

BFF Women Journalists: Award winning journalist and popular television host Christiane Amanpour recently announced on a late night tv show how the free press is, in fact, the “BFF of the people” and not the enemy of the people as has been touted and shouted the past couple of years from the White House. “Enough, with this other language,” she continued, “we are best friends to all of you because we go out there and go to all the dangerous places, and talk to all the dangerous people, and bring back the truth and the facts and the evidence. What more friendly thing could we do?”

Exactly! And, what proper language to inspire and support the free press journalists as well as all of ‘we the people’ who benefit from their work. I welcomed her positive, friendly words after far too long of negative, unfriendly words about America’s treasured free press and I thought, what a splendid theme she has for a book. A book of positive rhetoric ‘we the people’ are thirsting to read, a book I hope she will write. What more friendly thing could she do?

A day later, I read a column that echoed my thought. It suggested our bookshelves need bright new titles and suggested: “Literary agents and editors should be preparing a whole new slate of books ... for a reading public eager for something different. Give us something new, please,” it petitioned. What more friendly support for that more friendly thing she could do?

Until Ms. Amanpour’s book, some BFF women journalists of whom I have written are:

Eliza Scidmore: An adventurous global travel journalist was the first female writer, photographer, and editor with the National Geographic Society founded in 1890. Her photo articles decidedly helped shape the magazine’s format. Five years prior, she wrote of the cherry blossom trees in Japan and petitioned the US government to plant them in the barren marshlands of the new capital as an ecological and aesthetic, health solution to curb disease prevalent in Washington, DC. Officials denounced her plan for a quarter century until they relented and planted two trees in 1912. Multi-million dollar tourism followed for the District. CountHerhistory-September/2003.

Ida B. Wells: The first journalist to do investigative reporting observed a trend that most black men being lynched were making economic gains pursuing a respectable life. Her research uncovered supportive facts she published in 1892. Following publication, her Memphis newspaper office was looted and burned by white mobs who called for her death. Her reporting, however, launched the US international campaign against lynching. CountHerhistory-June/2008.

Alice Allison Dunnigan: As a young Kentucky teacher (1920s-40s) noted her students were not learning black history and scripted articles to supplement textbooks. In 1946 she was *The Chicago Defender’s* Washington correspondent, in 1948 the first black woman journalist to receive White House credentials, travel with a president, and be elected to the Women's National Press Club. She often was mistaken as the wife of a dignitary and

endured other indignities as having to sit with the servants to cover the funeral of a senator, and being barred from a speech by President Dwight Eisenhower in a whites-only theater. Eisenhower at first did not call on her in his press conferences, then asked for her written questions prior. She refused. She received many awards and was honored with a bronze statue at the Washington, DC Newseum which is dedicated to the free press, September-December, 2018, after which it will stand in the West Kentucky African-American Heritage Center. CountHerhistory-September/2018.

Daisy Bates: Founded an Arkansas black newspaper with her husband in the 1940s. In it her articles addressed issues of slums, police brutality, legal injustices, hiring discrimination and school segregation. In 1957 she accompanied nine teenagers to desegregate Little Rock's school system. Blocked by the National Guard ordered by the governor, federal troops were thus sent to successfully escort her and the students into school. Her newspaper advertisers were threatened and canceled their ads which shut down her paper. CountHerhistory-February/2007.

Rachel Carson: Wrote articles for the US Bureau of Fisheries about conservation and nature in newspapers and magazines since the 1920s. The dangers of pesticide overuse became her focus. She found DDT in the brains of prematurely dead bald eagles, and proffered DDT in the food chain was largely responsible, that oceanic food chains were contaminated and currents were spreading DDT to remote corners of the earth. Scrutiny of DDT in 1945 was not what her editors preferred to publish, but her letter to *The Washington Post* in 1959 was published. It attributed the decline in bird populations—her words, the "silencing of birds"—to pesticide overuse. After a unsuccessful legal suit to restrict DDT use in New York state, *The New Yorker* petitioned Carson to write an article. It became her book *Silent Spring* which birthed the environmental movement of today. CountHerhistory-January/2010.

Marjory Stoneman Douglas: Began writing in high school in 1907, and in college edited the literary magazine at Wellesley. A columnist at *The Miami Herald* in 1915, she set aside her writing during the war to join the American Red Cross in Paris. After the Armistice she cared for war refugees of whom she wrote, "helped me understand the plight of refugees in Miami sixty years later." Back at the *Herald*, her daily column covered urban planning, women's suffrage, civil rights, better sanitation, and poverty. A freelance writer in the early 1920s, she concentrated on Florida's environment/development issues, which led to her 1947 book, *The Everglades: River of Grass*. It galvanized people to protect the Everglades and has been compared to Carson's, *Silent Spring*. In 1969 she thwarted development plans that would have endangered the Everglades forever, and forever is immortalized as, the woman who saved the Everglades. A high school was named in her honor. CountHerhistory-April & May/2018

Maurine Watkins: A novice *Chicago Tribune* reporter during the roaring twenties, was assigned the crime of a cabaret singer who allegedly shot her cheaten' lover. Watkins spiced up her report with wry humor. Soon, another woman shot her "cheaten" lover, played a record before phoning her husband to tell him she killed an intruder trying to seduce her. Watkins' headline read "Woman Plays Jazz as Victim Dies." After her third

article on jealous female killers of men who done them wrong, her stories made the front page. With the women's trials resolved, Watkins resigned and rewrote her articles into a stage comedy she titled "Chicago." It opened on Broadway in 1926 then Chicago and was a smash hit. A musical version in the 1950s was stifled because Watkins vehemently refused to the sell the rights. Following her death in 1969, Bob Fosse obtained the rights and reinvented her "Chicago" into a musical with all his jazz. CountHerhistory-October/2012.

Ethel L. Payne: One of three black journalists in the White House Press Corps, when called on by President Eisenhower in a 1954 press conference, asked of his plans to initiate the Interstate Committee Commission's decision to end segregation practices on interstate highways, and noticeably unsettled Eisenhower. Canards followed that Payne was a disruptive reporter, to which *The Washington Post*, reported, "She was not 'trying to make waves' but rather to find out when and how the powers might act to end racial discrimination in housing, interstate travel and other areas in which government might act." Eisenhower did not recognize her at future press conferences. Payne is recognized as the "First Lady of the Black Press." CountHerhistory-July/2012.

Maria Teresa Ríos Versace: Married a graduate of West Point. As an Army wife during World War II she drove Army trucks and buses, and served as a pilot for the Civil Air Patrol. She wrote articles for the Armed Forces *Stars & Stripes*, for newspapers internationally in Guam and Germany, and nationally in South Dakota and Wisconsin. One of her five children, Rocky, also a West Point graduate, captured and executed by the Vietcong in 1965, is a Medal of Honor recipient. Author of several books, her third is the basis for the "The Flying Nun" TV series. She is buried with her husband at Arlington National Cemetery. CountHerhistory-December/2012.

Martha Rountree: Founded and served as the only female moderator of Meet the Press, the longest running news program ever which began on Mutual radio in 1945. At the time she was one of only two women then-hosting their own news program, the other was Eleanor Roosevelt. Her show moved to television two years later and it received a Peabody award. In her 1952 Peabody acceptance speech, she addresses the importance of a free press to democracy where reporters have the opportunity to get at the roots of news the American people have a right to know, and warns that suppression of a free press could happen in America and threaten her freedom if her free press is silenced. It is on YouTube. CountHerhistory-January/2017



<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/the-investigators-amanpour-1.3868441>

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