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## Review of *A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures* by Ben Bradlee

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Bradlee, Ben. *A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995. 514 pp. \$27.50.

While gossip and innuendo are often appealing, the opportunity to learn an insider's perspective on contemporary politics is undeniably tantalizing. Media historians are not exempt from wondering what John F. Kennedy was really like, or the true story behind the Janet Cooke scandal, or even if Deep Throat really exists. Ben Bradlee knows the answers to these and other questions, and it is the hope that he will share his knowledge with the rest of us that makes his memoir, *A Good Life*, particularly appealing.

Time seems to have softened this seasoned journalist, and readers may come away feeling that his vision is now rose tinted and not fitting the formidable foe of Richard M. Nixon. A significant part of the memoir details his professional and personal relationship with JFK and addresses Bradlee's confusion as a journalist during the Kennedy campaign and presidency. Readers may be surprised to read that although he was

admittedly appalled to learn of the level of deceit involved in Kennedy's extramarital dalliances, Bradlee insists he knew nothing of the President's activities even though his sister-in-law, Mary Meyer, was one of Kennedy's girlfriends.

Bradlee knows the identity of Deep Throat; Woodward and Bernstein told him following Nixon's resignation and the release of their second book, *The Final Days*, yet readers will not learn his or her identity from the book. Bradlee insists on keeping what he calls "the best-kept secret in the history of Washington journalism." His account of Watergate is one of the high points of this memoir, offering journalism historians a necessary corrective to *All the President's Men*.

Perhaps most telling is his realization that future generations would only most likely know the movie version of Watergate history. He connects changes in the field of journalism to Watergate and suggests that after the Nixon era the press began to lose faith in the political system and started looking for the truth after hearing the official version.

Amid the journalistic narrative there are other insights of interest to media historians. Bradlee addresses the non-coverage of African American issues by the "liberal" *Washington Post* which he insists would not address issues of race that were not upbeat or safe. He ponders the white male make-up of the staff and admits to the sexism and racism of the city room, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s. He points to the *Post's* efforts to hire female and minority journalists as an explanation of why Cooke was hired without a reference check. Worried that the competition might hire her first, Bradlee remembers that she "was too good to be true, and we wanted her too bad."

Ultimately, Bradlee offers readers a personal glimpse of his journalistic experiences along with his understanding of the role of the press in contemporary society.

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