



Ben Bradlee and some of his top editors during a so-called Pugwash in the early 1970s. They were meetings at Bradlee's cabin in the mountains where senior editors talked shop and socialized. The photo also shows Eugene Patterson, who briefly served under Bradlee and later was influential in advancing narrative journalism in American newspapers. Bradlee is wearing a sweater from the then-already defunct *New York Herald Tribune*, an early adopter of narrative journalism. Photo credit: Eugene C. Patterson papers/The Poynter Institute

Pioneer of Style: How the *Washington Post* Adopted Literary Journalism

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Abstract: The *Washington Post* was a pioneer in introducing the literary techniques used by the New Journalists into daily newspaper production. While the New Journalism had evolved mainly in magazine writing, the *Post's* Style section established a distinctive form of feature journalism that for the first time was embedded in daily news routines and practices. Eventually this model was imitated all across the US newspaper industry. Even though the form of news writing has dramatically changed over the past decades, we lack an adequate understanding of how this novel form of news writing has been shaped by organizational, institutional, and cultural variables. Following John Pauly's call for an "institutionally situated history of literary journalism," this study offers a detailed account of Style's emergence and evolution, through a description of the journalistic ecosystem of narrative writing from which it sprang. Based on archival documents and in-depth interviews, this study then outlines the conceptual and strategic origins of the Style section, showing how the staff collected, catalyzed, and percolated ideas that were circulating in the 1960s. The study analyzes the integration of the section into the daily newspaper's production. It identifies factors that shaped organizational practices and created a distinctive subculture in the newsroom, preconditions for creating a space for the narrative news logic to take hold in the US section and its contribution to the expansion of narrative journalism in US newspapers.

Keywords: *Washington Post* – Ben Bradlee – New Journalism – newsroom culture

Prelude: Benjamin Crowninshield Bradlee had just launched the Style section, the biggest and boldest experiment in his young career as executive editor of the *Washington Post*, and it wasn't going well. It was early 1969. Katharine (Kay) Graham, the publisher, was badgering him. Readers were complaining that the new form of narrative storytelling was "in very poor taste."¹ The Style section was buzzing with tension between the old guard of the women's pages (which focused on tea parties and diplomatic receptions) and the young, ambitious hotshots with their counterculture sensibilities. Looking back, Howard Simons, assistant managing editor during that time, described it as "a mixed-up, identity-crisis-ridden, constantly traumatized, and perhaps mismanaged section."² Seven years later, the Style section was called Bradlee's "clearest personal monument."³

The *Washington Post* Style section was a pioneer in many ways. It challenged the notion of segregated women's news, a common practice in the 1960s. It created a mix of entertainment and society coverage that was widely emulated throughout the industry. It combined criticism (art, music, television), opinion pieces, and service journalism, packaged in a stimulating and enticing layout. However, one of its most important accomplishments has not yet received sufficient attention: The Style section's staff deliberately and systematically introduced narrative writing into daily newspaper production. In doing so, the section followed and propelled the interpretive turn in US journalism and brought the narrative techniques of the New Journalism to a mainstream audience. As a result, the section's staff and the Style section transformed journalistic practices, changed news values, and diversified the newsroom culture so that narrative writing was able to take hold in a new environment, different from the magazine and book world where narrative nonfiction writing had experienced a renaissance beginning with the New Journalism of the 1960s. The Style section became a prototype and paved the way for innovations in other newsrooms.

This exploration of the emergence of the Style section pursues two objectives: (1) to provide the first detailed account of the Style section's beginnings and demonstrate that the experiment succeeded only after overcoming daunting obstacles; and (2) to make the argument, through an extensive analysis of internal documents, oral histories, and secondary sources, that the Style section served as a link between New Journalism and a subsequent shift towards narrative writing in the newspaper industry. As a result, the argument is made that the Style section's staff, by incorporating narrative techniques into daily news production, shaped organizational practices and a distinctive subculture

in the newsroom, demonstrating the possibility and feasibility of what I call a narrative news logic in daily newspaper production. Defined, *the narrative news logic* is an interlinked set of journalistic forms and practices that transformed routinized news conventions and established narrative journalism as a legitimate component of daily newspapers.

More than presenting a singular example, then, this study is an effort to historicize the emergence of narrative journalism as, to paraphrase Michael Schudson, a distinct "cultural form of news."⁴ Far from being a fully developed model at its inception, the Style section was brought together in a process of trial and error, reflecting controversial notions of journalistic values, professional practices, and readership expectations. Now that journalistic writing has moved so decisively in the direction of storytelling,⁵ it is easy to overlook how groundbreaking and revolutionary the Style section was when it was created. This study follows the call of John Pauly for an "institutionally situated history of literary journalism."⁶ My interpretation undermines arguments disputing the importance of literary techniques advanced by New Journalists such as Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, and Joan Didion for daily newspapers. Schudson has argued, "the highly personalistic, openly subjective elements of 'new journalism' had relatively little direct impact on the style of the daily newspapers."⁷ In contrast, this study shows that the *Post* staff, by developing a model for narrative writing, created space for personal, subjective, and interpretive writing that incorporated some of the techniques and practices of the New Journalists without giving in to some of their excesses.

This study will proceed in the following way: First I will describe the conceptual and strategic origins of the Style section, showing how the section's staff collected, catalyzed, and percolated ideas that were circulating in the 1960s. Then I zero in on the implementation of the section into the daily newspaper production. Specifically, I will analyze the newsroom culture and identify particular elements that allowed the narrative news logic to take hold in the paper. Finally, I will discuss the importance of the Style section and its contribution to the expansion of narrative journalism in US newspapers.

Developing Style

Against the backdrop of the counterculture unfolding in the 1960s, Ben Bradlee wanted a section that was "modern, vital, swinging."⁸ Style replaced and expanded the "women's section," a motley assemblage of society gossip, recipes, and news for the homemaker. As Bradlee later described the thinking behind launching the new section: "We had become convinced that traditional women's news bored the ass off all of us. One more picture of Mrs. Dean Rusk attending the national day of some embassy (101 of them)

and we'd all cut our throats. Same for dieting, parties that had no sociological purpose . . . or reporting teas, state societies, etc."⁹

This was the time when second-wave feminism was gathering momentum and when the women's movement was taking shape.¹⁰ Women were flooding the workplace and for the first time in US history, a majority of women had a job outside their homes.¹¹ The women's pages of the *Post* had made tentative steps towards reaching a more diverse female audience (instead of focusing solely on the wife/homemaker role), but the section also maintained and reified sexual segregation.¹² For Bradlee, who certainly was not a feminist, yet was attuned to the changing gender roles, the women's pages were out of sync with the broader cultural climate. In his autobiography, he wrote:

Women were treated exclusively as shoppers, partygoers, cooks, hostesses, and mothers, and men were ignored. We began thinking of a section that would deal with how men and women lived—together and apart—what they liked and what they were like, what they did when they were not at the office. We wanted profiles, but “new journalism” profiles that went beyond the bare bones of biography. We wanted to look at the culture of America as it was changing in front of our eyes. The sexual revolution, the drug culture, the women's movement. And we wanted to be interesting, exciting, different.¹³

What seemed so well defined from the perspective of looking back, however, was a more complex situation involving different, at times competing goals. Bradlee clearly wanted the women's pages to disappear. In a memo he wrote to publisher Katharine Graham and his top editors he suggested that the “Women's section as it is now constituted be abolished.”¹⁴ However, if the representation of women and their interests was one concern, there was also the big issue of improving the “readability”¹⁵ of the paper. Prior to *Style*, items such as reviews (art, movie, theater), television listings, news stories about the cultural scene and features, and similar non-political articles were scattered throughout the paper.

If Bradlee was the visionary of the *Style* section, David Laventhol was its mastermind. He was one of Bradlee's favorite assistant managing editors and had experience in designing newspapers to look like daily magazines, first at the *St. Petersburg Times*, later at the *New York Herald Tribune*. In the fall of 1968, he visited the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Detroit Free Press* to gain insights about their new lifestyle and women's sections. Comparing the *Post's* content to the other papers, he noticed that the society coverage in the women's section held up well, while coverage of newly developing areas, such as fashion, consumer issues, entertainment, and pop culture especially needed improvement. The biggest takeaway from this reconnaissance trip was that

Laventhol saw great potential for a section that was tentatively called *Life Styles*. “What surprised me,” he wrote to Bradlee, “was the limited thinking that is going on in this area.”¹⁶ He reported that the *L.A. Times* was thinking about innovation, too, but had not developed a concept beyond combining the entertainment with the women's section. Not mentioned in his report but widely known during that time was the fact that the *L.A. Times* had begun experimenting with the idea of making a newspaper more like a daily news-magazine.¹⁷ Supported by publisher Otis Chandler, who had taken over the family business in 1960, and conceptualized by Editor Nick Williams, the *Times* promoted interpretation and analysis.

Laventhol praised Dorothy Journey of the *Detroit Free Press* as “probably the brightest person in the US about conventional womans [sic] editing,” but added, “that ends it.” The only really innovative new section in US newspapers, in Laventhol's estimate, was a Monday supplement by the *Chicago Tribune* called “Feminique.” Laventhol concluded his original report to Bradlee by saying, “I'm still trying to bring thoughts together, but I think that Fashion [a preliminary title for the section] in its original sense—the current styles of life—is what is the key to the whole thing.”¹⁸

Focusing on popular culture and capturing the zeitgeist of the 1960s was a relatively new concept for most newspapers of this era. They were slow in adapting to the changing cultural climate and the growing competition of television. Nevertheless, innovations in newspaper content and design had been going on for years and in a variety of places. Of particular importance was the *Herald Tribune*. Before it ceased publication in 1966, it was a laboratory for new approaches to daily journalism. Part of its innovative spirit was to bring techniques from magazine journalism to the newspaper. John Denson had led the changes after taking over as editor of the *Herald Tribune*, bringing to the new role his success in improving the standing of *Newsweek*, where he closed the gap between it and its dominating competitor *Time*. He made the *Herald Tribune* more accessible and readable by emphasizing that the format ought to accommodate the news, not the other way around. He introduced catchy headlines, typographical innovations, horizontal instead of vertical design, and allowed for plenty of white space to focus the reader's attention. The content got more sparkle and the writing became more interpretive. James Bellows, his successor, toned down the sensationalism but followed Denson's approach to make the paper more modern, more sophisticated and more fun than any other US newspaper of that era. Bellows created an atmosphere that gave young, untested reporters, such as Tom Wolfe and Jimmy Breslin, free reign to experiment with storytelling formats.¹⁹

Under Bellows's reign, the *Herald Tribune* emphasized elements of news

reporting that indicated the shift towards a more narrative style of journalistic storytelling: describing people as characters not sources; using sensory detail for descriptions; telling stories instead of writing news reports.²⁰ One of the young staffers in Bellows's newsroom was Laventhol. "I don't think they ever said, 'Hey, we're in the television age; we've got to put out a different kind of newspaper,'" Laventhol later told a historian. "But they had things like a news summary on page one. They had . . . a tremendous amount of rewriting—a lot more like a magazine in many ways than a newspaper."²¹

The *Herald Tribune* ceased publication in 1966, but Laventhol carried over some of its philosophy to the *Post*.²² The first indication this new approach to reporting would require a particular style of writing can be found in the prospectus, the detailed outline of ideas and suggestions for the new section Laventhol sent to Bradlee. Later the prospectus would also circulate among the Style staffers. Laventhol wrote that the new section would contain "[r]eports and evaluations [that] would probe the quality of this life—and the kind of things happening elsewhere that affect it."²³ The next section laid out the approach to writing:

People would be stressed rather than events, private lives rather than public affairs. Profiles and interviews would be used frequently. Direct reports, with lots of quotes and hard, specific detail, would be emphasized. The tone would be realistic, not polyanish [*sic*]. Clarity would be the guiding principle of the writing style; it would be bright without being flip; sophisticated without being snobbish; informed without being "in."²⁴

This description is notable because it indicates elements of the New Journalism—the combination of "hard, specific detail" with a "realistic" tone, yet also defines the particular approach of the *Post* and accentuates the contrast with some of the *Post's* potential competitors and the freewheeling experimentation of some New Journalists such as, for instance, Hunter S. Thompson. When Laventhol rejected a Pollyannaish tone, he seemed to push back against other approaches to lifestyle sections with lighter fare and fluffier prose. The other juxtapositions are instructive as well. Even if Laventhol did not mention any specific media from which he wanted to set the *Post's* new section apart, his characterizations can be understood in light of the media ecosystem of the late 1960s. It appears Laventhol wanted to position the new section as different from other models of that era: *Esquire* (flip), the *New York Times* (snobbish), and *New York* magazine (in).

It is important to note that while the New Journalism was not established in name until 1969,²⁵ its practices and techniques had emerged throughout the sixties. It introduced novel journalistic habits of interpretation and "organizational practices that connected writers, editors, and publications," as John

Pauly has argued. "The writers who came to be described as New Journalists styled themselves as interpreters of large social trends . . . , and magazines like *Esquire*, *Harper's*, and *New York* sought the work of those writers in order to create an identity that would appeal to educated, upscale readers."²⁶ The same holds true for the Style section in general and its writers in particular. However, the specific context of the *Post* as a daily newspaper also created a different and distinct iteration of these techniques. Magazines had to plan months ahead to meet their specific production needs. Journalist and scholar Garry Wills described this process as "lead time." He wrote, "The best editors made a virtue of necessity—they learned to stand off from the flow of discrete items filling daily newspapers, to look for longer trends, subtler evidence. They developed an instinct for the things a daily reporter runs too fast to notice."²⁷ The *Post*, of course, had to figure out a different approach. The goal was the same, looking for "longer trends, subtler evidence," but simultaneously the Style section needed to be produced on a daily basis. Laventhol thought that, with a good concept in hand, organizational practices would develop organically. Progress, however, was very uneven in the early phase.

Implementing Style

The first *Post* Style section appeared on January 6, 1969.²⁸ Both in terms of graphic layout and editorial content, the section was a major departure from the past. The first edition of the Style section featured the first woman to be listed on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list. Two days later, on January 8, the front page of Style led with a story titled "Life Styles: The Mandels of Maryland," a profile of Marvin Mandel, Maryland's then-newly chosen governor, and his family.

About 6:30 in the morning, Marvin Mandel, who was chosen Governor of Maryland yesterday, rolls out of the double bed and heads for the bathroom at the head of the stairs (a small bathroom, in light blue tile, with three toothbrushes hung from little holes around the edge of a cup scone, a plastic curtain concealing and also indicating the bath-shower, and a neat medicine cabinet containing a tube of Prell, a can of shaving foam, a slot for used razor blades, and three or four jars and boxes but no medicines, not so much as an aspirin) and shakes off the five hours of sleep which is all he usually gets or needs.²⁹

The story goes on to describe a day in the life of Governor Mandel: when he leaves (at 8 in the morning); when he returns home (at 7 or 8 in the evening), what he watches on TV ("any damn thing that's on"); what he reads (everything from *Time* magazine to the Book-of-the-Month selection); what he drinks ("Bourbon is Mandel's drink, but he rarely takes more than two, even during the conviviality of a legislative session."). As a family portrait

the story also quotes the governor's wife ("He couldn't find a thing in the kitchen") and his daughter ("They are very understanding parents. . . . For instance, they have never set up a curfew").³⁰

The detailed description of the governor's bathroom was so shocking to a wider audience that the story was soon referred to as "the medicine cabinet profile."³¹ Letters to the Editor clearly show that readers were not amused by the new style. "Really now," Cheryl A. Skuhr from Arlington wrote. "Surely there must be more interesting things to write about Mandels other than their type of bathroom!"³² For Catherine Kaufman the article was "cheap and vicious." She called it "a hatchet job 'exposure through intimacy' . . . that should be done on someone who deserves it, not on a man just starting out as a very public figure."³³ And Dorothea Beall from Stevenson, Maryland, added, "Of all the things that I am interested in knowing about the new Governor of our State of Maryland, what is kept on his bathroom shelves is really at the bottom of the list."³⁴

These early reactions indicate that the narrative style was irritating to a large number of readers. They were puzzled that stylistic elements such as descriptions of personal details were part of a story in the *newspaper*. In all likelihood, they would not have been so surprised had this been a magazine story or a fictional narrative. Apparently, this detailed description offended their sense of propriety, revealing a certain cultural tension. Their expectations of *what* a newspaper should report and *how* it should report were clearly upset. The story was novel both in terms of news content and with regard to what Christopher Wilson describes as the *story-form*.³⁵

In contrast to previous profiles in the women's pages, this article was a family portrait, describing not just the first lady (as would have been the customary approach in the women's pages), but the whole family dynamics, including the grown-up children. Thus, the content was a novelty. However, this story also offers interesting evidence that illuminates how the Style section incorporated narrative, documentary techniques in daily newspaper reporting. Thus, the form was a novelty, too. With regard to the story-form, the profile employs an ironic tone, suggesting to the reader that the depictions of this picture-perfect family should be taken with a grain of salt. Signposts of irony are strewn throughout the text,³⁶ but the writer's tone of bemusement reaches a climax at the end: "Assembling in the living room, the Mandel family posed for a portrait, smiling gently and flashing unanimous gray-green eyes. Behind them stood a pair of marble stands topped with ivy bowls, a glass dish of wrapped hard candy by the sofa and, next to the fireplace, a small table bearing a vase of plastic yellow roses."³⁷

This article is an excellent example for showing how the narrative frame

affects the representation and interpretation of the subjects. To understand how radically this approach departs from previous conventions in the women's pages, one can look at a story that ran just a few days before the Style section was launched. Under the headline "Mrs. Onassis Explores Scenic Charms of Greece" the article began: "Mrs. Aristotle Onassis and her children sightsaw the Greek isle of Lefkas on New Year's Day, clambering up steep hills and riding donkeys to view the beautiful scenery."³⁸ No wonder many readers could not believe their eyes when they were reading about the Mandels. Instead of deferential treatment, the story portrayed the mundane details of the governor's life and did not hold back on irony (some readers took it as cynicism). In contrast to depicting the bucolic life of the rich and the famous, this story was rich in what Wolfe called "status details"³⁹ (some of it almost to a fault). The story shows the private side of a public figure, but by using a narrative frame of irony, the author also cautions the readers not to trust everything in this staged setting and encourages them to look behind the façade of the polished politician. A few years later, the Mandels would again take up quite some space in the Style section, and by then, the image of the wholesome family had fallen apart. The governor left his wife for another woman, and his former wife had refused to leave the governor's mansion for five months.⁴⁰

Emphasizing the function of the narrative frame is important in this context, because this story-form breaks away from a traditional news form that adheres to presenting the news in a supposedly neutral way.⁴¹ The two frames differ in their focus. The narrative frame responds to the question, "How do we live?" The news frame, in contrast, answers the question, "What happened?" While the news frame prioritizes a particular event, the narrative frame zeroes in on the context.⁴² The personal point of view (as told through a third-person narrator) of the narrative frame reveals a private life not so different from that of ordinary citizens. In the case of the Mandels, this rhetorical move decreases distance and difference, humanizes the subjects, but also mildly ridicules their personal tastes. This difference in style also reflects an evolution of different news values. The private becomes political and is subsequently scrutinized for consistency with or deviation from the public image. Even though the profile is more descriptive than narrative, it employs typical traits of narrative storytelling, especially the use of status details to craft a character.⁴³ Seeing and describing the world through the lens of narrative technique is very different from applying the "5 W's" approach of traditional news reporting.⁴⁴ As mentioned before, the Style section obviously did not invent the narrative form of news reporting, but the section systematically incorporated the narrative form into daily newspaper production. As such, the Style section expanded the space in which the newspaper offered stories

about people and how they lived.⁴⁵

Laventhol had identified a specific mission for Style: reports and evaluations probing the quality of life. However, living up to this mission on a daily basis proved to be a continuing struggle. About two months after the new section was launched, Laventhol wrote in a memo, “style is. But what it will be continues to be a necessary debate.”⁴⁶ He acknowledged that society news and the political party circle was being covered well, while the section had not sufficiently explored the lifestyles of “lost communities: kids, blacks” as well as “the middle-class suburbanite with a kid who takes pot.”⁴⁷ In a four-month review, the lack of direction and focus continued to be an issue. Laventhol identified the prime reason for this to be a “philosophical” one: “[W]hat ought Style to be?”⁴⁸ The core of the problem was a conflict between women’s news and lifestyle coverage. Neither area was done satisfactorily, he argued. The allocation of staff lay at the core of the problem. “Should we tie some of our top people on time-consuming takeouts,” Laventhol wrote, “or should we aim first at covering the parties, fashion shows and other social and women’s events that always are at hand in Washington—and then pursue other stories only as we have extra staff?”⁴⁹ Quantity of the staff, however, was only one side of the challenge. Its composition—old guard vs. young writers and editors—was the other.

The staff of the early Style section was a “raucous collection of young weirdos and rebels,”⁵⁰ seasoned writers who had distinguished themselves in other sections, and the veteran writers and editors from the women’s pages. Nicholas von Hoffmann had made a name for himself as the voice of the youth and counterculture within the *Post*. He was assigned to cover arts and culture for Style. Myra McPherson was a young mother of two, writing for the *Star*, when one day in 1968 she got a call from Bradlee: “McPherson, get your ass down here,” he said. “I’ve got an offer you can’t refuse.”⁵¹ Michael Kernan, after thirteen years of being editor of the *Redwood City Tribune* in California and a year in London, had landed at the *Post* in 1967. He started out as a city editor, but because of his elegant writing he was assigned to the Style section.⁵² Sally Quinn was hired without previous journalistic experience but quickly rose from a neophyte party reporter to a star writer specializing in what can be described as chatty, yet illuminating personality profiles.

Most of the writers were very much aware that they were part of an endeavor meant to shake up traditional journalistic patterns of reporting and writing. What they were doing “threw a grenade into old-school reporting.”⁵³ Many of them considered themselves to be reporters *and* writers. The goal was to write stories like those written by Wolfe and Talese, the leaders of the New Journalism.⁵⁴ Another key element was “riffing” on a particular topic.

As Henry Allen describes the term, “the true essence of it is a jazz musician improvising on a theme.”⁵⁵ The goal was to ring out the writer’s point of view. For Judy Bachrach, who had started out as a television critic at the *Baltimore Sun*, writing for the Style section was “TV criticism without having to watch TV.”⁵⁶ As a consequence, Style became notorious for its tone, which would run the gamut from snarky to satirical, from ironic to judgmental. At the same time, reporters, especially women, developed a reputation of being insightful and tough profile writers. The combination of Quinn, McPherson, Judy Bachrach, and Nancy Collins was called “Murderer’s Row.”⁵⁷ Graham recounted a conversation with Henry Kissinger, when he said: “Maxine Cheshire [the *Post*’s gossip columnist] makes you want to commit murder. Sally Quinn, on the other hand, makes you want to commit suicide.”⁵⁸

This kind of reporting was not only revolutionary for a “family newspaper,” but also for a city that had been known as the “graveyard of journalism.”⁵⁹ As a result, the evolution of the new section was followed with great interest, especially from Graham. Despite a certain involvement in the development of the new section (Graham sat in on brainstorming sessions), she was not all too pleased once it had rolled out. As she wrote in her autobiography, “I became more and more distressed over the direction the new section was taking, but I was unsure how to criticize constructively something I wanted to improve.”⁶⁰ Some of the stories she found “‘tasteless,’ ‘snide,’ or ‘grisly.’”⁶¹ Then the pendulum would swing in the other direction and she would complain in a memo: “Clothes, fashions, interiors and the frothy side . . . are all taking a hosing . . . I am quite fed up with the really heedless egg-headedness of Style.”⁶²

Graham was actively lobbying for a female editor of the entire section (not just the women’s news), “because as long as you have culture-happy editors who dislike and don’t want women’s news in, you are going to have this situation continue.” And she added, “I can’t see why we have to build ourselves a structure in which we have to fight and plead and beg to get into the paper (and I have never said this before in 5 ½ years) what I quite frankly want to have there.”⁶³ Graham complained to Bradlee so persistently that one time he yelled at her: “Get your finger out of my eye!” As they both recounted later, this was the only heated fight they ever had.⁶⁴ As a consequence, Bradlee bought some time by getting Graham’s assurance that she would not interfere for the foreseeable future.

Readers were not just upset with individual stories, like the one about the Maryland governor. Some generally disliked the new direction. Yet the section also created excitement by offering a fresh take on life in Washington.⁶⁵ A closer look at letters to the editor reveals how polarizing the new section

turned out to be. Edith Fierst, from Chevy Chase, was certainly not happy with the Style section. She wrote:

For many years it has been my ungrudging custom to surrender the first section of the *Washington Post* to my husband when he arrives for breakfast about five minutes after I do, and to read the Women's section instead. Now this tranquil arrangement is threatened, as morning after morning I find nothing to read in the Women's section.⁶⁶

She went on to complain that many articles embraced viewpoints of the New Left, noting that “most Americans do not subscribe to it.” In her view, the “steady diet of articles blaming the ‘establishment’ for everything, often in a smart-alecky way, [is] neither enlightening nor interesting.”⁶⁷ In contrast, in a letter published in response to Ms. Fierst's, Margaret E. Borgers praised the new section as a “daily treasure” and added, “I, for one, am greatly flattered by the *Post*'s innovation, with its implicit statement that women might be interested in something besides debuts, weddings and diplomatic receptions.”⁶⁸ It became obvious that the one-size-fits-all approach of the women's pages had lost its appeal while it was not clear yet what the alternative would be. As much as the Style section was presented as a new approach, it retained some of its patronizing outlook of assigning women a segregated news section. One advertisement for the Style section described the “new” way of looking at women: “Themselves. What they hope for, work for, worry about and achieve. Personal, individual stories.”⁶⁹ In this context, these letters to the editor reveal more than individual attitudes to the Style section. They illustrate a larger trend in the transformation of the readership, highlighting competing attitudes towards women's role in society.

Writing in Style

If newsrooms are always “tribal societies,”⁷⁰ the *Post* of the early 1970s was an example of how a new kind of tribe fought its way in, staking out territory and trying to win recognition. Initially, the Style reporters were either dismissed as unimportant or openly criticized as trivial by their colleagues on the metro and national desks. “We were like the combination of the drama club and the juvenile delinquents,” said former Style reporter Megan Rosenfeld.⁷¹

An analysis of oral history interviews reveals a particular subculture that took root at the Style section and established different ways of reporting and writing stories for the newspaper.⁷² A variety of factors contributed to this subculture. As much as Bradlee demanded impact and encouraged competition (both with other papers and internally between different departments), he was particularly fond of the Style section and shielded it from criticism. He was unrelenting when Style editors did not deliver satisfying results, as a

high turnover of editors in the early years of Style would evidence. However, he also provided a safe zone while editors and reporters were figuring out how to develop a new approach to daily storytelling. Even if the collective vision for Style needed time to take shape, many of the reporters brought a certain mindset to the task—the belief that good writing matters. Their styles differed widely. There were modernist writers, who included Mike Kernan, Phil Casey, and Henry Mitchell; and young rebels influenced by the New Journalism, such as Henry Allen, Tom Zito, and Bachrach. There were idiosyncratic styles, like that of von Hoffmann (provocative) and Quinn (unfiltered). These writers competed with each other but rallied around the notion of being the artists of the newsroom. As much as other reporters in the newsroom criticized them, they also knew the executive editor and a growing fan base recognized their writing. Working for the Style section carried cultural and social cachet. Viewing the Style section as a particular subculture is crucial for understanding how its new kind of journalistic storytelling emerged, survived, and expanded in a potentially hostile environment of traditional newspaper values.

The Style section was embedded in a newsroom culture that was uniquely Bradlee's. Even before he was the famed and glamorous editor depicted in the movie, *All the President's Men*,⁷³ Bradlee governed the newsroom with charisma, magnetism, and a visceral presence that would both instill awe and send chills down the spines of his reporters.⁷⁴ With an “absolute sense of stage presence” he would walk the newsroom, prowling in search for the newest gossip, as his reporters and editors remember.⁷⁵ The biggest validation was a slap on the back, a quick comment like “a helluva story,” the undivided attention of the boss who was said to have the attention span of a gnat.⁷⁶ Bradlee was equally powerful when communicating his disapproval. He would admonish reporters with characteristic candor, asking, “What the fuck are you doing?”⁷⁷ The biggest punishment, however, was when reporters realized Bradlee was ignoring them. Fully aware that they were craving his attention, Bradlee would turn his back or avoid eye contact. “He could be really cruel and obtuse,” remembers Henry Allen. “He was like a cat playing with a mouse sometimes.”⁷⁸

Bradlee ran the newsroom on a star system.⁷⁹ Backed by the full support of Graham, he pushed his staff to compete with each other, pitting editors against editors and reporters against reporters.⁸⁰ He called it “creative tension.”⁸¹ It was a “piranha atmosphere,” the longtime editorial writer John Anderson said in an interview with David Halberstam. “It can be uncomfortable as hell, but it may also be very good for people. And Bradlee is very good at making them feel that they're right on the edge.”⁸²

The guiding principle for Bradlee was impact. As he described his vision in the late 1970s to Chalmers Roberts, a *Post* reporter and designated historian of the paper: “I want to have some impact on this town and this country. . . . I want to know they are reading us. Impact.”⁸³ The most prominent examples of creating impact were publishing the Pentagon Papers in 1971, and then, of course, the Watergate burglary and the reporting that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. But Bradlee’s craving for impact was not just so much motivated by a particular political stance or an overarching moral vision.⁸⁴ He just immensely enjoyed good stories about power, people, and gossip.⁸⁵ Typically, the stories he appreciated the most were tales about winners and losers, one person’s rise and another one’s fall, human drama expressed in terms of individual bravery or tragedy.⁸⁶ In other words, Bradlee was a big fan of narrative storytelling.

With this proclivity Bradlee set the tone for the Style section (as with the rest of the paper) even if he did not involve himself heavily in the day-by-day operations. As Larry Stern, one of Bradlee’s best friends, noted in the late 1970s, Bradlee “is a good newspaperman but not a sustained one. He doesn’t follow through.”⁸⁷ Bradlee had a vision for Style but it was intuitive and not informed by a conceptual framework or specific guidelines. He encouraged and advocated a sensibility for more personal, magazine-like stories and enjoyed good writing.⁸⁸ What that looked like in a particular context was for the editors to decide and achieve. A story succeeded, it appears, when Bradlee felt it reached a wider audience and got people talking.

Because the quality of news writing was of special concern to Bradlee and his top editors, the style of writing was vividly debated in internal communications. One particularly illuminating document is a memo Eugene Patterson, then managing editor, sent to Bradlee in June of 1971. Not only does it highlight the importance of writing at the *Post*, it also demonstrates how debates about the New Journalism (debates that had been going on for several years at that point) found their way into the newsroom. Patterson was responding to an internal discussion about creating a statement of principles or set of standards for reporting and writing. Citing a piece from Tom Wicker in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, Patterson argued against a singular institutional or professional formula. Instead he emphasized the importance of creating and nurturing an environment for reporters as artists.⁸⁹ Then Patterson discussed a piece by Wolfe about the New Journalism in the *ASNE Bulletin*, which was an excerpt of Wolfe’s book, published later, saying, “it lays out exactly what constitutes the New Journalism, in which I [Patterson] happen to believe.” Patterson embraced Wolfe’s view that new nonfiction was as much about substantial and insightful reporting as it was about skillful writing.

Patterson concluded his memo by making a case for incorporating some of the New Journalism techniques into the production of the daily newspaper:

We need fewer exhibitions of moralistic, committed, romantic thoroughly conventional essay and more courage to do an *artist’s reporting of universal reality*, not personal commitment, and the skill to put it together. We are talking about artists, which is what the *Washington Post* ought to be about, and not about tin ears who try to write rule.⁹⁰

Patterson’s view was just one piece in a larger context of internal debates, many of which are not documented in a paper trail, but his perspective encapsulated and promoted particular elements of the *Post*’s culture that were constitutive for establishing the Style section. Patterson’s philosophy was also consistent with key elements of Bradlee’s newsroom culture: good writing and substantial reporting, a star system based on skillful writers, and a desire to stay ahead of current trends in journalism. Eventually, the Style section would come together along the lines that Patterson had envisioned: without a dogmatic formula but based on a shared understanding to do “an artist’s reporting of universal reality.”⁹¹ Moreover, Patterson’s intervention was also one of the earliest signs pointing at the larger importance of organizational practices that were consonant with Style’s subculture. Far from being relegated to the margins of the newsroom, the style that Style cultivated was embraced and ultimately expanded into other sections of the paper.

As much as Style was gaining traction and a loyal following, however, the paper was still struggling to find a cohesive strategy. There were problems with staff morale and productivity. There was friction with other sections and confusion about where news about women should go. And there was a power vacuum when after a few months Laventhol left to become associate editor at *Newsday*.

The situation at Style was so bad that Bradlee requested a special favor from his friend Larry Stern—to take over the lead of the Style section. At about the same time, the copy desk was also infused with new blood: Henry Allen, Joel Garreau, and David Legge. Henry Allen, an ex-Marine and Vietnam vet with some journalistic experience at the *Wall Street Journal*, was living with some artists in a decrepit loft on Connecticut Avenue and needed a job to pay for having his car fixed.⁹² Garreau had seen a couple of small, ambitious magazines flounder by the time he was hired in September 1970. The copy desk, led by Legge and manned by Allen and Garreau, asserted itself against the assigning editors of the old days (in the women’s section) and took liberties in editing stories and creating daring page layouts.⁹³ Stern steadied the ship and laid the foundation for later editors. When he left after nine months, he sent a famous farewell memo, writing something along the

lines of “If anybody asks you what style is about tell them it happens at mid-passage and everything will be all right.”⁹⁴

After about five years, the basic elements of the Style section were in place: a consistent philosophy, a reliable workflow, and productive collaborations between reporters and editors. While Stern had created the foundation for Style’s development, it was only with the leadership of editor Thomas Kendrick that the growing pains went away. Kendrick summarized the state of Style and his analysis of the road ahead in a memorandum to then-assistant editor Howard Simons. The conclusion of this memo is worth quoting in its entirety as it identifies key ingredients of the narrative news logic that had taken hold at that point. Kendrick emphasized the importance of keeping the section experimental. He advocated the serious, hard news relevance of its content. And he made a case for embracing the narrative news logic as a promising way to capture the human side of the news. He wrote:

Style’s original concept holds. A number of subsidiary definitions of Style’s role have even forged [*sic*] since its inception and this is as it should be. For many, these definitions seem hazy and that too, perhaps, is as it should be. It may well be a fatal error to define Style’s role too strictly. The freedom to experiment, to gamble, to make mistakes (but not to repeat them) is basic to Style’s charter. Such freedom is necessary to avoid the cardinal sin of dullness.

Finally, there should be an end to the attitude that Style is a soft, feature section that can be ignored or curtailed in the crunch. It feeds information that directly affects how people spend the leisure time that now occupies one-third of their lives. Style’s quick success and broad readership are evidence that its focus on people tapped an unfilled need. People are going to have more leisure time in the years ahead and their cultural interest will continue to expand. The political-governmental tunnel vision that this paper sometimes exhibits should not blind us to the possibility that our readers may be telling us that “people are as important as facts,” that Style’s fare “much more than luxury.”⁹⁵

The *Post*’s publication of an anthology of the best stories from the Style section in 1975 was a testament to the evolution of the section into a cohesive entity that was actively promoted as innovative news content.⁹⁶ When Kendrick moved on to become the director of operations for the Kennedy Center of Performing Arts in 1976, Shelby Coffey took over the leadership of the Style section and became one of Bradlee’s favorite editors. Style was established.⁹⁷ In addition, the *Post* had reached the peak of its reputation and cultural cachet. Stars and high society flocked to the Kennedy Center for the premiere of *All the President’s Men*, and it was obvious the *Post* had made the

step from reporting the news to being in the news. Within ten years, Bradlee had elevated the *Post* from a “swamp town gazette”⁹⁸ to the hottest paper in the country. Moreover, Bradlee became a person of interest himself, and his relationship with Style star writer Sally Quinn only added to the mystique.⁹⁹ Writing for *Esquire* in early 1976, James Fallows portrayed Bradlee and the *Post* in all their glory. “In the past ten years,” Fallows wrote, “Bradlee has remade the *Post* in his own image, making it, at different times, the most exciting paper to work on, the most interesting one to read, and the one from which wrongdoers had most to fear.”¹⁰⁰ Fallows called the Style section Bradlee’s “clearest personal monument”¹⁰¹ at the paper:

What Bradlee saw in the section was illustrated by the kind of gossip it purveyed. Society sections everywhere carry gossip of the normal variety—who has been seen with whom. . . . Style delivered this straight gossip by the ton, but it offered something else as well. It carried symbolic gossip, the novelistic details, the significant anecdotes that tell everything about the way the world works. So much of life within the government, so much of Washington society, could be explained as a game of manners—and Style did try to explain it.¹⁰²

By describing and “explaining these “game[s] of manners,” the *Post* went beyond the traditional role of the press and its task to provide, in the words of the *Post*’s early publisher Phil Graham, a “first rough draft of history.”¹⁰³ When the Style section highlighted the life world of politicians and people alike, attuned to changing attitudes, values and practices, it provided a first rough draft of culture.

Conclusion

The Style section continued to be the “prototype for daring, literary-minded newspaper feature sections throughout the country,”¹⁰⁴ but in the early 1980s the *Post* also suffered the biggest embarrassment of the Bradlee era—the Janet Cooke scandal. The fabricated piece about an eight-year old heroin addict did not appear in the Style section, but it had larger implications for the practice of narrative journalism. The scandal pointed to some potential pitfalls of narrative journalism (ethics of reporting, sensationalism, melodrama), which became topics of heated debates throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The *Post* was a pioneer and prototype in introducing into the daily newspaper production the literary techniques used by the New Journalists. “[Style stories] should be evaluated not as literature but as journalism with all its inherent strengths and faults,” Kendrick wrote in the introduction to the anthology of Style stories. “They carry both the bite of immediacy and dead-

line warts, the punch of individual perception and flaws exposed by time's perspective. Still, they hold up—proof that risks are worth taking, daily.”¹⁰⁵

Subsequently, the *Post's* innovation had a major effect on US newspaper journalism in the 1970s and thereafter. It provided a template for documentary writing and role models for narrative journalism, and laid the groundwork for a broader effort to incorporate magazine-style storytelling into daily newspaper production. As other major US newspapers began developing their own “style” sections throughout the 1970s (*L.A. Times*, *Miami Herald*, *New York Times*), their indebtedness to the *Post's* trailblazing became obvious.¹⁰⁶ This transformation created occupational structures and literary incentives so that young, talented writers would seek out careers in journalism. It also led to the formation of a readership that would embrace narrative storytelling as an integral part of their daily newspaper diet.

In reconstructing the beginnings of the *Post* Style section, this case study documents the emergence of a novel logic for narrative news, one which resulted in a distinct form of news in US newspapers. The approach of conceptualizing news as a cultural form¹⁰⁷ provides a lens for analyzing the production and reception of narrative journalism in an early phase of its expansion.

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Notes

¹ Cheryl A. Skuhr, “The Governor’s Bathroom,” *Letters to the Editor*, *Washington Post*, January 11, 1969, A12.

² Chalmers M. Roberts, *The Washington Post: The First 100 Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 401.

³ James Fallows, “Big Ben,” *Esquire*, April 1976, 144.

⁴ Michael Schudson, “Fourteen or Fifteen Generations: News as a Cultural Form and Journalism as a Historical Formation,” *American Journalism* 30, no. 1 (2013): 32.

⁵ Michele Weldon has noted, “Observers could then contend that a definition of good journalism has evolved into journalism with a narrative approach more often than a straightforward, summary presentation of facts. Modern newspaper journalism is as much about telling memorable stories as about telling the news of what happened.” Michele Weldon, *Everyman News: The Changing American Front Page* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), 108. For a critical perspective of narrative journalism’s predominance in US media, see Rodney Benson, *Shaping Immigration News: A French-American Comparison*, Communication, Society and Politics Series (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁶ John J. Pauly, “The New Journalism and the Struggle for Interpretation,” *Journalism* 15, no. 5 (2014): 590.

⁷ Michael Schudson, *The Rise of the Right to Know: Politics and the Culture of Transparency, 1945–1975* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2015), 177. Schudson does not dismiss the influence of the New Journalism entirely. He is careful to acknowledge that with its “brash outlook and its bold attack on the stodginess of ‘objectivity’ in news [the “new journalism”] was inspiring to many young journalists then and in the decades since.” *Ibid.*, 177.

⁸ As quoted in Roberts, *Washington Post*, 401.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 400–401.

¹⁰ For an excellent overview see Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

¹¹ Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 161.

¹² Mei-ling Yang, “Women’s Pages or People’s Pages: The Production of News for Women in the *Washington Post* in the 1950s,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 73, no. 2 (1996): 364–78.

¹³ Ben Bradlee, *A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 298.

¹⁴ As quoted in Jeff Himmelman, *Yours in Truth: A Personal Portrait of Ben Bradlee* (New York: Random House, 2012), 124.

¹⁵ “We were concerned . . . with the overall readability problem: how do you best organize the newspapers so as to give the reader the maximum ease in finding and reading what he wants to read in the minimal time he has to do it.” David A. Laventhol, “*Washington Post* Thinks Style is Stylish,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Newspaper Editors*, no. 533, August 1969, 13.

¹⁶ David Laventhol, memorandum to Ben Bradlee, n.d., ECP. [Note: Documents identified as “ECP” were retrieved from the Eugene C. Patterson papers at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Florida. The collection is not formally processed yet and does not have a finding aid.]

¹⁷ Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt, *Thinking Big: The Story of the Los Angeles Times, Its Publishers, and Their Influence on Southern California* (New York: G. P.

Putnam's Sons, 1977), 326.

¹⁸ Laventhol to Bradlee, ECP.

¹⁹ Richard Kluger and Phyllis Kluger, in *The Paper: The Life and Death of the New York Herald Tribune* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), quoted Ben Bradlee, chief of the Paris and then the Washington bureau of *Newsweek* under Denson, as saying "He [Denson] taught me the sizzle is important, not just the steak," 606.

²⁰ Kluger summarized a memo that national news editor Dick Wald had written and was circulating at the *Herald Tribune*: "The reporter's chief obligation, wrote Wald, was to tell the truth, 'and the truth often lies in the way a man said something, the pitch of his voice, the hidden meaning in his words, the speed of the circumstances.'" Stories were not so much about people as subjects but, in Wald's words, "characters in the cast" and observed "details that 'make up the recognizable graininess of life to the readers.'" The *Herald Tribune* "was looking for writing with 'a strong mixture of the human element,' articles that were 'readable stories, not news reports written to embellish a page of record.'" Ibid., 666, 671–72 (emphasis in the original).

²¹ As quoted in Robert F. Keeler, *Newsday: A Candid History of the Respectable Tabloid* (New York: Morrow, 1990), 448.

²² Ben Bradlee and Katharine Graham had a vision to make the *Post* among the most important newspapers in the country. "The demise of the *Herald Tribune* helped greatly. Until then, the customary iteration of the best papers was the *Times* and the *Trib*. Now a vacancy existed at the top that the *Post* was preparing to fill," wrote Harry Rosenfeld in *From Kristallnacht to Watergate: Memoirs of a Newspaperman* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 106. Bradlee wrote in his memoir, "Every newspaperman worth his pad and pencil had mourned the passing of the *New York Herald Tribune* in 1966. Wherever they worked, journalists envied the *Trib's* style, its flair, its design, its fine writing, its esprit de corps." *A Good Life*, 302.

²³ David Laventhol, memorandum to Ben Bradlee and Eugene Patterson, October 11, 1968, ECP.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," *Dateline*, April 1969, 43–47.

²⁶ Pauly, "The New Journalism," 592.

²⁷ Garry Wills, *Lead Time: A Journalist's Education* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), xiv.

²⁸ The Style section was part of a general reorganization of the *Post's* daily presentation. See advertisement, "The *Washington Post* in 1969," *Washington Post*, January 5, 1969, H54.

²⁹ Michael Kernan, "Life Styles: The Mandels of Maryland," *Washington Post*, January 8, 1969, B1.

³⁰ Ibid., B1, B2.

³¹ Helene Melzer, "Ben, Where Are You Hiding the *Post* Women's Section?" *Washingtonian*, April 1969, 53.

³² Skuhr, "Governor's Bathroom," *Washington Post*, A12.

³³ Catherine Kaufman, "Governor's Bathroom," *Washington Post*, A12.

³⁴ Dorothea Beall, "Governor's Bathroom," *Washington Post*, A12.

³⁵ Christopher Wilson, online project, "Reading Reportage," Boston College. Access granted to the author.

³⁶ "One hallmark of a cohesive family is the dog, preferably one of long tenure. For the Mandels it was Sandy, a collie who was with them 13 years until his death a year ago." Kernan, "Life Styles," B2.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Mrs. Onassis Explores Scenic Charms of Greece," *Washington Post*, January 3, 1969, B1.

³⁹ Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," in *The New Journalism: With an Anthology*, ed. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 32–36.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Judy Bachrach, "Barbara Mandel: Time to Move On," *Washington Post*, December 21, 1973, B1.

⁴¹ My argument builds on Barnhurst and Nerone, who argue that the form of news has an impact on the content of news. "Form structures and expresses that environment, a space that comfortably pretends to represent something larger: the world-at-large, its economics, politics, sociality, and emotion." Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone, *The Form of News: A History*, Guilford Communication Series (New York: Guilford Press, 2001), 6.

⁴² For a discussion of the narrative form see S. Elizabeth Bird and Robert W. Dardenne, "Myth, Chronicle, and Story: Exploring the Narrative Qualities of News," in *Media, Myths, and Narratives: Television and the Press*, ed. James W. Carey, Volume 15 in the Sage Annual Reviews of Communication Research (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988), 67–86.

⁴³ In literary terms, one could describe this technique as "tableau," a "description of some group of people in more or less static postures." It is worth noting that in nineteenth-century drama, this device was used in melodrama and farce, interesting connotations in this context of a political profile. Chris Baldick, "tableau," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), accessed May 9, 2017, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-1124>.

⁴⁴ Jack Hart, *Storycraft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). The 5 W's are who, what, when, why, where. Typically, "how" is added as a sixth element.

⁴⁵ Evidently, narrative stories had been part of newspapers before. Far from being a creation *ex nihilo*, narrative journalism had its beginnings in the late nineteenth century. When scholars of literary journalism describe this era, they emphasize a broad cultural shift in US culture. Connery, for example, talks about a "paradigm of actuality." See Thomas B. Connery, *Journalism and Realism: Rendering American Life* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 3–11. During the time of realism, journalism and literature turned their gaze to actual people and how they lived in an age of accelerating industrialization, massive immigration, and the nationalization of US life. It became important to describe the cities (especially

New York) with their sights and sounds, social life in all its complexity and diversity. Journalists and fiction writers were intrigued by the variety of immigrant lifestyles and their often abysmal living conditions. They were trying to make sense of the modern world, brought about by scientific innovation and economic expansion.

⁴⁶ Laventhol, memorandum to Bradlee and Patterson, February 26, 1969, ECP.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Laventhol, memorandum to Bradlee and Patterson, May 6, 1969, ECP.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Anonymous source (former Style section editor), interview with the author.

⁵¹ Myra McPherson, interview with the author, September 8, 2015.

⁵² See also Thomas R. Schmidt, "Michael Kernan: Poet and Newspaperman" (presentation, IALJS-10 [Tenth Annual Conference of the International Association for Literary Journalism Studies], University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis, May 7–9, 2015).

⁵³ Sally Quinn, interview with the author, September 3, 2015.

⁵⁴ McPherson, interview with the author. Various staff members referenced *Esquire*, *Harper's*, and *New York* as literary influences.

⁵⁵ Henry Allen, interview with the author, September 12, 2015.

⁵⁶ Judy Bachrach, interview with the author, September 5, 2015.

⁵⁷ McPherson, interview with the author.

⁵⁸ Aaron Latham, "Waking Up with Sally Quinn," *New York*, July 16, 1973, 25.

⁵⁹ Roberts, *Washington Post*, 468.

⁶⁰ Katharine Graham, *Personal History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 414. She went on to explain: "I tended to apply a dentist drill too frequently instead of considering things coolly and not constantly complaining" (ibid.).

⁶¹ As quoted in Roberts, *Washington Post*, 404.

⁶² Ibid., 401.

⁶³ Katharine Graham, memorandum to Bradlee and Patterson, May 6, 1969, ECP.

⁶⁴ Bradlee, *A Good Life*, 300; Graham, *Personal History*, 414.

⁶⁵ Thomas Kendrick, memorandum to Howard Simons, October 15, 1973. Courtesy of Evelyn Small.

⁶⁶ Edith Fierst, "Woman's Point of View," Letters to the Editor, *Washington Post*, April 25, 1969, A26.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Margaret Borgers, "Flattered by Style," Letters to the Editor, *Washington Post*, April 30, 1969, A26.

⁶⁹ Advertisement, *Washington Post*, January 5, 1969, H54.

⁷⁰ Shelby Coffey, interview with the author, September 3, 2015.

⁷¹ Megan Rosenfeld, interview with the author, September 17, 2015.

⁷² This was an "organizational cultural analysis," as described by Gerald W. Driskill and Angela Laird Brenton, in *Organizational Culture in Action: A Cultural Analysis Workbook* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), based on primary sources,

qualitative interviews with more than twenty newsroom veterans.

⁷³ Based on the book by the same title, by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward, *All the President's Men* (New York: Warner Books, 1975).

⁷⁴ Martha Sherrill, "Ben Bradlee: His Sense of Style Brought a New Sensibility to Features," *Washington Post*, washingtonpost.com, October 21, 2014 [retrieved online]; David Remnick, "Last of the Red Hots," *New Yorker*, September 18, 1995, 78: "He is also the only editor who, even in his sixties, made women blush and men straighten their posture."

⁷⁵ Eugene Patterson, interview with David Halberstam, n.d., Halberstam Collection, Howard Gottlieb Archival Research Center, box 194, folder 3, 1. These characterizations were confirmed in several interviews with the author.

⁷⁶ Coffey, interview with the author.

⁷⁷ McPherson, interview with the author.

⁷⁸ Allen, interview with the author.

⁷⁹ Patterson, interview with Halberstam.

⁸⁰ Bradlee was also aggressive with hiring and firing. "With Graham's support, Bradlee was soon firing the lazy and the mediocre, the racist and the dull, and he then set about raiding topflight papers around the country for their best talent. The talent level in the newsroom began to shift, and so did the culture of the place." David Remnick, "Citizen Kay," *New Yorker*, January 20, 1997, 68.

⁸¹ See, for example, Rosenfeld, *From Kristallnacht to Watergate*, 113; Fallows, "Big Ben," 144.

⁸² John Anderson, interview with David Halberstam, Halberstam Collection, box 192, folder 5, 7.

⁸³ Roberts, *Washington Post*, 379. Jeff Himmelman quoted Haynes Johnson as having said in October 2007, "[Bradlee] was determined to make the paper into what it could be: A great paper. Exciting. You had to read it. It was just, impact. He wanted impact. You ought to have impact, goddamnit. Instead of this namby-pamby stuff. And impact isn't cheap. It ought to have power, authority, and be well written; it ought to say something, and tell you about something you wanted to know; and it ought to be displayed so you don't miss it. That's what it's all about." Himmelman, *Yours in Truth*, 106.

⁸⁴ Patterson, interview with Halberstam.

⁸⁵ Anderson, interview with Halberstam, folder 5, 15.

⁸⁶ Bagdikian, interview with Halberstam, n.d., box 192, folder 6, 14.

⁸⁷ Larry Stern, interview with Halberstam, n.d., box 194, folder 9, n. p.

⁸⁸ Bradlee, *A Good Life*, 302. See also end note 22.

⁸⁹ Patterson included an extensive quote from Wicker: "First we must get the best people to work as journalists . . . good writers in the broadest literary sense . . . who in the best sense are the novelists of their time. The other thing we must do, having got all these good writers, we must create the kind of conditions in which they can do their best work. We can't do that by imposing formula writing, by group journalism. We are talking about artists." Eugene Patterson, memorandum to Ben Bradlee, June 1, 1971. See also Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism," *Bulletin of*

the American Society of Newspaper Editors, September 1970, 1.

⁹⁰ Patterson, memorandum to Bradlee (emphasis added).

⁹¹ Bagdikian, interview with Halberstam.

⁹² Allen, interview with the author.

⁹³ *Ibid.* Anonymous source, interview with the author; Paul Richards, interview with the author, September 14, 2015.

⁹⁴ Anonymous source, interview with author.

⁹⁵ Kendrick, memorandum to Simons, 7.

⁹⁶ Laura Longley Babb, ed., *Writing in Style: From the Style Section of the Washington Post: A New Perspective on the People and Trends of the Seventies* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975). In the introduction, Kendrick wrote: "One certainty is that the old feature formula of a grabber lead, a lively if unfocused anecdote or two, direct quotes and a good kicker was abruptly exposed as curiously obsolescent, unable to cope with the cultural change and revival of individualism that was rolling across the country. That tide rose so high and fast in the '60s that daily journalism often foundered in its task of forging patterns from the chaotic data spewing out of newsroom teletypes." Thomas R. Kendrick, "Introduction," in Babb, *Writing in Style*, i–xi, ii.

⁹⁷ "Under Tom Kendrick, and later Shelby Coffey, the Style Section had gathered under one roof a unique collection of young 'new journalists,' like B. J. Phillips, Myra McPherson, and Nick von Hoffman, to name just a few, who wrote with vitality, imagery, and humor. They knew their subjects, and they shared their insights with great flair." Bradlee, *A Good Life*, 387.

⁹⁸ Allen, interview with the author; David Remnick put it this way: "To understand the scale of Bradlee's achievement, it is important to know something about the mediocrity with which he began. The *Washington Post* in 1965 not only had no claim to rivalry with the *New York Times* but could not even claim to be the best paper in its city. Ever since the *Post* bought out the *Times-Herald*, in 1954, it had been profitable, but as an editorial enterprise it still was simply not competitive. It was, like most newspapers everywhere, pretty awful." Remnick, "Last of the Red Hots," 80.

⁹⁹ Sally Quinn, *We're Going to Make You a Star* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975).

¹⁰⁰ Fallows, "Big Ben," 53.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 144. See also Jeffrey Toobin, "The Regular Guy," *New Yorker*, March 20, 2000, 99: "For more than a decade after Bradlee founded the section, in 1969, Style developed a distinctive voice—bitchy, funny, sometimes smugly fatuous, but always readable."

¹⁰² Fallows, "Big Ben," 144, 146.

¹⁰³ Quote commonly associated with Phil Graham, without more specific origin.

¹⁰⁴ Jack Limpert, "David Laventhol, Ben Bradlee, and the Rise and Fall of Style," *About Editing and Writing* (blog), jacklimpert.com, April 10, 2015, <http://jacklimpert.com/2015/04/david-laventhol-rise-fall-style/>.

¹⁰⁵ Kendrick, "Introduction," in Babb, *Writing in Style*, v.

¹⁰⁶ As one example, see Edwin Diamond, *Behind the Times: Inside the New York Times* (New York: Villard Books, 1993).

¹⁰⁷ "Reporters breathe a specifically journalistic, occupational cultural air as well as the air they share with fellow citizens. The 'routines' of journalists are not only social, emerging out of interactions among officials, reporters and editors, but literary, emerging out of interactions of writers with literary traditions. More than that, journalists at work operate not only to maintain and repair their social relations with sources and colleagues but their cultural image as journalists in the eyes of a wider world." Michael Schudson, "Four Approaches to the Sociology of News," in *Journalism: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* vol. 2, ed. Howard Tumber (London: Routledge, 2008), 57–84, 77.