

**The Washington Post**  
**June 5, 2005**

**All the Bureaucracy's Men**

By James Mann

The unmasking of former FBI official W. Mark Felt as "Deep Throat" has given the country a rare glimpse into the two separate spheres that coexist uneasily within the U.S. government. Let's call one of them Hidden World and the other Talk Show World.

It's impossible to understand how things work in Washington without considering these two contrasting worlds and the inherent, unending struggle between them. Bob Woodward grasped the difference between them more than three decades ago. The many people who guessed wrong about Deep Throat's identity failed to understand it; they usually overestimated the role and power of Talk Show World.

When I refer to Talk Show World, I don't mean merely the people on the Sunday gabfests. In fact, there weren't too many talk shows in the early 1970s. Rather, I'm using the phrase to refer to all those prominent individuals who appear on television, or write articles and books, or go off on the lecture circuit to discuss what's going on inside the U.S. government or whatever administration is currently in power.

Often, it is the same identifiable faces, over and over again; after all (or so the logic goes) if someone is unknown, he or she must not be very important or must not have anything important to say.

Most Americans mistakenly presume that their government is run by Talk Show World -- even though, in reality, the denizens of this universe may have no power at all and may have no more than a limited connection to the inner workings of government.

To take just one random example: Ari Fleischer, the former spokesman for the current Bush administration, is a classic Talk Show type. Even out of government, his face is recognizable today. Yet while he was in government, he wasn't at the table for key decisions and, I suspect, didn't know very much.

Or take David Gergen, another classic Talk Show figure, who has served in high positions for both Republican and Democratic administrations. Gergen may be a knowledgeable specialist on perceptions or public relations -- but he wasn't a decision maker. Reporters who rely upon someone like Fleischer or Gergen as a source tend to learn only what a particular administration wants the press to know.

Mark Felt was a classic representative of that other sphere, Hidden World. It comprises bureaucracies and institutions through which the United States must operate day in and day out -- the FBI, the CIA, the armed forces. Hidden World is by its very nature faceless, but also permanent. Administrations come and go; the big organizations remain. Usually, Hidden World follows directives, but sometimes it balks, subverts and undermines. (Well before the Watergate break-in, Felt didn't like what the Nixon administration was asking the FBI to do.) Political leaders may despise Hidden World, but they often have no choice but to work with and through it. American presidents and political parties don't have their own people on 24-hour call in Jakarta or Dubuque; the CIA and FBI do.

Woodward had at the very start of his reporting career a superb (if intuitive) grasp of Hidden World. He had served in the Navy in Washington; by his own account in *The Post* last Thursday, his military duties involved errands at the White House. That's where, in a chance encounter, he met Felt.

Too many other reporters fall into the trap of believing in the centrality of Talk Show World. Since the 1970s, the endless speculation about the identity of Deep Throat repeatedly and cluelessly focused on famous faces from the Nixon era, such as Gergen, political strategist John Sears, presidential speechwriter Pat Buchanan, Republican National Committee chairman George H.W. Bush, White House press aide Diane Sawyer -- all people who had little or no access to the hidden law-enforcement and investigative information Deep Throat was providing. Even Alexander Haig, who in 1972 was a senior aide to national security adviser Henry Kissinger and later the subject of some Deep Throat speculation, didn't have that sort of information. (Haig was plugged into Hidden World, but in this case it was the wrong bureaucracy -- national security, not law enforcement.)

Even after Felt and his family came forward last week, some journalists seemed to cling to their old illusions that the faces they already knew are the most important ones. How could Deep Throat have known anything if he wasn't a regular at the Gridiron Club? Columnist Robert D. Novak, himself a Talk Show habitue, wrote last week of the "general feeling inside Washington" that Deep Throat had to be someone "closer to the scandal than a senior FBI bureaucrat." People like Haig or Gergen "would seem more dramatic" than Felt, asserted Novak.

Yet it is the humdrum, almost boring quality of Felt and others in Hidden World that defines their essence and their significance. To them, the institution counts more than individual flair or fame. That's the point I was trying to make in a 1992 *Atlantic Monthly* article (which mentioned Felt as one of a couple of Deep Throat candidates). The article said that Deep Throat's identity wasn't nearly as important as where he worked, namely the FBI.

How do these two worlds, Hidden and Talk Show, connect to each other? At the day-to-day level, they don't. Members of Talk Show World tend to deny the existence of Hidden World. Acknowledgement would undercut the reigning mythology that a few famous faces make all the important decisions, carry them out and go on television to explain them. You can't put a bureaucracy on the air or get it to write a book.

Meanwhile, inhabitants of Hidden World regard Talk Show World with an admixture of fear, awe and fascination. Over the past week, there has been considerable speculation about why Felt, even in advancing age, continued to hold back from identifying himself.

The answer, I think, is that as a Hidden World lifer, he regarded Talk Show World as an uncontrollable force, one that could upset his quiet existence. Those who operate with great power in the shadows are leery of the glare of the spotlight.

Of course, Talk Show World and Hidden World do connect -- not at the working levels, but at the very top. The president, his cabinet and the senior-most leaders of any administration play a role in both spheres. On the one hand, they appear in public to explain their policies. On the other, they also run -- or, more to the point, try to run -- the bureaucracies of Hidden World.

And that is what leads to unending conflict of the sort that was at work in 1972, when FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover died and Nixon tried to wrest control of the FBI -- Mark Felt's FBI -- for his own purposes.

In many ways, this struggle was unique. Hoover had not only run the FBI for decades; he had virtually created it, and he had attained a position where he could defy or even blackmail presidents. No one (one hopes) will ever have that sort of power again. Moreover, there may never be another administration so determined to misuse the FBI as Nixon was -- both because of Nixon's paranoid personality, and also because the Watergate revelations and Nixon's humiliating resignation have deterred any successors from following the same path.

It would be a mistake to dismiss the bureaucratic struggles of 1972 as ancient history. Today, as in virtually every administration, one can find comparable, if lesser, battles for control of bureaucracies. Indeed, looking at this bureaucratic warfare is often the key to understanding the dynamics of how any administration works.

Our leaders don't talk about this on television, but one of the things they worry most about is whether or how they can control the bureaucracies beneath them, so that an administration's policies are carried out, or at least not subverted. Virtually every president since John Kennedy in the early 1960s has wrestled in one way or another with the CIA. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, like all of her predecessors, has tried to win the loyalty of the foreign service.

In the George W. Bush administration, we have been witnessing for five years the epic bureaucratic tug of war between Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and the uniformed military. From his first day in the job, Rumsfeld (himself a Nixon protege) and his top civilian aides have been seeking to exert control over the military leadership.

Just as with the FBI in 1972, this is not a case where, as an abstract matter, either side has a monopoly on virtue. As a nation, we want -- indeed, require -- civilian control of the military. But we also need our uniformed military leaders to retain enough independence to say no to crazy ideas (as they failed to do in Vietnam).

The submerged struggle for control of the Pentagon was the key to understanding the tensions over the role of Secretary of State Colin Powell in Bush's first term. Powell was viewed as a threat by others in the Bush administration because he operated skillfully in both spheres, the public and the hidden bureaucratic ones. He was a popular, relaxed and sophisticated regular in Talk Show World. Yet as former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he also enjoyed close ties to the career military. In 2001, others in the administration (notably Vice President Cheney and Rumsfeld) worried that the uniformed military might prove resistant to change or to political control.

The distinction between Talk Show World and Hidden World can be extended to the world of journalism, too. In 1972, The Washington Post's staff included a few identifiable names -- publisher Katharine Graham, editor Benjamin Bradlee, a handful of top columnists and political reporters. They were, in a sense, part of Talk Show World.

Yet The Post was also itself a big organization, full of lower-level editors and reporters whom few outside the newspaper could have identified. As a reporter for The Post's Metro staff, Woodward was a representative of the newspaper's Hidden World. In that sense, it was no accident that he and Felt did business with each other.

James Mann, a longtime reporter at the Los Angeles Times and earlier at The Washington Post, is author-in-residence at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. His most recent book is "Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet" (Viking/Penguin).

© 2005 The Washington Post Company