including those in the political system, were willing to be open to fact and the best obtainable version of truth no matter how anathema those facts were to their partisanship, whatever. Political philosophies, totally different than today. Today, people are looking at media in terms of finding and choosing sources of information and stories that reinforce what they already believe, instead of the best obtainable version of the truth.

02:01:19:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

And that is perhaps—you can yell and scream all you want about the performance and the media. I think we've got to also look at the performance and open mindedness of our citizens because, now, you can say while it's brainwashing, it's social media, it's this that and the other. Incidentally it goes both ways. It's not about the Republicans, it's not about the Democrats, but

the predilection to seek out information to buttress what somebody already believes, is for so many people the basic choice in reading, viewing, processing information. That's the breakdown. And I'm not sure that *All the President's Men,* or a hundred movies about journalism can address that problem.

02:02:20:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:
I don't think it's about cynicism. I think it's—never think that journalism is separate from the rest of the culture. That politics or Washington is separate from the rest of the culture. Yes, it's a bubble. Yes, it's dysfunctional. Particularly the congress of the United States, totally dysfunctional, the institution. There's an interaction from the country out there and the people of the country. Washington is not in a vacuum in that sense. This is a two-way street, and the street that the citizens are riding is awful clogged up with a lot of awful traffic jam.

Luck

02:03:21:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:
First of all, there's one thing we haven't talked about, luck. Ben was lucky. We were lucky. Don't underestimate that. I think it's true in what— certainly what happened in Ben's life, it's really true in all our lives that we've been awfully lucky. No matter what the stumbles, Janet Cooke, marriages, all the rest, we still have been pretty lucky, so I wouldn't underestimate that. And I

think Ben had recognized this, incidentally. Bob recognized this. I think I recognized it. Part of that luck is the interaction of the three of us.

02:04:19:00

CARL BERNSTEIN:

You know, I miss him. And— You know, is there a voice that says to me, when I know I'm about to do something, "Bernstein, you're full of shit, you better watch that, you better pull back." I would say that's probably Bradlee's voice. I hope I hear it. And unlike someone in my family, that voice was inculcated, and as well as the voice of, "You know what you're doing out there. Just do what you know you're supposed to do." All of that comes, I haven't thought this through—there have also been through the years struggles with Bradlee and me in our own relationship. And yet, it's part of who I am and that voice is always there.

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