

JEFF GREENFIELD

It's been a well-kept secret, but *All the President's Men* wasn't supposed to be a movie at all; it was supposed to be a network television show. What went wrong? Here, through the intercession of a ridiculously well-placed source, is the memorandum from the programming chief of Transcontinental Broadcasting to the producers of *All the President's Men*:

TO: Pakula and Redford

FROM: SID CANN, V.P. Programming, Transcontinental Broadcasting.

Fellas: What can I say? We love it! A forty-share lock for sure! And I know these few problems will be cured with a rewrite faster than you can say fourth quarter dividends.

Your first problem, guys, is that the script's a little thin on action. This is not a static medium; unless you can jar the viewer, shake him out of his seat, nobody cares. And frankly, most of your story is Woodward and Bernstein on the phone, Woodward and Bernstein taking notes, Woodward and Bernstein typing . . . you get the point. Now I think we can make this thing a lot more potent without sacrificing anyone's basic integrity. Just a few simple changes.

I want two or three car chases: you know, big cars with "WHITE HOUSE" or "CREEP" painted on the side, to let the viewer in on what's going on. I'd like to see one of the second level bad guys (Colson? Erlichman?) driving the car, and someone like Dean or Magruder shooting at Woodward and Bernstein as they screech around the Washington Monument, the Tidal Basin, places like that.

Along this line, you need to make the good guy's car distinctive, like the Starsky and Hutch mobile. Maybe paint a stripe on the side (and a matching stripe on their typewriters as well—good sales tie-in possibilities there). I also want them to have a siren on their car. In fact, to tell you the truth, I'm not crazy about the jobs they have—there hasn't been a reporter show that's lasted 13 weeks since *The Big Story*. Maybe they could be undercover cops working at the *Post* as a cover.

Now—no TV viewer would ever believe the informants you have here. Send them into bars, massage parlors (I'll send you some *Cannon* scripts so you'll get the idea). Maybe have a hooker spill the goods on Mitchell. What I'm saying is that this isn't an 8 o'clock show, and you haven't got enough sex in there to stir the libido of a fly.

Finally, guys, the ending—the ending! Woodward and Bernstein just sit there typing while Nixon is inaugurated? Not on your Nielsons! What I want is the 21-gun salute at Nixon's second inaugural match-dissolved with the White House shootout. What I want, I want the good guys to ram through the White House gates (screeching tires, gunshots) and start firing into the Oval Office, screaming, "Come on out, Mr. President!" Then, Nixon grabs the Constitution and puts a knife to its throat, yelling, "One step closer and the Constitution gets it right in the Preamble!"

Then, I see a helicopter. . . .

Jeff Greenfield is a political consultant and writer who watches too much television.