

Turner

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## THE PRESS

### The Watergate Three

When the Pulitzer Prizes are announced next week, the citation for public service by a newspaper—barring a last-minute reversal—will go to the *Washington Post* for its continuous digging into the Watergate case and related campaign scandals. Certainly the *Post* deserves credit for its tenacity. But the trade knows that personal honors belong to an unlikely trio of relatively junior newsmen: the *Post's* District of Columbia editor, Barry Sussman, 38, and Reporters Carl Bernstein, 29, and Bob Woodward, 30. None of the three was accustomed to covering stories of

H.R. Haldeman had access to a secret campaign kitty used in part to fund political sabotage. Though other publications—principally *TIME* and the *New York Times*—kept up a steady rhythm of Watergate beats, Republican spokesmen reserved their harshest denunciations for the *Post*. The paper appeared to have been caught in a serious gaffe when it reported that an important witness had established the Haldeman connection in testimony to a grand jury. Such testimony was not given, though Bernstein and Woodward had obtained the information directly from the same person. Attacks by the *Post's* critics increased after the election, when Water-

than youth. Woodward, an enrolled Republican, is a graduate of Yale and the Navy officer corps. He is handsome, dresses old-campus conservative and once considered a law career. Last summer he had had only a year's experience with the *Post*, much of it covering local stories. He is considered a smooth interviewer but a mediocre writer.

Bernstein, long of hair and sloppy of dress, a college dropout, is something out of *The Front Page*. Despite his prose flair, he had a reputation for spotty performance, dating partly from the time a superior caught him apparently asleep in the city-hall press room. Bernstein literally throws himself at sources. Once, after a hearing at the Watergate trial, several defendants crowded into a single cab. Bernstein lunged into the car as it pulled away and was last seen on a defendant's lap.

Despite their differences in style and the fact that they see little of each other socially, the men work well together under Sussman's avuncular guidance. Some stories are written in collaboration; in cases where only one does the writing, a double byline is retained because they have developed a mutual pool of information.

The trio's work has already won six major reporting prizes, netting \$2,000 for Sussman and \$3,250 each for Bernstein and Woodward. The two reporters are planning a book on Watergate and have already received a \$55,000 advance from Simon & Schuster. They are still uncovering new chapters. Last week they reported that as early as last December aides had warned President Nixon of a White House cover-up of the Watergate case. The Administration had no comment on the story—and no denunciation of the *Post*.



WALTER BENNETT

EDITOR SUSSMAN, REPORTERS WOODWARD & BERNSTEIN AT WASHINGTON POST Prizes, uncommon backgrounds and a mutual obsession.

national significance; all felt the intense heat of Administration denunciations that threatened to wilt their credibility, even among some fellow newsmen.

Their partnership began by accident. Sussman paid an unusual Saturday visit to the office last June 17 after learning that five men had been arrested that morning while breaking into Democratic headquarters. He borrowed Bernstein from the Virginia desk to check the five suspects and called in Woodward for help. These three—and other *Post* reporters—at first covered the story as a rather exotic local burglary. Then, following the Democratic Convention in July, Managing Editor Howard Simons told Sussman to choose two reporters to work full time on Watergate; Sussman retained Bernstein and Woodward.

**Insinuations.** The team's most important news break came on Oct. 10, when it revealed the existence of a network of agents hired to undertake political espionage for the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, and named Donald Segretti as one of the operatives. Five days later, the *Post* (along with *TIME*) linked Segretti to Presidential Appointments Secretary Dwight Chapin. On Oct. 25, Woodward and Bernstein wrote that Presidential Aide

gate stories faded for a time from the *Post's* pages.

There were insinuations that the *Post* had played the Watergate story heavily only to help George McGovern's election chances. The *Post* was naturally eager to disprove that notion. Working up to 16 hours a day, Bernstein and Woodward hounded C.R.P. staffers in their homes and badgered White House aides with endless phone calls. "It was like selling magazine subscriptions," Bernstein remembers. "One out of every 30 people will feel sorry for you and buy one."

Finally, their doggedness produced a fresh lead. In early December, they published a former White House secretary's on-the-record statement that Watergate Defendant E. Howard Hunt Jr. had possessed a special telephone line into his White House office. The line bypassed the regular switchboard and the phone bills were routed through the secretary's home. "That story was like opening a pressure valve," says Sussman. "The criticism stopped immediately. It showed that there was more to the case."

The *Post* men came to share an obsession with the story that had raised them from professional obscurity. Otherwise, they have little in common other