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All the President's Men

"THE STORY THAT PEOPLE KNOW AND REMEMBER"

Carl Bernstein (Dustin Hoffman) and Bob Woodward (Robert Redford) investigate the Watergate mystery in *All the President's Men.* Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.

Warner Brothers' 1976 release *All the President's Men* gave audiences a powerful reminder of the ugly Watergate scandal that had destroyed the Republican administration of Richard Nixon just a few years before. The movie shows how *Washington Post* journalists Bob Woodward (played by Robert Redford) and Carl Bernstein (played by Dustin Hoffman) discovered and exposed corruption in the White House. It covers the early period of Woodward and Bernstein's investigations, showing the tremendous difficulties the young journalists faced in obtaining information, their determination to pursue the case despite many frustrating setbacks, and the excitement they experienced in discovering that the trail of scandal reached all the way to the highest office in the land. *All the President's Men* succeeds in making the complex web of intrigue understandable through a study in personalities. It reveals how two men with very different backgrounds and styles developed a cooperative relationship and managed to crack one of the most important political cases of the twentieth century.

Although the focus on personalities gives life to a story that otherwise might have been a confusing and perhaps boring examination of Washington shenanigans, the movie's concentration on Woodward and Bernstein's activities leaves the impression that the two journalists almost single-handedly brought down President Nixon's administration. Other major figures who contributed to the discovery of corruption receive almost no attention in the motion picture. Like many examples of cinematic history from Hollywood, *All the President's Men* tends to glamorize the achievements of a few individuals and overlook the roles of other people and other causes behind historical developments.

Despite this shortcoming, *All the President's Men* delivers a remarkably sophisticated glimpse of an important historical episode. It shows the tedious work of investigative journalists, presenting an inspiring story about the value of perseverance in the face of difficult obstacles. Furthermore, it demonstrates a commitment to authenticity through-out. With careful attention to detail, the filmmakers intelligently recreated the physical and mental environment in which the two newspaper reporters worked in the federal capital. Finally, the makers of *All the President's Men* succeeded in delivering an emotionally strong message. They made a powerful moral statement about the Watergate crimes. Few Hollywood films have offered such a boldly opinionated picture of an important episode from American political history. Indeed, the achievement was even more impressive in view of the timeliness of the subject. At the time of its release, the movie did not deal with a controversy from America's distant past, one for which the emotional partisanship had long passed. Rather, it presented judgments on a very recent political crisis, and the object of its criticism—the Nixon administration—still attracted many sympathizers in 1976.

The individual most responsible for bringing *All the President's Men* to the screen was Robert Redford, an accomplished movie actor who liked to work with stories about determined individuals who challenge "the system." Redford became fascinated with the activities of Woodward and Bernstein and sought the journalists' approval to make a movie about their exploits. After winning their support, he guided the film project through much of its development and helped to give the final production its committed and hard-hitting style.

Redford had been eager to produce a movie that reflected on Richard Nixon's leadership. Ever since his youth Redford had disliked Nixon. When he was thirteen years old Redford had received an athletic award from then-senator Richard Nixon. Years later Redford recalled that he "never believed a word [Nixon] said" at the event. On shaking Nixon's hand, he felt "absolutely nothing . . . it was just empty." As an adult Redford wondered why journalists did not sense President Nixon's insincerity and comment on it honestly in their publications. After revelations came out about Nixon's involvement in the Watergate scandals, Redford confessed that he wanted to believe that the president was responsible.[1]

Before news of the Watergate case broke in the press, Redford had not demonstrated much interest in politics. In fact, for many years he had not even shown much commitment to a career. In the years before he moved into acting, Redford had drifted into a number of different endeavors. He won an athletic scholarship to the University of Colorado but took little interest in his studies and received poor grades. Eventually he dropped out of college and engaged in a variety of jobs, operating a jackhammer, shoveling oil slick, and clearing pipelines.

Then he went to Europe for thirteen months to try his hand at sketching. Redford worked as an artist in Paris's Montmartre section. Later he moved to Florence to enroll in an art school. Frail from a poor diet and running out of money, he returned to the United States. Redford then married Lola Van Wegenen and enrolled in the Pratt Institute in New York. There he studied scenic design but soon took up acting on the advice of a friend. A lead role in Neil Simon's hit play *Barefoot in the Park* put him on the road to fame and fortune.[2]

Redford's success allowed him to be selective in his choice of scripts, and by the early 1970s, he was showing an interest in stories with political messages. Redford appeared in *Three Days of the Condor,* which deals with deceit and assassination in a CIA-type operation, and *The Candidate,* a story about a naive son of a former governor who is promoted for high office by a group of politicos. *All the President's Men,* however, was the film to which he gave the most personal enthusiasm in this period of his career.

The genesis of *All the President's Men* came during the presidential election campaign of 1972. At the time Redford became intrigued with the work of the two reporters for the *Washington Post.* He noticed that Woodward and Bernstein, obscure journalists with the newspaper, were publishing extraordinary revelations identifying the trail of wrongdoing in the Watergate break-in. Journalists for other prominent papers, such as those at the *New York Times,* as well as reporters associated with network television, on the other hand, offered relatively little new information. Why were they not as aggressive in pursuing the truth, he wondered? One day, when Redford was on a train in Florida to promote his movie *The Candidate,* he posed the question to some news reporters. The reporters gave him a cynical response, indicating that Watergate was business as usual in the nation's capital. The public probably would never learn the truth about the scandal, they speculated. Redford was appalled by the tone of the remarks, and as he read more articles by Woodward and Bernstein, he thought about turning their story into a movie.

As Redford learned about the character and background of the two reporters, the concept looked more and more appealing. Woodward and Bernstein reflected quite different personalities and styles, he discovered, yet they worked together effectively. Woodward was a graduate of Yale and a commissioned officer in the navy. He joined the *Post* from a position of privilege and was expected to rise quickly. Bernstein had been struggling to get ahead at the *Post* since he began as a copyboy at the age of sixteen. With less impressive credentials than Woodward, he won his assignment to the Watergate story by building a reputation as a scrappy competitor who relentlessly chased a story. Woodward was a WASP, Bernstein a Jew; Woodward was cool and controlled, Bernstein nervous and excitable. A movie about how these two men learned to work together in their sleuthing operation seemed very promising, Redford thought.[3] A study of contrasting personalities could provide an emotional hook to grab the audiences' interest.

Shortly after the November 1972 elections, Redford tried to contact Woodward and Bernstein to sound out his proposal for making a film about their reporting experiences. At the time the journalists were too busy with their investigations to give Redford much consideration. Bernstein did not return the actor's call, and Woodward explained to Redford that he could not break away from his work to arrange a meeting. In April 1973 Redford tried again. He told Woodward that he would be in Washington, D.C., for a screening of *The Candidate* and invited him to visit for a chat. Woodward came by but could not stay long. At the time Watergate events were breaking fast, for Nixon's top aides, Robert Haldeman and John Erlichman, had just resigned, and the president's counsel, John Dean, had been fired. Woodward did hear enough, though, to understand that Redford was still quite eager to make the movie.

During this time, the spring of 1973, Woodward and Bernstein had a book contract with Simon and Schuster. The journalists wondered how they were going to continue covering the scandal for the *Post* and complete the manuscript. When Bernstein heard that their lives could be further complicated because of a movie project, he replied, "First, let's get the damn book done." Redford persisted, and in time the parties worked out an agreement. Woodward and Bernstein received $450,000 for the movie rights to their publication. During their discussions Redford offered tips about the approaches the authors might take in their writing. He pointed out that readers were likely to be more interested in a book about *how* they discovered the information on Watergate than in a book that just reported *what* they discovered. Bernstein considered this recommendation to be misdirected. He thought that readers would react negatively to a volume that focused on the activities of two reporters; he worried that the format would make the two of them look egocentric. In time, though, *All the President's Men* did take the shape Redford recommended, and two years after publication Woodward acknowledged that "Redford was a factor in getting us to write the kind of book we wrote."[4]

After Redford achieved an understanding with Woodward and Bernstein, he sought cooperation from leaders at the *Washington Post*. Presenting an authentic picture of the operations of a major newspaper required assistance from these insiders, he thought. If his movie was to present a realistic depiction of the people at the *Post* and the working environment there, it would be important to gain access to the offices. Woodward wanted to talk with key figures in the operation and to observe the day-to-day activities. Katharine Graham, publisher of the *Post*, was wary, however. She preferred to keep a low profile for her newspaper and worried that the *Post* would appear to be congratulating itself for successful detective work if it cooperated extensively with the moviemakers. She also realized that the newspaper could not influence the movie's treatment of its activities in the investigation of the Watergate scandal. Giving the moviemakers free rein could result in some embarrassing portrayals. "Our interests are not the movie's interests," Graham explained. "I am concerned about having no control of what is in the movie." Graham did not even want Redford to use the *Post*'s name in the movie. That request was completely unacceptable for the producer/actor, for he intended to stage *All the President's Men* as a carefully designed reenactment of actual events.[5]

Graham's initial discomfort disturbed Redford and his associates. They thought that the resistance represented a form of censorship, something about which newspaper people are usually eager to complain. Redford thought that it would be ludicrous for individuals at the *Post* to tell him essentially that he could not make the movie. "What a bunch of garbage that would be," he observed later. "It would have been censorship, and movies are a medium just like newspapers, magazines, or books."[6] Redford left the clear impression that the movie was going to be made with or without the *Post*'s cooperation, and that it would be wiser to give the project a supportive blessing. Evidently Graham appreciated this reality. She did not say yes to several of Redford's requests, but she did not say no either, and the cooperation moved forward.

Ben Bradlee, the *Post*'s respected executive editor, represented another potential obstacle. Bradlee's cooperation was important, since he would be a prominent figure in the story (actor Jason Robards played his part). Bradlee thought that "journalists belong in the audience, not on the stage," and he worried that the reporters would have little recourse if the movie portrayed them inaccurately or unfairly. "Just remember pal," he told Redford, "that you go off and ride a horse or jump in the sack with some good-looking woman in your next film—but I am forever an asshole." Bradlee reminded Redford that the *Washington Post*'s leaders "will forever be known as we are portrayed in this movie." Despite these reservations, Bradlee cooperated, and he came to appreciate the finished product considerably.[7]

There were more challenges ahead, for Redford and his associates encountered difficulties trying to design an exciting script about the lives of investigative reporters. The Woodward and Bernstein saga contained no sex and violence, and the action in the story involved telephone calls, interviews, and note-taking. Also, Woodward and Bernstein's large book contained far too many incidents and events to include them all in a screenplay; deciding what to include and what to cut was not easy. Additionally, the public appeared to be sick of the Watergate story, which received media exposure day after day. Furthermore, no matter how carefully the writer worked to create excitement and suspense in the drama, audiences would know how the case turned out. How could the screenwriter make such a story riveting drama?

To face these challenges Redford sought help from an accomplished Hollywood writer who had prepared the screenplay for an earlier Redford movie, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. William Goldman brought impressive talent to the task, but his first effort to shape the complex record into an interesting movie script encountered difficulties. The Woodward and Bernstein book was packed with names and facts, and no obvious story line came to mind as Goldman went through his reading of it. The writer worked on a number of schemes for a screenplay and supplemented his understanding of the events with additional reading. Eventually he decided to throw away about one-half of the book and concentrate on the journalist team's early experiences in the Watergate investigation.[8]

At first it seemed that Woodward's would be the more difficult character to work with, but Bernstein became Goldman's bigger source of troubles. Goldman thought that Bernstein would be easier to create on paper because of idiosyncrasies in his personality. Woodward seemed to be particularly hard to develop as a main character in a movie because, as he admitted himself, "I'm especially boring. The way I live and work is undramatic."[9] In time, however, Goldman learned a great deal about Woodward's activities and viewpoints, because the young journalist became extremely cooperative. Woodward spent numerous hours with Goldman reviewing evidence and discussing particulars in the story. An early meeting with Bernstein, however, introduced a sour note in the relationships. Goldman made a remark about the incompetence of the White House conspirators, observing that they did a clumsy job with break-ins and cover-ups. "It's like a comic opera," he joked. Bernstein took offense. Goldman's remark seemed to diminish the difficulty of Bernstein's journalistic achievements and suggest that his discoveries were easy in the face of resistance by hapless adversaries. Discussions between the two became tender.[10]

Later a new element of tension emerged. Redford was partly to blame for the new difficulties, although his motives were decent. In an effort to encourage the cooperation of Woodward and Bernstein in his movie project, Redford had invited the journalists to contribute ideas regarding the script. Redford's openness apparently gave Bernstein incentive to take an aggressive role in mapping out a strategy for the screenplay. Rather than comment quickly on Goldman's initial draft, Bernstein held back his remarks and spent time ironing out some ideas of his own. Eventually Bernstein gave Redford a draft of a script plan that he had prepared with his friend Nora Ephron. This version presented Bernstein as an aggressive reporter and a Don Juan with women, while it characterized Bob Woodward as a colorless Elmer Fudd. Goldman was visibly shaken by the implied criticism of his work and Redford's suggestion that he should give Bernstein's script a serious reading. Redford resolved the crisis by turning down the proposed revision, telling Bernstein that "Errol Flynn is dead." The experience disrupted the production schedule, however. Goldman had difficulty getting back on track, especially when *Time* magazine reported that Bernstein had criticized his draft. Emotions became strained, and Redford recognized that he had made a bad judgment in placing Goldman in a delicate situation. His well-intentioned efforts to ensure that the screenplay would benefit from the input of the historical figures being portrayed on the screen brought mixed results. It worked in the case of the Woodward-Goldman relationship and backfired in the case of Bernstein-Goldman dynamics.[11]

The ultimate success of *All the President's Men* depended on more than just the screenwriter, of course. It rested on the shoulders of a number of production personnel, including the talented chief cinematographer, Gordon Willis. Above all, Redford received valuable assistance from the director of the film, Alan J. Pakula. Pakula had made a number of films, including *Klute,* which Redford liked very much. Most important, Redford was impressed by his direction of *The Parallax View,* a movie that effectively communicates a sense of conspiracy and fear. Redford waited until relatively late in the project to appoint Pakula. He had initiated overtures with other directors but was not successful in securing their services, and then he had to wait until Pakula was available. The delay also concerned Redford's desire to maintain control over the film for as long as he could. He wanted to get a strong version of the script in place before a director came on board. Redford understood that once the director took charge, that person would have the primary authority for establishing the film's direction.[12]

In trying to make the movie effective as drama, Pakula realized he faced a special challenge that other Hollywood directors did not usually confront. He wanted *All the President's Men* to re-create the journalists' experiences authentically, and that would require a realistic portrayal of their tedious work. Somehow he had to develop a sense of excitement out of a story of day-to-day research. Pakula needed to make routine activities—telephone calls, personal interviews, and examination of documents—appear interesting and important. He needed to show that the materials Woodward and Bernstein used—typewriters, pencils, pads, and library cards—served as important weapons that could bring down some of the most powerful men in the country. Pakula also wanted the story to show that journalism typically involves not the fast-paced dramatics seen in the 1931 Hollywood movie *The Front Page* but rather day in and day out plodding in pursuit of a lead. Investigative reporting is not physical, Pakula observed; it is intellectual. The production team needed to imagine ways to make this cerebral experience understandable to movie audiences.[13]

The principal solution was to design a documentary-like story that would establish a strong sense of realism. Pakula wanted the film to have "immediacy." *All the President's Men* would bombard viewers with so many authentic-looking details that viewers would feel as if they were present at the scene of history when watching the picture. The actors would look very much like the historical figures; sets would be designed to resemble the places where events actually occurred, and, through a television set placed in the offices of the *Washington Post*, viewers could see news broadcasts showing some of the real players in history (such as Richard Nixon, Richard Kleindienst, Ron Ziegler, and Spiro Agnew). Furthermore, in maintaining the documentary style, the film would not give audiences some of the advantages of perception typically featured in the movies. For example, in scenes showing Woodward and Bernstein asking questions over the telephone, viewers would not see the individual at the other end of the line. By limiting the audience's information solely to the voice heard over the phone (exactly what the reporter experienced), viewers would sense better the difficulty of trying to interpret a respondent's comments without seeing the individual's facial expressions. This format would also make audiences sensitive to the journalists' difficulty in extracting information from a conversation before the person at the other end chose to hang up. Pakula wanted audiences to see only what the reporters saw so that they would better appreciate the tensions reporters experienced.[14]

Bob Woodward thought that Pakula succeeded in capturing "the fundamental essence of journalism." Recalling the director's work on the film years later, Woodward praised Pakula for appreciating that, in journalism, "information is king." Journalists must pursue facts in difficult ways, seeking out individuals who will give them leads, Woodward explained. Interviews add up to no more than pieces of a puzzle. Some witnesses are noncooperative, others are cooperative, and some are cooperative but in ways that the journalist only partly understands. Lacking a complete picture of what happened, the journalist feels vulnerable. "You're out there," wondering why other journalists are not writing about the story that begins to take shape in your mind, explained Woodward. Pakula effectively communicated the sense of "wonderment" and "doubt" that an investigative reporter experiences—"the emotional and psychological dimensions" of journalism. During the time of production, Woodward thought that a story about the monotonous pursuit of names "can't possibly interest anyone." Yet Pakula managed to make his motion picture compelling by portraying the journalists' experiences "exactly as we lived," he said.[15]

Pakula and his colleagues also employed a number of artistic devices to communicate their message about the importance of journalism in sustaining American democracy. They found an opportunity to do this, for example, by focusing closely on a page in a typewriter in the opening moments of the movie. A tremendous pounding follows, and viewers become aware that a microphone close to the typewriter is amplifying the noise as the machine's keys print out the date of the Watergate break-in. The typewriter appears to send out cannon shots, suggesting the power of the press in exposing assaults on freedom. Later in the story audiences see Woodward and Bernstein flipping cards in the Library of Congress, searching for a sort of needle in a haystack that may provide a clue to the location of the Watergate trail. The camera then travels upward to the heights of the cavernous room. This scene cost $90,000 to photograph, but it was worth the price, for it intelligently communicates a feeling for the tremendous challenges the reporters faced in searching for leads in a bewildering maze of documents. The filmmakers also used lighting to convey a message about the workings of democracy. They shot scenes representing the *Washington Post*'s offices in bright, clean light and shot scenes around Washington, D.C., in darkness and shadows. The former suggests openness and honesty, whereas the latter suggests a secretive, menacing environment.

Following the plan to design the movie with documentary-like authenticity, Pakula and the production crew gave considerable attention to small historical details in the set design. Indeed, they made a greater effort to ensure the historical correctness of the props than was really necessary, for movie viewers were unlikely to take notice of these many details. Still, the care given to historical re-creation helped Redford and Pakula to advertise their movie as a realistic representation of the actual historical conditions and events. Their promotional literature stressed that the movie reproduces the environment of Woodward and Bernstein's investigations with considerable integrity.

Much of the work toward authentic re-creation went into the set design for the *Washington Post*'s offices, the location for many of the movie's scenes. Members of the production team visited the newspaper's Washington, D.C., offices, obtained architects' blueprints for the building, consulted with the firm that handled the interior decorating, and took hundreds of slide pictures of the rooms. After finishing this research they designed and constructed a 35,000-square-foot representation of the *Post*'s newsroom in Burbank, California (at a cost of $450,000). When executive editor Ben Bradlee visited California, he felt as if he were in his own office.[16] The production designers also gathered an abundance of authentic materials from the *Post*'s newsrooms to accent their commitment to verisimilitude. Sitting on the 200 reporters' desks seen in the film were 1972 calendars (with dates changed to match the date for the scene being shot). Also on the desks were 1972 telephone directories and 1972 newspapers (again, dated according to the day in the drama). Set designers also arranged to have 270 cartons of paper from the *Post*'s offices shipped to Burbank. These letters, pamphlets, newspaper clippings, copy papers, carbons, and reporters' notes were then distributed around the Burbank set and placed in the trash cans under each desk. In scenes showing the break-in at Watergate the filmmaker used $100 dollar bills in sequential order, just as the real burglars did, and they used the same model walkie-talkies.[17] Again, movie audiences were not likely to know about the care given to these details (unless they read the movie reviews), and the specificity in these historical re-creations did not significantly affect the film's interpretation of the Watergate story. Nevertheless, the efforts to use authentic materials made good advertising copy when promoters praised the motion picture as a serious examination of recent American history.

The producers' commitment to authenticity also appeared in the choice of locations and in the choice of actors. The filmmakers shot the scenes of the Watergate break-in at the Watergate complex in Washington, D.C., and they filmed scenes showing the burglars' lookout across the street from the Watergate complex at the Howard Johnson's motel where the stakeout actually occurred. In choosing actors the casting directors sought individuals with a strong physical resemblance to the people in Woodward and Bernstein's story. Promotional literature emphasized the resemblances. Publicity photos juxtaposed portraits of Robert Redford with Bob Woodward, Dustin Hoffman with Carl Bernstein, and actor Stephen Collins with CREEP treasurer Hugh Sloan. The similarities in physical appearance were striking, particularly in the case of the actor playing Hugh Sloan. In one minor role the representation was perfect. Frank Willis, the night guard at the Watergate building who reported his discovery of a taped door latch to the police in June 1972, played himself.

The makers of *All the President's Men* also put key production and acting personnel through a rapid course of instruction regarding the life of a *Washington Post* journalist. Several actors and technicians visited the *Post*'s offices in Washington for weeks at a time, including director Alan Pakula, writer William Goldman, Robert Redford, and Dustin Hoffman. The visitors sat alongside reporters while they performed their daily work, accompanied them on research assignments, attended meetings of the newspaper's editors, and generally observed language and behavior around the newsroom. Redford gravitated toward the editors in these visits, while Hoffman spent a great deal of time sitting in with reporters and clerks. An assistant director also joined the team in Washington and took abundant notes (he observed, for example, that contrary to popular images, little smoking took place in the newsroom). Some of the actors with less important roles received a lecture in California from one of the *Post*'s West Coast editors. To strengthen the portrayal of the burglars, Pakula talked at length with one of them (Bernard Barker), as well as with one of the police officers who conducted the arrest. A researcher for the movie spoke with one of the burglars' lookouts, who had operated from across the street.[18]

These efforts to approximate the historical reality, while admirable, could not guarantee that *All the President's Men* would examine the Watergate story with sophistication. It was not enough that Redford and Pakula got the furniture right in the *Washington Post*'s offices or hired actors whose features closely resembled the appearance of the actual figures in Washington, D.C. Redford and Pakula could cram each scene with authentic-looking details yet misinform their audiences about the lessons of the past.

One of the greatest temptations the filmmakers needed to resist was the tendency for a movie about crusading newspaper reporters to give a glamorous portrayal of the principal characters. It would be easy to make Woodward and Bernstein seem like national heroes. The filmmakers could depict the two journalists as humble giant slayers who brought down some of the most powerful men in the country by using their typewriters as weapons. The movie does this to a degree, and in this regard it misrepresents the story of how the president and his aides fell from power. Numerous other individuals helped to break the secrets of Watergate—journalists, members of Congress, judges, and special prosecutors, for example. *All the President's Men*, as might be expected, assigns an inordinate amount of credit to Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. Indeed, when the movie had its debut in Washington, D.C., many of the Watergate investigators who had made important contributions to the discoveries were upset that the film gave no attention to their activities. Other people were "more consequential than us," Woodward recalled years later, but "in a way they didn't exist," since *All the President's Men* did not deal with them. A movie has special power, Woodward noted, because the history it portrays "becomes the story that people know and remember."[19]

What people would know and remember in years to follow was, indeed, shaped by this popular motion picture. The image of the heroic investigative reporter remained strong in the public mind, especially for those who were poorly informed about politics. Talk about the Watergate case frequently referred to the story of the two young men from the *Washington Post* who uncovered details of the scandal. Easily overlooked in these discussions were the contributions of important figures who were not portrayed in *All the President's Men*, individuals such as federal judge John Sirica, special prosecutors Archibald Cox and Leon Jaworski, Senate Select Committee on Campaign Practices chairperson Sam Ervin, and a host of other figures.

Although the movie gives substantial credit to Woodward and Bernstein for breaking the case, it does at least recognize some of the journalists' flaws. *All the President's Men* reveals occasional overeagerness on the part of Woodward and Bernstein, who are seen bending some of the rules of their profession to extract information from the potential sources. In the movie Woodward and Bernstein bluff, cajole, deceive, and threaten as they try to shake details about the Watergate story loose from people who evidently know some clues to the puzzle. The journalists even extract some valuable information from members of a grand jury (clearly a violation of the law). Also, they reveal human qualities. Bernstein appears to be perpetually nervous in the movie and frequently stutters; Woodward seems to be a plodder—hardworking but conventional in style and socially unexciting. Neither demonstrates romantic interests.[20]

Although it shows some of the reporters' questionable activities, the movie never addresses questions about their ethics frontally. Woodward and Bernstein did, after all, get access to the credit card records of Watergate trickster Donald Segretti. The journalists also obtained phone records through a friend that helped them to trace links between the burglary and the activities of the Committee to Re-Elect the President. Was it proper for Woodward and Bernstein to break into private information for a good cause? The movie considers the question only briefly. Dustin Hoffman, portraying Bernstein, says, "George, I really feel bad doing something like this. You know that." George replies, "Don't give me any more of your liberal shit, okay Carl?" This is as close as the film comes to acknowledging that the supposed heroes may have assumed too easily that good ends justify questionable means.

Key figures at the *Washington Post*'s office also reveal some shortcomings in the movie. The *Post*'s editors get credit for their courage in pursuing the Watergate scandal with more energy than other managers in American journalism showed, but they are also seen as a disputatious, egotistical group. The editors compete aggressively with each other for influence over the newspaper's reporting; infighting and jockeying for position are evident in their deliberations (Goldman wrote these scenes into the script after witnessing similar competition at meetings at the *Post*, and some of the newspaper's editors were not pleased with the revealing dialogues he incorporated in the screenplay).[21] Furthermore, *All the President's Men* shows some of the editors demonstrating considerable uneasiness when Woodward and Bernstein produce their revelations. The managers worry that if they publish the reports, someone will sue the newspaper for libel, or leaders in the Nixon administration will become angry with the *Post* and complicate the reporters' efforts to cover events in the nation's capital. The editors' attitudes reflect the realistic concerns of executives who want their organization to win Pulitzer Prizes for investigative reporting but also are fearful about the risks involved when publishing shocking news reports. The movie's portrayal has basis in fact. The president was quite angry about Woodward and Bernstein's articles. When tape recordings of conversations in the White House were released a few years later, they revealed that Richard Nixon wanted to pressure the Federal Communications Commission not to renew the *Post*'s six radio and television broadcast licenses.

In dramatizing the story of Watergate, the makers of *All the President's Men* could have limited their movie's scope to an examination of the break-in and the discovery of those responsible for it and its cover-up. But the moviemakers also aimed at a much larger target. They traced connections between the break-in and other lawbreaking activities carried out under the Nixon administration that constituted significant challenges to government under the Constitution. In fact, *All the President's Men* provided a valuable history lesson worth repeating to a public that suffered historical amnesia in the years following Watergate. Too many Americans forgot what was at stake in the scandal, and consequently, they considered the crisis to be far less serious than it really was. *All the President's Men* offered them a useful reminder.

In the years after Nixon's resignation a significant portion of the American public believed that the former president had not committed crimes any more serious than those perpetrated by various other scandal-blemished presidents. Many of these people remembered Nixon fondly for his foreign policy achievements (opening relations with Communist China and improving the United States' relationship with the Soviet Union, for example), and they regretted that Nixon's supposedly small miscalculations in the Watergate matter tarnished his reputation badly (this interpretation was particularly noticeable in the public's responses to news of Nixon's death in 1994). They pointed out that other leaders in the White House had made mistakes, but Nixon got caught. Many claimed that the liberal media—Nixon's longtime enemies—brought him down by relentlessly publicizing his errors.

This distorted assessment gained popularity in the years after President Gerald Ford pardoned Nixon, and indeed, the pardon had a great deal to do with the warped perspective. If Richard Nixon had faced criminal charges, the public would have received a lengthy reminder of the Executive Office's alleged complicity in a wide range of political scandals. Court proceedings and news coverage would have lasted months, perhaps years, and the public would have gained a more thorough understanding of the breadth of the crisis and the role of the White House in it. Instead the public got only a limited lesson on the case's importance. Through media coverage of the investigations, particularly television broadcast of the Senate subcommittee hearings on Watergate, viewers received an excellent introduction to the problem. But television did not bring closure on the matter. The televised hearings aimed to discover what had occurred, not to punish the guilty. A courtroom was the appropriate forum for that kind of settlement. Watergate conspirators eventually were sentenced to prison and served time for their crimes, but the sentencing usually occurred away from the glare of television lights and at a time when public interest in Watergate was beginning to fade. More important, President Richard Nixon never had to confront definitive judgments about his own role in the Watergate affairs. Consequently, many Americans assumed that his transgressions were not very great. A number even speculated that, had the president revealed everything he knew from the moment of the June 1972 break-in, he could have finished his second term in office. These assumptions contrast sharply with the realities. The House Judiciary Committee voted for impeachment of the president on three major counts. If Nixon had experienced the impeachment process in the Senate and later had faced criminal proceedings without a presidential pardon, his apparent connections to the Watergate activities would have received more meaningful exposure.

There are several moments in *All the President's Men* that refer to the breadth of the Watergate crimes. The issue is addressed most directly near the end, after Woodward and Bernstein have been chasing the complex trail of evidence for months. The two reporters are still confused about the goals of the conspirators, and they are uncertain about how high the trail of criminal responsibility stretches into the upper ranks of the national government. Woodward then meets his contact—a White House insider whom he calls "Deep Throat"—and describes some of the facts he has learned in tracking the road to the break-in at the Watergate complex. Deep Throat warns Woodward that he and his partner are getting so bogged down in details about that story that they are missing the bigger picture. The informant urges Woodward to think about the broader meaning of the evidence he has studied. The conspirators, says Deep Throat, bugged conversations, followed people, designed phony press leaks, and faked letters. They canceled Democratic party campaign rallies, investigated the private lives of leading Democrats, planted spies, and stole documents. Woodward should recognize that the crimes involve much more than just a break-in at party headquarters, Deep Throat concludes. A short time later Woodward meets the informant again, and Woodward expresses frustration about his difficulty in getting to the heart of the crime. Deep Throat then reminds Woodward again to cast his eyes in high places. "It involves the entire U.S. intelligence community," he says. "The FBI, CIA, Justice—it's incredible." Deep Throat explains that "the cover-up had little to do with it. It was mainly to protect the covert operations." In other words, the break-in at the Watergate complex, although reprehensible, represents only the surface of the iceberg. Below the water was the complex form of a much larger scandal.

In the course of telling the story of Woodward's and Bernstein's investigations, the filmmakers revealed aspects of this deeper problem. They conveyed an important message about the way in which Nixon's men threatened democracy, for example, through a dialogue involving Carl Bernstein and CREEP saboteur Donald Segretti. Segretti had tried to create deception and confusion to undermine the candidacy of the leading Democratic contender for the White House in 1972, Edmund Muskie. The CREEP organizers who sent him worried about Muskie's popular appeal; they thought that Muskie could compete effectively against Nixon in the coming elections. If they could stop Muskie in the early primaries, his candidacy would quickly lose momentum. In support of this effort, Segretti, a young lawyer with a reputation for playing dirty tricks during his college days in California, sabotaged the Muskie campaign. He obtained some "Citizens for Muskie" stationery and used it to send letters to two other Democratic candidates for the presidency (Hubert Humphrey and Henry M. Jackson), accusing them of sexual misconduct. Segretti disrupted a Muskie fundraising dinner, and he planted agents at Muskie rallies carrying probusing posters (a sensitive issue in the Florida primaries). The trickster also assigned agents to appear at Muskie rallies to ask the candidate embarrassing questions, and Segretti placed an ad harmful to Muskie in newspapers and on radio stations. This interference in the Demohis partner are getting so bogged down in details about that story that they are missing the bigger picture. The informant urges Woodward to think about the broader meaning of the evidence he has studied. The conspirators, says Deep Throat, bugged conversations, followed people, designed phony press leaks, and faked letters. They canceled Democratic party campaign rallies, investigated the private lives of leading Democrats, planted spies, and stole documents. Woodward should recognize that the crimes involve much more than just a break-in at party headquarters, Deep Throat concludes. A short time later Woodward meets the informant again, and Woodward expresses frustration about his difficulty in getting to the heart of the crime. Deep Throat then reminds Woodward again to cast his eyes in high places. "It involves the entire U.S. intelligence community," he says. "The FBI, CIA, Justice—it's incredible." Deep Throat explains that "the cover-up had little to do with it. It was mainly to protect the covert operations." In other words, the break-in at the Watergate complex, although reprehensible, represents only the surface of the iceberg. Below the water was the complex form of a much larger scandal.

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All the President's Men does not provide elaborate details about Donald Segretti's efforts to sabotage Muskie's presidential campaign, but it does reveal enough information to sharpen the viewer's appreciation of the importance of Segretti's activities. The movie shows that Segretti and his CREEP backers tried to tamper with the democratic process, and judging by the outcome, it appears that they were rather successful. The tricks made an impact on a national race for the White House. *All the President's Men* also shows that the perpetrators of these crimes sometimes failed to recognize the seriousness of their transgressions. As Segretti tells Bernstein in the movie, "I honestly don't see what we did that was so goddam awful."

In a variety of other small ways the movie hints of the multitude of different illegal activities that got Nixon and his team in trouble—paying off the burglars for remaining silent, breaking into personal offices in search of incriminating evidence against individuals, circulating deliberate lies about public figures, destroying evidence, conducting illegal surveillance, and intimidating critics of the administration. The producers were unusually successful in cramming so many references to historical events in a Hollywood entertainment film. They succeeded in drawing attention to a number of controversial issues. Rather than apply a soft touch to their interpretation of the Watergate crimes, the moviemakers managed to drive at the heart of the scandal. They showed that it involved much more than just political hanky-panky at the opposition party's headquarters; "Watergate" concerned violation of many of the fundamental tenets of democratic government.

The filmmakers' forthrightness must be viewed in the context of the times, of course. Their movie went into production in the year after Richard Nixon's embarrassing exit from office. Although a number of Americans in 1975 continued to believe that Nixon had not committed serious crimes, many others were highly disgusted. They felt that the former president and his associates had broken the public's trust. The year 1975 offered a propitious environment for making a hard-hitting motion picture about corruption in Washington.

Actions in Congress gave evidence of the new reform mood in the nation during the period when *All the President's Men* was in development. In 1973–74 the legislative branch became more assertive in dealing with the White House. Congress passed the War Powers Act in 1973, asking that the president consult with the legislative branch when dispatching troops to foreign lands and requiring a withdrawal of such troops within ninety days unless Congress authorized their continued use. More relevant to the Watergate scandal, in 1974 Congress voted for the Campaign Financing Act, which attempted to reform some of the abuses in financing elections. Then, in 1975 and 1976, Congress passed the Freedom of Information Act and other legislation designed to give citizens access to government documents that previously had been kept from public view. Congress also investigated the extraordinary abuses of power by the CIA and the FBI. None of these efforts completely corrected the dangers that historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. associated with the "Imperial Presidency," but they gave evidence of the reformers' growing strength in American politics at the time when *All the President's Men* went into production and made its appearance in American theaters.[22] In many respects the movie's highly critical view of corruption reflected current political fashions in the angry days during and after the Watergate revelations.

The appearance of *All the President's Men* in the spring of 1976 was bad news for President Gerald Ford, coming as it did in the midst of a battle for the presidency. Any reminders about the nation's embarrassments under recent Republican leadership had the potential of hurting Ford's campaign. The incumbent president was already in trouble with voters for pardoning Nixon. Now Jimmy Carter had emerged as the Democratic presidential front-runner in the primaries by projecting the image of an honest politician from outside the Washington loop. To defeat Carter, Ford needed to keep the public's thoughts about Watergate to a minimum. The arrival of *All the President's Men* made that task difficult.

Some leaders in the Democratic party thought that the movie could help their cause. At the time of the film's release, Basil Patterson, vice chair of the Democratic National Committee, observed that there had been a national effort "to exclude from our consciousness the painful, unpleasant, unacceptable memories of the Watergate debacle." Patterson claimed that *All the President's Men* "revives all the recollections and the emotions."[23] William vander Heuvel, New York cochair for Jimmy Carter's presidential bid, agreed. Heuvel speculated that "the movie will have a major impact on the 1976 campaign" and observed that *All the President's Men* "takes a subliminal issue and puts it back in the front ranks of people's minds."[24]

Carter surged ahead in the polls in the months following the movie's release, but he slipped later in the year and beat Ford in November by only a small margin. Whether the motion picture made a difference in the close race is impossible to determine. The movie's effect on the American voting public, if significant, probably came not in the form of a direct influence on votes but in a vaguer sense of sowing doubts about Republican leadership, raising suspicions about a president who would pardon Nixon, and arousing general anger over the wrongs of Watergate.

All the President's Men opened to generally good reviews. Commentators praised the film for its realism and its thesis. *All the President's Men* is a morality play, wrote Joy Gould Boyum in the *Wall Street Journal.* Its lessons about freedom of the press and political corruption are familiar themes from grade school civic classes, yet the picture is "so exciting, so effective in building tension, and so ultimately moving, that we tend to experience its familiar materials almost as revelation," wrote Boyum.[25] Jack Kroll, commenting in *Newsweek,* saw similar virtues. *All the President's Men* "gets under your skin," he reported, because "behind the scrabbling style of the reporters lies a world of moral meaning."[26] The movie is "spellbinding" and "riveting," wrote Vincent Canby of the *New York Times.* It manages to show the young reporters "becoming thoroughly absorbed in seemingly unimportant minutiae," details that ultimately reveal a conspiracy of gigantic proportions. "'All the President's Men' is remarkable for its understatement, for the cliches it avoids, for all the things it doesn't do, as for the things that it does," wrote Canby.[27]

The understated documentary style did not please all. Some reviewers considered the emphasis on realism to be tedious. *All the President's Men* gives too much attention to details, they said, and too little consideration to drama. Writing in the *Washington Post,* Gary Arnold complained that *All the President's Men* "verges on being meticulous to a fault." Arnold found the story flat, lacking "highs and lows" and "ups and downs." It needs a "spark of showmanship and inspiration."[28] Similarly, Stanley Kauffmann of the *New Republic* complained that the movie delivers an "ultimately static and uncomfortable result." He noted that much of the film shows Woodward and Bernstein working on the telephone (with the other party not seen but heard as a filtered voice). This hardly seems to be the stuff of riveting drama.[29] *All the President's Men* features no "big scenes" and "no sudden confrontations," complained Robert Hatch in *The Nation*. Instead, it concentrates on journalists combing through lists looking for leads, ringing doorbells, and drinking numerous cups of coffee. The real villains in the Watergate story are not even portrayed on the screen. Hatch observed that Attorney General John Mitchell is only a voice on the telephone in the movie, and President Richard M. Nixon appears only as a face on a television screen in the *Washington Post*'s office. Attention to realism, in short, diminished the movie's potential for delivering a compelling story.[30] To these critics, the edification gained by the documentary style did not offset the losses created because of a format that they considered to be poorly suited for Hollywood.

Not surprisingly, some of the individuals who had been involved in the Watergate scandal and were mentioned or portrayed in *All the President's Men* were not pleased with the movie. They objected to the film's depiction of certain White House figures, and they challenged aspects of the movie's interpretation of history. Herbert G. Klein, the former White House communications director, thought that *All the President's Men* concentrates on the negative aspects of White House activities and ignores the "good deeds" of the president's advisers. Klein also criticized the movie for delivering forms of "character assassination." *All the President's Men* unfairly associates decent people with the scandals, he claimed, individuals such as Clark McGregor and Ken Clawson. The movie fails to distinguish between major and minor crimes. A typed note featured near the end of the film announces "Maurice Stans guilty," Klein noted, yet Stans's guilt pertained only to five technical misdemeanors or violations (such as tardy reporting of a contribution and two disbursements). Charles W. Colson, the president's former counsel in the White House, agreed that Ken Clawson had not been treated fairly. Colson took issue with the movie's suggestion that Woodward and Bernstein feared that their phones were tapped and their lives were threatened. The danger did not really exist, Colson insisted, and the two intrepid journalists probably never felt insecure about their safety. Filmmakers probably threw this idea into the movie to breathe life into the plot, Colson guessed. He also complained that the movie gives too much credit to Woodward and Bernstein for exposing the Watergate scandals. *All the President's Men* fails to recognize the contributions of Seymour Hersh of the *New York Times*, as well as figures such as Senator Sam Ervin and special prosecutor Archilbald Cox, Colson observed.[31]

The argument that *All the President's Men* accentuates the role of Woodward and Bernstein in bringing down the Nixon administration was the most commonly repeated criticism of the film. It appeared in both favorable and negative reviews of the movie. Commentators were quick to note that many individuals played important roles in the exposures of 1972 to 1974. The objection was not surprising, of course, for history from Hollywood frequently concentrates on the activities of a hero or two and assumes that the principal characters almost single-handedly changed American politics. Redford, Goldman, and Pakula were well aware that their movie could not achieve a balanced examination of the Watergate investigations that would provide attention to all the major players. It was difficult enough to communicate an understanding of the complex web of corruption and to mention some of the many individuals associated with the scandal. Accordingly, the moviemakers focused tightly on the work of the two journalists.[32] This focus on the actions of Woodward and Bernstein evidently gave luster to their profession. During the year after the movie's release, application to journalism schools increased significantly.[33]

Not many other objections arose about the movie's presentation of recent history. In view of the many depictions of historical events in *All the President's Men,* it is remarkable that the moviemakers took so few hits regarding interpretation. Most commentators seemed to accept the film's rendition of the Watergate story as essentially true and argued instead about whether they thought the documentary style was effective. By basing their movie closely on Woodward and Bernstein's book, Redford, Pakula, and Goldman managed to protect themselves rather effectively from criticism of their interpretation. Woodward and Bernstein's writing also provided a shield against lawsuits. Ordinarily, a movie about the recent political behavior of real-life individuals can be risky. The living persons portrayed in such a film may try to sue a studio or the producers if they do not like the way they are depicted on the screen. Since no one had challenged Woodward and Bernstein's book in court, it seemed unlikely that there would be an attack on the same material if it appeared in the movie. Besides, many of the Watergate conspirators had been convicted by the time the movie came out; they were in no position to mount a legal campaign against the film's characterizations.

When William Goldman accepted the assignment to write a screenplay for *All the President's Men,* he suspected that he would face a difficult job making a successful drama out of the Watergate story.

Hollywood executives preferred to stay clear of political movies, evidently because they sensed that the public did not like them very much. "Message pictures" were often losers in the commercial entertainment business. When a social or moral message had to be incorporated in a motion picture, usually it would be soft-pedaled. Nonetheless, the story that Goldman, Redford, and Pakula constructed moves in opposition to these familiar standards. It strikes hard at the record of scandal, bluntly identifies the names of living culprits, and honestly demonstrates how widespread and serious was Watergate's assault on American democracy. The movie's toughness emanated from the peculiar times in which it was made, an era when Americans were outraged over the evidence of conspiracy and lies that had come out of Washington. Yet its sharpness can also be traced to the man who conceived the film. Robert Redford had communicated very few public statements about American politics before he created the 1976 movie. With *All the President's Men* he emerged as a political man and made an important contribution to the public's thinking about history.

All the President's Men does exaggerate the accomplishments of its two protagonists, Woodward and Bernstein. The movie ensured that, as Bob Woodward observed, their story would be the one about Watergate "that people know and remember."[34] The movie's tendency to glamorize the achievements of the reporters is common to the genre, however. Most Hollywood docudramas accent the heroic action of a few people and downplay the role of other individuals and the impact of broad, complex forces that can contribute to change. Despite this limitation, *All the President's Men* manages to deliver a bold and informed view of a significant crisis in American political life. As such, it represents one of Hollywood's better examples of cinematic history.