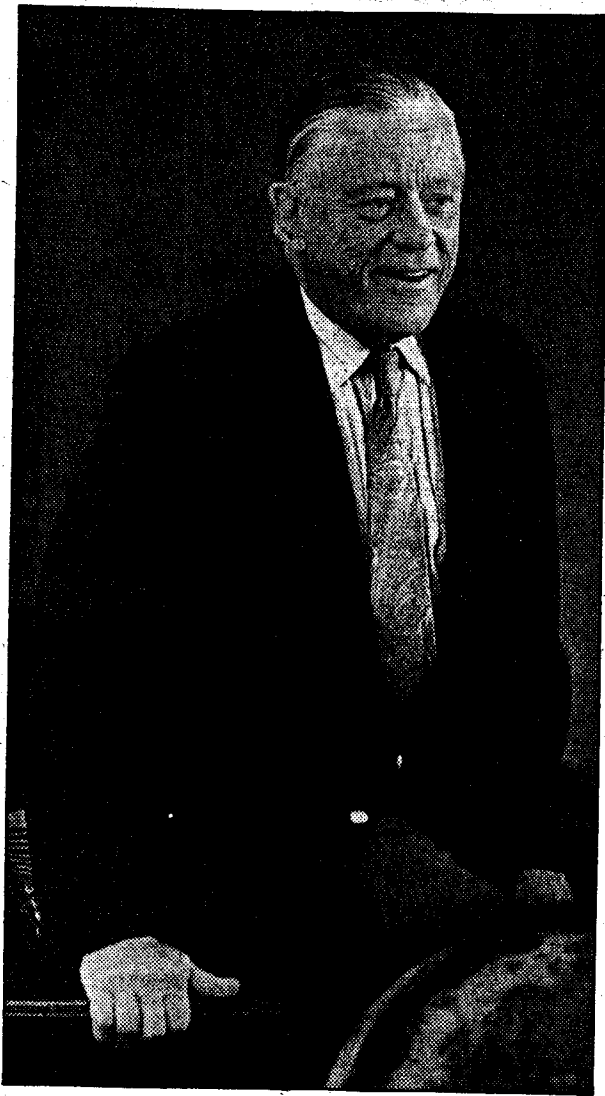


Bradlee Retiring as Editor of The Post

Managing Editor Downie Moves Up; Kaiser to Succeed Him

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By Howard Kurtz
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BY JAMES A. PARCELL—THE WASHINGTON POST
Executive editor Bradlee left his mark on The Post as the newspaper rose to the top ranks of American journalism.

Benjamin C. Bradlee said yesterday he is resigning as executive editor of The Washington Post, ending a 26-year career that boosted the paper to the top ranks of American journalism and made Bradlee the best known editor of his era.

Leonard Downie Jr., 49, the managing editor of the Post since 1984 and long considered Bradlee's heir apparent, will succeed Bradlee as executive editor. Deputy managing editor Robert G. Kaiser, 48, will become managing editor. The changes will take place Sept. 1.

Bradlee, who turns 70 on Aug. 26, said he will become a vice president of the paper and a director of The Washington Post Co. He is writing his memoirs and a second book on the newspaper business, and is narrating a television documentary on the Middle East being produced by the Post Co.

Bradlee said he is ready for the change. "I have no doubt it's the right time for me to move on," he said.

Bradlee is best known outside the news business for directing The Post's coverage of the Watergate scandal, which led to the 1974 resignation of President Richard M. Nixon. To the paper's staff over 2½ decades, he set a tone of aggressive reporting, journalistic initiative and independence from the Washington establishment.

In a note he posted on the newsroom bulletin board last night to announce his plans, Bradlee said, "This is a cause for nothing but optimism and excitement about how productively time marches on." Downie and Kaiser, he wrote, "are ready to get on with this wonderful job."

"This is to thank each one of you for all you have done for me, and for the paper. No editor ever had such a collection of talented and wonderful journalists by his side," Bradlee said.

"This was a great editor and we all owe him a lot," Post Co. Chairman Katharine Graham said of Bradlee. "He has great magic as a personality."

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The Post has become a much larger, more profitable institution since Bradlee became managing editor in 1965 and executive editor in 1968. His retirement completes a generational shift at the paper. In May, Graham, 74, relinquished the chief executive officer's job to her son, Donald Graham, 45, who also is the paper's publisher.

Downie, who was Donald Graham's editor when Graham was a Metro reporter in the early 1970s, has a close working relationship with the publisher, who essentially settled the succession question when Downie was chosen as managing editor in 1984.

One major challenge facing The Post, like many urban dailies, is to broaden its geographic circulation base. Downie said that as managing editor he has expanded Metro coverage and opened new bureaus in the outlying suburbs.

Looking toward possible future expansion of local coverage, he said, "We have a large number of readers in counties like Anne Arundel and Charles. Those readers deserve Washington Post-quality coverage of where they live."

Downie said the paper also has expanded and improved its foreign and business coverage and that he has tried to broaden its focus by putting more sports and science

stories, as well as photographs, on the front page.

Bradlee and Downie are very different in temperament and background. Bradlee, the son of a Boston stockbroker, is a Harvard graduate and an outgoing public figure who frequently entertains at his Georgetown house.

Downie, who describes himself as "fairly shy" and "not very social," is more diffident and dislikes small talk. The son of a businessman who began his career as a milkman in Cleveland, Downie is an Ohio State University graduate who lives in Northwest Washington, spends his spare time with his wife and children and is rarely seen at diplomatic or social functions. "I'm pretty boring," Downie once told Washingtonian magazine.

Milton Coleman, assistant managing editor for metropolitan news, described Downie as "a total product of the Washington Post newsroom. He grew up as a local reporter here, and that's already made a difference in the front page. . . . It's going to be a more diverse paper under Leonard, geared to a more diverse readership."

Several editors said Downie had paid special attention during his tenure as managing editor to tightening the paper's editing, improving science coverage and stepping up minority recruitment. Some described him as interested primarily in the

traditional, meat and potatoes Washington stories involving government institutions, while others said he had given new prominence to such lifestyle issues as day care, traffic and commuting problems and health care.

Downie is a methodical boss who immerses himself even in minor decisions, colleagues say. "Len is a classic hands-on manager," foreign editor David Ignatius said. ". . . [He] is out on the floor, looking for problems."

Downie's collegial approach to decision-making—staffers call it MLE, for Multiple Layers of Editors—has sparked complaints that management at The Post has become too cumbersome. But Downie said, "The great strength of this newsroom is the wonderful, smart people who work for it. I really do believe many of them are smarter than I am; it's not a cliché. My genius is being a catalyst for people of such talent."

Kaiser, a graduate of Yale University and the London School of Economics, is a former Moscow correspondent who has published two books about the Soviet Union, including a volume this year about Mikhail Gorbachev.

He made his early mark at the paper in the late 1960s, as a District Building reporter and as a correspondent in Vietnam. Kaiser also covered the Senate before becoming editor of

the Outlook section. In 1985, he became assistant managing editor for national news, and directed the paper's coverage of the Iran-contra scandal.

"There wasn't any point going around looking for another Ben Bradlee because there isn't one," Donald Graham said. But he said Downie and Kaiser "clearly look like a very strong team."

Downie and Kaiser have worked together since 1964, when both were summer interns at The Post. They locked horns in a front-page "byline derby" that ended in a 13-13 tie. Downie said he was conscious of the fact that most of his new colleagues came from Ivy League backgrounds.

"Everyone else [among the interns] was the son or daughter of someone well-connected or famous," Downie said. "I felt very provincial."

Downie quickly moved from a \$105-a-week job as the night police reporter to investigative work. His first series, on flaws in the District courts, led to a reorganization of the court system and became the subject of one of his three books. A 1969 series, which implicated savings and loan officials in real estate schemes to gouge inner-city residents, led to Downie's first major contact with Bradlee.

The executive editor told Downie that a delegation of bank officials had just threatened to withdraw



BY BILL O'LEARY—THE WASHINGTON POST

When Bradlee retires, Downie, right, and Kaiser will become paper's top editors.

their advertising. "I threw them out," Downie recalls Bradlee saying. "Now, can you tell me what you're doing?" After he explained the project, Bradlee told him, "Just make sure it's right!" The thrifts pulled hundreds of thousands of dollars in ads after Downie's series was published.

In those years, Downie said, "I didn't dream of being an editor at all. I mistakenly thought I could write." When Downie was made a local editor, he viewed it as "punishment" for being "unproductive."

By early 1973, however, Downie was editing the paper's Watergate

stories, and the following year, at 32, he became assistant managing editor for metropolitan news. Downie was named London correspondent in 1979, and returned to Washington as national editor in 1982.

Downie said the paper needs to be "still more aggressive" on what he calls "accountability reporting—finding out information that is not provided by events or press conferences or political campaigns. I'm going to push real hard for the kind of reporting I began doing here when I was 23 years old."