

# The American Daily

## THE INSIDE STORIES OF MODERN POLITICAL SCANDALS



*Foreword by Jeff Greenfield*

How Investigative  
Reporters Have  
Changed the Course  
of American History

By Woody Klein



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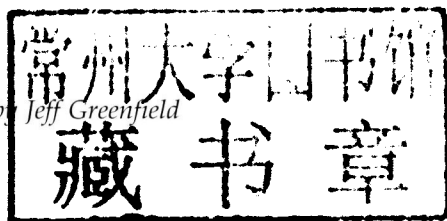
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WOODY KLEIN

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PRAEGER

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Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward. (Illustration courtesy of Tracy Sugarman.)

*To my friend and mentor, John Hohenberg  
(1906–2000), professor of journalism at the  
Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia  
University, whose caring advice and guidance  
on investigative reporting inspired me from the  
outset and for the past 60 years*

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## FOREWORD

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JEFF GREENFIELD

As the American newspaper more and more takes on the coloration of an endangered species, an intriguing argument has broken out in preparation for the postmortem: if the newspaper dies, will we be bidding goodbye to a creature that has outlived its time; or will we be losing something that is irreplaceable and critical to a free society?

There is, after all, nothing especially admirable about an information delivery system that requires the felling of countless trees, the transportation of wood, then paper, and then the newspaper itself across crowded streets via trucks that clog the roads and foul the air. And those of us who were poetic about that feel of the newsprint in our hands . . . well, how different are we from our ancestors who might have sighed, "You know, I really need to feel that papyrus under my hands as I unscroll the news"? Even if we are talking not about the form of the newspaper but the institution itself, perhaps it's simply that the time has passed when the bundling of so much disparate information—comics, horoscopes, advice to the lovelorn, high school lunch menus, weather, national and international news, and opinion—was a sensible combination of data. Today, the sports comes via ESPN, the comics come animated, and opinions—unlimited in volume or ideology and covering the entire thoughtfulness-thuggishness spectrum—are free for the asking (whether you have asked for them or not). What then, might we lose if the newspaper dies?

Woody Klein's book provides one powerful answer: for generations, the conglomerate nature of the newspaper, and its profitability, enabled reporters to devote great amounts of time, energy, and

publishers' resources to throwing light on dark corners of power, especially political power. Put bluntly, the readers who paid their nickels and dimes for "Dear Abby," "Steve Canyon," or "Omarr the Stargazer" were funding the work of uncovering the abuse of power by officials high and low, in arenas that ranged from kickbacks for paving contracts to the conduct of war—and that is why the most worrisome aspect of the decline of the newspaper is the possibility that, at least for now, there is no clear idea of how and where such journalism will survive.

It is not precisely a blazing new insight to note that the founders of the Republic were certain that an independent check on authority was as essential to America's survival as a standing army or a means to raise revenue. It is practically illegal to convene a journalism conference without noting James Madison's observation that "a popular government without the means to popular information is a prelude to a tragedy or a farce—perhaps both," or recalling Thomas Jefferson's statement that, given a choice between a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, he would unhesitatingly choose the latter. Of course, Jefferson said that before he was president; afterwards, he said, "Nothing is to be believed which now appears in a newspaper; truth itself becomes suspect when placed in that polluted vehicle." And that underscored a critical point: the shapers of the Bill of Rights knew full well that the press could often be irresponsible, inaccurate, indeed completely mendacious. Newspapers in the United States at that time, remember, were more often than not wholly owned subsidiaries of political factions and parties. Yet the Founders still made newspapers the only enterprise specifically granted exemption from substantive government regulation.

Klein's accounts of how the press uncovered some of America's most significant political scandals shows that the Founders knew what they were doing. His survey brings to life Lord Acton's famous observation that "all power tends to corrupt." More intriguingly, this survey reminds us that corruption is a house with many mansions.

Those who have great power may abuse it to get rich, to broaden their sexual horizons, to avoid dealing with intractable dilemmas, to punish their political enemies, or—most chillingly—to pursue what they are certain are noble ends by means forbidden to them by law or simple human decency. In almost every case, the work of exposing such wrongdoing is laborious, time-consuming, and

unglamorous (having your story made into a movie and finding yourself played by Robert Redford is generally not the fate of the investigative reporter). Moreover, like the old-time wildcatter looking for oil, these reporters know that sometimes their work produces only dry holes. But it is work without which the possibility of unchecked power would be much closer to reality.

Woody Klein is, manifestly, the right man to take us on this survey. He has, as they say, “worked both sides of the street”—as a press secretary and for many years as a dogged reporter for the *World-Telegram & Sun* in New York City. In my youth, if a story appeared exposing corruption, neglect, or bureaucratic ineptitude in the inner workings of city government, the odds were pretty good that Klein was one of its authors. From decades of experience and observation, he has selected ten tales that do much more than bring some of the biggest news stories of the last half century to life; they also serve as a cautionary tale about what we will lose should the new forms of journalism fail to find a mechanism to keep investigative journalism alive.

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## PREFACE: A PERSONAL RETROSPECTIVE

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Some reporters have done brilliant work in unearthing wrongdoing by acting as detectives or accountants, and sometimes both.

—John Hohenberg, *The Professional Journalist:  
A Guide to Modern Reporting Practices*

This book is the inevitable product of my career-long passion for investigative journalism. Long before Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein became household names, I first became enthusiastic about this kind of proactive journalism when I was a student at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University in the 1950s. I began doing this kind of reporting in 1955 when I joined the *New York World-Telegram & Sun*, after spending a year learning the ropes of reporting on the night police beat on the *Washington Post and Times-Herald*. For a decade on the *World-Telegram*, I was assigned to cover the “housing” beat, which soon led me to firsthand on-the-scene visits to people—mostly blacks and Puerto Ricans—living in dank, gloomy tenement houses in the depths of poverty, mostly in the Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhoods of New York, but also on the Upper West Side of Manhattan where once-proud brownstone buildings that flourished in the 1920s had been divided up by greedy landlords into what was known as single-room occupancy (SRO) apartments. These cramped quarters were often occupied by more than one family, with as many as 10 or 12 people sleeping literally side by side on the floor in unbelievably cramped quarters. It was, to paraphrase Lincoln Steffens (1866–1936), the

famous crusading reporter at the turn of the century, the “shame” of New York City.<sup>1</sup> Steffens was considered by some the first “muck-raker” in American history.<sup>2</sup> With Steffens as a model, I tracked down landlords who failed to fix building violations and wrote stories about them.

The tenants, many of whom were being gouged by shady landlords for high rents just to remain in their dilapidated apartments, frequently called my newspaper with complaints of lack of running water, electricity, or heat and the City of New York’s failure to pick up their garbage or even clean their streets. Further, they complained that neither the Buildings Department nor the police responded to calls for help in bringing their living standards up to the minimum requirements of civilized society in America in the 20th century.

My interest in exposing the “slumlords” of New York turned into an obsession. I began to read all of the books of other famous muck-raking reporters—especially Jacob A. Riis (1849–1914), the Danish-born journalist who immigrated to New York in the 1870s and made it his hunting ground for stories and starkly photographic exposés of the city’s slums that were published in the *New York Tribune* and later the *New York Evening Sun*, where he worked as a photojournalist. Riis—who developed a close working relationship with then New York City police commissioner Theodore R. (Teddy) Roosevelt—was dubbed by Roosevelt as “the most useful citizen of New York.”<sup>3</sup> It was obviously not a coincidence that Riis authored a biography of his friend, whom he idolized. It was titled *Theodore Roosevelt, the Citizen* (1904). Of this book, one chronicler of the history of muckrakers stated: “It was full of loyalty and conviction that could not have been bought at any price: the biographer, although older than his subject, was never able to discuss him in any other terms than those of reverence.”<sup>4</sup>

Riis wrote many books about his findings, among them *Children of the Poor* (1892), *Out of Mulberry Street* (1898), *The Battle with the Slum* (1902), and *Children of the Tenement* (1903). His autobiography, *The Making of an American*, was published in 1901. Riis was perhaps the greatest reporter to expose slum conditions in New York City. As a result of Riis’s book *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (1890), Roosevelt ordered the city police lodging houses that were featured in the book closed down.

Of all the early muckrakers, Riis inspired me the most. I identified with him in my fervent desire to carry on his crusade in my newspaper, the *New York World-Telegram & Sun*, to rid the city of slums.

I was working for a successor newspaper to the one Riis had worked for, the *New York Evening Sun*, so I felt a special tie to him. In pursuit of this goal, I reached out to find anyone alive who had known Riis. I looked up the name Riis in the Manhattan phone book and, much to my amazement, I discovered that Riis's widow, Mary, his second wife whom he married in 1907—seven years before he died—lived in an apartment on Manhattan's Upper East Side.

In an interview in 1964 in her apartment, Mary Riis told me: "I don't think my husband would have been very happy with New York today. He would have been disappointed to see our city today." Mrs. Riis, then in her 80s, described her late husband's friendship with Theodore Roosevelt: "Teddy and Jake were more than good friends," she said. "They were like brothers. They got along well together." She added: "But when we had other company, I would have to ask Jake, 'Now you must talk to other people, too.'" When Roosevelt became president, Mrs. Riis recalled, "the president was devoted to Jake. As a result, Jake found himself influential in [national] politics because all of his friends knew he was a close friend of the president."<sup>5</sup>

At that time, I really believed slums could be eradicated, not only in the city in which I lived but throughout America. Lyndon Johnson was president and his "War on Poverty" program was pouring billions of dollars into a nationwide effort to clear the slums once and for all. I was a believer. For that reason, I decided to experience firsthand what it was like to live in one of the worst slum buildings in New York City, located at 311 East 100th Street. It had more violations on it than any other building and housed more than a dozen families in filthy, rat-infested, roach-filled rooms, all without electricity and hot water. The stench from clogged toilets and stale air in the summer was almost unbearable.

Posing as an out-of-work actor, unshaven, wearing torn, dirty clothes, I was gradually accepted as an outsider with nowhere else to turn. I carried only a Social Security card with me. One or two tenants suspected I was an undercover agent looking for drug dealers, but after I failed to arrest several young men whom I found in the basement every few days injecting themselves with hard drugs, I won the trust of those who lived in the building.

After three months, I emerged and returned to my desk in the city room at the *World-Telegram & Sun* to write my series under the banner headline: "I LIVED IN A SLUM." The exposé of this old-law (pre-1901)<sup>6</sup> tenement on East 100th Street brought the wrath of

Mayor Robert F. Wagner down on my newspaper, on me personally, and, perhaps more appropriately, on his housing officials.

Before long, my publisher, Roy W. Howard, of Scripps-Howard Newspapers,<sup>7</sup> on a visit to our city room on Barclay Street in Lower Manhattan, stopped by my desk and asked if I was the reporter who wrote the series on the slums. When I acknowledged my work, he looked at me sternly and said, somewhat impatiently: "Well, son, you've gotten us halfway up the tree. How are you going to get us down?" I took that to mean he wanted me to help solve the problem I had focused on. Accordingly, I called City Hall's housing officials and asked them to devise a plan to solve the slum issue. In return, I told them, my paper would support a plan if we deemed it worthwhile.

I interviewed Mayor Wagner to get his viewpoint on what could be done to solve the generations-old problem. After defending his administration's efforts to hunt down landlords whose buildings had multiple housing violations, he knew I was not satisfied. Finally, he smiled, looked at me, and said, condescendingly: "There's nothing you can do about the slums. You know that. They're always going to be that way."<sup>8</sup> At the time, as a young, idealistic reporter, I thought his comment was cynical. But the mayor did hire a prestigious consultant, J. Anthony Panuch,<sup>9</sup> a New York lawyer and leading authority on government reorganization, to make a thorough study of the city's uncoordinated housing agencies and to recommend comprehensive city policy by February 1960. Panuch himself, at the outset of his probe, said he was "shocked" by the extent to which slums "had taken over the city."<sup>10</sup>

When Panuch's report was released for publication,<sup>11</sup> the *World-Telegram & Sun* took note on its editorial page and claimed credit for pushing the mayor into taking corrective action to solve the "slum problem." We also praised the well-organized, detailed plan in reaction to our series. Shortly after that, I was the recipient of a Page One Award from the American Newspaper Guild of New York in 1960 for my series. That was followed by an invitation from NBC broadcaster David Brinkley to write a TV script about that slum building—by then declared the "worst slum" in New York City by the mayor—for *David Brinkley's Journal*, which aired on November 22, 1961, and July 25, 1962.

In retrospect, I now realize that all of this attention to one particular building—which has since been torn down—and to the slums of New York at that time was to little avail. There was an effort to improve the blighted parts of the city—which has since been

continued by successive mayors. With the passing of time, however, and after becoming more realistic in the nearly half a century that has elapsed, I would agree today that Mayor Wagner was partially correct, but with one caveat: the government's efforts to reform housing conditions in the ensuing years, driven to a great extent by newspaper exposés, *have* made a difference. I believe we are much better off today than we were at the turn of the last century. But there remains a huge task ahead in the 21st century to realize the dream of a slum-free New York or, for that matter, a nation without slums.

## NOTES

1. "Shame" was the word vividly describing the slums of cities. It was first used by famed journalist Steffens, who was the first reporter to be called a "muckraker" as a result of a series of reports he wrote about a number of cities. They were published by McClure's magazine under the title "The Shame of the Cities" in October 1902.

2. Louis Filler, *Crusaders for American Liberalism* (Yellow Springs, OH: Antioch Press, 1939), 55.

3. Louis Filler, *The Muckrakers* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1968), 45.

4. *Ibid.*, 46.

5. Woody Klein, interview with Mrs. Jacob Riis, *New York World-Telegram & Sun*, May 5, 1964.

6. So-called new-law tenements, requiring much safer construction, were built after 1901 when the State of New York passed a reform measure.

7. Roy Wilson Howard was one of the most important journalists of the 20th century. He headed the United Press during its greatest period of growth, turning it into a worldwide news agency. As chairman of the board and business director, Howard saw the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain become the largest chain of newspapers in the United States before his death in 1964.

8. Woody Klein, *Let in the Sun* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 118.

9. Panuch prescribed a brand-new plan in a special report to the mayor titled "Building a Better New York: Final Report to Mayor Robert F. Wagner," March 1, 1960.

10. Klein, *Let in the Sun*, 128.

11. Summarizing the report, Panuch stated: "In our overcrowded city, where low-income minorities fight desperately for living space in its blighted neighborhoods, slum formation has steadily increased. What appeared to be a manageable problem in the 1930s has assumed staggering proportions in the 1960s in congested New York City."



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First, I want to acknowledge the deep commitment—both personally and professionally—of my wife, Audrey Klein, who is always there to provide me with never-ending support. As an editor, her insights and suggestions helped me formulate the content of this book. She has been, at once, my hardest critic and my most enthusiastic reader. It is never easy to live with an author, but she has managed to cope with this writer's idiosyncrasies for the past 48 years. For that I thank her with all my heart.

I should like to express my profound gratitude to Jeff Greenfield, an award-winning senior political correspondent for *CBS News*, for contributing the foreword to this book. Greenfield, a former colleague of mine in the news business, is a commentator on the *CBS Evening News with Katie Couric* and *CBS Sunday Morning*. He has also worked as a senior analyst for CNN, serving as its lead analyst for coverage of the primaries, conventions, presidential debates, and election nights. Greenfield also has reported on the media, culture, and trends for the cable channels. He is principally known for his coverage of domestic politics and media. A one-time speechwriter for Robert F. Kennedy, he has served as a floor reporter or anchor booth analyst for every national political convention since 1988. His experience as an analyst and investigative reporter places him among the elite in the news business today. Greenfield has twice been named to *TV Guide's* All-Star Team as best political commentator and was cited by the *Washington Journalism Review* as "the best in the business" for his media analysis.

Greenfield has contributed articles to the *New York Times Magazine*, *Esquire*, and *National Lampoon* and has authored or coauthored

nine books, including *Television: The First 50 Years* and *The Real Campaign*. His first novel, *The People's Choice* (1995), was named one of the *New York Times's* notable books of the year. Before joining CNN, Greenfield was ABC News's political and media analyst for 14 years and was with CBS before that. Greenfield has earned a number of awards, including the 2002 Quill Award for Professional Achievement and three Emmy Awards. He graduated with honors from Yale Law School with a bachelor of legal letters degree.

I am deeply indebted to my editors who guided me along the way from conceptual proposal to final manuscript. They are Robert Hutchinson, senior editor, Praeger Publishers; Brian Foster, formerly an assistant editor with Greenwood Publishing; Michael Millman, senior editor, ABC-CLIO, who was enormously helpful down the stretch in helping me shape the final manuscript and getting it on press; and, finally, Erin Ryan, submissions editor of ABC-CLIO.

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In addition, I could not have written this book without the advice of Mark Feldstein, associate professor of media and public affairs and director of the Journalism Oral History Project at George Washington University. He is a former TV investigative reporter whose work has won more than 50 journalism awards. He is quoted as a media analyst by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, CNN, NPR, NBC News, ABC News, CBS News, C-SPAN, Al-Jazeera, BBC News, *Newsday*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and other news outlets. Feldstein's latest book is *Poisoning the Press: Richard Nixon, Jack Anderson, and the Rise of Washington's Scandal Culture*.

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- Ben Bradlee, arguably the most influential American newspaper editor in the second half of the 20th century, currently vice president at large of the *Washington Post* and the