

Terrence O'Flaherty Views TV

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SFChronicle APR 30 1976 The Watergate Kids II

SELDOM has the fickle finger of fate changed directions as rapidly as it seems to have done for reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein whose aggressive journalism succeeded in toppling a deceitful President.

Following the unprecedented success of their newspaper accounts and their first book, "All



Carl Bernstein

The President's Men," the critical reception of its sequel "The Final Days," has cast some shadows over the sunny pair.

Were they overzealous? Did they track down their prey too heartlessly? We have heard from everyone but Zsa Zsa Gabor on this subject and tonight

we can finally listen to the two men themselves when they are interviewed on "Behind The Lines" (7 p.m., Channel 9). The reporters discuss how they gathered their material as well as their reaction to the criticism of "The Final Days" which Woodward sees as "very similar" to the initial reaction to their original Watergate stories.

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IT IS AN embarrassing comment on the state of professional criticism in the U.S. that many of the critics of the sequel seem to have read the Newsweek excerpt of the book instead of the book itself. The mental picture of a whimpering Richard Nixon pounding the carpet of the White House is so appalling that the non-reading public is in danger of losing sight of the real message of "The Final Days" which is the story of how a lie fell apart and particularly of those aides who tried to hold it together.

Richard Nixon played his role with remarkable consistency from start to finish. Such a morsel of backstage gossip as the praying and the pounding was not so much a revelation as it was a substantiation of everything we come to suspect about the man. The book has more important messages to deliver.

But if the image of the two Washington reporters seems to be somewhat tarnished in recent weeks, their status as national heroes is alive and well and living in 604 movie theaters where the Hollywood version of "All The President's Men" has attracted ecstatic reviews and approximately \$7 million in its first seven days.

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WOODWARD and Bernstein have no need to worry about the criticism of the second book. It won't make any difference now anyway. Their image is out of their hands entirely. In their newspaper and book days, they were creating a *reading* image. From now on, their film image in the guise of Robert Redford and Dustin Hoffman will reach those uncounted millions who watch more than they read.

I doubt if they can change things now. Viewers who have seen the film will know that the two men on tonight's TV interview show aren't the *real* Woodward and Bernstein. To see them, you must go to the movies . . .

"Behind The Lines," public television's weekly journalism review is one of TV's most informative and stimulating features but in recent months our local PTV station, KQED, has made it as difficult to find as Howard Hughes' will. It is disgraceful that such a good series is not given the dignity of a regular time on the dial.

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