

BFFWomenJournalists-III: My two previous columns of historic women journalists were inspired by the words of award-winning journalist and popular television host Christiane Amanpour who spoke of how the free press is, “the BFF of the people and not the enemy of the people.” More here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nd0Blxbgpuw>. Her words also prompted me to suggest she author a book expanding her friendly rhetoric. Awaiting Ms. Amanpour’s book, I recalled ten historic women journalists from my previous columns, gathered together in one column (November/2018) to support them, their profession and the free press. In my December/2018 column I recalled five more women journalists from my previous columns, (born in the 1800s) again, gathered together in one column to support them, their profession and the free press. This month, still awaiting Ms. Amanpour’s book, I recall five more women journalists from my previous columns, (born in the 1900s) and again, gathered together in one column to support them, their profession and the free press.

Doris Fleeson (1901-1970) was the first U.S. female journalist to have a nationally syndicated political column. She received a BA in Economics from the University of Kansas in 1923, wrote for the *Pittsburg Sun*, was the society editor of the *News-Index* in Evanston, Illinois, then in Long Island, New York, as an editor at *Great Neck News*. She joined the *New York Daily News* in 1927 as a general assignment reporter, and moved to the newspaper's Albany bureau to cover state politics. With her then-husband, she penned a column titled “Capital Stuff” in the *Daily News’* Washington Bureau from 1933-42. Newly divorced in 1943, she became a war correspondent from France and Italy for *Woman’s Home Companion*. She then returned to DC to write a political column for *The Boston Globe* and *Washington Evening Star* that was picked up by the Bell Syndicate in about 100 newspapers across the nation. For more than thirty years and five presidents (FDR, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson), some of whom she scolded, she probed the political elite to keep them accountable. Democrats and Republicans alike, she considered herself nonpartisan and shared her findings in clear, concise language with readers. She was considered by many as “incomparably the best political journalist of her time.” Politicians respected her while they feared being “fleesonised.” Often patronized, she rose above the chauvinistic system. She was a sixties’ feminist who hated racism and sexism, who sponsored the admission of a black reporter to the National Press Guild and supported young women journalists until her retirement in 1967.
countHerhistory-June/2014 and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doris_Fleeson

Katharine Graham (1917-2001) became the most prominent woman in journalism in 1962 upon assuming her rightful position as publisher of *The Washington Post*. The *Post*, a bankrupt newspaper when purchased by Katharine’s father Eugene Meyer in 1933, upon his passing in 1948, was passed on to her spouse Phil because Meyer had no son. Of the thousands of shares of stock transferred, Phil was given the larger number because, according to Meyer, no man should be in the position of working for his wife. Katharine writes of how, at the time, she concurred. Whether it was or wasn’t, is or isn’t, gender-bias based, it follows a gender bias pattern that adheres to the historical patriarchal pattern of passing down family wealth through family males. However, after Phil’s

ruinous years and ultimate suicide, the floundering *Washington Post* flourished under Katharine.

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Marguerite Higgins (1920 -1966): earned an MS in journalism from Columbia University during which time she was a part-time college correspondent for the *New York Tribune* and hired full-time upon graduation, with a byline shortly thereafter. Unable to convince her editors to give her the foreign war assignment she wanted, she pleaded with the wife of the publisher to intercede and became the first female World War II correspondent in Europe. She was named the best foreign correspondent of 1945 by the New York Newspaper Women's Club. In 1950, as the Far East bureau chief of *The Herald Tribune* covering the outbreak of hostilities between North and South Korea, the military ordered her to leave Korea because "there are no facilities for ladies at the front." But she stood her ground and pleaded this time with General Douglas MacArthur who lifted the ban. She was the only woman of six reporters honored with a Pulitzer Prize in 1951 for covering the Korean War.



During the cold war, she reported from behind the Iron Curtain. In 1961, she covered the civil war in the Congo. She went to Vietnam in 1963 to document her concerns about American military involvement there. Two years later when she returned to Vietnam at age forty-five, she became ill with a tropical disease from which she did not recover. Her exemplary career as a journalist, and her service to her country as a war correspondent, were honored with her burial at Arlington National Cemetery. Oft 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.

countHerhistory-June/2014 and <https://biography.yourdictionary.com/marguerite-higgins>

Susanna McBee (1935-) was a journalist in the 1960s when white women reporters had little opportunity to cover civil rights stories and black women reporters had less-than-little opportunity to cover civil rights stories for major white owned and operated newspapers. McBee did cover 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, she learned of the lunch counter event details from her reliable sources, was the only reporter to report on it and, thus, her article appeared on the front page. McBee continued reporting civil rights cases as she could until 1972, as she had done since 1957, including her coverage of passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

countHerhistory-June/2014 and https://prabook.com/web/susanna_barnes.mcbee/29482

Jill Abramson (1954-) began her academic and professional journalistic resume in the 1970s as the Harvard undergrad arts editor of the *Harvard Independent*, then at *TIME* magazine, then the *Legal Times* in Washington, DC, and then *The Wall Street Journal*. Jill joined *The New York Times* in 1997 and 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. On the day she was fired it was noted that she was seen as difficult—a word when, 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 gender bias pattern. Abramson will not publicly address her firing, preferring not to be defined as a disgruntled, terminated editor but rather as the distinguished documented capable journalist she has been.

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