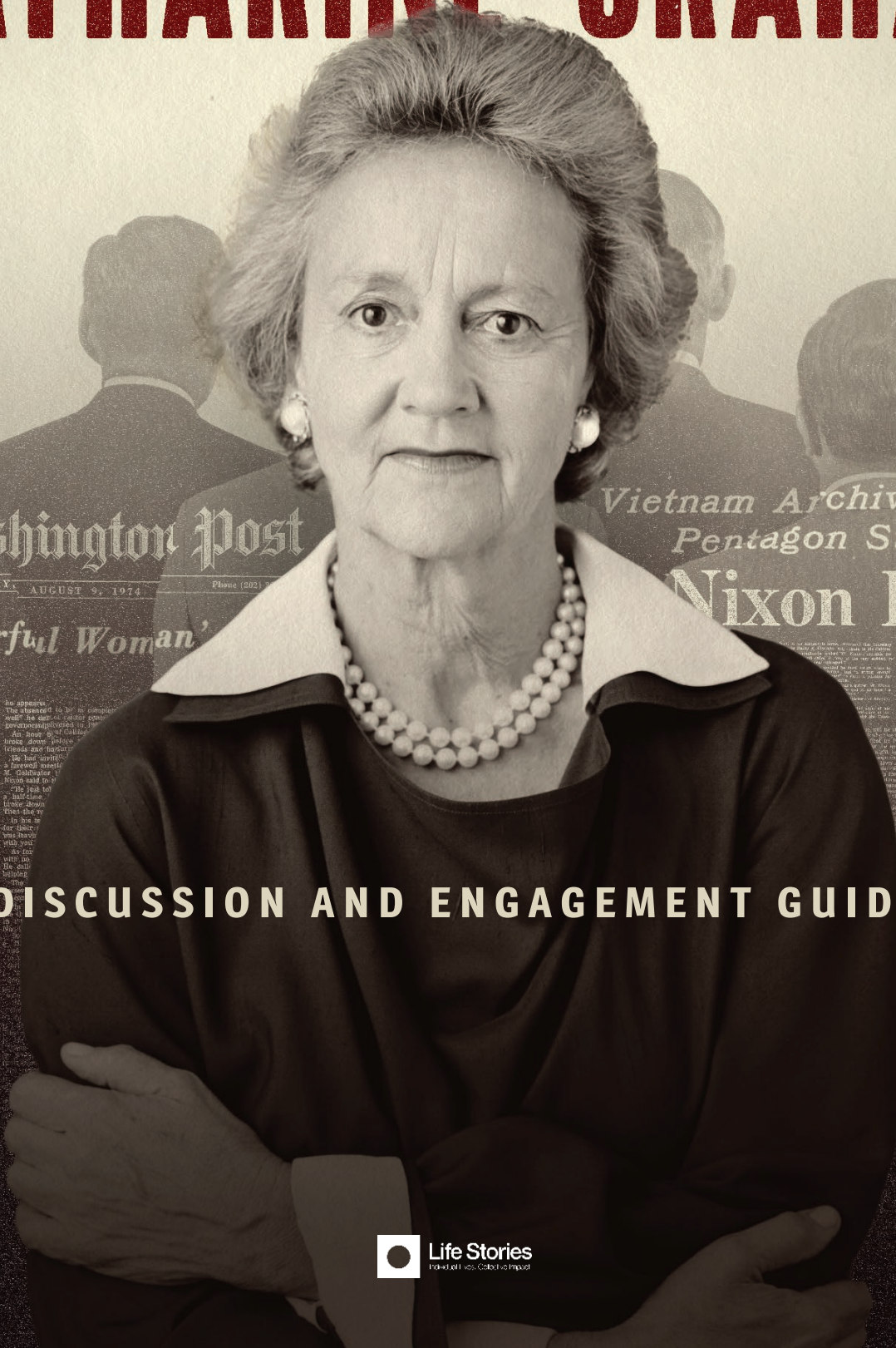


BECOMING KATHARINE GRAHAM



The Washington Post
FRIDAY, AUGUST 9, 1974

*Vietnam Archive:
Pentagon Study Traces
Nixon Resigns*

'Most Powerful Woman'

By Joan Wiltcover
Washington Post Staff Writer

Gerold Rudolph Ford Jr., a Grand Rapids, Mich., lawyer who served almost 100 million of his fellow Americans as the 38th president of the United States, was today hailed as a great American President, not only for his leadership in the Vietnam War, but also for his leadership in the Washington Post.

He will be the first American President not elected in a national election by his people, having been nominated by President Lyndon B. Johnson last Oct. 12 under provisions of the new 25th Amendment to the Constitution.

Last night, thousands of cheering Americans gathered in the streets of his hometown to celebrate his election to the White House. Many thousands more gathered in the streets of his hometown to celebrate his election to the White House.

Four years ago, he was named Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, whom he called "a man of great mind, a man of great vision, a man of great courage, and a man of great integrity."

From 1973 to 1974, he served as the director of the entire Nixon Library, which includes the White House, the Nixon Library, and the Nixon Library.

Mr. Ford's election to the White House is a landmark in American history, and it is a landmark in the history of the Washington Post.

DISCUSSION AND ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

A Solemn Charge
By [Name]
Good Feeling
By [Name]

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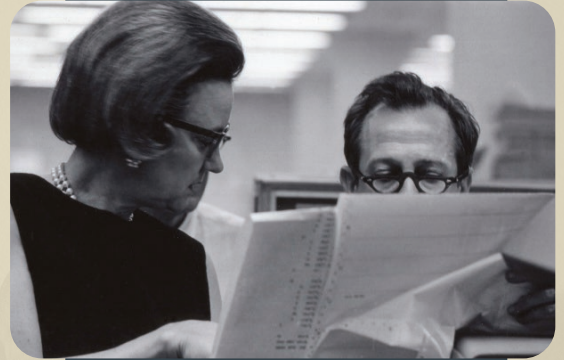
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INTRODUCTION



“The performance of the reporters and editors on the Watergate story speaks for itself. And in our judgment, it speaks well for American journalism. For what it really comes down to is nothing less than the state of the First Amendment: our freedom to gather the news, and to publish it. And your freedom to read it.”

- Katharine Graham, White House Correspondents' Association Dinner, May 3, 1975

ABOUT THE DOCUMENTARY

Becoming Katharine Graham is a profile of one of the most influential forces in modern American history. The Emmy-nominated feature documentary tells the story of Katharine “Kay” Graham’s accidental rise to power and her impact on journalism and American democracy. Born in 1917 into economic privilege, Kay grew up with traditional expectations of her era: men pursued careers while women raised the family and did “good deeds” when time allowed, norms she initially accepted like most women of her time and class.

But her family’s life changed when her father, financier Eugene Meyer, bought a struggling newspaper in 1933, *The Washington Post*. While the paper improved under her father and continued to flourish under her husband, Phil Graham, Phil’s suicide in 1963 left Kay facing an unthinkable situation – a leaderless newspaper and the responsibility of raising her four children. This tragedy forced a choice: she could sell the family business or make the difficult, unprecedented choice to run it herself. She chose to lead.

At its heart, the documentary highlights her principled leadership of *The Post* during pivotal events of the 1970s that tested our democracy – publishing the Pentagon Papers, the Watergate scandal and investigation, and a violent *Washington Post* pressmen’s strike. While she endured ongoing sexism as one of the first female leaders in corporate America, Kay was a woman who transformed her personal tragedy and guided American journalism through one of its most critical times.

As David Remnick, editor of *The New Yorker* emphasized in the film, “the essential first job of journalism is to put pressure on power – investigative pressure, reporting pressure, intellectual pressure on the ideas being put out by power.”

In a climate where investigative journalism is being systemically eroded by layoffs and media consolidation, and journalists’ First Amendment rights are threatened by authoritarian pressure and legal actions, there is no better time to watch and learn from *Becoming Katharine Graham*.



STORIES FOR DEMOCRACY

“Stories For Democracy” is our civic biography and education collection. These documentary films and resources are more than historical accounts; they are narratives that help us practice “civic courage.” By inviting multiple perspectives and examining turning points in our nation’s history through individual lives, we hope to cultivate critical thinking, moral courage, and active engagement in classrooms and communities—qualities essential for a healthy democracy.

Becoming Katharine Graham is one such story, revealing how journalistic courage at a critical moment held the government accountable, challenged institutional power and sexism, protected the principles of investigative journalism, and defended First Amendment protections despite personal risk and financial threats.

For over 40 years, we have been preserving these types of stories – we are not stopping now.

USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is a tool to prepare for and host screenings of *Becoming Katharine Graham*.

KEY AUDIENCES



Community organizations addressing press freedoms and the First Amendment



Higher education including Journalism and Media, Business, History, Women and Gender Studies, Law, Government and Public Service, Women's Leadership



Professional audiences in Journalism, Media, Law, Business, Government and Public Service, Communications, Crisis Management



PURPOSE

- Understand historical context
- Recognize both progress and persistent challenges
- Connect individual experiences to larger systemic insights
- Explore how leadership evolves through challenge and complexity

CONVERSATION GUIDELINES

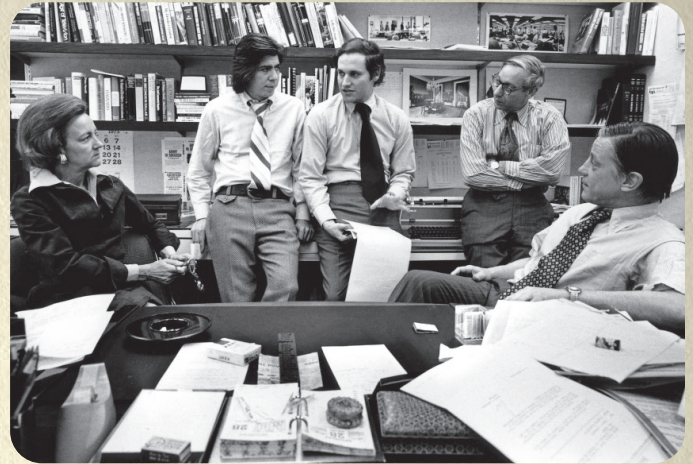
- Listen with curiosity and empathy
- Share personal experiences while respecting differences
- Move beyond individual stories to systemic understanding
- Recognize that progress is neither linear nor simple

APPROACH

- Begin with personal reflection
- Connect personal stories to broader historical patterns
- Examine how individual choices create institutional change
- Generate insights, not definitive conclusions

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Our goal for *Becoming Katharine Graham* was to uplift “Kay” Graham’s story out of the shadows. As the owner/publisher of The Washington Post during the Pentagon Papers and Watergate, we wondered why she was not at the center of the many Nixon stories that have been told over the years. In the process of making this documentary, what we learned was that she was always overshadowed by men - by her husband, by many of the men who worked for her, and by the President himself. Because of this, she has been given far less credit than she deserves. When the movie *All the President's Men* premiered in 1976, Kay was nowhere to be seen.



Recognizing that Kay’s accomplishments occurred half a century ago, we wanted to bring her story back to life, revealing new details for older generations who remember her and introducing this brave change-maker to young people who can draw inspiration from her commitment to storytelling. So, we set out to tell a coming-of-age story, tracking Kay’s unconventional childhood, and her transformation from a self-described “doormat housewife” into one of the most powerful women in America.

To humanize Kay, we decided early on that we did not want to use a narrator. Our challenge, then, was to source actual recordings of Kay speaking, enough so that she could tell her story in her own words. Led by our experienced producer Jill Cowan, we combed through hundreds of archives and found dozens of long-forgotten recordings, most of which had to be digitized for the very first time.

Early in production, we uncovered something extraordinary - throughout Watergate, Kay constantly heard rumors about White House retaliation toward *The Washington Post* and directed at her. Our team listened to hundreds of hours of tapes from President Nixon’s secret recordings and we found numerous attacks and threats against Kay. It was vital that we graphically illustrate these White House conversations so that viewers would clearly understand the cruel planning that went on behind Kay’s back, from the highest office in the land.

The film reveals how Kay’s story was as much about the changing role of women in the 70’s as it was about the golden age of journalism. Having now screened the film for a handful of journalists and people who knew Kay best, we are confident that we met our challenge – to make a 50-year-old story relevant, accurate and intriguing for a wide audience, and to give her the credit she so deserves for changing the course of history.

- Directors Teddy Kunhardt, George Kunhardt

BEFORE THE SCREENING



PRE-SCREENING FRAMING QUESTIONS

To build community and set the tone for your event, take time to discuss these prompts prior to watching the documentary. After discussing, invite participants to keep them in mind as provocations as they watch, and returning them again in your post-screening conversation.



- **Where do you get your news?**
- **What is the press's responsibility in a constitutional democracy?**
- **Who decides what the public needs to know?**
- **Can we trust reporters over government officials?**

BACKGROUND

Review, reference, or share any of this background content to inform and deepen your pre- and post-screening conversations.



BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Katharine Graham was born in 1917 into what would become one of the most influential families in American journalism. She was the fourth of five children born to Eugene Meyer, a banker, and Agnes Elizabeth (Ernst) Meyer, an author and generous contributor to charity. Her father, Eugene Meyer, later purchased the struggling Washington Post newspaper in 1933 and transformed it into a respected and influential publication.

Growing up, Katharine witnessed firsthand the inner workings of a major newspaper and developed a keen interest in current events, politics, and a deep appreciation for the power of the press and its role in a healthy democracy. She attended the University of Chicago and later graduated from the University of California, Berkeley in 1938 with a degree in history. After graduation, she spent a brief stint working as a journalist for the San Francisco News before marrying Philip Graham in 1940. Philip took over The Washington Post in 1946. The couple had four children together - Elizabeth, Donald, Stephen, and Lally.

In 1963 Philip Graham took his own life in 1963, leaving Katharine to assume control of the family business. She quickly proved herself to be a formidable leader, guiding the Post through two of the most consequential moments in 20th century American history - the publication of the Pentagon Papers in 1971 and the Watergate scandal in 1972-1974. Graham's courage in standing up to government pressure and her staunch defense of press freedoms cemented her legacy as a champion of democratic values.

In addition to her work at *The Post*, Graham served on the boards of numerous prestigious institutions, including the World Bank, the Rand Corporation, and Harvard University. She was also a prominent philanthropist, supporting causes ranging from education to the arts. In 1979, Graham became the first woman CEO of a Fortune 500 company, and she continued expanding The Washington Post Company's media holdings until her retirement in 1991.

Katharine Graham passed away in 2001 at the age of 84.

KEY TERMS

These terms are film-specific to *Becoming Katharine Graham* and can be a reference on the important intersections between journalism, government power, and public information.



CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL TERMS¹

Executive Privilege: The president's right to withhold certain information from Congress, courts, or the press.

First Amendment: Guarantees freedoms concerning religion, expression, assembly, and the right to petition.

Grand Jury: A group of citizens who determine whether there's enough evidence to bring criminal charges.

Indictment: A formal charge or accusation of a serious crime.

Impeachment: The process of charging a government official with wrongdoing; does not mean removal from office.

Obstruction of Justice: Actions taken to interfere with legal investigations or court proceedings.

Subpoena: A legal order requiring someone to testify or produce documents.



JOURNALISM AND PRESS FREEDOM²

Editor: Journalists who review, revise, and decide what stories get published.

Fourth Estate: The press's role as an unofficial fourth branch of government, serving as a watchdog on the other three branches of government.

Investigative journalism: In-depth reporting that uncovers hidden information, often institutional corruption

Prior Restraint: Government censorship of information before publication.

Public Interest: Information that benefits society's understanding of government actions and policies.

Public Service Journalism: Reporting that serves the public interest rather than commercial interests.

Publisher: The person or entity responsible for the final decision on what gets published.

Source: A person who provides information to journalists, either on or off the record.

Off the Record: Information given to journalists with the understanding it won't be published or attributed to the source.



NATIONAL SECURITY AND CLASSIFIED INFORMATION³

Classified documents: Government information restricted from public access for national security reasons, and categorized by levels (Confidential, Secret, Top Secret).

Cover-up: Deliberate concealment of illegal or unethical activities.

Espionage: The act of obtaining secret or confidential information without permission.

Whistleblower: A person who exposes information about illegal or unethical activities within an organization.

¹ law.cornell.edu, rcfp.org, freedomforum.org

² archives.gov, fas.org, nsarchive.gwu.edu, eff.org

³ *The American Press (AP) Style Guide*, spj.org, americanpressinstitute.org, poynter.org

EXPANDED CONTEXT AND TIMELINE

JUNE 1933

Eugene Meyer (Katharine Graham's father) purchases *The Washington Post* at a bankruptcy auction.

JUNE 5, 1940

Katharine Meyer marries Phillip L. Graham, a Harvard Law School graduate.

JUNE 18, 1946

Meyer hands control to Philip Graham who begins expanding its influence.

1961

Phil Graham purchases *Newsweek* magazine.

1963

August 3: Philip Graham dies by suicide.

September 22: Katharine Graham becomes president of The Washington Post Company at age 46.

JULY 7, 1965

Katharine Graham recruits Ben Bradlee as deputy managing editor.

NOVEMBER 5, 1968

Richard Nixon is elected 37th President of the United States.

1968

The Washington Post Company buys Miami TV station and names it after Phil Graham-WPLG.

1969

Katharine Graham is named Publisher of *The Washington Post*.

MARCH 1970

Women at *Newsweek* file a discrimination complaint against The Washington Post Company.

1971

June 13: *The New York Times* publishes top secret documents (Pentagon Papers) from the Department of Defense on U.S involvement in Vietnam.

June 18: Federal Court blocks *The New York Times* from publishing more excerpts. *The Washington Post* publishes a different segment. DOJ seeks a restraining order.

June 30: Supreme Court overturns a district court injunction. Landmark Supreme Court case, [New York Times Co v. The United States](#) affirms press freedom.

1972: WATERGATE REPORTING BEGINS.

June 18: *The Post* reports on break-in at the Watergate Hotel in D.C. Five men are arrested for plotting to bug the Democratic National Committee offices.

August 1: The Post reports that a \$25,000 cashier's check earmarked for the Nixon campaign wound up in one of the burglar's bank accounts.

September 29: The Post reports that former Attorney General John Mitchell controlled a secret Republican fund used for intelligence-gathering against the Democrats.

October 10: The Post reports the Watergate break-in was part of a larger spying and sabotage effort against the Democrats.

November 7: President Nixon re-elected in a landslide. Congress remains Democratic.



1973

May 7: *The Washington Post* receives the Pulitzer Prize for their Watergate coverage.

June: Warren Buffet acquires over 5% of B-stock in *The Washington Post*.

June 3: The Post reports on John Dean's testimony, claiming he had discussed Watergate cover-up with President Nixon at least 35 separate times.

June 25: John Dean implicates Nixon in the cover-up during Senate testimony.

July 16: Alexander Butterfield testifies that Nixon authorized a secret White House taping system.

1974

February 6: The House votes to proceed with impeachment.

July 24: The Supreme Court rules Nixon must turn over subpoenaed tapes.

August 8: Nixon announces his resignation, effective the next day.

1975

October 1: The pressmen at *The Washington Post* set printing presses on fire in the basement of the building. The next day they go on strike.

December: Replacement workers are hired.

1976

February: The last Union members supporting the strike return to work.

April 4: Premier of *All The President's Men* at The Kennedy Center.

JULY 7, 1965

Katharine Graham recruits Ben Bradlee as deputy managing editor.

NOVEMBER 5, 1968

Richard Nixon is elected 37th President of the United States.

1968

The Washington Post Company buys Miami TV station and names it after Phil Graham-WPLG.

1969

Katharine Graham is named Publisher of *The Washington Post*.

1979

Katharine Graham retires as CEO; Don Graham (Katharine's son) takes over.

1997

Publishes memoir, *Personal History*.

1998

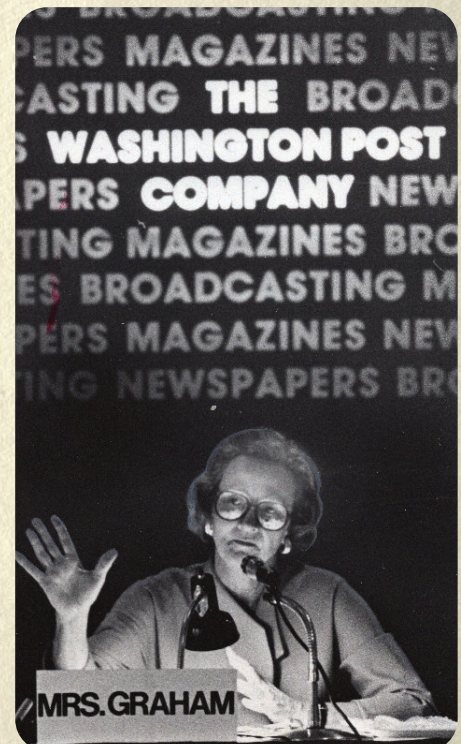
Katharine Graham wins the Pulitzer Prize for Biography.

JULY 17, 2001

Katharine Graham dies at the age of 84.

2013

The Washington Post sold to Jeff Bezos.⁴



⁴ While not covered in the documentary it remains a highly consequential decision. To learn more read: [Don Graham on the sale of The Washington Post, Jeff Bezos, and the pace of newsroom innovation | Nieman Journalism Lab](#)

WATCH



Access *Becoming Katharine Graham* from these sources:

Full Feature (90 min)
available on [PBS](#)
and [Amazon Prime](#)

Request a Free
Educational Version
(45 min)
at [Life Stories](#) via [this link](#)

POST-SCREENING FRAMING QUESTIONS

The goal for any post-screening conversation is to create a rich, nuanced dialogue that connects accurate historical experiences with contemporary challenges.

The questions and decisions Katharine Graham faced haven't gone away. They've only gotten more complex.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which scene, interview quote, or passage from Katharine Graham's memoir, resonated with you most?
- If you had a chance to speak with Katharine Graham today, what question(s) would you ask her?
- What aspects of Graham's personal life or leadership style did you find surprising?
- *The Washington Post* won the The Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 1973 in recognition of their Watergate investigation and reporting. The Pulitzer is journalism's highest honor and given for work that serves the public good.
- How do you define public service?
- Do you think journalism is a public service? Why or why not?

The final time we hear Katharine Graham's voice in the documentary, she says:

"I don't see myself as being a model, but I think I helped younger women. I hung in for 30 years, and therefore, they saw a woman who was at the head of a company. And they knew that that could happen, and I think that, to that extent, I played the role model to them. And that gave me great pleasure and satisfaction when I realized that I mattered to younger women."

Research suggests that role models are critically important and motivational in many ways including acting as behavioral models, representing what is possible to accomplish, and being inspirational.

- Who were Katharine Graham's role models?
- Do you see Katharine Graham as a role model after watching the film?
- Who are your role models?

ENGAGEMENT TOPICS

DIVE DEEPER INTO THE DOCUMENTARY

These topics focus on discussing and analyzing the documentary through four critical lenses:

- Katharine Graham's personal transformation
- Her commitment to press freedom and democracy
- Her advocacy for investigative journalists integrity and rights
- Her groundbreaking leadership as a CEO in a male-dominated field



“The press in this country, under a constitutional democracy, is set up to be the critic of the government. And it’s very important that they do that with a lot of responsibility.”

- Katharine Graham

KATHARINE GRAHAM'S JOURNEY:

LOSS, INHERITANCE, UNEXPECTED POWER

This section explores how Katharine Graham transformed from a self-described 'doormat-wife' to a trailblazing leader who reshaped women's roles in journalism, the media, and business.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Her son Don Graham shared: "She was beyond unsure of herself. She was as self-doubting as any human being has ever been."

- After watching the documentary do you agree with her characterization?
- How did she transform from that self-image into a decisive leader?
- What moments in the film show this transformation?



Her own father said "no man should work for his wife" and left her husband two-thirds of the company.

- How did this decision shape her journey?
- Are there areas of your life where you've felt pressure to hold back your ambition?



Despite Katharine's upbringing being one of tremendous privilege, her mother made her intelligence "invisible", reinforcing traditional gender roles." My mother was a woman of great ability who had made the choice to subordinate her life to my father's, and to an extent to us children as well...I grew up in a family where my mother's intelligence and talents were neither acknowledged nor cultivated. I absorbed the lesson of my mother's life: that women should be intelligent but not too intelligent; accomplished but not too accomplished."

- Do you see people reinforcing traditional gender roles today? Where?
- What specific cultural shifts and legal protections do you think are required to achieve true gender equality?



During editorial board meetings at The Post, Katharine Graham never indicated her political positions. Roger Rosenblatt, a journalist who served on the board, noted that for Graham, "the paper was to be inviolate (sacred and protected)."

- Do you agree or disagree with Graham's stance on keeping her personal views separate from the paper?
- What constitutional principle does this position reflect?
- What other moments in the documentary illustrate her principled leadership?

PRESS FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY: THE FIRST AMENDMENT IN PRACTICE

This section explores the core of the documentary – journalism’s role as a critical watchdog in a democracy. By examining Katharine Graham’s leadership of *The Washington Post* and her defense of the First Amendment, audiences will gain a deeper understanding of why a free press is indispensable for political accountability.

“Ben Bradlee would come to my house and say, ‘We’ve got another story.’ And I would think, ‘Oh God, here we go again.’ But what could I say? Stop reporting the truth? That’s not what a newspaper does.”

- Katharine Graham



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How did *The Washington Post*’s decision to publish the Pentagon Papers (1971) and investigate Watergate (beginning in 1972) help preserve constitutional democracy?
- What do you believe is the role of a free press in a democracy?
- How do you decide what’s true and accurate when reading the news?
- *The Washington Post* investigated Watergate when no other major news outlet picked up the story. Could an in-depth investigation like this happen today? Do you know of examples of investigative reporting today?
- Are there barriers that threaten the ability of journalists to report the truth?
- How does the press put pressure on powerful institutions and the powerful today?

TO LEARN MORE: [The Washington Post - The Pulitzer Prizes](#)

THE STAKES OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM: A NECESSARY WATCHDOG IN A DEMOCRACY

When deciding whether to publish the Pentagon Papers or investigate Watergate, Katharine Graham received conflicting advice from lawyers, editors, and friends. This section explores the context in which Kay ultimately made decisions based on upholding the people's right to know and the press's right to print.

"I had to choose between the lawyers and the editors. The lawyers said we'd go to jail and the company would be ruined. The editors said this was what newspapers exist to do... I remember thinking, 'If we don't publish, why should anyone believe anything we print? How can we ever hold our heads up?'"

"Finally, I said, 'Let's go. Let's publish.' My voice was shaking. After I hung up the phone, I thought I might be sick. I had no idea if I'd just saved the paper or destroyed it."

- Katharine Graham, on publishing the Pentagon Papers



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The Supreme Court confronted a critical question in the landmark case [New York Times Co. v. United States](#) (1971): **Could the government prevent a newspaper from publishing what it termed "classified information" about the Vietnam War?**

The court's 6-3 decision affirmed press freedom, rejecting government attempts to impose prior restraint. Justice Brennan argued that potential harm did not justify preventing publication.

- What would have been the consequences for press freedom and our constitutional democracy if the Court had ruled against *The New York Times*?
- What role did the press play in investigating Watergate? Could that scandal have been exposed without a free press?
- *The Washington Post* used anonymous sources for Watergate reporting. What are the ethical implications of using anonymous sources? When is it justified?
- How is today's media environment different from the 1970s? How would the Pentagon Papers or Watergate unfold differently now?
- What challenges face journalists today? Consider political pressures, economic pressures, and misinformation.
- Social media has changed how we consume news. What is lost when traditional investigative journalism declines?

LEADERSHIP WITHOUT PRECEDENT: GENDER, POWER, AND CIVIC COURAGE

Katharine Graham's leadership was a constant negotiation between institutional authority and societal constraints. As Warren Buffett observed, she was often a "prisoner" of her generation, balancing her intellect against the self-doubt imposed by a male-dominated society.

"I was the only woman in the room. Always... The men would look past me, or through me... as if I hadn't said anything. I learned I couldn't lead the way men led. If I was too soft, I wasn't taken seriously. If I was too tough, I was called a bitch. There was no template."

- Katharine Graham



This personal bias mirrored her company's policies. Despite the 1964 Civil Rights Act, *Newsweek* restricted women to research roles while only men wrote. In 1970, female employees filed a landmark discrimination suit to coincide with the magazine's "Women in Revolt" cover story. Forced to reconcile her role as CEO with her identity as a woman, Graham asked, "**Which side am I supposed to be on?**"

Though she was the target of the suit, Graham's willingness to evolve helped shift the industry. As Gloria Steinem noted, it finally allowed women "not just to research, but also to write."

Reflecting later, Graham realized: "Much of how I was treated was a factor of my being a woman. People were simply not used to a woman as the Chief Executive Officer."



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you define civic courage after watching this documentary? What examples of civic courage were highlighted?
- Katharine Graham felt there was "no template" for her leadership. How does the "soft vs. tough" double standard still affect leaders from marginalized groups today?
- How should a leader handle a situation where their organization's public message (like the "[Women in Revolt](#)" cover) contradicts its internal reality?
- Katharine Graham became the first female Fortune 500 CEO while battling deep self-doubt. How can a leader's insecurities both hinder and help their effectiveness?
- What echoes exist between Katharine Graham's experience in the 1970s and current conversations regarding gender equity and the "glass ceiling"?

CONNECTIONS: THEN AND NOW

While *Becoming Katharine Graham* captures events and personalities from a specific era, Kay's journey also offers timeless insights. This section, Connections: Then and Now, uses her experiences as a lens and a bridge to examine today's challenges and opportunities in leadership, media, and gender equality.



“Real American patriotism does not force journalists to deliver government propaganda. My grandmother was a real patriot; she protected the rights of her journalists to deliver the facts and speak their minds—without fear of censorship.”⁵

- Pamela Alma Weymouth, Katharine Graham's granddaughter

⁵ <https://pamelaalma.org/2025/06/26/my-grandmother-stood-up-to-nixon-jeff-bezos-should-take-note/>

WHEN THE PRESS BECOMES “THE ENEMY”

“Nixon hated *The Post* and us personally through his dying day.”

- Katharine Graham

“No reporter from *The Washington Post* is ever to be in the White House again.”

- Richard Nixon (White House Tapes)



THEN: THE POST AND NIXON

In the documentary *Nixon’s “enemies list”* targeted Katharine Graham and *The Washington Post* with multiple threats and limiting access to the White House.

NOW: CHALLENGING THE FIRST AMENDMENT

The U.S. Press Freedom Tracker⁶, part of *Freedom of the Press Foundation*, reports a dramatic uptick in death threats, harassment campaigns, coordinated online attacks, equipment destruction, and press credentials being revoked. Phrases like “enemy of the people” and “fake news” continue to circulate, further delegitimizing journalism.

“I have spent my entire career covering the news. I will not stop now. In fact, there is no more important time than right now, this very moment for a free and independent media that shines a light on the truth and holds those in power accountable.”⁷

- Don Lemon, statement following indictment, January 30, 2026



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What happens to democracy when leaders systematically attack journalists for doing their job?
- How do threats against journalists and their publications affect what gets investigated, reported on, and published?
- Do you think calling the press “the enemy of the people” is protected speech, hate speech, or dangerous rhetoric?

⁶ “The U.S. Press Freedom Tracker is a nonpartisan news website and database providing reliable and contextualized information on the number of press freedom violations in the United States... As a centralized repository for research, the data we gather informs journalism, legal action and is the backbone of advocacy efforts for major press freedom groups. <https://pressfreedomtracker.us/about>

⁷ [Don Lemon speaks at courthouse after indictment](#)

THE ECONOMICS OF TRUTH-TELLING

“She was beyond lucky that ... our stock got so cheap that it attracted Warren’s attention in 1973. But it was the greatest thing that ever happened to Kay Graham.”

- Don Graham



THEN: THE BUFFET ERA

In the 1970s, Katharine Graham risked the company’s survival to publish the Pentagon Papers and investigate Watergate. At the time, the stock price plummeted as investors feared the loss of television licenses. Warren Buffett saw this as an opportunity, stepping in as an investor whose capital stabilized the paper, allowing its investigative mission to flourish.

NOW: THE CURRENT REALITY

While Don Graham’s 2013 reflection was favorable, the sentiment has shifted. Despite Bezos’s initial investment, today *The Washington Post* has faced deep job cuts and a struggle to find a sustainable “Big Tech” business model for journalism. The “business genius” of the owner is now being tested against the harsh realities of a shrinking newsroom.

“I, along with Katharine Weymouth and our board of directors, decided to sell only after years of familiar newspaper-industry challenges made us wonder if there might be another owner who would be better for *The Post*. Jeff Bezos’ proven technology and business genius, his long-term approach and his personal decency make him a uniquely good new owner for *The Post*.”

- Don Graham shared in a [press release](#)

THEN: THE TRANSITION

By 2013, the collapse of print advertising forced a different choice. *The Washington Post* was sold to Jeff Bezos (not to Amazon.com Inc.) for \$250 million.

NOW: THE EMERGING ECOSYSTEM

With newsroom employment down 26% since 2008⁸, the industry continues to shift towards new models:

- Non-profit newsrooms and digital startups
- Collaborative platforms⁹

While these models are growing, their combined revenue remains a fraction of what the traditional industry once earned, leaving investigative journalism in a precarious state.¹⁰

⁸ U.S. newsroom employment has fallen 26% since 2008 | Pew Research Center.

⁹ To learn more see organizations like the [Institute for Nonprofit News \(INN\)](#) and [Local Independent Online News Publishers \(LION\)](#).

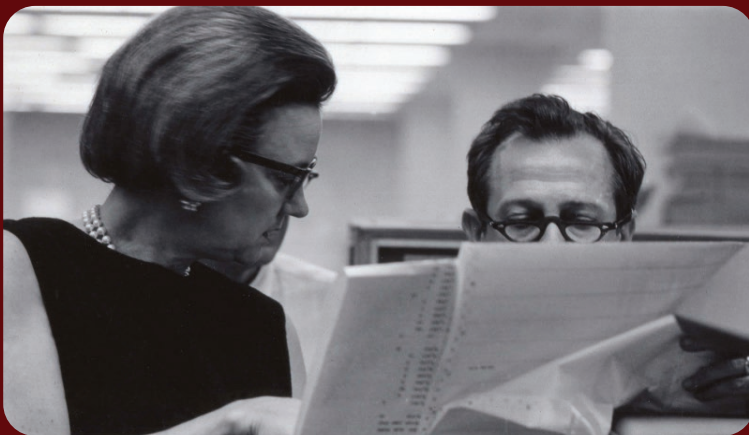
¹⁰ The financial crisis in journalism is a matter of scale: in 2024, nearly 400 digital-first nonprofit newsrooms generated a combined \$650–\$700 million in revenue. While significant, that total is a mere 1% of what the newspaper industry earned from advertising and circulation just two decades ago in 2004. <https://www.pewresearch.org/chart/sotnm-newspapers-newspaper-industry-estimated-advertising-and-circulation-revenue/>



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Warren Buffett acted as a supportive minority shareholder for a family-run paper. Jeff Bezos is a sole proprietor.
 - How does this difference in ownership structure affect the paper's ability to remain an independent "public trust"?
- Don Graham sold the paper to ensure its survival. Given the recent deep cuts at *The Post*, is a billionaire owner a permanent solution or simply a temporary shield against market forces?
- When a newspaper is owned by an individual with vast global business and political interests, can it maintain the same "high-stakes economic gambles" for truth that Katharine Graham took during Watergate?
- Take a moment to read [this link](#) on the changes to legacy papers.¹¹ How have the financial changes in the news media impacted what kinds of news we have available?
- What is lost when local investigative journalism disappears?
- Can non-profit startups realistically fill the gap left by legacy newsrooms?
- If news is treated as a business:
 - Who pays for investigations that take years to report?
 - Who protects those newsrooms when they face lawsuits or censorship?

¹¹ [Bezos orders deep job cuts at 'Washington Post', Washington Post Losses Topped \\$100 Million in 2025 - WSJ](#), [The LA Times's owner wants to take the struggling paper public. Will it work? | Margaret Sullivan | The Guardian](#)



CLASSIFIED OR PUBLIC INTEREST?

“Publishing the Pentagon Papers meant that this [*The Washington Post*] was a dangerous newspaper now. Dangerous if you were a lying politician, dangerous if you were a corrupt person.”

- Richard Cohen, Reporter, *The Washington Post*, 1976 - 2019

THEN: THE WATERGATE INVESTIGATION UNCOVERED

- **Political espionage** (President Nixon’s involvement in the Democratic National Committee headquarters break-in and bugging)
- **Cover-up** (obstruction of justice, using government agencies to harass opponents)
- **Abuse of presidential power** (using government resources to attack political opponents and intimidate *The Washington Post*, and try to revoke their media licenses)

NOW: THE ONGOING DEBATE

(See Appendix: Select Timeline: Noteworthy Investigative Journalism Since Watergate)

The digital age has introduced a more radical form of transparency, where whistleblowers bypass traditional newsrooms to expose systemic state secrets. From WikiLeaks’ disclosure of military logs to Edward Snowden’s revelations of global NSA surveillance, these acts have fundamentally challenged the government’s monopoly on information.

However, the protracted prosecution of Julian Assange has sparked a fierce debate over the boundary between journalism and espionage, raising the question of whether the legal system now poses an existential threat to those who publish classified truths in the public interest.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Who should decide what the public should know?
- Should journalists who publish leaked classified information in the public interest face prosecution?
- Who determines what the public has a “right to know”?
- Is there a meaningful difference between publishing the Pentagon Papers and more recent examples like WikiLeaks? Where do you draw your line? (If you are not familiar with Wikileaks, see 2010 on the Select Timeline.)
- How has technology changed the landscape of classified information and leaks?

APPENDIX: SELECT TIMELINE

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM SINCE WATERGATE

Since Watergate, investigative journalism has continued to expose governmental deception, corporate corruption, and abuses of power often at grave risk to the journalists and news organizations.

Many of these reports exposed corruption, led to leadership changes, and institutional reforms, and are often recognized by The Pulitzer Prize for Public Service. Learn more [here](#).

1986-1987: IRAN-CONTRA AFFAIR

Exposed multiple illegal arms sales and funding of Nicaraguan rebels. Led to Congressional hearings and criminal convictions and demonstrated executive branch accountability limits.

1994: EXPOSÉS ON THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY

Reported by *The New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*, this investigation revealed that companies knew cigarettes were addictive and caused cancer. Led to a landmark settlement (\$206 billion) and transformed public health policy.

2002: CATHOLIC CHURCH SEXUAL ABUSE

The Boston Globe Spotlight Team exposed systemic sexual abuse by Catholic priests in the Archdiocese of Boston, revealing decades of institutional cover-ups and resulting in the resignation of Boston's Cardinal Bernard Law, over \$3 billion paid in settlements nationwide, and was awarded the [Pulitzer Prize](#) for Public Service in 2003.

2004: ABU GHRAIB PRISON ABUSE

Reporter Seymour Hersh, *The New Yorker*, and CBS exposed the torture of Iraqi detainees. Eleven U.S. Army soldiers from the 372nd Military Police Company, along with other intelligence personnel, were convicted.

2007: WALTER REED HOSPITAL SCANDAL

The Washington Post exposed neglect of Iraqi and Afghani wounded veterans, leading to the resignation of the Army Secretary Francis Harvey and reforms to the military healthcare system.

2010: WIKILEAKS/AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQI WAR LOGS

Published by *The Guardian*, *The New York Times*, and *Der Spiegel*, this reporting revealed civilian casualties and war conduct, raising questions about classified information and the public interest.

2013: EDWARD SNOWDEN & NSA SURVEILLANCE

Journalist Glenn Greenwald (*The Guardian*) and *The Washington Post* published classified documents exposing global surveillance programs and changing global privacy debate and tech policy. Often cited as a direct parallel to Pentagon Papers.¹² *The Post* and *Guardian* shared the [Pulitzer Prize](#) in 2014 for Public Service.

¹² [National security reporting, post-9/11](#), Columbia School of Journalism.

2016: THE PANAMA PAPERS

11.5 million leaked documents exposed offshore tax havens and reported on by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), the largest collaboration of journalists in history (400+ journalists, 100+ outlets) and leading to the resignation of prominent world leaders. This investigation is often cited as the model for modern investigative journalism.

2017: HARVEY WEINSTEIN / #METOO

The New York Times and *The New Yorker* exposed decades of sexual abuse and cover-ups by The Weinstein Group, sparking a global movement to change workplace culture and accountability. These publications were awarded the [Pulitzer Prize](#) for Public Service in 2018.

2018: JAMAL KHASHOGGI MURDER INVESTIGATION

The Washington Post investigation of the Saudi government's assassination of their own columnist. Khashoggi's murder demonstrated lethal threats to press freedom globally which led to global sanctions against several Saudi Arabian officials.

2019: THE AFGHANISTAN PAPERS

The Washington Post exposed over 18 years of government deception about the Afghanistan War, revealing systemic lying to the American public about the war's progress.

2021: JANUARY 6TH CAPITAL ATTACK

The Washington Post, *The New York Times*, *ProPublica* investigations exposed the planning, coordination, and security failures leading up to the attack. This reporting later informed the Congressional investigation. *The Washington Post* was awarded the [Pulitzer Prize](#) in 2022 for Public Service.

2024: THE SUPREME COURT INVESTIGATION

ProPublica's investigation revealed how a small group of politically influential billionaires wooed justices with lavish gifts and travel, pushing the Court to adopt its first code of conduct.



APPENDIX

CORE PRESS FREEDOM CASES

“In the First Amendment, the Founding Fathers gave the free press the protection it must have to fulfill its essential role in our democracy. The press was to serve the governed, not the governors. The government’s power to censor the press was abolished so that the press would remain forever free to censure the government.”

- Justice Black, [New York Times Co. v. United States](#) (1971)

These cases specifically involve news organizations, reporters, and journalistic practices.

[NEAR v. MINNESOTA](#) (1931)

Established that [prior restraint](#) (government censorship before publication) is unconstitutional except in rare circumstances (wartime troop movement, obscenity, incitement to violence.) Foundation for Pentagon Papers case (1971).

[NEW YORK TIMES CO. v. SULLIVAN](#) (1964)

Established “actual malice” standard for public figure libel cases. Officials must prove the press acted with “knowledge of falsity” or “reckless disregard for the truth” making defamation suits significantly harder to win.

[NEW YORK TIMES CO. v. UNITED STATES](#) (1971)

Strong presumption against prior restraint. The government cannot stop publication without meeting extreme burden. Press freedom outweighs national security claims absent immediate, grave danger.

[BRANZBURG v. HAYES](#) (1972)

No absolute constitutional privilege for journalists to refuse testimony. Limited protection for confidential sources in grand juries; led to state “shield laws.”

[MIAMI HERALD PUBLISHING CO. v. TORNILLO](#) (1974)

Newspapers cannot be compelled to publish replies or rebuttals. Struck down “right to reply” laws; protected editorial independence.

[NEBRASKA PRESS ASSOCIATION V. STUART](#) (1976)

Gag orders on press coverage are presumptively unconstitutional. Prior restraints are among the most serious First Amendment violations.

[BARTNICKI v. VOPPER](#) (2001)

Media can publish illegally obtained information if newsworthy and of public concern, even if obtained by a third party.

These cases are important in reference to student journalism.

[TINKER v. DES MOINES](#) (1969)

Students don’t “shed their constitutional rights at the schoolhouse gate” and have First Amendment rights unless speech causes “substantial disruption.”

[HAZELWOOD v. KUHLMEIER](#) (1988)

Schools cannot censor student speech in school-sponsored activities. Shows First Amendment protections aren’t absolute and vary by context.

APPENDIX

FURTHER READING

BOOKS

Graham, Katharine. *Personal History*. Knopf, 1997.

Woodward, Bob, and Carl Bernstein. *All the President's Men*. Simon & Schuster, 1974.

ARCHIVES

[Katharine Graham and Philip L. Graham Papers](#), Library of Congress

[Publishing the Pentagon Papers](#), The New York Historical

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM ORGANIZATIONS TO EXPLORE

[International Consortium of Investigative Journalists \(ICIJ\)](#): A global network of more than 190 investigative journalists in more than 65 countries who work together to investigate cross-border issues including crime, corruption and abuse of power. Was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service in 2017.

[ProPublica](#): Founded 10 years ago by a former managing editor of *The Wall Street Journal*, *ProPublica* is a nonprofit investigative news site based in New York City. In 2010 *ProPublica* was the first online publication to win a Pulitzer Prize and has earned two more since, as well as a long list of other prestigious awards.

[The Center For Investigative Reporting \(CIR\)](#): Founded 40 years ago in the San Francisco Bay Area, CIR is a nonprofit that has partnered for years with other outlets to reach a wide audience in print, on television, on radio and online. It collaborates with PRX Radio to produce [Reveal](#), the investigative radio program and podcast. The Reveal website is now home to all of CIRs investigative content.

[The Center for Public Integrity \(CPI\)](#): CPI has been around for over 30 years. Its reporters have won dozens of journalism awards, including a Pulitzer in 2014, for its investigations of money in politics, national security, health care reform, business and the environment.

BECOMING KATHARINE GRAHAM



Life Stories, a nonprofit media and education organization born out of Kunhardt Films, brings decades of experience in moral storytelling. Led by Teddy, George and Peter Kunhardt, the team is responsible for award-winning films including *King in the Wilderness*, *Obama: In Pursuit of a More Perfect Union*, *True Justice: Bryan Stevenson's Fight For Equality*, *The Silent Witness*, *Becoming Katharine Graham*, and many more. Their films have won nine Emmys and multiple Peabody Awards.

Life Stories is committed to civic storytelling through documentaries, a national interview archive, and educational resources, all available to the public at no cost.

LIFESTORIES.ORG



Life Stories
Individual Lives. Collective Impact.