

MAKING BOOK

'The new (pant, pant) Woodstein is still a secret; my Deep Throats say it shows Nixon in collapse much earlier than is supposed.'

BY ELIOT FREMONT-SMITH

"We're shipping books at the end of March," Dick Snyder said the other day over drinks at the St. Regis. The tone was serious, the look poker-frank. "All reviewers will get copies at the same time." Pause, sip. Then, gleefully: "There's just no way anybody's going to see it before then. We didn't print any galleys, and copies of the manuscript have been destroyed."

Snyder is president of Simon & Schuster. The book he was talking about is (*pant, pant*) the new 'Woodstein'—Bob Woodward's and Carl Bernstein's account of the Nixon collapse, their sequel to "All the President's Men." Its title is "The Final Days." Rather blah. But the panting was for real.

There used to be one way to promote a soon-to-be-published book of great expectations, and that way was to get the word around as much as possible, via telephone calls, galleys, planted news stories, advance releases, etc. to the media, the idea being, of course, to build knowledgeable anticipation. Now, and in effective ascendancy for certain books, there's another way to get the juices flowing, and that is to withhold as much prepub information as possible, create a secret, and let the rumors do the walking. Or the running. It can work only for known quantities (Woodstein is one), and it risks some backlash if the secret turns out to be a dud. Still, a lot of people are going to drop everything to read "The Final Days" the instant it appears, in the minimum sure suspicion that, dud or not, everybody else will be doing the same. (The book's immediate spurt into best-seller heaven is not in doubt.)

The technique is not entirely new. Back in 1968, Little, Brown deliberately dillydalleyed even in sending out finished review copies of Gore Vidal's "Myra Breckinridge," so I did the unheard-of thing for a (then) Times reviewer, rushed out and bought a copy. Anything, even \$5.95 cash, for a scoop. (Peter Prescott scored another, for Women's Wear Daily, by obtaining a forbidden early copy of William Manchester's "The Death of a President." Much famous flak in reviewing annals.) An utterly silly business, the critical scoop, and thought less than properly dignified in some harrumphing quarters. But then, so is Olympic luge racing. One can't be circumspect all the time.

"These facts about "The Final Days": Newsweek has paid "six figures" for two 15,000-word installments to run (or be drawn upon) in consecutive issues at the end of March. Simon & Schuster has an initial printing of 150,000 copies, some of which may appear in bookstores before Newsweek's second issue. (The official publication date is May 3, no doubt set by some resident astrologist.) It will be the mainest of main Book-of-the-Month Club selections. Paperback rights have not yet been sold, but they should make Woodstein and S & S rich again—and Warner Paperback Library, which paid \$1 million for "All the President's Men," a mite nervous. Movie rights? Good God—one thing at a time, and Redford's busy. Big stuff—conceivably the biggest ever for a "political" book. If.

If performance matches promise. If it is good, and juicy. If expectations haven't been raised too high. S & S's catalog copy, the only publicly available description of the book so far, is notably lengthy, full of names (Haig, Kissinger, St. Clair, Garment, the Nixon daughters, etc.) and claims (300 people interviewed, "some as many as 15 times") and hints of revelation ("a portrait of a

two ways: stir relieving, explanatory empathy in those who wish to "defend" Nixon; and expose yet more enticing vulnerability for those who would like to kick him around some more. (I confess to the latter: politics and I suppose humanity aside, I miss Nixon as an object of adrenal pleasure.)

Haig is presented as acting president—not much new in that except perhaps degree, length of time, and a conveyed sense of desperately conflicting responsibilities. Kissinger is said to be painted in much darker colors, as a rival, would-be acting president; a man with a true bead on the jugular—anybody's. (I am not alone in panting; Kissingerphobe Bill Safire is said to have pulled all stops for an early look, without success.) One other tidbit: excepting Nixon and his daugh-



Known quantities Woodward, Bernstein, and Hellman

ters (not their husbands, and not the haggard Missus), everybody intimately involved knew the game was up about a year earlier than is generally supposed.

Of course, in the journalistic tradition, if this rumored preview of the book turns out to be wrong, it should be forgotten. You were warned. Journalism works nefariously two ways: Not saying all one knows, and saying what one doesn't know for sure, as even Walter Lippmann didn't admit. On the other hand, if this turns out to be right, you read it here first.

Another book of considerable advance interest among those few who know about it is Lillian Hellman's "Scoundrel Time," which Little, Brown is bringing out in April. Again, no galleys—a decision of Hellman's editor William Abrahams. Also no prepub serialization (to the particular consternation of the Atlantic and Esquire, which ran parts of "An Unfinished Woman" and "Pentimento"), though the reasoning here may have had less to do with hype-by-denial than with the book's being short and difficult to extract from.

"Scoundrel Time" is the book Hellman has often said she could not write; the subject was too painful, she would have to be candid about the cowardice of too many eminent colleagues still alive. The subject is the anti-Communist pogrom of the late 1940s and early 1950s, the hounding of Hellman and Dashiell Hammett by HUAC, Hammett's time in prison, the resulting difficult changes in their lives. The theme is that responsibility for the pogrom rests not alone with the creators and exploiters of that era's paranoia, but at least as much, maybe more, with famous "liberal" friends (Elia Kazan and the late Lionel Trilling among them) who played, if not quite dead, dumb and numb—dumb to personal betrayals, numb to clear and present outrage. It is a personal book, also a correction of history (Garry Wills has done the intro): McCarthyism was in no small part a liberal failure, as Watergate may have been in part a failure of the left (Nixon's plurality in 1968 was tiny, and the other fellow maybe wasn't Tweedledee).

There are silver linings. The Woodstein will anyway provide conversational entertainment. The Hellman—well, the Hellman is the third installment in a continuing and fascinating autobiography of a woman who has had not one, but two productive and creative careers. And that's rare, sort of dazzling.

Nixon unknown to the general public and hardly known even to those closest to him"). And it is notably uninformative.

In fact—and here lie back for a ride down the chute of rumor, but solid rumor my Deep Throats say—the book focuses on three men: Nixon (of course), Haig (of course), and Kissinger (surprise). Nixon is shown to have disintegrated emotionally more severely and much earlier than has been generally thought. If so, this should work, fascinatingly, to the book's advantage in