

# Ben Bradlee to receive Medal of Freedom



For 23 years Ben Bradlee steered The Washington Post through some of the most trying and triumphant episodes in the paper's history. Friends, colleagues and Bradlee himself talk about his legacy, including the publishing of the Pentagon Papers and the coverage of the Watergate scandal.

Website: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/posttv/national/the-legacy-and-legend-of-ben-bradlee/2013/08/07/edcf8e4e-b3f1-11e1-98e9-bbf4aa4074bb\\_video.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/posttv/national/the-legacy-and-legend-of-ben-bradlee/2013/08/07/edcf8e4e-b3f1-11e1-98e9-bbf4aa4074bb_video.html)

By David Nakamura:

Former president Bill Clinton, talk-show icon Oprah Winfrey and Benjamin C. Bradlee, the former executive editor of The Washington Post who oversaw the Watergate coverage that helped end the presidency of Richard Nixon, will be awarded the country's highest civilian honor by President Obama later this year.

Obama will present the Presidential Medal of Freedom to 16 honorees in all, including the late astronaut Sally Ride, women's rights activist Gloria Steinem, baseball star Ernie Banks, former University of North Carolina basketball coach Dean Smith and country singer Loretta Lynn.

More than 500 people who have made "especially meritorious contributions" to national security, world peace or cultural developments have received the medal in the 50 years since President John F. Kennedy established the awards.

In announcing the medal winners, Obama said, "The Presidential Medal of Freedom goes to men and women who have dedicated their own lives to enriching ours. This year's honorees have been blessed with extraordinary talent, but what sets them apart is their gift for sharing that talent with the world."

Other winners this year are the late senator Daniel K. Inouye of Hawaii; former senator Richard G. Lugar of Indiana; the late civil rights activist Bayard Rustin; jazz legend Arturo Sandoval; Nobel Prize winners Daniel Kahneman and Mario Molina; Patricia Wald, chief judge for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit; and civil rights leader C.T. Vivian.

In bestowing the award on Clinton, the White House emphasized his continuing contributions to the country after his presidency, including his formation of the Clinton Foundation "to improve global health, strengthen economies, promote health and wellness, and protect the environment." The Clinton Bush Haiti Fund, which Clinton started with former president George W. Bush in 2010, was also cited.

In a brief biography accompanying the announcement of the awards, the White House called Bradlee, 91, who remains a vice president at large at the newspaper, "one of the most respected newsmen of his generation" for his tenure as The Post's top editor from 1968 through 1991, during the paper's heyday.

"Good God, how fabulous," Bradlee said in a phone interview from the vacation home he owns with his wife, Post writer Sally Quinn, in the Hamptons. "What more can a man get? I feel terribly honored. What does a person do to deserve this kind of prize?"

Katharine Graham, The Post's late publisher, tapped Bradlee to run the paper's news coverage during a time of great competition among Washington's daily newspapers, and Bradlee quickly reshaped The Post to reflect his own pugnacious personality.

In 1971, The Post, along with the New York Times, successfully won a legal battle with the Nixon administration over the right to publish the Pentagon Papers, which revealed the Johnson administration's political machinations over U.S. military involvement in Vietnam.

A year later, two young Post reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, began investigating a break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Watergate hotel. Bradlee and Graham backed the pair despite heavy pressure from the Nixon administration, as the reporters traced the story all the way to the White House, precipitating the president's resignation in 1974.

In a moment recounted in several books about the Watergate story, Bradlee instructed Bernstein to quote then-Attorney General John Mitchell on his threats against Graham after the reporter contacted Mitchell to inform him of an explosive story.

The Post won the Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for its Watergate coverage.

Bradlee's award was announced just three days after news broke that Washington Post Co. Chairman Donald E. Graham, Katharine's son, has agreed to sell the newspaper to Amazon founder Jeffrey Bezos for \$250 million, ending the family's 80-year ownership of the publication.

Bradlee declined to discuss the sale of The Post. "Any change is so difficult to discuss," he said.

The awards will be presented in a ceremony at the White House later this year.

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