

Jack & Jill Journalism: Women correspondents historically have been confined to reporting social news. Political news of male legislative decisions regarding laws affecting both men and women was written from a male perspective by males.

In 1870, four women journalists were listed in the Congressional Directory as “entitled” to Capitol press gallery privileges. In 1879, nineteen women were listed, about 11% of total accredited correspondents. In 1880 new rules made by the male journalists banned all women journalists from the galleries.

But women’s suffrage and World War I lured women journalists to Washington to report political news to men and women from a female perspective. Women journalists did find their way back into the galleries, but the National Press Club (male) openly barred press women from their activities. Plans to organize a national women’s press club germinated.

Twenty-eight women started the National Women’s Press Club in 1919. In 1920 women journalists in the gallery numbered only about 10 out of 213, but they numbered. Albeit their assignments were confined to the fringes, not core politics.

Winifred Mallon was hired by the *New York Times* in 1929 as the first female “political” writer assigned to cover news on a regular basis. At the time, Mallon was a veteran reporter with over twenty-five years of experience. She began reporting from Washington for the *Chicago Tribune* in 1902, her first column covered First Lady Edith Roosevelt.

In 1933, another First Lady Roosevelt, this one Eleanor, called together a group of about thirty-five women journalists to tell them she appreciated them, their work, and that during her tenure as First Lady she planned to hold weekly White House press conferences for women only.

Her ban on men reporters, or an attempt to level the journalistic field that otherwise banned women reporters, created opportunities for female journalists and opportunities for male editors to hire more female journalists, which they did.

Eleanor’s First Lady tenure, tenured for twelve years of White House press conferences until 1945, after which her activities kept women journalists reporting another seventeen years until her passing in 1962.

The first woman of color to be accredited to the Capitol press galleries, White House, Supreme Court, and State Department was journalist Alice A. Dunnigan in 1947. In 1955 Dunnigan was invited to join the WNPC, another first for her and minority women.

In 1952 Doris Fleeson became the first female journalist to write a national “syndicated” political column. It ran for twenty-two years in some one hundred newspapers, producing some 5,500 columns.

Columbia University journalism graduate Marguerite Higgins pleaded with the wife of the publisher of the *Herald Tribune* for her “right” to become a World War II correspondent in Europe. Successful in her plea, she was the first female war correspondent and named the best foreign correspondent of 1945 by the New York Newspaper Women’s Club.

As the Far East bureau chief of the *Herald Tribune* in 1950 covering the outbreak of hostilities between North and South Korea, the military ordered Higgins to leave Korea because “there are no facilities for ladies at the front.” Again she pleaded, this time with General Douglas MacArthur who lifted the ban.

Often accused of using her good looks, and/or sexual encounters to advance her career, Higgins maintained that she simply refused to go along with the double standard that permitted men sexual freedom while punishing women for similar conduct.

In 1955 the NPC agreed to “allow” any member of the working press in Washington to cover luncheon addresses. BUT, women working press had to stay in the balcony, overlooking the dining area where men working press had access to speakers as well as to food and beverages served there.

In the balcony, hot, crowded, hungry, and thirsty women “allowed” to enter via a back door and be glowered at by male club members as they walked through male club quarters, endured raw gender discrimination, and the very visible second-class status of women.

In the 1960s white women reporters had very little opportunity to cover civil rights stories. Black women reporters had less than little opportunity to cover civil rights stories for major white owned and operated newspapers.

Susanna McBee covered school desegregation for the *Post* but was taken off a 1960 lunch counter sit-in story because it was “too dangerous” for a woman to handle. But through her contacts McBee learned of the lunch counter event, was the only reporter to report on it, thus her article appeared on the front page. McBee continued reporting civil rights cases including passage of the Civil Rights Act.

In 1962 Katherine Graham became the most prominent woman in journalism upon assuming her rightful position as publisher of the *Washington Post*. The *Post*, a bankrupt newspaper when purchased by Katherine’s father Eugene Meyer in 1933, was passed on to her spouse Phil Graham in 1948 because Meyer did not have a son.

Whether it was or wasn’t, is or isn’t, gender bias based, it follows a journalistic gender bias pattern that adheres to the historical patriarchal pattern of passing down family wealth through family males.

Of the thousands of shares of *Washington Post* stock transferred to Phil and Katharine by

Katharine's father, Phil was given the larger number because, according to Katharine's father, no man should be in the position of working for his wife. Katharine writes of how, at the time, she not only concurred, but was in complete accord. However, after Phil's ruinous years and ultimate suicide, the floundering *Washington Post* flourished under Katharine.

The New York Times founded in 1851 was acquired by Adolph Ochs in 1896. Under Ochs the paper achieved international scope, circulation, and its formidable reputation. He and his wife Effie Wise had only one child - a daughter, Iphigene Bertha Ochs who married Arthur Hays Sulzberger.

When a little girl accompanying her father about the newsroom, it was written that newspapering was the birthright of Iphigene. But born a girl not a boy in 1892, it appears her birthright was not birthed the right gender. When Ochs died in 1935, not his daughter but her spouse, Arthur Sulzberger succeeded him as publisher of the *Times*.

Both these historic passages by-passed well qualified daughters for their husbands, as well-qualified or not is not questioned, but unquestionably gender bias based. Unlike the *Post's* return to Meyer's daughter, the Sulzberger family maintains the dominant role in the *Times* as direct descendants of Adolph Ochs not through direct lineage but through marriage and its journalist gender history.

The lack of opportunities to advance and keep women in place informally via the old boy network led to a 1972 class action sex discrimination suit brought by women journalists at the *New York Times*. It cited major gender inequities i.e., a fifty-nine dollar weekly gender pay gap. The *Times* settled out of court in 1978 but the suit forced the *Times* to promote capable women as well as capable men.

Jill Abramson's capable academic and professional journalistic resume began as a 1970's Harvard undergrad arts editor of the *Harvard Independent*, then at *TIME* magazine, at *Legal Times* in Washington, DC, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Jill joined *The New York Times* in 1997. She was named an executive editor in June 2011, the first female executive editor in the 160-year history of the paper. Three years later, Jill was fired.

Weeks before her firing, the question of gender pay-equity surfaced as she understood her compensation likely was not equivalent to her male predecessor's. She hired a lawyer to represent her. On the day she was fired it was noted that she was seen as difficult—a word that, applied to a woman in a position of authority, raises questions about gender. Whether it was or wasn't, is or isn't, gender bias, it follows a journalistic gender bias pattern. Abramson will not publicly address her firing.

It is understood she signed a nondisclosure document with the *Times*, agreeing not to reveal the financial terms of her termination, but refused to sign a non-disparagement agreement that will not allow Sulzberger to say that she was resigning. It is reported Jill said, "Just as I'm not going to end my job at the *New York Times* by lying, I'm not giving up my right to free speech."

Abramson prefers not to be defined as a disgruntled, terminated editor but rather as the distinguished documented capable journalist she has been.



Whether it was or wasn't, is or isn't gender bias firing, it follows a historic Jack and Jill journalistic gender bias pattern.

Sources: *Women of the Washington Press: Politics, Prejudice and Persistence*, Maurine H. Beasley; *Personal History*, Katharine Graham;
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