

Woodward & Bernstein at Trinity 40 Years After Watergate

JORDAN GASS-POORE¹ on 30 October, 2013 at 04:59



Between 1972 and 1976, Woodward and Bernstein, as the former Washington Post duo is best known, became synonymous with great investigative journalism by breaking the biggest story of their generation, coverage that led to former U.S. President Richard Nixon's resignation in disgrace.

Woodward and Bernstein inspired countless people to go into the field, including myself and a mentor of mine.

As a kid, I remember really wanting a Nixon mask because I thought it was grotesquely comical. I planned to go around my grandmother's neighborhood shouting in a very bad, nondescript accent the only thing I knew about Nixon: "I am not a crook."



*Journalists question President Richard M. Nixon during a Watergate press conference, October 26, 1973.
White House Photo Office Collection, 01/20/1969 – 08/09/1974; Nixon Presidential Materials Staff, College
Park, MD. (Public Domain)*

Popular culture influenced my feelings toward Nixon and that entire era. I first heard about Watergate, after watching the 1999 movie “Dick,” starring Kirsten Dunst. That’s when my mom’s “Deep Throat” comments started to make sense. Deep Throat was the pseudonym of Woodward and Bernstein’s secret Watergate informant, whose true identity was later revealed to be former FBI Associate Director W. Mark Felt. I was about eight years old, the year I declared to my family and anyone else that would listen that I was going to be a journalist – the closest career path to being a spy that didn’t require me working for a government entity.

Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein presented the free lecture, “[Inside The White House: From Nixon to Obama](#)” last night to a full house at Laurie Auditorium on the Trinity University campus to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Watergate.

Approximately 2,000 people gathered for the talk moderated by [Trinity University President Dennis Ahlburg](#).

High school and fellow college students had the opportunity to ask Woodward and Bernstein questions about how the political landscape and the field of journalism has changed since the 1970s.

“What really is reporting? It’s the best attainable version of the truth,” said Bernstein, in response to an audience member’s question about present-day journalists’ hesitation to report or counter government lies.

The National Security Agency and wiretapping were topics of conversation and comparison throughout the lecture.

“I’ll start with one basic difference and that is, what Watergate was about was a criminal president of the United States and all the things that we’ve talked about,” said Bernstein. “And what is going on now is about what and how far have the agencies of government gone and have they exceeded their authority, and even if they haven’t exceeded their authority, is it right?”

Everything Woodward and Bernstein were able to find in regards to the Watergate burglary indicates that it was “part of a general N.S.A.-like vacuum cleaning operation to learn absolutely everything they could about the political opposition.” Bernstein said.



*Robert Upshur “Bob” Woodward (left) and Carl
Bernstein (right). Courtesy photos.*

Woodward added that the Democratic National Committee's headquarters being burglarized in the Watergate office building in D.C. in 1972 was indisputably a crime, while the N.S.A. wiretapping controversy poses a larger question to the U.S. government – "Does it make sense, is it something that we need to do?"

There was a comfortable back-and-forth between Woodward and Bernstein, who played off each other and provided comic relief to some of the serious topics discussed, despite comments to the contrary from an attendee who approached me after the lecture.

In response to a San Antonio high school journalist's question during the lecture, Woodward recalled an experience while working on a book about former U.S. President George W. Bush where he utilized some of the reporting tactics he learned from his friend and colleague.

"... One of the many things that I've learned from Carl is when we were working on the Watergate story, go out and talk to people, even if you don't have an appointment," said Woodward, 70, who still works for the Washington Post as an associate editor.

"I remember working on one of the Bush books and there was a general who would not talk, and I sent emails, intermediaries, phone calls, nothing, so I found out where he lived, it was in the Washington area. Now, what's the best time to go knock on the door of a four star general without an appointment, what would you say?"

"I would say just around dinner time, after your first cocktail." said Bernstein.

"8:15 on a Tuesday." Woodward responded. "This guy's a firm no. And I knock on the door and he opens the door and looks at me and says, 'Are you still doing this shit?' "



I attended the lecture with some members of the Texas State University Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists, something the chapter's vice president and I had been organizing and promoting for months. Speaking with a few of the members in the car to-and-from the event I began to realize that the lecture was really less about the "real" Woodward and Bernstein and more about solidifying our preconceived notions of them, that they are fearless, intelligent and powerful in their right.

Erin Cantu, Texas State SPJ member, said she first heard about Watergate from her dad when she was nine years old. As the years went on, Cantu said she became more curious about the historical event and finally watched the 1976 film "All The President's Men," starring Robert Redford (Woodward) and Dustin Hoffman (Bernstein), based on Woodward and Bernstein's bestselling book of the same name.

"I liked how fearless (Woodward and Bernstein) were and how they were able to just go to these sources and seriously, they hounded them for all of this information, they basically made the case," said Cantu, adding that they were partly the reason she changed her major from pre-nursing to mass communication. "So, I found that very inspirational, and that I should be able to go out and be fearless like them."

To me, born in 1990, the duo (how did they decide whose last name would go first?) will always be the spunky, late-twenty-something Washington Post reporters, the ones portrayed in the film, however factual it is or is not.

On the other hand, the lecture dissuaded Texas State SPJ member Virginia Alves from becoming a political journalist because she does not believe that she is as “fearless” as Woodward and Bernstein.

“In the afterglow of the event, I decided that I definitely do not want to go into political journalism. It’s definitely something I don’t want to do,” Alves said.

For those who would like to find out more information about Woodward and Bernstein’s coverage of Watergate straight from the source, you can view primary documents and sources, “The Woodward and Bernstein’s Watergate papers” online at www.hrc.utexas.edu/exhibitions and at the [Harry Ransom Center](#) on the University of Texas at Austin campus.

Jordan Gass-Poore’ is an English/mass communication senior at Texas State University- San Marcos. She began her work as a paid intern for The Rivard Report in June 2013. Her previous and current intern experience includes the [New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung](#), [The Austin Chronicle](#), [Slackerwood](#) and the [Austin American-Statesman](#), among others. Contact Jordan via jgasspoore@gmail.com or follow her on Twitter [@jgasspoore](#).

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JORDAN GASS-POORE'

A former Rivard Report intern, Jordan Gass-Poore' is now interning at The Los Angeles News Group in California. She is an English/mass communication senior at Texas State University. She has also worked as a paid intern for LMG Communications. AT&T is a client of LMG Communications. Jordan's previous and current intern experience includes the New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung, The Austin Chronicle, Slackerwood and the Austin American-Statesman, among others. Contact Jordan via jgasspoore@gmail.com.

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DON MATHIS on 31 October, 2013 at 15:55

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I was a journalism student at SAC when the film came out. When I suggested to Professor Dub Daugherty that the movie should be assigned viewing, he replied that maybe the book should be required reading.



RICHARD NIESS on 24 November, 2013 at 07:01

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Woodward and Bernstein should be considered as 2 un-informed news men with no clear view of American history. RAT FINKS! They should share the blame for the loss of the Viet Nam War. They have a lot of blood on there hands. They should be considered traitors. I am certain that if Nixon remained president their would still be a South Viet Nam. Nixon was not going down as a first president to loose a war. Two more days of the Christmas Bombing and the North would have surrendered. Woodward and Bernstein just wanted to become famous and they are! Their popularity show how ignorant the American voter and press are and has lead to the leadership that we have in the White House. Remember history is subject to change.

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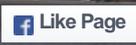
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It was such an honor to hear her speak, and to meet her even if it was just briefly. :)



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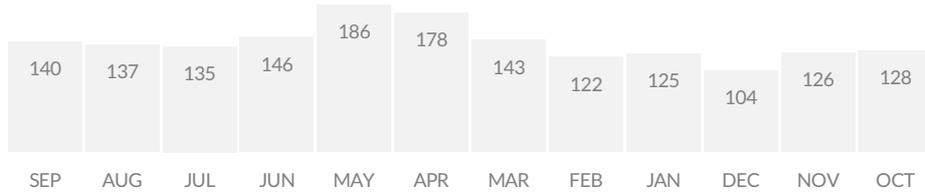
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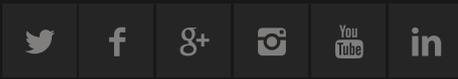
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