

## Behind the By-Lines

THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER by Gay Talese. 555 pages. World. \$10.

Inside this fat and often sassy non-fiction portrait of a great American institution, a slightly thinner work of factualized near-fiction struggles to be born.

The institution is the New York Times, where Gay Talese worked as a reporter for ten years. The newspaper's serious beginnings, by his accounting, stretch back well before 1896, when the paper (circ. 9,000) was bought by Adolph Ochs for \$75,000. Times tradition includes Ochs' historic dictum about the news: "I want it all." Trying to get it all has raised the *Time's* circulation to 1,000,000, made it the world's greatest newspaper—with a not entirely justified reputation for being the

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world's most accurate newspaper as well.

Talese's nonfiction novel is a dramatic incident comprising about a fourth of the book. It combines the documentary quality of Arthur Hailey's institutional epics *Airport* and *Hotel* (for which Hailey, like Talese, did a monumental amount of research) with the ambitious maneuvering of Cameron Hawley's *Executive Suite*. The subject: horrendous infighting which occurred in 1968, when forces aligned with pipe-smoking, politically pious James ("Scotty") Reston, brilliant columnist and former head of the *Times's* Washington bureau, confronted elements led by genteel, manicured E. Clifton Daniel, then (as now) managing editor of the *Times*. The civil war turned region against region, for it was nourished by a longstanding feud between the New York office and the Washington bureau, for years run as a separate fiefdom. Example: Once, working a steel strike story, *Timesman* A. H. Raskin, probably the best labor reporter in America, was unable to cover it when negotiations reached the White House. After turning up at the *Times's* Washington office, he was firmly told that the story would be handled by the Washington staff.

**Machiavellian Maneuver.** Reston won. He successfully withstood a New York effort to put a New York man in charge of Washington, and he is now executive editor of the *Times*. That outcome, of great moment inside the *Times*, is of less than secondary interest to the outside world. Accordingly, to curry reader excitement, Talese has had to transform the newsroom on the third floor of the *Times* building into a for-

ress of machiavellian maneuver. (One wonders, sometimes, how the paper ever got put out at all.) *Timesmen*, in the book, tingle with preternatural sensitivity to the subtle shifts of desk assignments that mark shades of advancement or demotion. They count the entrances and exits into editors' offices that signal a power crisis, with the intensity of a lawyer reading his own will. They are astoundingly skillful at deducing mood from an editor's voice as he summons writers for comments on their copy. "If the editor paged the reporter in a snappy, peremptory tone—*Mr. Haberman!* very quick—it meant that there was only a small question . . ." Talese explains. "But if the editor languished on the sound of a young man's name—*Mr. Haberman*—then the editor's patience was thin, and the matter was very serious indeed."

Talese tends to overinterpret a bit. Still, whether he is studying bullpen pecking order, invoking the camphor-scented memory of *Times* past, or heightening the Reston-Daniel showdown, at his best he has an eye like a Hasselblad for detail and a novelist's feel for scene setting.

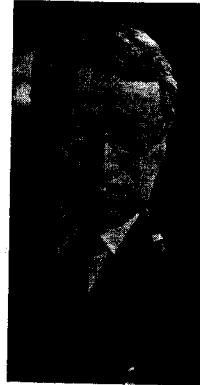
Though he tends to treat his leading characters as if they were dukes and dauphins of some royal court, dwelling upon their power drives at the expense

of their unquestioned professional skill, he is at pains not to take explicit sides. Clearly Talese does not care for Daniel. Yet the book's main characters, Reston and Daniel, are not hero and villain but nearly equal protagonists. Daniel is shown as a careerist who cultivates worldly graces and helpful grantees. Against that, the reader can balance Reston's less blatant but equally tenacious ambition, and his curious notion that what is good for Reston and the *Times* is good for the U.S. as well.

This peculiar confusion of allegiances, Talese suggests, led Reston, "on grounds of national security," to help doctor a report on the Bay of Pigs which, if printed when and as written, might have prevented the attack from being launched at all.

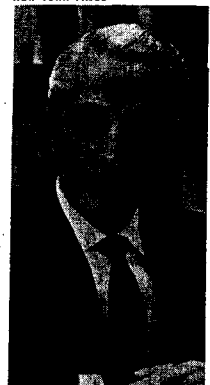
On the record, both men are classic American types, sprung to eminence from provincial poverty by their own exertions: Daniel from a soda-jerking

WALTER BENNETT



RESTON

NEW YORK TIMES



DANIEL

*Joust for the gray lady's favors.*

job in Zebulon, N.C., Reston via an impoverished childhood in Scotland and a U.S. boyhood in the Midwest, partly spent working as a caddie. Readers in search of profundities and nuances will be more satisfied with the portrait of Reston, perhaps because Talese implies that Daniel's surface is Daniel. Reston's Horatio Alger idealism and Establishment pieties Talese wryly ascribes to a successful immigrant's fervor for his new-found land. In assessing the American scene, he charges, rather unfairly, Reston is a "better convert than a critic."

The *Timesmen* Talese describes are not likely to be grateful to him. Sometimes he presents them in quasi-caricature. But for all his citified cynicism about personalities, Talese and his book remain oddly in awe of the "good gray lady" and some of his ripest overwriting is put to the service of its glorious past and present. This means that the New York *Times* emerges from Talese's chronicle-cum-novel with most of its mythology intact. A good reason why *The Kingdom and the Power*, like the newspaper itself, is best read with a selective eye.

TIME, JULY 4, 1969