

The Union Book

2012



Interview with President Ainlay

March 14, 2012

Stephen C. Ainlay has served as the 18th president of Union College and the chancellor of Union University since 2006. As an academic, his work often encompasses sociological studies of religion. Mr. & Mrs. Ainlay currently reside on campus at the President's House with their dog, Winnie.

THE UNION BOOK: What is your response to the statement, “Union College is a first-rate, second choice school”?

STEPHEN AINLAY: I think there have been times when that [sentiment] might have been true, although student views of Union have changed over time. If you go back to the beginning of the nineteenth century, for example, Union was a small school, yet it was larger than Harvard, Yale, or Princeton. There were undoubtedly students deciding to come to Union and not go to those other institutions because of what Union offered, breaking new ground as it did in the sciences. And, for a lot of students in New York, they only had a couple of choices if they wanted to stay in state. So, when people say “it was a second choice school,” I am sometimes uncertain what they mean.

But I suspect I know where that [statement] comes from. It results from the fact that Union has attracted very talented students, some of whom thought they wanted to go to Ivies. For them, the so-called “little Ivies,” which Union was part of, became the second choice. But that

would have been true of Amherst and other schools as well.

You hear that less these days. In fact, what’s really gratifying to me is that I hear lots of students who had the opportunity to go to Brown or to other Ivies, but they said, “I want to go to Union.” They tell me they chose Union because of what it represents. I think we’ve achieved an institutional momentum now and students are making us their first choice. This is good for us because it results in commitment to the College.

This year, we’ll set a bunch of records: we’ve received the most applications in the history of school [with] nearly a thirty percent increase in students who requested Early Decision. When students ask for Early Decision, we’re not a second choice school; they’re saying, “We’re not going to apply any place else if you let us into Union.” And I think that’s an indication that that phrase, “Union is a second choice school” is antiquated and part of Union’s history now. And again, I guess the point I would make is that it was probably a phenomenon of a specific period in Union’s history. I don’t think it’s always been the case.

TUB: What do you think of the current situation with Greek life, especially in terms of its recent publicity?

SA: I remain positive about Greek life at Union. When I arrived at Union, I didn’t have particular stereotypes about Greek organizations. And I was

very lucky in that the head of the IFC [Interfraternity Council] made an appointment with me shortly after I arrived at Union and said, “We have no interest in struggling with the administration. We would like to be part of Union, and part of Union’s mission. We would like to help you get Union to where you want it to go.” And I replied, “Then, we’ll have no problem. As long as we’re all working together to advance Union – no matter our differences – we won’t have any issues.”

For the most part, I’d say Greek organizations have tried to do that. I think work done by the groups – sensitizing our community

to issues of domestic violence and around violence towards women and so forth – has been very helpful. Greek leaders asked me early on, “What should we do to advance the mission?” I responded, “Whatever is stereotypical, do the opposite.” And, I think they’ve done a good deal of that. Their philanthropy has been terrific – volunteering in Vale Cemetery, reading to kids in public schools, and helping out in the aftermath of Hurricane Irene. It’s been great for the community and for us.

Have there been hiccups? Sure, there have been. And hiccups are not the unique province of Greek life. So, I’ve not really been directly



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Interview with Bob Woodward

April 19, 2012

Robert “Bob” Woodward is a journalist best known for his reporting on the Nixon Era Watergate scandal. Currently serving as an associate editor for the Washington Post, Woodward visited campus in the spring of 2012, and spoke with student media representatives.

THE UNION BOOK: In a 2011 interview with Susan Glasser for *Foreign Policy*, you reflected upon the possibility that the war pursuits following September 11, 2001, might be viewed in fifty years as an overreaction on the part of the United States. In similar form, we’re wondering if you anticipated forty years ago that your coverage of the Watergate scandal would be as highly known and revered as it is today?

BOB WOODWARD: Well, you never know when you’re involved in something like the Watergate reporting. And, of course, it’s incremental. I remember one of our editors of Watergate, Howard Simons, who went here and graduated in ’51. Howard was a great editor, and I’m quoting him directly, he said, “Watergate was like you get in a bathtub, and you turn the water on and you get it hotter and hotter and hotter. And you can’t feel the incremental increases. And all of a sudden, you’re boiling.”

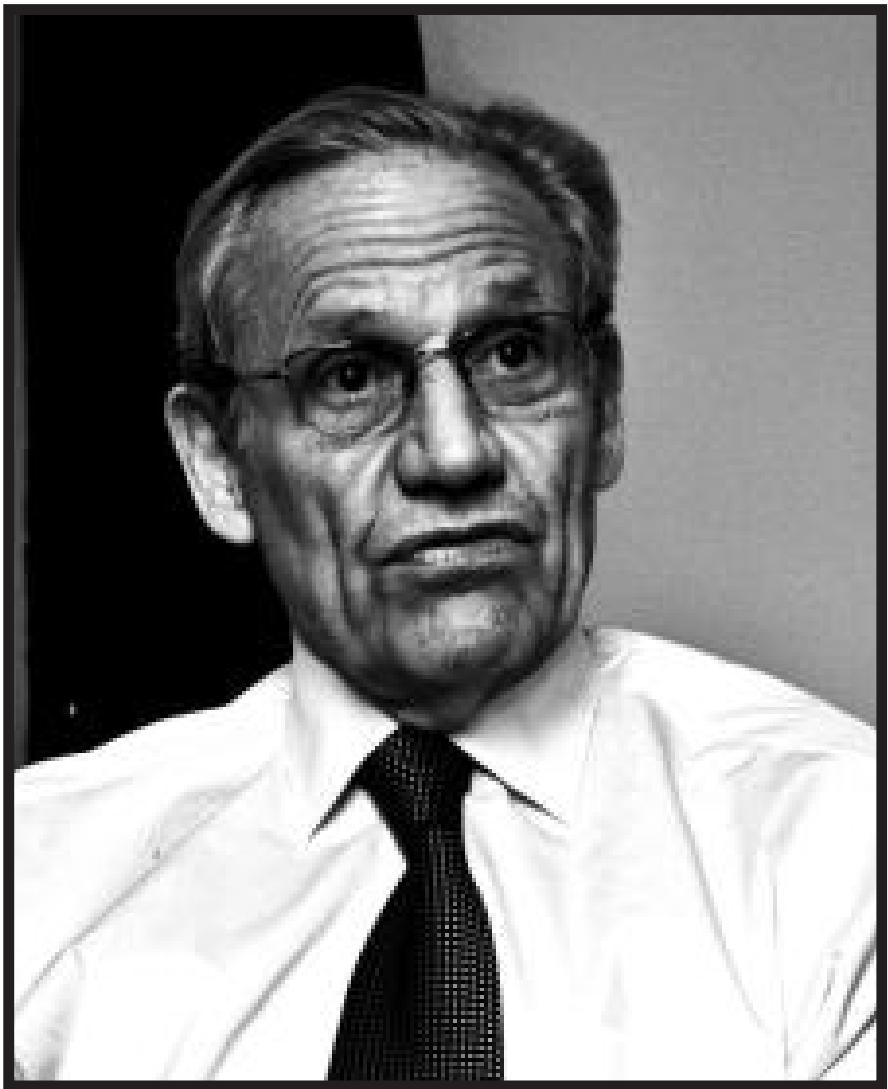
And it was an incremental coverage, we did hundreds of stories and it was twenty-six months before Nixon resigned and within days we tied the people involved in Watergate to the White

House and then to the Attorney General, and then to the chief of staff, and then to the personal lawyer and so forth. But it was small parts; there were some stories bigger than others. And we were protected by editors like Howard Simons and Ben Bradlee. And we were protected by the publisher to just kind of go out and find out what happened.

TUB: Right. And forty years later, how do you think the public understanding of your coverage has changed?

BW: My coverage of it? Well, reflections on it continue in a sense. Carl Bernstein and I have gone around giving speeches this year and we will for the rest of the year to colleges and before business groups and so forth. And one headline in one of the papers about our talks was “Dissecting History,” still dissecting history. I think that is what we’re still doing, trying to figure out, “What does it mean, what don’t we still know?” We know a whole lot; there are still people out there who are Nixon defenders. There was one review of a Watergate novel saying, “We really don’t know what happened, and your guess is as good as mine.” Well, not so. I mean, we do know what happened. [We have] the Nixon tapes and so forth.

I was talking to an NPR reporter about this, just about a half hour or so ago. Why would [President Richard] Nixon do all of these things; what was it in his character? And, I think I’ll talk



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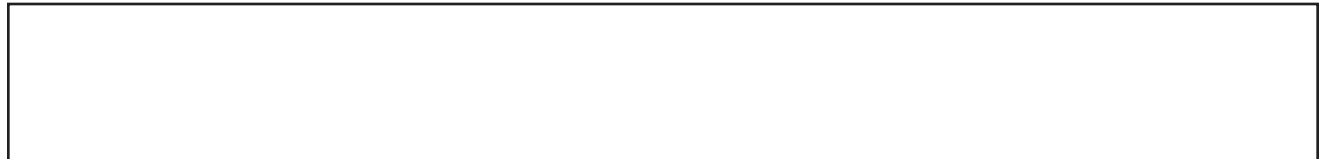
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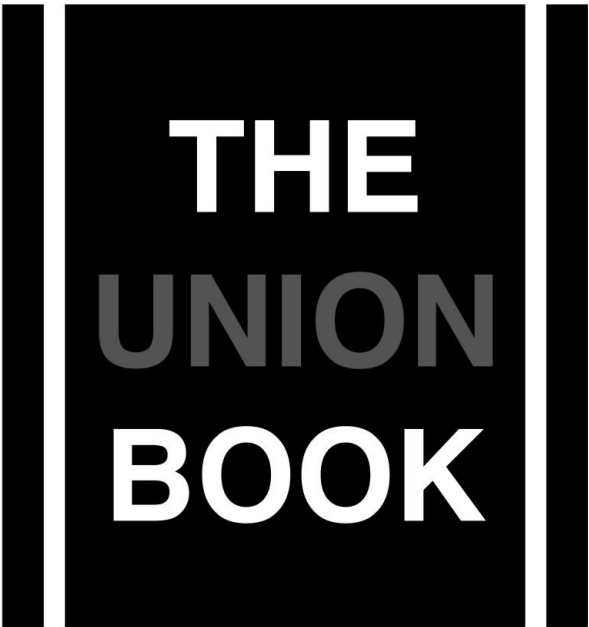
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All interviews were conducted and transcribed by Erica Fugger '12 with the addition of Adam Pere '13 for President Ainlay and Ceillie Clark-Keane '13 for Bob Woodward.

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