



THE WANING WASHINGTON PRESS CORPS  
AND HOW IT HAS FAILED THE PUBLIC

HELEN THOMAS

*Author of *Front Row at the White House**

# Watchdogs of Democracy?: The Waning Washington Press Corps and How It Has Failed the Public

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## **Watchdogs of Democracy?: The Waning Washington Press Corps and How It Has Failed the Public Details**

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# **From Reader Review Watchdogs of Democracy?: The Waning Washington Press Corps and How It Has Failed the Public for online ebook**

## **Liz says**

Enjoyed the historical perspective that only Helen Thomas can share firsthand on the White House press corps..but the book could have been summed up in an op ed piece.

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## **Ian says**

I'm normally a big fan of Helen Thomas, but I found this book to be disappointing. It felt very disjointed to me, especially at the end, where the topics seemed to switch mid-paragraph.

It was a litany of good journalists in the past, and references to bad journalism of the present, without naming names. I was hoping for more blood.

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## **Brad Lucht says**

Disjointed commentary on the decline of journalism.

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## **trav says**

No doubt Helen Thomas is one of the most respected and recognizable reporters over the past 50 years. Over the years she has observed some of the most powerful people to pass through our nation's capital. And she's been at it long enough that she has an above average perspective on things. She can see the 'big picture'.

While, in this book, she often does reference the 'big picture' she spends a lot of time focusing on specific instances where the media shined or fell flat on its face. Needless to say, Thomas thinks reporters and the public were better off back in her younger days.

She talks about the difficulties back then that they had to work through to get the story. She also states that today's reporters couldn't cut it back then. I couldn't tell if she faults the easy access of information (ie Internet) or schools or what. But basically she thinks that reporter's are too lazy (maybe?) to do the real work.

It all comes across very "When I was young I had to walk to school barefoot, in the snow, uphill... both ways."

Maybe that's not fair to what she was trying to say, but it's the impression it left on me.

Maybe "not enough constructive ideas on contemporary events", would be a better way to put it. She spends equal amounts of ink slipping in attacks on current policy as she does the media. too much subjectivity for a reporter, in my opinion. But, hey, she's 86-years-old, maybe she's earned the right to let it fly.

It's a great refresher course of all the names and places that have shaped our country over the past few decades and an ok read for anyone who enjoys studying the media.

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### **Bruce Cline says**

Watchdogs of Democracy? The Waning Washington Press Corps and How It Failed the Public, by Helen Thomas (pp 206). This Thomas' book was published in 2006, it remains on point about shortcomings of the Washington Press Corps and news providers generally. Thomas is at her best telling stories about her White House days; extolling the virtues of reporters over the years, including many fine women; castigating those who compromised their objectivity for a variety of reasons (let alone being outright deceptive); discussing the role and history of newspapers and other media sources; and lamenting the proliferation of supposed news sources that are little more than purveyors of bias and opinion. The book suffers when she is self-congratulatory for many of her successes or her access to the powerful, but luckily that is quite limited. Oddly, in two chapters that cover the business of news—the lamentable need to make money, and a detailed explanation of the FCC regulatory authority and legal aspects of confidential sources and privilege—the writing loses Helen's voice, as if they were written by others. That may be partly true, in that she thanks her agent, a lawyer, for contributing to chapters about the First Amendment and the need for federal shield laws. Regardless, this very readable book about the essential but imperiled role of journalism in American society is insightful, educational, and alarming. It's especially worth reading because of how we are inundated by information and opinion, little of which constitutes factual news.

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### **Darlene Ferland says**

Helen Thomas was an incredible woman... Her accomplishments were far-reaching and I think anyone interested in journalism as a career, or if they love history, should read it. Whether you agree with her or not, you will have to respect her strength in standing up for her beliefs. I am so glad I read this book. . .

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### **Sami says**

Helen Thomas - a brilliant member of the Washington Press Corps - discusses the complacency of journalists in the last 35 years regarding the hot topics of the White House. What happened to journalists asking the

difficult questions and not taking the President's or the Press Sec's word as gospel. She poses an interesting dichotomy between the flack and the hack. :)

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### **Danielle Sanzone says**

The author has led an amazing life and shows how the relationship between the press and government has changed over the decades.

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### **Marshall says**

She is a feisty old lady with a lot of history in her bones. It was a good read if only for some of the great stories from her years in the White House Press Corps. Yes, it can be dry at times, but that's the way history plays out sometimes. It doesn't make the events any less important. What she drives home throughout the entire book is the need for journalists, and good, true ones at that. There will always be a need for people to deliver the facts, the unbiased truth.

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### **Scuppers says**

Helen Thomas is that wizened old lady you can see at the White House press corps meetings (usually asking the best questions).

The book does exactly what the title says -- it describes Thomas' observations about how the press in Washington has changed through the years; mainly about the shift from newspapers to TV.

Maybe it's predictable that Thomas would critique the shift of media from something "for the people" to a few global businesses focused on revenue streams, entertainment, and ad copy.

More interesting than her perspective on the shift from newspapers to TV is her perspective on the White House staff through different administrations, and the creation of the public relations / media arm of the White House. She doesn't seem to think very highly of bloggers, or of the GW Bush administration.

As you read this, keep in mind that she's almost 90. If you're doing this when you're 90, you deserve a cookie.

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### **Sarah says**

Rather depressing outline of where journalism has fallen apart. Some due to economic pressure, but she argues that the biggest problems lies with doormat reporters who cow-tow to increasingly manipulative politicians. I so agree. She contrasts war reporting in Vietnam with war reporting in Iraq. Things are worse. I think if she had lived, she would have loved Snowden. Easy read, with lots of name dropping and little stories. She does make an excellent larger point about the decline of democracy caused by the decline in investigative journalism. No real suggestions as to how to fix. Nor do I have any.

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## **Katy says**

Though it touches on a number of points from a journalist's perspective that opened my eyes about the history of the presidential press corps (and effects of the previous administrations' policy of secrecy), much of the book was dedicated to paeanic lists of all the wonderful reporters she has known. Perhaps it would be more relevant for a journalism student.

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## **CD says**

No media bias you say? Helen Thomas lays that to rest from the preface forward in her tight elegant journalistic prose.

Part memoir, part auto-biography and part history of American Journalism all bordering on screed at times, this is a well written and quite informative dip into the world of a 20th century journalist.

Thomas in her trademark style doesn't pull any punches on any topic she attempts to write about in this probably all to brief work. At times, such as her explanations of the 'current' state of affairs regarding freedom of the press and court decisions she gets out of her league and resorts to language not her own. The sections in question don't suffer even with the different tone and complexity of writing. Just not enough of the type of detail that the author is best at writing and too much information to beat her point into the readers consciousness.

By her own admission writing a straight story is her forte. This later in life role as a commentator/opinion writer is new enough that even with her years of experience there are some gaps in the work. Too much polarized opinion, hers and others, color descriptions of various presidents and their behavior. A few cheap shots at even wives that she didn't see eye to eye with.

One great contribution in this book is why the press/media was so immediately opposed to Bush-2 as she refers to him. His father, Bush-1, was far more personally popular than most people realize. The son certainly didn't inherit that mantle in anyway and there's a 'discovery' in this book that should be left for the reader to find as to one undoubtedly huge factor as to the press's general dislike of Bush-2. It's only two or three sentences spread over a page but in this extremely well written portion Helen Thomas, unwittingly I believe, lays the groundwork for the root of the intrinsic dislike of 'Junior'. Petty as it may seem or innocuous at first, there is revealed what motivated many to never trust Bush-2.

Her list of the great journalist's of the 20th Century has no clinkers but I believe is missing some greats. Then again Thomas's list is mostly with those she has had personal experience.

A book that is worth a couple of looks for those who have an interest in Helen Thomas, White House journalism and reporting, or are intrigued by snapshots of history viewed through the eyes of one it's chroniclers.

Erratic in the amount of commentary on various figures that she probably could have made a unique and important commentary regarding including some of her fellow journalists. Other place she doesn't want you to have any question about how she viewed certain individuals from press secretaries to political advisers

and then the book veers towards screed as mentioned at the start.

I hope Helen Thomas gets to write another book on this or similar topics as I enjoy reading her work, even if I fervently like only half of it. Therein she does attain balance.

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### **Angel says**

I gave it two stars, but it is mostly because the book is a little on the dry side. It has some interesting things, but it can also bog down at times depending on the chapter. Her dislike of bloggers is very evident, which certainly did not make me like her any better; while debatable whether bloggers should be treated as journalists (some probably should), in her despise of them she comes across as someone who is just not with the times, which is kind of ironic given she is making an argument for reporters to keep up.

Her points about the press being pretty much complacent and lapdogs is significant, and it should cause concern for people. Clearly, the press has failed the public when it comes to covering the news in an objective and fair way. For history buffs, this is a pretty good book on the history of the press in the U.S. in the 20th century. So, overall, not bad, but not great either.

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### **Kathy says**

Great read. Helen Thomas definitely makes my list of people I'd love to invite to a dinner party.

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