



## Power at play

IN THE CAPITAL, KNOWLEDGE IS POWER—  
SO ARE LUNCHESES, DINNER PARTIES,  
TENNIS, SHOPPING, SUPERMARKETS . . .

BY MAUREEN ORTH AND KAREN FELD

**B**eing informed, Washington style, is a deadly serious business. It is not for those who try to pass off mini-gossip gleaned from secretly watching *Entertainment Tonight* instead of the *MacNeill/Lehrer News Hour*. To be truly informed in Washington is to be in a state of perpetual information overload. The minimum daily requirement is a familiarity with the debates on Capitol Hill, perfect pronunciation of the name and title of the current foreign dignitary visiting the White House, and a trivial pursuit of First Family-bilia: knowing that Betsy Bloomingdale is out, but the wife of USIA Director Charles Wick, Mary Jane Wick, is in, and that Ronald Reagan, who campaigns on family issues, never sees his grandchildren.

You must also spend large chunks of the weekend indoors watching political talk shows, and never miss reading the editorials and Op-Ed pages of the *Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, plus the all-important Style section of the *Washington Post*, and parts A and D of *USA Today*. You should also know the cover stories of both the *National Review* and *The New Republic*. You're considered a real slouch if you can't quote the latest "numbers"—the results of a half-dozen polls on who will beat

whom in November. Beyond that, it also helps to have a good backhand.

Take the St. Albans Tennis Club, for example. In in in. The waiting list for membership is more than a decade long. Just by having a strong tennis game, however, one can literally leapfrog the usual routes of climbing the Washington social ladder: elaborate entertaining or having a Powerful Job or Spouse. At St. Albans, the newly powerful who have a great serve are always admitted. Yet there are no towels, no chairs, and no bar, a spartan locale for people like Kay Graham, Walter Mondale, Swedish Ambassador Wilhelm Wachtmeister, and FBI director William Webster, all of whom cheerfully wait in line for the courts. Naturally, wearing a beeper is de rigueur on court, and it's not unusual for players to be momentarily distracted by a huffing and puffing entourage of Secret Servicemen trying to keep up with George Bush jogging around the track above.

Gone are the days when the first diplomat sent here from Prussia in 1880 wistfully wrote: "Everything is dreadfully boring. The city is a real village with few attractive people." The diplomat would be amazed, for example, at Independence Bank President Bill Fitzgerald's Thursday Power Lunches. Fitzgerald, one of (Continued on page 434)

Washington's leading black power brokers, hosts the city's business and political elite in his boardroom, behind his lavender leatherette "amnesia door." To prevent leaks in this rumor-mad city, Fitzgerald insists his guests develop amnesia regarding what is discussed.

People talk issues everywhere—even in supermarket aisles. One of the hottest spots in town is the Georgetown Safeway, the "social Safeway." There you may find Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger and Senator Charles Percy talking AWACS over heads of lettuce; or Senators Howard Baker and Lloyd Bentsen simultaneously squeezing tomatoes and crunching defense-budget numbers. Elizabeth Taylor was a Safeway regular when she was a Senate wife in Georgetown, but she was usually left alone. The checkers—who speak Spanish, Greek, and Chinese to accommodate embassy chefs—are strictly admonished never to gape at famous customers. The Safeway has always been considered an ideal pick-up place. But recently, it was dismissed by a glamorous Washingtonian who said, "I never talk to anyone in there anymore. All you meet are bachelors who want you to cook them dinner." Still, it is amusing to see couples in black tie and evening gowns on their way home from embassy parties stocking their shopping carts with Lean Cuisine.

strictly for culture. But now both the Kennedy Center and the I.M. Pei-designed East Wing of the National Gallery have added quite a gloss to the formerly dreary cultural scene. These days, the culturati are abuzz with anticipation that twenty-six-year-old wunderkind theater director Peter Sellars, the newly named director of the American National Theater Company at the Kennedy Center, might actually establish the national theater company here that America has never had.

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It is now even possible to get a great haircut in Washington—from Sylvain at Visage or from Eivind at Lucien et Eivind, both in Georgetown—or to be a pampered female executive at the Georgetown Women's Club. There are a dozen amusing, if not superb, restaurants—Filomena for pasta or Germaine's for Vietnamese—and a branch of New York City's Glorious Foods to cater dinners for twelve or twenty where the inevitable topics of conversation are who exactly will hold power after election day, and isn't it dreadful how stiff Walter Mondale is on TV? Why can't he be as charming on television as he is

Washington dinners are almost always extensions of the work day and at such occasions, looking good is not enough. Woe to the dinner-party guest who can't contribute anything new to the day's headlines. Even after four years of a president from Hollywood who has taught Washington much about image dominating substance, the natives stubbornly cling to a fascination with the printed word. They persist in reading each other. Well-known writers always rank above TV people, for although television correspondents are often secretly envied for their salaries, they are not so secretly dismissed for getting so much of their information first from print. Gradually, however, TV is taking over, if only because the President prefers to spend so much of his time in front of a camera.

Nancy Reagan, of course, remains the quintessential traditional political wife—masking her power, standing close to and adoring her man. More usual, however, for both Republicans and Democrats, is the spouse who can totally pinch-hit if the politician in the family is suddenly called away. Doctors or lawyers wouldn't dream of asking their spouses to do their work for them. Politicians would and often do. Professionalism is a highly regarded trait in a partner.

Washington used to be a cruel place for a woman. There didn't seem to be much to emulate between Alice Roosevelt Longworth and Elizabeth Ray. But the emergence of so many professional women in the last decade, coupled with strict laws against sex discrimination in government hiring, have forced a change in attitude. So have the numbers. It is estimated that this November several more million women than men will go to the polls. The President might be against ERA, but the most practical politicians are not—at least in private. If only because they can count.

The new importance of women has also bred a new social phenomenon: Power Couples. Two-career families with a ten-fold impact are the most coveted of guests. Hostesses love them—they make seating so much easier, because, thank God, they both can talk. Currently, the most sought-after Power Couples are people like the Senator and the Cabinet Secretary—Bob and Elizabeth Dole, or the *Washington Post's* Ben Bradlee and Sally Quinn, and *The Wall Street Journal's* Al Huns and *MacNeill/Lehrer's* Judy Woodruff.

It's indeed a radical change to see a tiny band of women recognized in their own right in Washington—women like Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick—but the emergence of Power Women also seems to make the simplest things confusing. For one thing, many Power Women, like Geraldine Ferraro, and particularly women in media like Leslie Stahl, tend to keep their maiden names, so it's often very difficult to figure out who is married to whom until late in the evening. Then, just as you're wondering why this dull boring man was invited to this party, your hostess whispers that his wife produces the evening news. Only then can you desert him with impunity and make a beeline for her. ▽