Long before Robert Novak became the center of a political firestorm in the Valerie Plame CIA leak scandal, he had established himself as one of the finest—and most controversial—political reporters in America. Now, in this sweeping, monumental memoir, Novak offers the first full account of his involvement in that affair, while also revealing the fascinating story of his remarkable life and career. This is a singular journey through a half century of stories, scandals, and personal encounters with Washington’s most powerful and colorful people.

Novak has been a Washington insider since the days when the place was a sleepy southern town and journalism was built on shoe leather and the
ability to cultivate and keep sources (not to mention the ability to hold one’s liquor). He has covered every president since Truman, known (personally and professionally) virtually all the big movers and shakers in D.C., and broken a number of the biggest stories—the Plame story, we see here, being far from the most important. In this book, he puts it all into perspective. He also reveals the extraordinary transformations that have fundamentally remade Washington, politics, and journalism—and his own role in those transformations.

Moving beyond the “first draft of history” that is daily journalism, Novak can at last tell the stories behind the stories. He vividly recalls encounters with the Kennedys (angry meetings with Bobby, a scary ride home in Jack’s convertible), his unusual relationship with Lyndon Johnson (who hosted Novak’s wedding reception and who, “drunk as a loon,” had to be carried out of a bar by the young newsman), a decidedly odd off-the-record lunch with Ronald Reagan, and his first meetings with George W. Bush—at which the veteran journalist seriously underestimated the future president. We meet other fascinating characters as well, from Deng Xiaoping to Ted Turner to Ezra Pound.

Writing with bracing candor, Novak tells us how politics and journalism truly operate at the highest levels, both publicly and behind closed doors. He is equally open about his private experience. He writes frankly about the days when his drinking reflected too closely the boozy ways of the town. He acknowledges times when his job took precedence over his family. He is reflective about his political journey to the right. And he writes more personally than ever before about his spiritual journey, from his early life as a secular Jew to his conversion to Catholicism at the age of sixty-seven.

Packed with riveting, never-before-told stories, The Prince of Darkness is a hugely entertaining and equally perceptive view of fifty years in the life of Washington and the people who cover it.

**Personal Review: The Prince of Darkness: 50 Years Reporting in Washington by Robert D. Novak**

Robert Novak is known as the melancholic counter-balance to the more phlegmatic Rowland Evans. More recently, he has become known for his work on television. He helped to start the McLaughlin Group on public television, and started a program on CNN called, "The Capital Gang." But in future generations, he will be known for this book.
As a history buff, I often have to read books that are really not about history, but contain items of interest that you cannot find elsewhere. This book, in sharp contrast, is a treasure trove of historical information. I was born in Japan, but my parents were Americans, and I made my first trip to the United States in the spring of 1957, when I was three years old. In that same year, Robert Novak moved to Washington D.C. to work in the AP Washington bureau. So this book is a political history of the United States over the span of my lifetime. You can understand my interest.

I don't remember the election of 1956 ("Don't change the team in the middle of the stream."), because I was only two years old. But I remember 1960 well. I was in first grade. We had an election in class, and I voted for Nixon. I followed every election after that. I registered to vote when I was a senior in high school, and voted for the first time (officially) for Nixon the autumn after my graduation. Do I regret that vote? Not really, because I don't think McGovern was a serious alternative. But this book told me some things about Nixon that were not apparent to most people, and I'm not just talking about Watergate.

Ever wonder where all those government leaks come from? This book will tell you. Who was it that said, "The people don't know McGovern is for amnesty, abortion and legalization of pot. Once Middle America--Catholic Middle America in particular--find this out, he's dead?" You wouldn't believe it if I told you. But Novak will tell you, because the individual in question is no longer living, so the need for confidentiality has expired. This book contains many of these fascinating tidbits, insights, and perspectives. Novak made a career (with Evans) of reporting exclusives, and this book is full of them.

The greatest strength of this book, though, is the refreshing contrast it offers to the ocean of Internet "journalists" who litter the Internet with their compulsive outpourings, which are either ill-informed rants, or shameless paraphrases of other people's work. Many of these folks are bloggers, of course, but you would be surprised how many of them actually make their living writing purely from what they read in the papers. I read an article recently by a guy who was bemoaning the decline of print newspapers. He said, "People think that newspapers can be replaced by the Internet, but if conventional newspapers disappear, where will we get the information we need to write Internet articles?" ??? Where does he think the people who write newspapers get their information? Somebody has to do the actual reporting.

Novak epitomizes Edison's well-worn statement that "Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration." He got his own information. He talked to people. He went there and found out what was really going on. This is old-fashioned journalism at its best. Novak seems to take it for granted, but he is a hard worker. Doing things this way he did was work. Lots of work. It was fun, but it was work. It was fascinating,
and exciting and stimulating, but it was work. Lazy people cannot produce
the kind of quality that Novak was known for.

So why should you read this book? This book would appeal to two kinds
of people. I have already mentioned history. This book is a political
history of the last half of the Twentieth Century. You will read the stories
that were not told, and the reason they were not told. Case in point: Joe
Kennedy bought Virginia for his son in the 1960 election by bribing the
sheriffs who controlled the voting process. Why was the story kept under
wraps for thirty years? Because the story would have come out just before
the Democratic convention, and the top brass at the Wall Street Journal
did not feel it was their place to influence the choice of the Democratic
candidate. In fairness to the Journal, they said they could not break the
story because their sources refused to sign affidavits. You decide for
yourself why this corruption was hidden from the American people for a
generation.

The other type of person who could really benefit from this book is a
budding journalist. This book could also be subtitled, "Career Path for a
Political Journalist." Novak describes every step of his career path, gives
information about how he got the job in each case, his salary, and the
equivalent value in 2007 dollars.

Novak made mistakes. His departure from the McLaughlin Group was a
real loss. They needed him more than he needed them. Not sure what he
could have done, but perhaps he should have apologized to McLaughlin.
Novak is a man with strong convictions. Not hard to see how he would
have trouble getting along with someone like McLaughlin, who is the
furthest thing from an ideologue. But ideologues do not typically make
good moderators, and McLaughlin is, hands down, the best moderator in
the business. But while I think Novak left the McLaughlin Group too early,
I also think he stayed with CNN too long. For those of you who don't
remember what CNN was like before it became so trashy, I remember
when CNN started. I watched the interview Ted Koppel did with Ted
Turner on Nightline. Turner was talking about how modern (1980)
commercial television had degraded, and he wanted to provide something
wholesome for the American people. I was struck by this, and a bit
sceptical, but you know, whatever you think of Turner, his network really
did start out that way. In my opinion, Novak stayed until long after CNN
had become a lost cause. Part of this was contractual, but I sometimes
think I would have been inclined to leave television altogether, rather than
stay with an outfit that had become so completely given to trivia. CNN has
become the "soap opera" of network news.

Perhaps my negativity comes from the fact that I believe America is clearly
a civilization in decline. To the extent that men like Evans and Novak did
their part to live and work as men of principle and honor, and slow the
insidious demoralization of society, we should thank them. And we should
also express our thanks to their families, who had to bear with a work schedule that was very intense and demanding. We are all in their debt.

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