

## **Introduction: ‘To search out and discover the news’.**

The investigation by *The Washington Post* newspaper following the break-in at the Democratic National Headquarters on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1972, have led to many studies into the ‘Watergate’ crime itself, an examination of what the precise aim of the burglars was (this remains unclear almost four decades later), the motives of the men involved and exactly who did what and when, regarding the White House cover-up which followed and led to the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon in August 1974.

A seemingly endless array of journalistic and scholarly books, have also been published in the decades since the incident and the resignation, examining a multitude of aspects related to it. In pop-culture terms, explored in later chapters, the Watergate phenomenon is inextricably linked to the journalistic investigations of *Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. Their series of news articles and the subsequent recounting of the investigative steps they undertook in the course of writing their pieces for publication formed the basis of their bestselling *All the President’s Men*, which is still regarded as the definitive account of their reporting journey. The subsequent Hollywood movie of the same title and their follow-up book *The Final Days* elevated their status as reporters and increased their fame outside media circles until they and their reporting became surrounded by a pop-culture version of ‘mythology’.<sup>1</sup>

This study aims to assess what impact that reporting by the *Post* has had on investigative journalism in the USA and UK. In the process, it summarizes fifteen key points which, it is argued, can be used in many other projects. The study also examines and assesses the development of investigative journalism before and after Watergate, in

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Schudson, ‘Watergate: A Study in Mythology’, *Columbia Journalism Review*, (May/June 1992)

both the USA and UK and considers how they impact their respective societies.<sup>2</sup> The current status and future of investigative journalism is the focus of the final chapter.

Examples from both the USA and UK journalism traditions are cited and examined in each chapter of this study. Inherently, a bias to examples from the USA will prevail. This is acknowledged from the outset and is simply because the whole issue of the Watergate scandal, its coverage, its development as a topic worthy of academic study and its implications for investigative journalism, was greater in the USA than in the UK. But the significance of the Watergate investigation in the UK was – as we'll see in later chapters – also important to the development of investigative journalism as it was across the Atlantic.

Case studies<sup>3</sup>, predominately based on investigations carried out by the author, are used to demonstrate how the Watergate investigation by Woodward and Bernstein can be used as a toolbox for reporters engaged in in-depth reporting. These studies appear throughout this thesis and vary in length and depth. Some are labelled as case-studies and are cited and cross-referenced to points being made in the text: other cases are mentioned periodically and or referred to in a more cursory fashion. They are all strategically placed to illustrate and expound certain strategies for reporting and examples cited are meant to help the reader understand how these techniques work in practice.

### **Theoretical relevance and context**

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<sup>2</sup> Helping democratic societies function whilst seemingly a very general goal is one of the most commonly cited aims of investigative journalism. This is theoretically achieved because it tries to uncover hidden information of value and importance to a country's citizens, meaning they can evaluate and question powerful forces in their midst, in a more complete and knowledgeable way. As Hugo de Burgh states, "Investigative journalism still has the potential to make a worthwhile contribution to society... It does so by drawing attention to failures within society's systems of regulation and to the ways in which those systems can be circumvented by the rich, the powerful and the corrupt." *Investigative Journalism* (Routledge, London & New York, 2008) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, P3.

<sup>3</sup> Eleven case studies in total are contained in the Appendix of this work.

The use of these case studies address the gap in the literature for ‘administrative-interest’<sup>4</sup> based studies carried out by investigative journalists using their own work as a critical starting point for analysis.

The author partially places these sections within that area of study<sup>5</sup>, but also qualifies that context, since I strongly do not believe that an administrative approaches and examination of individual case studies for their goals, techniques and outcomes, do justice to the frequently-present deeper reasons which underpin my own – and others’ – commitment to the practice and development of this kind of journalism.

The straightforward administrative interest in the genre assumes too much from the reader in terms of them understanding the internal and external drivers which often encourage and direct the practitioner in this genre. If no such drivers exist, then that in itself is of note and should be explicitly explained by the authors of such studies. This rarely occurs however. MacFadyen<sup>6</sup>, for example, typifies this: he explains *how* to practice investigative journalism and outlines a number of in-depth, specialist techniques. But he never mentions in any depth, the various reasons why a journalist might want to undertake such a singular route in their profession nor examines the drivers that they need to sustain their journey.

In the author’s experience, to undertake a practitioner role in investigative journalism requires professional stamina and a deeper understanding of the failures of most news provision, a matter discussed in later chapters of this study. I would argue

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<sup>4</sup> ‘This term denotes discourse which deals with how investigative journalism is carried out, meaning the processes and practices used.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, David Spark’s, *Investigative Reporting – A Study in Technique* (Oxford: Focus Press, 1999) This publication is an example of a publication which acts as a how-to guide for journalists interested in investigative techniques. It does not examine the social, economic, political or media-communications meaning and ramifications behind the practice it explains. Two other good examples in the same vein are David Northmore’s, *Lifting the Lid – A Guide to Investigative Research* (London: Cassell, 1996) and from the USA Houton, Bruzzese and Weinberg, eds. *The Reporter’s Handbook – An Investigator’s Guide to Documents and Techniques*. (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1983)

<sup>6</sup> See Gavin MacFadyen, in *Investigative Journalism* (Routledge, London & New York, 2008) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Chpt 8.

that the inherent difficulty of meeting these requirements ensure recruits to and supporters of, investigative journalism are often low and the attrition rate amongst those who would like to do it but in the final cut, do not, is very high.

From the few available studies<sup>7</sup> it seems the driving forces behind forging a career in this genre of journalism includes deeply held personal beliefs that it can be effective in scrutinising the powerful, acting as a watchdog for the weakest, and, creating positive social change by exposing wrongdoing and laying out facts and hidden motives for examination by the public. McNair, and others, support this and have pointed out how ‘journalism as surveillance’ provides societies with “an ongoing narrative about the world beyond our immediate experience” and develops the argument by setting out the case for its wider role ‘sustaining the democratic process’ and setting agendas in the political, social and economic spheres.<sup>8</sup> But it is the work of Ettema and Glasser<sup>9</sup> however which serves as a more focused and acceptable link – and also theoretical backdrop - between the practice exemplified by the case-studies presented here, their links to Watergate and indeed their wider meaning generally.

This author agrees with their thesis of a ‘morally engaged voice’ in relation to the work of investigative journalism and locates this study within the normative theoretical landscape Ettema and Glasser have mapped out. This normative approach underpins the arguments relating to the impact of Watergate in this work, the wider social importance and relevance of Woodward and Bernstein’s impact, and a justification for taking their blueprint and applying it to future projects.

As Ettema and Glasser state:

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, De Burgh, (Ed) *Investigative Journalism* (Routledge, London & New York, 2008) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.

<sup>8</sup> Brian McNair, *News and Journalism in the UK* (London: Routledge, 2009) pp21-22.

<sup>9</sup> See Ettema, James S. and Glasser, Theodore L. ‘The Reporter’s Craft as Moral Discourse’ in *Custodians of Conscience: Investigative Journalism and Public Virtue* by (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998)

Investigative journalists... can issue a compelling call for moral indignation... Their stories call attention to the breakdown of social systems and the disorder within public institutions that cause injury and injustice; in turn, their stories implicitly demand the response of public officials – and the public itself – to that breakdown and disorder. Thus the work of these reporters calls us, as a society, to decide what is, and what is not, an outrage to our sense of moral order and to consider our expectations for our officials, our institutions, and ultimately ourselves. In this way investigative journalists are custodians of public conscience.<sup>10</sup>

Schudson's contribution that Watergate was a cultural phenomenon, as much as a journalistic landmark, is also of significant importance here however, since it helps explain – and for us to understand – how the cultural mythologizing connected to Watergate, further highlighted the classic 'David versus Goliath' narrative model of social storytelling aspect of the reporters' work.

However, I would suggest that, in the midst of this powerful cultural transformation of a journalistic project, some of the practical reporting steps used in Woodward and Bernstein's reporting were lost, or at least, obscured. The froth of fame overshadowed the very pedestrian (literally, since they carried out traditional 'shoe-leather' reporting as they sought sources, corroboration and documentary evidence during their investigation) methodology employed by Woodward and Bernstein. This is a pity. Their strategies were a mix of the old, current and innovative. The scale of their challenge meant their work has had a disproportionate impact on the field of investigative journalism and the lessons to be drawn from it are profound and surprisingly timeless, remaining relevant even in a digital age. Chapter Four in particular explores this theme, explaining how the Watergate investigation raised the profile a number of pre-existing significant journalistic approaches.

From the outset of this study it is important to note that the way that *The Washington Post* team of Woodward and Bernstein, with input from their editors, handled the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid P3.

Watergate reporting, led to lasting impact on how the press would subsequently carry out later investigative-based stories. The book *All the President's Men* and then the film of the same name, told the story of the journalistic investigation to millions of readers and cinema-goers across the world.<sup>11</sup> It was accepted almost immediately as a kind of 'how-to' guide for aspiring reporters.<sup>12</sup> Key lessons are apparent in the techniques and approaches used by its authors. These are:

1. Use of low-level contacts to establish basic knowledge of situations and institutional inner-workings;
2. Using the so-called 'circle technique'<sup>13</sup> of reporting from the 'edges' of an institution and working inwards towards higher-level sources;
3. Being prepared to work long, out-of-office hours;
4. Being self-motivated; being willing to approach uncooperative witnesses;
5. Being will to repeatedly approach unwilling witnesses time and time again;
6. Studiously avoiding displaying any politicised ethos behind their mission;
7. Being prepared to ignore the tradition 'day-to-day' News agenda being followed in other sections of the *Post's* organisation;
8. Producing a constant stream of small, but important, stories and thus earning and maintaining full editorial and management support at every level of the *Post's* organisation;

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<sup>11</sup> The book was a bestseller for five months in 1974; *Playboy* magazine paid \$30,000 for two months' worth of prepublication rights, and actor/director Robert Redford bought the screen rights for \$450,000 (Source: *Newsweek* magazine 1974). Another \$105,000 was paid by the Book of the Month Club for selection rights, whilst foreign rights brought in another \$100,000 (Source: Len Downie, 1976); the book's paperback rights sold for \$1m (Source: Katherine Graham, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> In 1974, *The New Statesman* magazine, for example, 'predicts that students at every journalism program in the United States will be taught the story of Woodward and Bernstein's persistence at unravelling the Watergate story.'

<sup>13</sup> Len Downie's *The New Muckrakers* (New York: New Republic, 1976) p159.

9. Creatively hypothesising the ‘meaning’ behind their findings but always ensuring best-practise by working from the verifiable facts ‘outwards’ and not from a vague hypothesis ‘inwards’;
10. Developing and using daily desk skills (e.g. making repeated phone calls and keeping excellent notes);
11. Also using one source to lead them to the next source;
12. Being able to identify and utilise publicly available resources like library databases and staff records;
13. Using multiple sources (i.e. in the case of Watergate one source to state an assertion, then two additional sources to independently support this claim) for key points laid down in articles;
14. Being able to apply logical and analytical writing skills to their reporting in terms of publishing articles which conveyed factual information and unbiased interpretations of the probable meaning of such information;
15. And finally, using and maintaining the trust of confidential informants when necessary.

These fifteen points are, and remain, a powerful mix of both traditional and innovative approaches, but at the time of Woodward and Bernstein’s investigation they added up to a fresh and novel representation of what some individual reporters and publications had perhaps been deliberately or accidentally doing for a number of years in the decade prior to the 1972 break-in at the Watergate complex and the subsequent *Post* coverage of this event and its ramifications.

In understanding the genre known as ‘investigative journalism’ the historical roots of the practice are identified and examined. Recent works<sup>14</sup> have shed light upon the beginnings of this kind of reporting. De Burgh for example, suggests that the popular press’ self-styled mission statement forged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was keen to sell as many newspapers as possible and thus wrote articles which were more about reporting than analysis.<sup>15</sup> This ‘impartial’ reporting – ‘just the facts’ - gave rise to a style and tradition which is with us to this day. Its roots however, may lie in the attempt to provide information in a form designed not to offend, as much as to inform.<sup>16</sup>

The early appearance of influential work by the likes of Stead challenged this style and approach.<sup>17</sup> Their passionate, polemic articles were the result of techniques which are still used to this day by investigative reporters including undercover reporting and non-fiction narrative styles of writing.<sup>18</sup>

Although Stead’s work drew large readership, he was an exception and much investigative journalism, even at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was still a niche activity and consumed in relatively small numbers. It was then, as it is now, often – though not permanently - on the fringes of the media.

The quasi-moral crusades of figures like Stead indicate that from its earliest modern origins, the reporters using investigative techniques were attracted to the great social issues of their eras and perceived journalism as way of highlighting what they saw as wrongdoing. The infusion of investigative journalism with various self-styled missions for the greater-good of society would resurface time and again and in modern forms.<sup>19</sup> The work of Ettena and

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<sup>14</sup> Hugo De Burgh,, ed. *Investigative Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2008) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

<sup>15</sup> Hugo De Burgh,, ed. *Investigative Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2008) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Chapter 2.

<sup>16</sup> David Mindich, *Just the Facts: How "Objectivity" Came to Define American Journalism* (New York: NYU Press, 1998)

<sup>17</sup> WT Stead, *Pall Mall Gazette*, July, 1885, the "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon".

<sup>18</sup> Hugo De Burgh,, ed. *Investigative Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2008) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Chapter 2.

<sup>19</sup> James S. Ettena and Theodore L. Glasser, ‘The Reporter’s Craft as Moral Discourse’ in *Custodians of Conscience: Investigative Journalism and Public Virtue* by (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998)



Glasser suggest that a surprising amount of journalism working on investigations do regard their mission as having a crusading aspect and agree that, “Investigative journalists... can issue a compelling call for public moral indignation.”<sup>20</sup> Whilst Stead was tackling exploitation of the under-classes for sexual satisfaction in Victorian London, across the Atlantic, others were turning their attention to the painful price exacted by the forging of the United States of America. The spectrum of issues tackled by investigations in the decades which followed ranged from racism, to abuse of hospital patients, to urban poverty, to sharp-practices in the burgeoning oil industry and to dangerous working practices in the mass-produced meat industry. The techniques used in the investigative process of articles examining these topics, present themselves as being instantly recognisable to a 21<sup>st</sup> century report working in the same field. These include: undercover reporting; document analysis; business analysis; multiple-sourcing; and challenging orthodox settled ‘facts’ and ‘truths’.<sup>21</sup> Aucion’s work however, reminds us that the path of American investigative journalism has been far from easy and counts as much on individuals as institutions for its progress.<sup>22</sup>

The journey of much of investigative journalism has its roots in an old mission, stretching back to 17<sup>th</sup> century English periodicals like *The Parliament Scout* which in 1643 proclaimed to readers it was aiming to ‘make an effort to search out and discover the news’, thus implying that its authors knew that news did not always make itself obviously available and that active searching was required. The authors of such early investigative projects worked

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<sup>20</sup> James S. Ettena and Theodore L. Glasser, ‘The Reporter’s Craft as Moral Discourse’ in *Custodians of Conscience: Investigative Journalism and Public Virtue* by (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) P3.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce Shapiro, (Ed), *Shaking the Foundations* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2003)

<sup>22</sup> James, L. Aucoin, *The Evolution of American Investigative Journalism* (Missouri: University of Missouri, 2005)

for a mix of minor and mass-market publications and interestingly, many focused on corporate malpractice as opposed to government misdeeds and crimes.

Available literature clearly indicates UK's investigative journalism sector evolved and progressed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in its own way. The impact of the US' First Amendment rights ensured its journalism sector always had a different legal and social framework to operate in.<sup>23</sup>The unique nature of the UK's tabloid sector meant that their forays into investigative territory have been marked by mass-appeal agendas, the support of particular editors and targets from the celebrity world that have fallen from grace.<sup>24</sup>The 1960s saw a fusion of investigative journalism and television, with the new visual, mass-appeal medium being exploited vigorously by weekly strands like Granada TV's *World in Action*. Whilst the period of its production over the best part of three decades is regarded in sections of the UK broadcasting sector as a high point, it is interesting to note that many of its programmes were not hard-hitting investigations and that a fair number of them focused on non-UK based topics.<sup>25</sup>Goddard et al, also portray an evolving 'unit' at Granada, which attracted an eclectic and disparate crew of recruits from different sectors and countries. A connection between this Manchester-based production and the Watergate inquiry emerges in this study, with a senior series-producer claiming that the structure of *The Washington Post*'s investigative teams was provably based on close-cooperation between the two trans-Atlantic media outlets.<sup>26</sup>

Outlets for broadcast-based investigative journalism projects flourished between the 1980-1995 time-frame.<sup>27</sup>Difficulties in dealing with the secrecy of the Thatcher era and her formidable press operations team meant that some genuinely revelatory investigative projects

<sup>23</sup> David Mindich, *Just the Facts: How "Objectivity" Came to Define American Journalism* (New York: NYU Press, 1998)

<sup>24</sup> Hugo De Burgh,, ed. *Investigative Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2008) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Chapter 3.

<sup>25</sup>, Peter Goddard, John Croner and Kay Richardson,. '1967-75: the classic period' in *Public Issue Television – World in Action 1963-98* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2007)

<sup>26</sup> This claim was made by Gus MacDonald author of 'A Short History of Group Gropes' in *Edinburgh International Television Festival Magazine*, (August, 1984)

<sup>27</sup> Hugo De Burgh,, ed. *Investigative Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2008) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Chapter 3.

were attacked and to an extent<sup>28</sup>, stymied.<sup>29</sup> Bolton's fight to air his film on the violent deaths of IRA terrorists at the hands of the SAS in Gibraltar came to personify the idea that the press became more of an active political opposition than the professional politicians.

The more recent work available on UK investigative journalism provides thought-provoking studies of Watergate-era output and charts how the genre has ebbed and flowed and evolved since. In relative terms this is a new area of scholarly study in the UK context and work remains to be done. Importantly, De Burgh's revision and newly edited work, suggests that it is a far from stagnant debate however and some studies suggest a more optimistic future than other's predicted.<sup>30</sup> A combination of new source material and renewed investigations in print, broadcast and online platforms, has stimulated debate on work on the Blair administration, English law Freedom of Information usage and Iraq war.<sup>31</sup>

It must be stressed that the presentation of case studies in De Burgh's collection, has helped inform the development of this thesis. Employing such an approach is, it seems, rare in literature. The innovative inclusion of investigative journalists who now work – sometimes part-time, sometimes full-time – within the academy, and the publication of their research into aspects of the debate makes sense to this author and assisted me greatly in understanding, developing and finding a natural home for my own research. Studies in practice have enhanced my own reflections and research in a number of case-studies presented in this thesis. In particular, the chapter by Gaber (in De Burgh), assisted this thesis in confronting, identifying, discussing and analysing shortcomings in his own case-studies, both in content and style.<sup>32</sup> This thesis is therefore linked to this emerging genre of academic research in the

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<sup>28</sup> See Miller, David *Don't Mention the War: Northern Ireland, Propaganda and the Media*. (London: Pluto Press, 1994)

<sup>29</sup> Bolton, Roger, *Death on the Rock and other stories* (London: WH Allen, 1990)

<sup>30</sup> Hugo De Burgh,, ed. *Investigative Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2008). Chapter 8 suggests good quality work still exists in defiance of the bleak predictions contained in Paul Foot's, 'The Slow Death of Investigative Journalism,' in *The Penguin Book of Journalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1999)

<sup>31</sup> Hugo De Burgh,, ed. *Investigative Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2008) Chapters 4 & 7.

<sup>32</sup> Hugo De Burgh,, ed. *Investigative Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2008) Chapter 14 by Ivor Gaber which examines BBC's Panorama series, in particular an investigation carried out by John Sweeney into Scientology which resulted in a controversy and led to the reporter confessing he looked like 'an exploding tomato' in

field of investigative journalism within a UK context. The work of MacFadyen and Greenslade contributed to the process of perceiving my professional work as source material for academic study.<sup>33</sup> The contribution of Brooke has been significant for sections of this study in relation to both in her published guides to using Freedom of Information Act legislation and her own findings as a result of investigations.<sup>34</sup> Davies' recent publication examining the standard of journalism content in UK newspapers has met with controversy and praise. The significance of his ongoing research and findings was underlined by continued revelations from him on the matter of the use of private detectives to illegally obtain personal information for tabloid projects and to create such stories.<sup>35</sup> This study benefitted from his work in the first chapter regarding the paucity of court coverage in the UK.

As said previously, the classic insider-account of *The Washington Post's* Watergate investigation remains *All the President Men* but in the years since its publication other works have been published which add depth and breadth to the Watergate subject. For example, the recent work *The Secret Man*<sup>36</sup> which explained how Woodward established a relationship with Felt and how it developed and was exploited by both sides, during his investigations, was a truly revelatory book which unintentionally conveys a calculating aspect to the process of investigations and throws the self-interest of both the whistleblower and the journalist into chilly relief for all to see. This balances the notion that the Watergate investigation was solely about noble goals like freedom of speech and preservation of democracy. Felt's motives were a mix of anger, betrayal, frustration and ego-driven power-tripping: Woodward's drivers

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footage. Especially welcome was Gaber's identification of a disturbing sequence captured – it would appear – on a Scientology-funded camera of Sweeney seemingly faking non-entrance to a rear-door in a Church of Scientology building.

<sup>33</sup> Hugo De Burgh, ed. *Investigative Journalism* (London: Routledge, 2008) See Chapters 8 & 19 respectively.

<sup>34</sup> Heather Brooke, *Your Right to Know* (London: Pluto Press, 2005)

<sup>35</sup> Davies, Nick, *Flat Earth News* (London: Random House, 2008)

<sup>36</sup> Bob Woodward, *The Secret Man* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005)

included promotion, pleasing senior colleagues, ambition and satisfying an innate need to know secrets.<sup>37</sup> His other comments on the legacy of Watergate came in a separate work and he limited himself to suggesting the role of the Independent Counsel was worthwhile but often ponderous, that scandal should not be allowed to fester and advised those at the centre of such messes to get the facts out fast.<sup>38</sup>

Shephard's work was instructive in understanding the differing personal and professional backgrounds and motives which fuelled Woodward and Bernstein. Her work also made use of the new archives available at the University of Texas which include the reporters' notes during the investigation and writing of the books. This opened up the investigative process considerably and assisted me in identifying the key fifteen-points which serve as a guide for starting an investigative project. Separately, Shephard also addressed and I believe resolved, one of the key criticism levelled at the journalists' writing style which used a narrative approach which literally projected thoughts, feelings and quips into real-life character's heads and mouths. Reviewer and journalist Richard Reeves famously criticised *All the President's Men* for using this process and asked – not unreasonably – how they knew such details when there were few witnesses? Shephard's meticulous research in the archives uncovered detailed notes from Woodward and Bernstein which indicated they had sources and information to back their claims up and justify their use of this narrative non-fiction technique.<sup>39</sup>

Bradlee's recollections serve to underpin the thesis that the management of the Watergate investigation was a marriage of classic-techniques and new approaches which were sometimes hastily devised on a regular basis.<sup>40</sup> His reflections and recounting also

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<sup>37</sup> Woodward has alluded to this latter trait on many public occasions and believes it can be traced back to looking at his lawyer father's files when he was a child.

<sup>38</sup> Bob Woodward, *Shadow: Five Presidents and the Legacy of Watergate* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1999)

<sup>39</sup> Shephard, Alicia, *Woodward and Bernstein: Life in the Shadow of Watergate* (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2007) P147.

<sup>40</sup> Ben Bradlee, *A Good Life* (New York: Touchstone, 1995)

fleshed out – sometimes unintentionally – the importance of a close and experienced editor-reporter working relationship for investigative projects.

Woodward's published work unrelated to Watergate, including four books on the administration of President George W. Bush, have received mostly positive reviews. Despite having been accused of being 'court stenographer'<sup>41</sup> to Bush's government however, his publications have constantly topped bestseller lists.

Kutler's seminal work on Watergate stands out amongst the almost 300 published works on related subjects. He identifies a cut-throat mentality that existed in the White House under Nixon long before the burglary of June 17<sup>th</sup> 1972 happened. I have found Kutler's interpretation helped me shape a deeper and wider understanding of the administration of Richard Nixon and gain perspective in grasping the motives and political mindset of this singular president. At the centre of his analysis there is his thesis that Watergate was not an aberration and that an air of inevitability pervaded the corridors of Nixon's White House. The dark heart of this drama is home to the figure of Nixon who harboured grievances and replaced Presidential Relations with 'PO: Presidential Offensive' plans at an early stage of his first term in power. Kutler's devastating conclusions state that – through his own words and deeds - before, during and after Watergate, Nixon was first and foremost a liar. He had used lies as a weapon for gaining political advantage from his youth and continued following the same strategy as President. This eschews other more psychological works which proffer a deeper set of reasons why he committed the acts he did.<sup>42</sup> Summer, an ex-*World in Action* journalist, for example, argues that Nixon was mentally unstable, a heavy-drinker, a wife-beater and secretly taking the drug Dilantin for psychiatric problems. The same author also

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<sup>41</sup> By Newsweek reporter Howard Fineman in 2005, who went on to say: '[Woodward] is a great reporter, but he's become a great reporter of official history'.

<sup>42</sup> For example, see Anthony Summer's thought-provoking and highly-controversial work *The Arrogance of Power: The Secret World of Richard Nixon*.

claims Nixon's condition was known about to the extent that Defense Secretary James Schlesinger revealed no military orders from the Commander-in-Chief were to be followed unless they were first cleared through the offices of the Secretaries of State and Defense. Kutler's portrayal is the more convincing, since it suggests these behavioural problems were symptoms and not causes. He believes Nixon fell apart – drinking, abusing relationships, taking drugs – because his lies unravelled and his Presidency slipped from his grasp. Watergate was therefore, only one part of a wider withering of Nixon, it was not the entire story.

Woodward and Bernstein's uncovering of the facts behind the Watergate break-in, reveal what Felt labelled a 'switchblade mentality' at large in the White House. This is perfectly in line with the ghastly viciousness apparent in Kutler's masterful rendering of the administration and Nixon's eventual fall from grace, replete with detailed accounts of the President's perpetual denial of responsibility for his own downfall.<sup>43</sup>

Opt and Delaney's study of post-Watergate investigative journalism argues that corporate America effectively used the legal system as a battering ram against resurgent members of the press. Their pivotal work sets the context for understanding how Clinton-era investigations generated more heat than light.<sup>44</sup>

Kalib's detailed telling of the paucity of quality investigative journalism examining the alleged high crimes of Clinton was a key source for the section of this study dealing with that issue.<sup>45</sup> Brill's masterful magazine investigation into the same theme was even more thought-provoking in its attention to fact, sourcing and chronological context.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Stanley Kutler, *The Wars of Watergate* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1992) Book Five: Chapter XXIII

<sup>44</sup> Susan K. Opt, and Tomothy A. Delaney, in 'Public Perception of Investigative reporting', *The Big Chill* (Iowa: (Iowa State University Press, 2000)

<sup>45</sup> Marvin Kalib, *One Scandalous Story: Clinton, Lewinsky, and thirteen days that tarnished American journalism* (New York: The Free Press, 2001)

<sup>46</sup> Steven Brill, 'Pressgate' by in *Brill's Content* (July/August 1998)

Remarkable investigative scoops written by Seymour Hersh, now based at *The New Yorker*, surfaced during the same time-frame of 2002-8 during which Woodward was working on his Bush at War books<sup>47</sup>. Hersh's most important investigation revealed the torture of Iraqi prisoners in the Abu Ghraib prison in 2004.<sup>48</sup> Few of Woodward's recent revelations have had the impact that this kind of work from Hersh has had in recent years. All the more remarkable, is that Hersh's scoops about issues in distant countries, usually emanate from his sources based in and around Washington DC. Unusually, he also claims many of his sources are mid-ranking and not top-brass in the military, whereas Woodward's books are usually based on access to top-level White House staffers, senior intelligence community officers and senior Pentagon-based personnel. Hersh's work is not without critics or flaws. Nevertheless, Hersh's industrious output and constant relevance represents potential for a fuller study examining how modern-day investigative reporting, sometimes thousands of miles removed from the scenes it is examining, can systematically dominate and, to an extent, set the news agenda even in the digital age.

Much has been written on the use of secret sources in the Watergate investigation by Woodward and Bernstein. Brenner's portrayal of a journalist-source relationship in action, against the backdrop of corporate America, reveals how little has changed down the years since Nixon's resignation and underscores the perennial difficulty for journalists entering such a pact.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> These are: *Bush at War* (2002), *Plan of Attack* (2004), *State of Denial* (2006), *The War Within* (2008).

<sup>48</sup> Seymour Hersh, 'Torture at Abu Ghraib: American soldiers brutalized Iraqis. How far up does the responsibility go?' *The New Yorker*, May 10, 2004 issue

<sup>49</sup> Marie Brenner, 'The Man Who Knew Too Much' *Vanity Fair*, (May 1996)



Schudson's seminal contribution to the debate still retains persuasive power today.<sup>50</sup> It assists in contextualising sometimes caustic assessments by veteran reporters about what Watergate meant to them and their work.<sup>51</sup>

More recent systematic analysis of current investigative work in the USA presents a mixed and compelling picture. Powerful work continues to be done, but lay-offs and lack of financial support remains the norm. Innovative funding sources have been identified and new online initiatives now exist. The future remains precarious however, although studies and individual testimony from editors do strongly indicate that investigative journalism is in demand by print and online readers.<sup>52</sup>

Feldstein's study also adds an extra dimension to the context which this debate is conducted in. His research challenges us to consider whether the changing fortunes of investigative journalism conforms to a historical pattern he has identified. His model is based on supply and demand, and argues that investigations rise in significance and popularity when public demand and media supply meet. The former is driven by "some combination of political, economic and social turmoil", the latter by "new technologies and journalistic competition aided by a tolerant legal climate." He suggests the lesson of history leads him to feel "docile" journalism will prevail, although an "occasional journalistic dissident can be counted on to expose and oppose those in authority."<sup>53</sup> This would therefore place the actions of Woodward and Bernstein, and even those who follow in their wake, as being unwitting actors on a wider stage of history and events, than was previously thought possible.

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<sup>50</sup> Michael Schudson, *Watergate in American Memory* (New York: Basicbooks, 1992)

<sup>51</sup> I am thinking, in particular, critical remarks made by Phillip Knightley who was initially almost dismissive of Watergate's impact. Schudson's analysis contributed to my understanding of the mythology surround Watergate and also helped me understand some strands of investigative reporting, like Knightley's, were genuinely in place and developing on their own paths, before, during and after the pop-culture appreciation of Woodward and Bernstein had come and gone.

<sup>52</sup> See Daniel Brogan, Neiman Report Spring 2008 'Good Journalism Can Be Good Business.'

<sup>53</sup> See Mark Feldstein, 'A Muckraking Model: Investigative reporting Cycles in American History'. Harvard University Press. 2006.

## Methodology

This study sets out to examine the impact *The Washington Post's* Watergate investigation has had upon investigative journalism in the USA and UK. It also aims to chart the development of the genre against legal, social and political backdrops in both countries and looks at what practical lessons might be drawn and applied to future investigative projects.

A mixture of research techniques and sources are used in this thesis. A deliberately wide approach to methodology was undertaken to reflect the broad nature of the question being examined.

Case studies featuring investigative approaches are utilised throughout, most of which were carried out by the author of this study. These are explained, examined and used as working examples to help us understand and evaluate whether - from a practitioner's evolving professional perspective – investigative journalism contributes something unique and valuable to wider field of professional journalism in the UK and internationally. This analysis provides raw-material from the professional frontlines of the industry in terms of broadcast, print and online journalism. They also allow an assessment of whether methodologies and approaches used during the Watergate inquiry, are usable in other scenarios.

A comprehensive review of selected literature, both scholarly and journalism-based works, historic and recent in origin all closely-connected to or solely focused on the genre of investigative journalism is also incorporated into this introductory chapter. This review includes articles, academic journalism studies, biographies, investigative-based current-affairs publications, academic collections and other related works. They have been sourced from both the USA and UK and span over a century and a half between publication dates.

Interviews carried out by the author, either recorded electronically face-to-face, or taped on long-distance telephone sessions, or in question and answer studies carried via email, are used to understand the progress and development of investigative journalism on both sides of the Atlantic over the past half-century.

Specific investigative projects, research material and published articles by the author which merit frequent attention or strategic study within this work, are included in an appendix. Where they are referenced within the text of this study, readers can access them and examine their contents to illuminate and expand points made. These case-studies comprise a wide-range of articles published in both the UK and USA over the past twenty years and cover an array of topics tackled by the author during that time-frame. They have been researched using accepted and settled professional ethics and standards and have already withstood publication for a combined readership running into the millions. All of them have been thoroughly ‘legalled’<sup>54</sup> and have met the highest evidential standards that most serious editors demand.<sup>55</sup> The issues covered therein can be broadly categorised as investigations into: crime; financial scandals; intelligence-related topics; terrorism; war; institutional corruption. Inevitably some topics do not fall easily into categories (e.g. missing persons cases; or investigations of suspicious deaths which authorities have classified as accidents or suicides, to cite just two examples).

A comprehensive selection of the author’s professional archive of totalling approximately 300,000 published words has also been utilised and examined in preparation of this thesis. The author refers to these works in various parts of this thesis and standard referencing is recorded to guide readers to this source material (where currently available). This breaks down into approximately one hundred articles

<sup>54</sup> An industry-wide term used to denote having been checked and scrutinised at every stage, but particularly just prior to publication, by lawyers specialising in media-law to ensure that no crime is being committed in publishing such potentially damaging, and possibly costly, work.

<sup>55</sup> Usually involving multiple sources; documentary proof of claims made within articles; and production and availability of important documents, transcripts/tapes and, if required, sworn testimony from witnesses quoted in the articles.

comprising of three thousand words each. These articles were published in a range of magazines and newspapers in the UK – and internationally – and were by and large investigative in nature. Additionally, a broadcast library of detailed research material, in both print and visual form, from the author’s various roles as investigative researcher, reporter and producer on approximately twenty network screened documentaries from the last twenty years, has also been mined for relevant material. All of these broadcast productions were investigative in terms of approach and content.

One area which the author has focused on is the issue of miscarriages of justice and the role journalists can play in bringing claims of such to the public’s attention. The cases the author of this thesis has worked on are explained and detailed in various chapters where appropriate.

The central reason for this study’s theme, stylistic approach and focus, comes from an argument aired as a scholarly and professional ‘call-to-arms’ in probably the only standard academic work published thus far in the UK on investigative journalism.<sup>56</sup> The editor of this collection, De Burgh, stated:

*The task of... providing some orderly account of investigative journalism is made more difficult by the shortage of preliminary studies. True, journalists write up their cases into books and they write memoirs; there are books on wide questions of journalism’s impact upon society. [However] there are few books... that look at genres or journalistic phenomena, and analyses of investigative journalism hardly exist. We call for more studies...<sup>57</sup>*

Other archives from fellow professionals were occasionally consulted for accuracy and contextualisation purposes.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Investigative Journalism* (London: Routledge, London & New York, 2008) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, p5.

<sup>57</sup> *Investigative Journalism* (London: Routledge, London & New York, 2008) 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, p5.

<sup>58</sup> Archives connected to interviewees such as Jenkins, Knightley, MacFadyen, Greene and Macdonald being five examples who contributed in this way.

Significant, use was made of online databases accessible through membership of professional organisations.<sup>59</sup>

Academic volumes published through Harvard University and dedicated to the academic publication and study of practical and theoretical aspects modern journalism – and in particular, a recent series running over eight-volumes across two years focusing solely on investigations – was accessed and used as part of research for the final chapter.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The member's database of investigative cases available at the US based Investigative Reporters and Editors organisation, for example, was used in this thesis. The author is a member of this group. [www.ire.org](http://www.ire.org).

<sup>60</sup> See <http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports.aspx>