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The Documentary and Journalism

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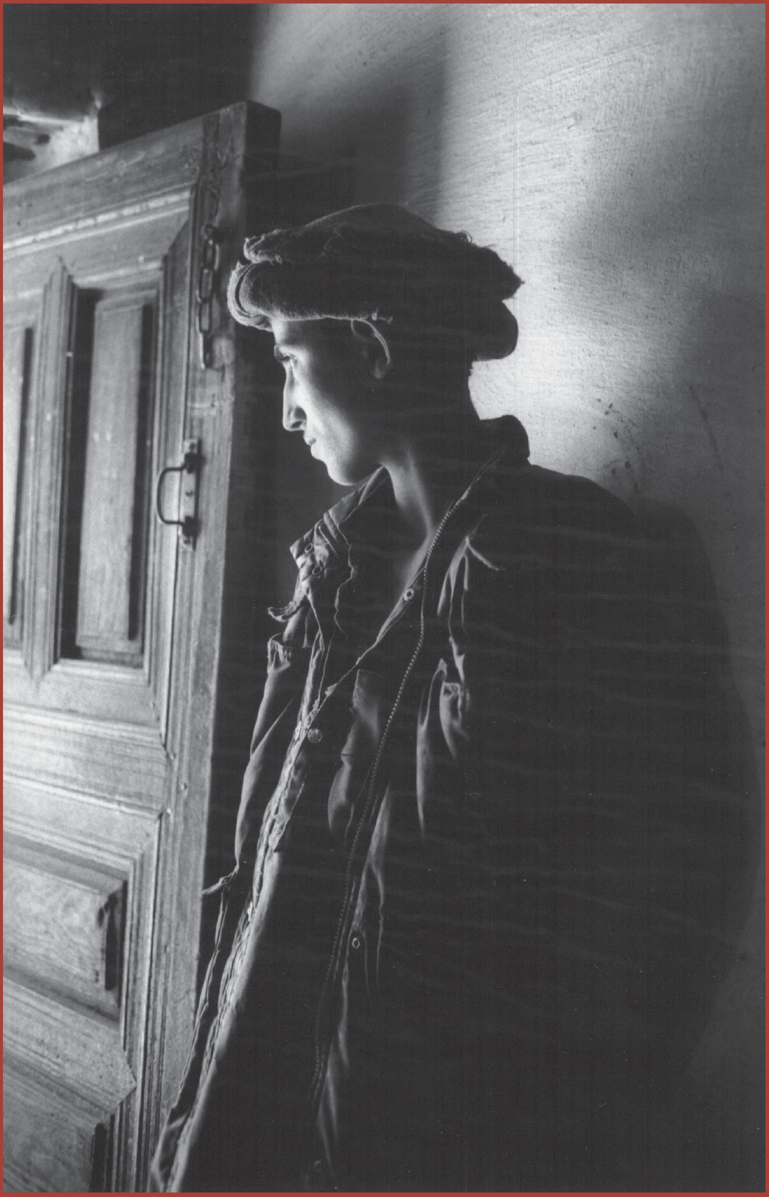

Newspaper Cutbacks: Is this the only way to survive?

"…to promote and elevate the standards of journalism"

—Agnes Wahl Nieman, the benefactor of the Nieman Foundation.

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Narrative Journalism: A New Nieman Program

Mark Kramer brings his teaching and narrative journalism conference to Harvard.

By Bob Giles

In its Fall 2000 issue, this magazine published a series of articles exploring the idea that narrative writing was returning to newspapers. The lead article was written by Mark Kramer, a writer and highly respected teacher of the narrative craft who has directed a conference on the narrative form each year at Boston University, where he has been a professor and writer-in-residence for more than a decade.

"The basic assertion is simple," wrote Kramer. "Newspapers might both improve coverage and retain more readers by employing storytelling techniques to convey news." Editorial interest in narrative has been stimulated, he continued, "in the course of a search for remedies to widespread current business problems: declining or stagnant newspaper circulation, aging readership, and decreased minutes spent reading papers."

Narrative was on the list, he explained, "because it engages readers; in this age of mega-corporate media saturation, Web sites and workaholism, readers still are attracted to stories in which people's lives and decision-making are vividly portrayed."

Last winter several Nieman Fellows, who were among 750 to attend Kramer's narrative conference and who attended his class at B.U., urged me to bring him to Lippmann House to teach a narrative journalism class. Mark and I had lunch and then a series of meetings that led to reinstating the narrative course for the Nieman Fellows that had been introduced the year before by Robert Vare (NF '97), and much more.

Kramer laid out a vision for making the Nieman Foundation a center of activity in narrative journalism. He saw it as an opportunity to deploy the great strength of the Nieman name and reputation by reaching out to the working press through discussions of reporting and writing practices; the role of editing; the ethics of narrative reporting, and relationships of reporters with sources, with readers, and with the culture and institutions of journalism. He described formal and informal ways in which the Nieman program could support the development of narrative work, both in the United States and abroad through seminars and the Nieman Web site. (I urge you to go to the foundation's Web site [www.nieman.harvard.edu] to read more from our Fall 2000 issue about the experiences of other reporters who use this approach.)

His ideas struck me as a natural fit with the Nieman mission to elevate the standards of journalism, serving Nieman Fellows and the larger journalism community as well. We were able to quickly transform this vision into a new initiative—the Nieman Foundation Program on Narrative Journalism. Kramer joins the Nieman staff as director of the program and writer-in-residence. He brings with him the annual narrative journalism conference, which will be held November 30-December 1-2 under the Nieman/Harvard banner. This fall, he will teach the narrative form to the Nieman class and plans to offer courses to Harvard students. He will be available as a writing consultant to student publications, thus helping to fulfill the Nieman Foundation's obligation to serve the university community.

Kramer's presence will enrich significantly our program and the fellows. As Stefanie Friedhoff, Nieman Fellow '01, said in her note to the class of 2002, "Mark Kramer stuffed his students with ideas of how to convince colleagues and editors that a long narrative story here and there can have an impact; how to go about narrative and do it in a way that is intriguing and convincing. Thus, narrative became visible as one concrete tool to do a better job."

Kramer's overview of narrative journalism is worth noting. "First of all, it's not an invented thing, but one that is evolving," he wrote in reply to my query. "My observations on narrative derive from common practice, although I plead guilty to trying to influence that practice.

"Narrative describes events as they take place over time. This splitting of event into process of course fully mobilizes journalists' writing skills and judgment, which is why it can serve readers well and excite reporters, but also why editors approach cautiously. All reporting implies a selective eye. In narrative accounts, the selection is fine-grained: What events are central? Where in the tangled rush of events might a reporter slow action to catch moments and details and persons, and where brush past events? The reporter gets to figure it all out and to chat with readers.… Narrative invites reporting beyond the least common denominator, because it acknowledges complex emotions, human situations and consequences, moving conversation with readers beyond simple shared sentimentality."

So, in a sense, this narrative movement in American journalism isn't simply about storytelling, but about connecting with varied readers. It invites us to deploy proven practices, including scrupulous use of set scenes and information about personality. It invites the reporter's artistry. Kramer adds, "It surely doesn't include inventing an iota of material. That's a bedrock taboo, as industry-threatening as ever."

The Nieman Foundation Program on Narrative Journalism has been launched. I invite your ideas and experiences, cautions and encouragement. ■

The Documentary and Journalism

At a time when so much of journalism is quicker, shorter and hyped to grab the public's presumed short-attention span, the documentary—with its slower pace and meandering moments—is finding receptive audiences in many old places and some new ones as well. In radio, documentary producers tackle society's most pressing issues, and on the Internet, there are homes for documentary exploration. Photographers linger in communities to document the lives and places they encounter. And though documentary films are not as visible on network and local broadcast stations as they once were, on public and cable TV and in theaters, the documentary form is thriving.

In this issue of Nieman Reports, we've asked those who document our world to explore how their work converges with ours. How is what they do related to journalism? And what does the documentary form allow its adherents to do in reporting news or exploring issues that other forms of journalism do not?

Stephen Smith, managing editor at American RadioWorks, begins our inquiry by raising—and responding to—a familiar question: "What the hell is a radio documentary?" **Joe Richman**, producer of the "Radio Diaries" series on National Public Radio, describes how his documentary "reporters," who are untrained in journalism, capture moments that journalists never could. Two of these reporters write about their work as radio diarists. At 360degrees.org, documentary photographer **Sue Johnson** uses Web technology to merge voices and images to create an interactive opportunity for people to explore the day-to-day experiences of prison and to gain understanding about topics of criminal justice. In an interview, radio documentary producer **David Isay** shares his views and experiences about the points at which his work intersects with that of journalists and where it diverges. **Jay Allison**, an independent broadcast journalist, begins with "Life Stories," a diary series he began in the 1980's, and ends his article with a description of his newly developed Internet site Transom.org—"a combination library, master class, and audition stage," where producers and citizens gather to talk and learn about radio documentary. Producer **Sandy Tolan** reminds us of the power of first-person radio narratives as he retraces his experience in making the award-winning documentary, "The Lemon Tree," and **Johanna Zorn** at Chicago Public Radio alerts us to an October festival where radio documentaries will be featured.

Photographer **Denise Keim** used her camera to document life in Poland during the year she spent there. "With documentary work," she writes, "I stretch the boundaries, nurture the subject matter, and communicate critical thinking on many layers." Photojournalist **Peter Howe**, who directed photography at The New York Times magazine and Life, describes the crossroads at which photojournalism now finds itself, a place in which technology, culture and economics will determine its future. Photographer **Antonin Kratochvil** draws distinctions between what he regards as photojournalism and what he believes is documentary photography. They are, he writes, "identical mediums, but conveying very different messages." Alongside his haunting photographs, he speaks about what motivates him to tell stories in this way. **Eli Reed**, a photographer for Magnum, takes us along as he immerses himself in the community of Eau Claire, South Carolina to document moments that bring residents together. **Robert Coles**, editor of DoubleTake, a documentary magazine, and a teacher at Harvard University, returns us to the words of those who inspired him to create DoubleTake. "Pictures and words, *both*, is now our refrain…" he writes, in tribute to poet, artist and physician William Carlos Williams. Magnum photographer **Chris Steele-Perkins'** photographs reveal what he found in Afghanistan, a country cloaked in secrecy. His mission: "to commit these people's sufferings, their crazy ways, their grace and culture to film." And photographer **Andre Lambertson** focuses his camera's lens on the enduring plight of poor, black children growing up in decaying neighborhoods of urban America. "I wanted my work to help me and others understand why these neighborhoods continued to devour their children, how children who lived there saw themselves, and where they found hope," he writes.

In the early years of television, producer **Robert Drew** used his Nieman year to ponder how the documentary method of storytelling could flourish in this new medium. By the early 1960's, he pioneered what he calls "candid" documentary. Unfortunately, in recent years, documentaries have nearly vanished from broadcast television, as **Philip S. Balboni**, president of New England Cable News and a juror for the Alfred duPont-Columbia University Awards, attests in his article exploring why this happened and the consequences of their absence. "Frontline" is one of the only reliable outposts for documentary journalism left on television, and its founding and ongoing mission are the topics of producer/director **Michael Kirk's** article. **Cara Mertes**, executive producer for the public television series "P.O.V.," talks about how personal storytelling, told subjectively, finds links to journalism. **Ellen Schneider**, executive director of "Active Voice," which includes a new media model called the Television Race Initiative, writes about trying to use the documentary form to inspire collective action within specific communities. And **Margaret Lazarus**, an independent documentary filmmaker, speaks to ways in which her own advocacy intersects with her filmmaking and, in turn, how her films intersect with journalism. **Robert Richter**, the last producer from the Murrow/Friendly "CBS Reports" unit still making documentaries, explains why the long-form documentary can't be replaced adequately by the ubiquitous newsmagazine. "The reason: To make what is complicated able to be understood, and potentially acted upon, eats up valuable airtime." Independent filmmaker **Chris Hegedus** uses the "cinéma vérité" approach to documentary filmmaking to take viewers into places like Bill Clinton's 1992 "War Room" and the offices of a young entrepreneur's dot-com start-up (it fails) and keeps her cameras running as the story-behind-the-story unfolds. Is this related to what journalists do? "I'm not sure," Hegedus writes, but she explores ways it might be. Finally, **Michael Rabiger**, a founding member of the BBC Oral History series "Yesterday's Witness" and author of "Directing the Documentary," describes the methods of documentary filmmakers and how their decisions and actions influence the story the film tells. He supports documentarians who have decided "to show not only the result of their work but how they created it." Such transparency, he argues, "is encouraging since, as with journalism, the more the public understands how a story is constructed, the more likely they are to ascribe fairness to it." ■

'What the Hell is a Radio Documentary?'

It's a familiar question. Now here are some answers.

By Stephen Smith

I was interviewing a man in Tennessee this year, a well-educated professional in his 60's and a devoted listener to public radio. I introduced myself by explaining that I'm based at Minnesota Public Radio and make documentaries for National Public Radio (NPR). He cocked his head and eyed me funny. "What the hell is a radio documentary?" he said. I get that question all the time.

Unlike television and film viewers, most radio listeners don't identify an investigative story or intimate human portrait they just heard on public radio as a documentary. To them it's just a program, a piece, a story, a write-up, or even an "article."

Yet an increasing flow of documentaries is pouring out of American radio speakers. They come almost exclusively from public radio stations but also, occasionally, from commercial news stations. Some are an hour long, others 10 to 20 minutes. The best can often be heard within NPR news magazines such as "All Things Considered" and "Weekend Edition"—producer Joe Richman's chronicle of the lives of prison inmates through their audio diaries—or David Isay's portrait of a New York City flophouse, or the work of the Kitchen Sisters in their "Lost and Found Sound" series. There are also documentaries heard on our rival network, Public Radio International (PRI), in programs like "Marketplace," "The World," and "This American Life."

American RadioWorks (ARW) makes documentaries that air within the major NPR news magazines, but we've also made a priority of producing hour-long special reports distributed directly to public radio stations nationwide. These specials air in virtually all the major American cities.

Neither length nor audience define radio documentaries. Ideally, a documentary possesses a depth of research or proximity to its subject that distinguishes it from a long feature or enterprise story. Length is not the defining quality; a documentary can last hours or five minutes. Documentaries convey a rich sense of character and detail—or a substantial body of original investigative material—that simply aren't heard in the majority of public radio news reports.

At the heart of the documentary style are moments recorded on tape in which the story unfolds in front of the listener. These scenes function like a photo essay or a film documentary, where events play out in real time. For example, there is a scene in an American RadioWorks documentary on child poverty, "The Forgotten 14 Million," in which the mother of a family in Kentucky, Janet, lectures her son Jim about the perils of getting married too young.

Jim: "You're allowed to get married when you're 21."

Janet: "Yeah, you're allowed to get married when you're 21, but where you gonna take her to?"

Jim: "I don't know."

Janet: "Without the money and without a home, you gotta have the money and you gotta have a home to take her to!"

Jim: "Yeah, but I'm gonna get me a home first."

Janet: "There ain't no way you can get married at the age of 18 and think that you can go through college, get a job, and support a family, and get your own home and everything else. You can't do that. That's what Mommy and Daddy's been a-trying to tell youn's. You get your education and everything, then you can get you a woman. Other than that, if you don't go through all of that, then you ain't gonna have nothin. And you know it."

In a stunning piece of historical documentary, producers Christina Egloff and Jay Allison of the "Lost and Found Sound" project used audiotapes made by a soldier named Mike, who died in Vietnam, to tell his story: "I have the recorder here, and I'm going to try to keep it elevated off the ground and away from everything here. I'm going to try to keep it up in the air because everything I touch here eats through my skin or bites me, or rots, something. This is, this is something else. The grass will cut you. The mud will rot your skin. This is something else."

Time spent in the field is often what distinguishes a radio documentary from a feature or enterprise report. The piece feels lush, more active. At American RadioWorks, we encourage producers to revisit their subjects time and again, to document the story over months, if not years. These kind of character-driven stories are a powerful way of exploring larger social themes. Some producers pride themselves on never quoting experts in their documentaries because conventional news reports tend to rely heavily on academics and government officials as on-mike sources. At American RadioWorks, we try to weave the larger social context into a compelling, character-rich story. When we get it right, the flow of an engaging narrative helps carry the weight of figures and facts. The trick is choosing the right subject. ARW covers a mix of domestic and international subjects, from global public health to war crimes, from the American prison industry to the history of segregation.

Narrative documentaries are far more common in public radio than investigative projects, in part because investigative reporting devours time and money. Most radio news organizations simply can't afford it. But in February, American RadioWorks broke the story of how Serbian security forces serving the regime of Slobodan Milosevic burned hundreds of bodies of slaughtered Kosovo Albanians in an industrial furnace to cover up potential war crimes evidence. This story was the result of nearly two years' work researching war crimes in Kosovo.

Do listeners want these documentaries? If you ask many program directors—the gatekeepers to local airtime on more than 600 stations nationwide—the response is mixed. Some insist that long-form work is at the heart of public radio's mission and distinguish it from all the brainless chatter elsewhere on the dial. Others say documentaries are a ratings killer. They point out that the average commercial radio listener tunes in for only 15 minutes or so and that longer stories won't help lure these listeners to our side. On the other hand, time spent listening to public radio is more like an hour per occasion, and documentaries recently aired within NPR's "All Things Considered" have been among the most popular pieces that program has aired.

Although documentaries are alive in public radio, it's hard to argue that the genre is healthy, at least in terms of employment opportunities. Only a handful of radio producers in the United States actually make a living from documentary work, and they don't earn much money. Most producers also work as journalists for local stations, or hold down editorial posts at NPR or PRI, or toil at an unrelated day job. American RadioWorks, the largest documentary production unit in public radio, has nine people on staff.

Still, the near future seems promising for documentary radio. An excellent radio program can be made for a fraction of what a quality independent film costs: As a rough estimate, radio documentaries can cost anywhere from $20-80,000 or more per hour, compared to a documentary film, in which the budget might start at $100,000 and soar past one million dollars. Foundation and government funding for radio documentaries, while not simple to obtain, does exist. And when a piece airs on an NPR newsmagazine it reaches a large, influential audience. For example, more than 10 million people listen to "All Things Considered." That's a far bigger crowd than watch most film documentaries and a healthy figure when compared to the four million people a week tuning in to the prestigious PBS TV documentary program "Frontline."

I like to think that the future is promising for audio (not just radio) documentaries. The Internet has already created new venues for audio work, though the audience is uncertain and work suffers from the squishy sound of Web audio. There might be other ways to distribute audio documentaries in the multi-media future. Some day, we might get our radio signals from satellites instead of towers and be able to chose the "all documentary" channel while driving to work. We might even be able to chose programs on demand, á la cable television. This could mean a bigger market for audio docs.

In the meantime, keep an ear open for the radio documentaries already beaming through the atmosphere. ■

Stephen Smith is managing editor and a correspondent with American RadioWorks, the documentary project of Minnesota Public Radio and NPR news.

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Radio Diarists Document Their Lives

These 'reporters' capture moments journalists never could.

By Joe Richman

What made Josh Cutler a great radio diarist was that I never knew what he was going to say. Sometimes he didn't, either. Josh has Tourette's syndrome, a neurological disorder that causes involuntary verbal and physical tics. I first met him in 1995 when he was in the 10th grade. I had just received a grant to produce a series called "Teenage Diaries" on National Public Radio [NPR]. The idea was to give tape recorders and microphones to a group of teens around the country and help them report about their own lives.

Josh recorded for more than a year. [See Josh's description of his work for "Teenage Diaries" on page 8.] He brought the tape recorder to school (reluctantly at first), kept an audio journal, and recorded all the sounds of his daily life. Josh documented his tics, he taped himself doing everything from preparing breakfast to making prank phone calls, and he recorded one amazingly intense and honest conversation with his mother that became the centerpiece of his audio diary. All together, he collected more than 40 hours of tape, which was edited into a 15-minute radio documentary for NPR's "All Things Considered."

The fact that Josh could not always control what came out of his mouth is a kind of metaphor for this type of documentary journalism. The process of going through hours and hours of raw audio diary tapes is like mining for gold. Ninety percent is junk, but then every so often there are little magical moments that are completely unexpected. Things emerge about people that, in an interview, I would never have known to even look for.

With all the diarists there comes a point, maybe after the first month of recording, when they get bored with the process. That's what I'm waiting for. They're no longer trying to sound like Tom Brokaw. They're not performing, so they're less self-conscious. They relax and become themselves. It takes a lot of practice to be natural.

Of course, the key to all documentary journalism is time; spending enough time for people to trust you with their stories, hanging out enough so that you're there when things happen. By turning the tape recorder into a constant companion, the diarists take this process a step further. It's like bringing the microphone backstage, to a place where truth and understanding are found not just in words but between words—in the pauses, accents, in the sighs and silences.

Teenagers make good diarists because they have an abundance of time. It's also an age where people are just beginning to discover themselves and their world. And unlike many adults teenagers simply have an inherent belief that whatever they say is important and people should be listening. When I ask a teenager to carry a tape recorder around for six months, they don't think I'm crazy.

Radio is the perfect medium for these diary-style documentaries. The equipment is relatively inexpensive and easy to use. A microphone is less intrusive than a video camera so people can be more natural, more themselves. Most importantly, radio is intimate. Great radio sounds as though it's being whispered right into your ear.

For these reasons, I believe some of the best first-person documentary work is found on the radio. David Isay's "Ghetto Life 101," in which two young boys in a Chicago housing project were given tape recorders, and Jay Allison's on-going "Life Stories" series were both direct inspirations for our "Teenage Diary" series. And during the past five years the public radio show, "This American Life," has reinvented and reinvigorated the form.

"Radio Diaries" is a small, nonprofit company—me and associate producer, Wendy Dorr. Since Josh's story aired in 1996, we have produced more than 20 diary-style documentaries for NPR. The "Teenage Diaries" series has included diaries from a teen mom, the daughter of an evangelical minister, a gay teenager, an illegal immigrant, and the running back for an Alabama high-school football team. Other projects have included a 30-minute diary-style documentary from residents of a retirement home and, more recently, we produced "Prison Diaries," a series of stories from inmates, correctional officers, and a judge.

Diarists have to play two roles, both subject and reporter, and negotiating

A Tape Recorder Becomes a Connecting Thread

By Joshua Cutler

I went to a small high school where everyone had some vague notion that I had a disease called Tourette's syndrome. But very few students really knew what that meant and even fewer seemed to care enough to find out. That was until I brought the tape recorder to school with me.

At first, I was absolutely mortified at the idea of actually interviewing anyone. I was in 10th grade and, back then, I used to dread going to school every day. I was already enough of a social outcast because of my condition, which causes me to sometimes move or speak involuntarily. I was terrified that shoving a huge microphone in somebody's face would cause me to be the victim of further scorn. I was wrong.

When I took out the tape recorder and explained what I was doing, there was a huge commotion. Soon, I had at least a dozen students waiting to be interviewed. During this lunch period, I became closer to my classmates than I had in the several previous years.

Recording these diaries made me realize something important: I'd never really talked to anyone at school about Tourette's. Talking in this way now showed me that people were interested and did care. After my story aired, even complete strangers from around the country went out of their way to drop me a note. My well-wishers ranged from ordinary people, to a man in prison in Texas, to a young lady named Emily, who also has Tourette's, and with whom I still correspond.

The lesson I learned from documenting my experience is that in some ways the cold, cruel world is not as cold and cruel as I used to think it was. ■

Joshua Cutler. *Photo by Kate Burton.*

"People are always taught to think before they speak. Everybody has deep dark things that they don't want people to know they're thinking about. The bottom line is sometimes I actually have to teach myself not to care. I can't care because most of the time I can't control what comes out of my mouth. I control what comes out of my ass better than I control what comes out of my mouth. But the last thing I want people to think is, 'Oh, poor Josh.' It's not like I'm in a wheelchair or I have snot dribbling down my chin. I really just don't want anyone to be feeling sorry for me. This is not a Sally Struthers commercial."—From the "Teenage Diaries" series.

Joshua Cutler graduated in June 2001 from Vassar College. When he was in high school, he reported two stories about his life and struggle with Tourette's syndrome.

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the two can be tricky. So the rules—my rules, anyway—are different from traditional documentaries. I give each diarist final editorial control over their story. I also pay most of the diarists a small stipend for their work. In this way, the relationship is closer to the model at NPR and other news organizations: The diarist is the reporter and I am the producer—although by the time a diary airs on the radio, my job feels more like that of a midwife.

The "Prison Diaries" series, which aired on NPR in January 2001, was certainly the most difficult project among the diaries that we have undertaken. After spending more than four months trying to gain access to prisons, we found two institutions willing to participate. One was an adult prison in North Carolina for 18-22-year-old inmates. The other was a juvenile facility in Rhode Island. We gave tape recorders to five inmates, four correctional officers, and a juvenile court judge. For six months, the diarists kept audio journals and recorded the sounds and scenes of their lives. At the end of six months, we had 250 hours of tape. Eight or 10 months after that, we had four half-hour documentaries for NPR's "All Things Considered."

Along with the radio broadcasts, we also teamed up with an innovative online documentary project about the criminal justice system. Called 360degrees.org, it allows visitors on their Web site to enter and move around the diarists' environments while they listen to their audio diaries. [See story about 360degrees.org on page 10.]

"Prison Diaries" was the first time inmates have been given tape recorders to document their lives in this way. The series tested the limits of what this form does well but also exemplified how it can fall short. When a topic is so emotional and complicated, the absence of an "official" narrator poses a difficult problem. In choosing inmates, it was important to find diarists who could own up to their crimes and their lives, who could somehow address the skepticism and questions of credibility that listeners would naturally bring to the stories. I also grappled with the issue of empathy, wondering whether our listeners could invest emotionally in the story if they didn't like the diarist. On the other hand, so much of what happens in prison is normally out of our reach, and this method allowed listeners unprecedented access. We wanted to document a side of prison life that people rarely hear—including the quiet, intimate sounds, and not just the traditional slamming of cell doors.

"Prison Diaries" was also challenging for the diarists. One thing correctional officers and inmates share is they have to always maintain their game face. Honest, vulnerable moments are

'It was just me and the recorder.'

By Cristel

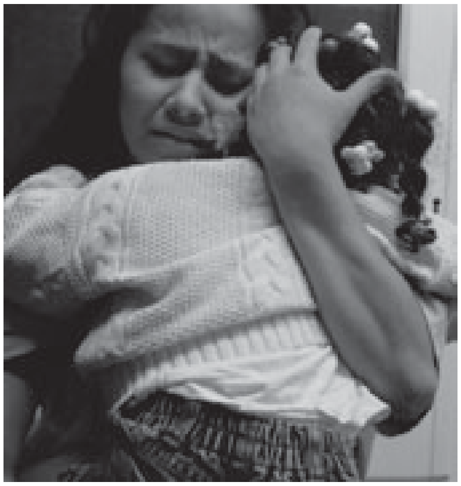
I had been incarcerated at the Rhode Island Training School for three years when I met Joe [Richman]. He asked if I wanted to carry a tape recorder around the training school for a few months and record my life. I told him yes. But at the same time I was wondering why in the world would people be interested in someone that's not famous at all. I mean, what's the point?

That was 1999. Three years earlier, when I was 15, I cut a girl many times on her face with a razor. The judge had locked me up for six years. I didn't think anybody would want to hear from a criminal's point of view. I figured people would hate me for what I did, or at least they wouldn't be interested.

At first it was strange to carry the tape recorder around, but it also made me feel special. There were times when I had no one to speak to. The recorder became my friend and social worker. It was like I was keeping a verbal journal. I knew that one day, millions of people would hear my story. But I never pictured it like I was talking to the whole world. I felt like I was just talking and nobody's listening. It was just me and the recorder.

I remember one time I stayed up all night in my cell to watch the sunrise. I hadn't seen it in a long time, and I told the tape recorder how one day I was going to see the sunrise from a better view. And that's what happened. Soon after that night, the judge decided that I was rehabilitated and let me out three years early.

I was scared to have my story on the radio. But when I heard it, I began to understand why people might want to listen to somebody that's not famous. I guess it's so you'll know about other human beings that you may not know about, and hear their stories. ■



Cristel and daughter Rayonna. *Photo by Sue Johnson.*

"Sometimes, you know, I just look out the window and I just sit here and think like something I decided in 10 minutes changed my entire life. Not even 10 minutes. I mean three years gone by, and I'm still sitting here. What would I be doing if I was out? What would my life be like? Would I have finished school? Would I have settled down? Would I have done something worse? I just look out the window, and I think about all this stuff."—From "Prison Diaries" series.

Cristel was released in early 2000 after being incarcerated for three and a half years. Now 20 years old, she lives with her boyfriend and two daughters and still carries her tape recorder with her.

hard to come by. Yet what many of the diarists appreciated about the project was the opportunity to let their guard down. One inmate later said he had never in his life talked to anyone the way he talked to the tape recorder. Buried in those 250 hours of tape from prison are many intimate and magical moments. On one cassette, Cristel, an 18-year-old girl incarcerated at the Rhode Island Training School [See Cristel's description of her work for "Prison Diaries" on page 9.] was recording late one night when she heard a faint knock from the wall of the cell next door. It was a 13-year-old girl who had just recently been locked up. Neither of the girls could sleep, so for 10 minutes they sent each other syncopated rhythms back and forth between the cell walls. After a while the knocking stopped. Then Cristel picked up the tape recorder, walked over to her window and brought the microphone close to her mouth.

To hear Cristel speaking quietly into a tape recorder late at night, it's almost possible to enter into her world, to imagine ourselves there behind the microphone. What radio diaries can do well is to give us all glimpses into a different reality and to document the moments of lives that can't be told except by those who live them. ■

Joe Richman is the producer of the "Radio Diaries" series on National Public Radio. He is also an adjunct professor at the Columbia University Graduae School of Journalism. Radio Diaries Inc., a nonprofit production company in New York City, recently published a guide to making radio diaries, the Teen Reporter Handbook, available for sale and on their Web site: www.radiodiaries.org.

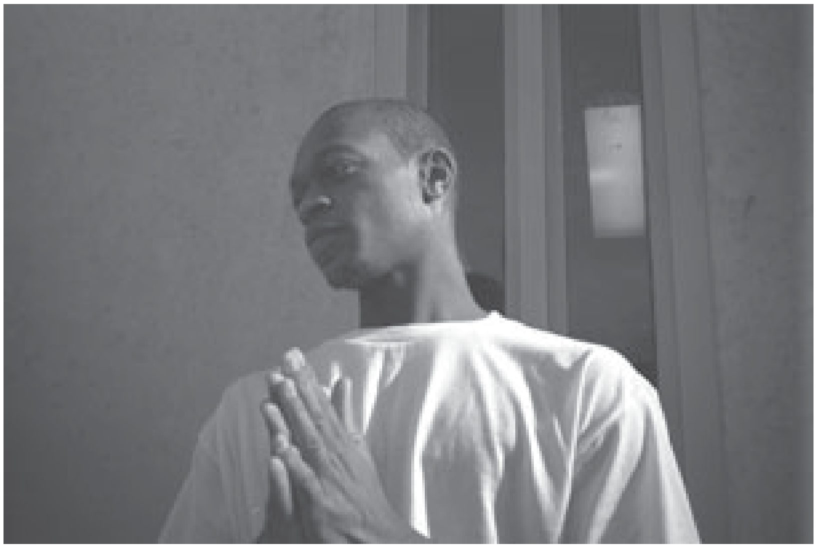
✉ joe@radiodiaries.org

Using the Web for an Interactive Documentary Project

At 360degrees.org, the U.S. criminal justice system is examined from many perspectives.

"My name is John Mills. I'm 21, a black male…in prison. I wanted to be a police officer, you know what I'm saying? When I was smaller, I used to think about that all the time. All the sirens and loud noises and blue lights. It was just something I always wanted to be. But now I hate the police. I know my life just took a big turn somewhere. I just don't know where. My mom always predicted my life: 'You're going to be just like your daddy.' He went to prison. I think he pulled like five years in prison. 'Just like your dad.' She'd say that all the time."

By Sue Johnson



John Mills is serving seven to nine years at Polk Youth Facility. From the documentary, 360degrees.org. *Photo by Sue Johnson/Picture Projects.*

John Mills is one of 1,100 young men ages 19-21 who are incarcerated at Polk Youth Facility in North Carolina. His story is part of an ongoing series called "360degrees: Perspectives on the U.S. Criminal Justice System." This Web-based documentary attempts to put the recent growth in the prison population into historical perspective and examine the impact it has had on individuals, families and communities. Each story, and there will be eight by the end of 2002, addresses a new theme—the juvenile justice system, prison towns, children of incarcerated parents—and is told through first-person stories, data that can be examined in different ways, an interactive timeline, and online and offline discussion.

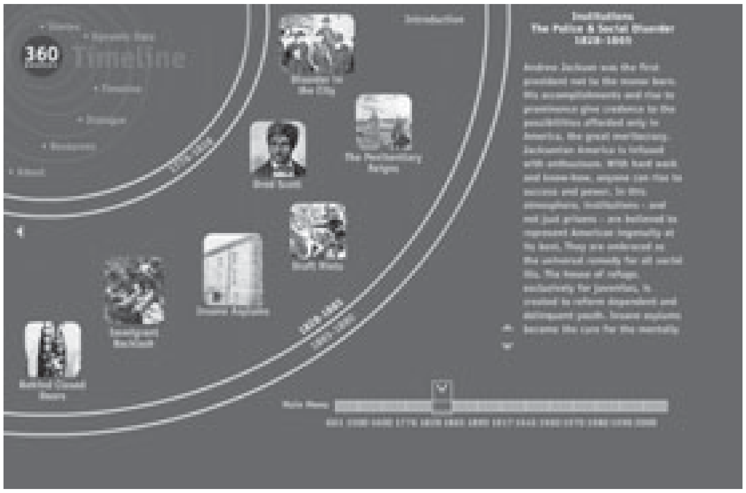
We launched 360degrees.org in January 2001 in conjunction with Joe Richman's "Prison Diaries" series on National Public Radio. [See story by Joe Richman on page 7.] We spent several months doing interviews together. While Joe focused exclusively on John's story for a 30-minute broadcast, we interviewed two correctional

A panoramic photograph of the intake process. On the Web site, 360degrees.org, the visitor can pan around this photograph by moving the cursor while hearing stories from the correctional officers who work in intake. ***Photo by Sue Johnson/Picture Projects.***

officers, the warden, and John's mother and stepfather. We edited these interviews, along with John's, into short audio clips for 360degrees. The site uses streaming audio and navigable 360 degree photographs to create a "sensurround" simulation of each person's environment. While listening to each person's story, visitors to the site can pan up, down and around the storyteller's space—prison cells, recreation yards, living rooms, and judges' chambers.

From this story section, visitors can go to an interactive timeline that shows the evolution of the criminal justice system from 601 AD to the present. Beginning with the Code of Etherlbert, which placed a monetary value on each body part, the timeline conveys the cyclical nature of the system by highlighting theories and practices that have gone in and out of fashion throughout the years. The dialogue area is a place for open discussion, e-debates between invited guests, and small closed discussion circles.

The dynamic data area is a place where we have experimented with visualizing and animating statistics, charts and graphs. This work has been conceptually difficult and the programming very intensive. Each interactive exercise requires a significant amount of data, often more than what is available, in order to generate accurate comparisons or calculate risks and odds. To develop this, we've worked with a number of criminologists and researchers at the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Currently, the site offers two quizzes: "Are You a Criminal?" and "What's Your Theory?" In time, we'll offer interactive maps of neighboring communities showing the number of people going into and coming out of prison and money spent by the criminal justice system in each neighborhood, and we'll launch three new dynamic data scenarios by the end of the year.



Screenshot from the online documentary, "360degrees: Perspectives on the U.S. Criminal Justice System," by Picture Projects.

The idea for the project originated in 1998 when my partner, Alison Cornyn, and I read "The Real War on Crime," a report from the National Criminal Justice Commission that detailed the ineffectiveness of tough-on-crime measures through a combination of anecdotes and statistics. It challenged us to think about how we could illustrate—using interactivity and multimedia—the rapid growth in America's prison population since the 1980's and its impact on our daily lives. By this time, our multimedia documentary group, Picture Projects, had already collaborated with several photojournalists, filmmakers and cultural institutions to create interactive documentaries including "akaKURDISTAN" with Susan Meiselas, "Farewell to Bosnia" with Gilles Peress, and "Re: Vietnam: Stories Since the War" for PBS online.

360degrees.org, as we envisioned it, was larger in scale than any of these projects. It would require a significant team of advisors, producers and programmers and, of course, a much larger budget. As with our past online projects, our goal was to capitalize on the assets of the medium: its capacity for quick computation, motion graphics, and the integration of audio and video, as well as the opportunity to cross over geographic boundaries. We wanted to reach new audiences, primarily high school and college students, that have had little exposure to the criminal justice system or to those who had come into contact with the system but wanted to know

A panoramic photograph of John Mills' cell. At 360degrees.org, the visitor can explore Mills' surroundings while his audio story plays. *Photo by Sue Johnson/Picture Projects.*

how their experiences fit into a broader picture. (We knew we were headed in the right direction when The New York Times reported that criminal justice was the fastest growing major on U.S. college campuses.) More importantly, we wanted to tell a compelling story, one that fully engages the audience through their actions on the site, and one that ultimately gets people thinking about the efficacy of our current policies and alternative approaches to crime control and incarceration.

We refer to 360degrees.org as an interactive documentary. When people hear this, they want to know how long it is. Of course, its length is determined by how the user travels through the site. The combination of high-end graphic design, storytelling, interactivity and the nature of the subject matter positions 360degrees.org somewhere between art, documentary and activism. The site has been featured at documentary film festivals, galleries and at new media trade shows. It has also been nominated for journalism awards. The blurring of the lines has made it difficult for us to get funding, yet a handful of foundations including the New York State Council on the Arts, Creative Capital, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting came on board while the project was in its nascent stages. The budget for the site resembles that of a low-budget documentary film with half of the resources going toward our production team of database programmers, Flash animators, audio editors, photography researchers, and writers. The other half goes toward the cost of outreach and marketing.

We developed the site independent of an online distributor so we'd be free to experiment with the technology, the narrative structure and, most importantly, the content. This, of course, put the task of audience building in our hands, which has been costly, but the result has been a series of enterprising partnerships and collaborations. The site averages about 5,000 hits a day and closer to 10,000 during the related NPR broadcasts. Adrienne FitzGerald, a former social worker with a degree in new media, has been working with us to bring 360degrees into high schools and universities. She created a pilot program called the Social Action Network, where students talk with ex-offenders, judges and lawyers in a guided, four-week program that takes place both online and offline. We are seeking funding to make this a national program in partnership with several educational organizations, including a criminal justice textbook publisher.

360degrees.org is in many ways an experiment in how far we can push the medium (and our resources) and how much an audience is willing to engage with a story. In this non-linear Web environment there is less narrative control. Visitors to the site will listen to characters in a different order, in different environments, and in different ways. So it is vital for us to create a "stickiness" between the stories, keeping visitors curious enough to continue exploring the site. Our goal has been to construct the overall narrative by collecting many—sometimes hundreds—of first-person stories. One of the advantages of working in this medium is the ability to change the site in response to viewer feedback. The downside is living with the feeling that the project is never complete. Built into the architecture of our sites is the space to play with different methods for storytelling.

These large-scale projects can only be accomplished through collaboration; they can be costly and incredibly time consuming. We have been encouraged by the growing community of filmmakers, writers, photographers and journalists willing to pool their experience and resources. It is a critical time, as the Web becomes increasingly commercialized, to carve out a space online for experimentation with these new forms of documentary. ■

Sue Johnson is a documentary photographer and cofounder of Picture Projects, a new media production company specializing in Web-based documentaries. Picture Projects' work can be found at www.picture-projects.com.

suej@picture-projects.com

Radio Documentaries Take Listeners Into Dark Corners

David Isay is the founder of Sound Portraits Productions. Its radio documentaries profile the lives of men, women and children living in communities often neglected or misunderstood. During the past 13 years, Isay's work has won nearly every award in broadcasting, including three Peabody Awards, two Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards, and two Livingston Awards for Young Journalists. He was recently awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. Included among Sound Portraits' documentary work is "Ghetto Life 101," "Witness to an Execution," "The Jewish Giant," "The Sunshine Hotel," and "The Executive Tapes." Isay was interviewed by Nieman Reports editor, Melissa Ludtke.

Melissa Ludtke: Can you describe why you chose the radio documentary as a way to tell the stories and reflect on social issues?

David Isay: Well, I didn't choose it. It was a series of strange circumstances and twists of fate that kind of led me into making radio documentaries when I was 22 years old and headed to medical school. It totally kind of exploded my life and sent me in a whole new direction. So I wasn't drawn to the radio documentary; it just kind of happened…. I wasn't a journalist.

I'd never taken a journalism class. I never listened to public radio. I mean, I knew nothing. And I certainly could have ended up going in different directions in radio, or leaving radio and going to some other form of storytelling…. And it just so happens that it was the medium that was perfect for telling the kind of stories that I care about. Radio is a wonderful medium to tell emotional stories. That interests me. It's a great medium for getting into dark corners of this country and telling stories that can't be told on film.

SOUND PORTRAITS.ORG
listen
Witness to an Execution
read
explore

On soundportraits.org, visitors can learn about David Isay's work.

ML: Why is it a great medium for telling the kind of stories you want to tell?

Isay: Well, it's cheap. And a lot of the stories that interest me are about people who are living on the margins. Our mission is to tell stories of people who are outside of the mainstream. A lot of times people don't want photographs, don't want their faces shown. Many times they communicate best through talking.

ML: You've spoken about finding a place where the concentric circles of what you do well come together. Could you share what you feel are the ingredients of those intersecting circles?

Isay: It's everything from technically—it is not rocket science to use audio equipment, and technically I enjoyed doing it. It was just the right amount of technical stuff so that it didn't distract me. I like asking questions. And I love editing. I love hearing tapes. I mean, making these programs is all about finding tape that's on fire and stringing it together in a cohesive way. So that was great. And doing the interviews when you're talking about the kind of stories that I'm drawn to, it's kind of a cross between, I don't know what it is. I'm uncomfortable kind of labeling. But, it's sort of part journalism, part like social work. When you're doing an interview, it can be this very intense sort of verbal exchange. I come from a family of therapists. And that's enjoyable to me.

ML: What's the part of it that you *think* relates to journalism?

Isay: That it tells the truth. The kind of radio stuff that I do is close to narrative journalism. It's about a kind of total immersion in a topic and bringing you into a place. If you look at something like the Sunshine Hotel, it's a matter of going into a dark place and doing a lot of recording and then creating this space through audio where people can step into this other world.

ML: A journalist who goes into the Sunshine Hotel and does interviews might ask the same questions you do, or might not. Might get similar answers to what you get. But, if that person was doing this as part of a news story on radio, then there'd be other components and responsibilities. To the best of their ability, they would have to check out the story that they were told, to see what was true and what might not be true.

Isay: And that's sort of a fallacy about the work. Of course we do that, the kind of research that goes into doing a story like this, even though there's never been an expert in a piece that we've done in nine years. When we do a story, we've got cubic inches of information. Every expert that could be talked to has been talked to. I mean, it's like jazz in the sense that you can't improvise until you've got the basics down. So when we go in we do the basic journalistic work, the research, the background, the digging, talking to people, getting to know them, and checking their stories as best we can.

ML: But that's not transparent in the work you do.

Isay: Absolutely. But, hopefully, when people hear the work they'll hear a solidity to it. And if it's on public radio, they'll understand that it's not done lightly. If this had been done as a straight reported news piece, the research that would have gone into it, on any of these pieces, is much less than what we end up doing. We spend a long, long time doing these pieces. And that involves checking it backwards and forwards and upside down. I think it's very similar to the long-form New Yorker sort of journalism or any other sort of immersion journalism. It's just that the narration is usually in the hands of someone who is in the place that we're working. That's what makes it different. And that's part of what differentiates radio from print.

ML: Your work often airs without a narrator's voice per se.

Isay: It always has a narrator, because it's impossible to tell a story without a narrator. And that's great if you didn't realize that someone was narrating. There's always a narrator. But the narrator is not us. The narrator is someone who is from the place where this documentary is taking place. In the documentary about the executions in Texas, the narrator is the warden. In "The Sunshine Hotel," the narrator is the guy who runs the flophouse.

ML: He's also a character in it in some ways, too, isn't he?

Isay: Yeah, he is.

ML: Where there is another overlap with the role that the journalist plays in reporting a story is in the fact that you're making obvious editing decisions about what voices to include, what sounds to make prominent, and the order in which the story will be told.

Isay: Sure, absolutely. The bottom line is that hopefully I can look the people with whom I've worked in the eye and not feel embarrassed about what we've done together…. I like to think that these are places that are important for people who don't live in [them] to experience. And for people to meet people living these lives that are different than theirs. Because the eight million listeners to public radio are typically middle class, upper middle class, you know, people driving to or from work. I mean, that's who you're playing to. My goal always is to kind of sneak up behind people and almost like quietly lift them up into this story. And I try to carry them for 22 minutes without them even knowing it. Not give them the chance to turn off the radio, if it's successful. And then 22 minutes later quietly put them down and walk away. That's sort of the image in my head of what I'm trying to do.

ML: You want to have left them at that point with an emotional experience primarily, or with an experience that could be defined as one that increases their knowledge?

Isay: It's an experience where they've gone some place they wouldn't otherwise have gone. And if it's emotional for them, that's great; if it's not, that's fine. Whatever that experience is. But it's a matter of leading them into a world that they would not otherwise know of or experience, and letting them meet people who they otherwise wouldn't have met.

ML: And is there a purpose in your mind beyond the transporting of someone to a different place?

Isay: Yeah, because I like all the people that I do stories about, and it's about seeing the humanity in others. Again, it's hard because it's so easy to get kind of clichéd. But, that's what it is. The guys who do the executions in Texas, you know, they're decent people. The kids who live in the ghetto or the guys in the flophouse—whatever. I do stories about people that I like, who are for the most part probably either ignored or misunderstood or not thought about. It's just about humanity. It's just about introducing people to people. And again it's corny, but just seeing that everybody is sort of the same.

ML: I'd like to go to your experiences, particularly looking on death row, where you've spent a lot of time, whether it was in the jails of Louisiana or more recently bringing to light the tapes from the death chamber in Georgia. There's been a lot of reporting examining the death penalty from a lot of different angles, whether it's the racial fairness angle or the question of whether there should be a death penalty. What do you think your work illuminates that isn't part of the traditional or mainstream journalistic coverage of the death penalty story?

Isay: Again, I'm not consciously thinking like "What story can I tell that nobody else has told?" or "How can I do something different?" I was in a situation in which I was doing a story, and it just kind of occurred to me, "What is it like for these guys who do these executions?" And I didn't know if it was going to turn into a five-minute piece or a no piece. And it just kind of opened up. It was just being curious and then following the path and seeing where it leads. And these guys who we interviewed, for the most part, had never been asked these questions before. The warden hadn't. None of the people who worked in the prison had been asked what's it like to do these executions…. Again, it's as much as possible trying to be the vehicle through which people can tell their stories. That's what we're trying to do, trying to be the translator to the larger world of some kind of insular group or whatever, some group of people, and to help them use this medium to tell their story in a way that they feel is true…. I'm in a really fortunate circumstance of getting independent funding, and being able to do whatever I feel passionate about, and then slamming it onto the air whichever way I can…it's about not letting stories be watered down.

ML: Your work, like any work, is a product of its time. The way that you approach your subjects, and the way you approach the telling of stories has something to do with the times in which we are in, with the progression or change of style in terms of how the documentary is used. In the past, there seemed to be a particular sort of style and purpose to the documentary that might have changed over time in terms of the way that we, as Americans, or we, as an audience, take information in. You may be a product of a different era in terms of how you go about presenting stories. If you were doing "Harvest of Shame" today what you might do is have the migrant workers be the only voice, as opposed to literally be standing in the field, were you Edward R. Murrow. It's just a different style.

Isay: Absolutely. But there were always people doing oral histories. I do think that doing the kind of hard hitting journalistic stuff, I mean, certainly the investigative stuff is a little bit apples and oranges with this kind of documentary work, because usually these pieces are about kind of talking to people who haven't been talked to before to reveal the humanity that's there, as opposed to uncovering hard news. It does uncover injustice, but in a more roundabout way. I mean, as opposed to investigating some actual single wrong that has been done. And with the execution tapes, that was more similar because it's uncovering documents that have been withheld or getting into a place that's been routinely kept from the American public. So that would be more in that tradition.

ML: National Public Radio [NPR] declined to broadcasting those tapes from the Georgia execution chamber that you so much wanted to bring out and use as documents. Instead, you brought this consortium of stations together to air this, which you thought was very important for people to hear.

Isay: I still do. I think it's the only document we'll ever have of modern-day American executions.

ML: And why do you think it's important for Americans to hear?

Isay: Because this is an act that's being done in the name of American citizens. And I think people have a right to know what's going on….

ML: In terms of building this new consortium of public radio stations, do you think that experience will lead to any new ways in which documentary radio producers can have their stories aired? Or was this sort of a one-time situation?

Isay: I think that the radio documentary is vastly underutilized. A lot of people should be making a lot of documentaries. And there should be a lot of ways to get them out there. With NPR, it's kind of a complicated story the way this happened with the decision not to broadcast the Georgia execution tapes. But I think that as much good stuff should be able to get out there in any way that it possibly can. All I really care about is that good stuff gets on the air and gets heard by as many people as possible. And whatever way that needs to be done is good with me. I think it's more an issue of making more people understand what a great medium radio is to tell stories in and getting more great stories, as opposed to there being all these great stories that are somehow being kept from the public. I see more that there aren't enough. And there are a lot of reasons. Because it's hard to make a living. But you know, that's changing, because I think we have entered this little renaissance for radio documentaries.

ML: Why do you say this?

Isay: I think a lot has to do with "This American Life." Letting people see what radio could be, can be. And maybe some of the work we've done. But it's totally changed. The New York Times is reviewing radio documentaries. They regularly review radio now. We couldn't get an intern six years ago, and now we have the best and the brightest coming out of the best Ivy League schools, lining up to do this stuff. People are seeing what a powerful medium this is. It's a very exciting time technologically, too, because anyone can take a $700 i-Mac computer and have an incredibly powerful editing system. You can download free software, and you can be at a console which is a thousand times more powerful than the fanciest studio was six years ago. And you can buy a mini-disk player for $197, and a microphone for $100 bucks, and you are a walking, 35mm film production studio. I mean, you can't do better than that. The potential is limitless. So the dream is a lot of people start picking up tape recorders and interviewing people and playing around and adding music, and doing all kinds of cool stuff. That would be the dream…. I think there's nothing wrong with having a lot of great radio journalism documentary stuff happening. I think that would be the best thing that could ever happen.

ML: Because we are living in an era where, at least, when one talks to media specialists they say, "Short is better. People's attention spans aren't there." Yet this advice runs counter to what you are saying.

Isay: I think you can have a half-hour piece that seems like one minute and a two-minute piece that seems like seven hours. It's about doing good work. And certainly if the stuff can sustain, then people will listen and appreciate it. It's all about doing good stuff. ■

Radio Storytelling Builds Community On-Air and Off

'The journalist must be facilitator, fact-checker, ethicist, but not puppet-master….'

By Jay Allison

What separates radio documentary from any documentary? And what separates public radio journalism from any journalism?

Radio gets inside us. Lacking earlids, we are defenseless, vulnerable to ambush. Sounds and voices surprise us from within. As radio documentary makers, we have this tactical advantage over our colleagues in print, film, television and photography. Our tool is aural story, the most primitive and powerful. Invisibility is our friend. Prejudice is suspended while the listener is blind, only listening.

Perhaps this distinguishing trait lies quietly near the heart of public radio journalism, close to the utopian ideal that we use these airwaves to share our stories as we try to understand each other better, to not be afraid of each other, to come a little closer together.

We're not regular media, after all, or even regular journalism. We have a calling to mission and public service that exists outside the marketplace and squarely in the civic realm. We can serve that mission through traditional reporting and documentary, but we also help citizens speak for themselves, to one another, directly.

I got into public radio because someone at NPR loaned me a tape recorder and microphone. It was the mid-70's and NPR was just inventing itself, always a good time to join an enterprise. I used the recorder as a passport into every part of life that seemed interesting. I could find out about anything I wanted. Amazing. At the beginning, I was simply a citizen, suddenly armed with the tools of production and a means of distribution, an independent journalist being born. By apprenticing at the news shows, reading everything I could get my hands on, and prodding my elders with questions, I learned the trade on the fly and in the next 25 years made hundreds of radio features, documentaries and series. For much of that time, I've also been loaning out tape recorders and tools to others, encouraging citizen voices on the air, repaying and replaying my own start.

In an age of corporate consolidation of the press on one hand and cheap bogus Internet journalism on the other, it is more important than ever to bring a range of voices to the air in a sane and respectful way. The public radio journalist can assume a shepherding role.

Life Stories
www.atlantic.org

My first batch of tape recorders went out beginning in the 1980's with the series "Life Stories," which sought out stories that seemed best told from the source. (A six-hour collection aired on NPR stations this summer.) It's hard to say how I found the storytellers, but once I declared I was interested, they seemed to cross my path. I equipped them, instructed them in the use of the gear, and worked with them editorially, often bringing them to mix in my home recording studio.

The grown son of concentration camp survivors accompanies his parents on their visit to the Holocaust Museum; he hopes they'll talk to him about their experience for the first time in his life. He asks for a recorder. A young woman wants to revisit the scenes and characters of her hospitalization and near-death from anorexia 10 years before. She needs the passport of the recorder to enter her own past. These sorts of stories cannot be told best from outside. They are better lived and narrated by the principals, the main characters in the stories of their lives.

Radio is well suited to the "diary" form. It's inherently intimate, confidential, lends itself to scribbled notes, fragments and whispered entries at night. The technical inexperience of the diarist doesn't show as clearly as it does in video, or even in print, and therefore doesn't get in the way. As the eventual producer/editor, you are there, but you disappear. The journalist must be facilitator, fact-checker, ethicist, but not puppet-master, allowing the listener an authentic, direct, empathetic encounter with the teller.

Lost & Found Sound
www.lostandfoundsound.com

Our series "Lost & Found Sound" (produced with the Kitchen Sisters, Nikki Silva and Davia Nelson for NPR's "All Things Considered") offered another tool to the citizen storyteller—voice mail. We asked listeners to call and tell us about precious audio artifacts they'd saved. In my role as "curator" I poured through hundreds of these messages, and in virtually every case the phone message itself became the spine of the piece. In the message was the story, the link between the caller and the sound.

The callers, in telling of their treasures, seemed to be in the presence of the past. The voices they described were in the air around them, true ghosts, filled with breath, as real as a lock of hair. Some of the recordings were intensely personal—the lullaby of an immigrant grandparent, the answering machine message from a child given up for adoption. Others fell at the intersection between the individual and history—a family's recording of an ancestor's eyewitness account of the Gettysburg Address; reels of tape made in the fighting holes of Vietnam, brought to us by the platoon mate of the 19-year-old Marine who recorded them and died there.

In every case, the direct connection of the living citizen to the sounds of the past was the key. We called it "the universal ancestor effect." A grandfather's voice, enhanced by the love of the grandchild who tells us about it, then shared on the radio, is somehow transformed to become everyone's grandfather. In the absence of a concrete and distancing visual image, an invisible human link is made and, for that instant, nationalities and races are joined through voice and memory. All the dead are one. Your mother is mine. Only radio, and only public radio at that, has the uncanny means and the actual calling to make that happen.

WCAI & WNAN
www.cainan.org

We have brand new public radio stations here on Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket in Massachusetts, the newest in America. We wanted them to sound like here, not just anywhere. A place defines itself by its stories, and we have chosen to broadcast our citizens' stories on and off all day, unexpectedly—portraits, oral histories, poems, anecdotes, memories, fragments of life overheard. They pop up during every national show around the clock, short bursts of life as experienced or remembered by all of us who live here. They are the thread in the fabric of our broadcast day.

The effect is startling, unexpected. You are listening to news of the world and then, during a pause, an unheralded speaker—a local elder or high-school kid or sandwich maker or scientist—pops in. The voices of our neighbors, surprising us, are given equal weight with events on the world stage.

The concept has become wonderfully popular here. Learning from "Lost & Found Sound," we've also installed voice mail where people can tell us about something that happened years ago, or that morning. Learning from "Life Stories," we buy old cassette recorders from eBAY to loan to whomever promises to use them.

Listeners have said that these little breaks not only contribute to community, they actually *build* it. We live in a place that is geographically fragmented (islands, after all) and each region feels itself to be more "special" than the others. Yet the radio signal extends across them all, disrespecting the boundaries. We have feuds and jealousies, political division, parochial ignorance (Is it so different from anywhere else?), but these stories tend, almost miraculously, to break those down. When a story begins, we don't know where the teller is from, so we listen, without judgment. We like what we hear. But then, when we discover the teller is not from our island, we must decide how to incorporate the contradiction that may lead us, helplessly, to acceptance. "Well, I guess they're not *all* bad over there," we think. And, eventually, we may even come to think of *their* stories as *our* stories.

Transom.org
www.transom.org

Finally, the Internet. If there's democracy in storytelling, it's here. If there's an openly accessible way to pass on what we've done before in public radio and to try to make things better, it's here. Our current attempt is Transom.org (a project of Atlantic Public Media). We call it a showcase and workshop for new public radio, and we premiered the Web site in February. It's a combination library, master class, and audition stage.

The site showcases new work from first-time producers and unheard work from established producers. As I write this, the featured piece is a 40-year-old, and utterly contemporary, documentary from Studs Terkel, which never received a national broadcast. Last month, it was a documentary from a first-time producer in Seattle using his mini-disc recorder, and skills he picked up at Transom, to craft a remarkable story about his friend's suicide.

Transom holds or links to virtually all the tools—technical, editorial, philosophical—people would need to tell their own radio stories. Encouragingly, quite a few high-school and college students are frequenting the site and their work has been featured there.

Each month a new special guest writes a "manifesto" and hangs around the site, critiquing new work and making conversation. Recent guests: Tony Kahn, Scott Carrier, Paul Tough, The Kitchen Sisters, Sarah Vowell, Studs Terkel [See accompaning excerpts from the Web site on page 18.] Editors, producers and managers throughout the public radio system read and listen to this work and participate in these conversations, but they are also there for *anyone* to read, listen to and join.

Producers and citizens gather at Transom.org to talk about radio documentary and to try their hands at it. Subjects of documentaries talk with those who made them and to listeners about editorial and stylistic choices. The site encourages an interactive, self-correcting, open-eared, civic journalism made possible by the Internet and extended to public radio.

The site represents virtual street-level access to national air, as most Transom stories end up adopted by a national program. An on-air mention of Transom.org drives listeners back to the Web, making a creative circle between the traditional media and the new. At Transom.org, we have a voice mail line to collect stories, we loan out tape recorders, and we broadcast Transom pieces locally on WCAI and WNAN.

So, everything ends up tied together. Journalists help citizens reach the air, to tell of their lives. Public radio carries the voices out and back, across a borderless country populated by the living and the dead. Citizen stories are shared out loud, journalists mediating the exchange, partners in the mission. Somewhere between the din of the Internet and the drone of corporate media is a place for these voices, testifying on their own behalf. ■

Jay Allison is an independent broadcast journalist living in Woods Hole, Massachusetts. He is founder and executive producer of WCAI/WNAN and Atlantic Public Media. His radio documentaries air often on NPR and his solo-crew video documentaries on ABC News "Nightline."

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Listening to Radio Talk

At Transom.org, the conversation is about documentaries and public radio.

Transom.org, an online project of Atlantic Public Media in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, provides tools for public radio production and features original work from first-time producers. It also hosts forums for the general discussion of public radio journalism and storytelling. What follows are a few excerpts from the Transom discussion boards. Some exchanges are sequential. Most are not. The following comments were selected from recent conversations on the general themes of radio documentary and the role of public radio. Transom is frequented by seasoned journalists, beginners and listeners. The happy equalizing effect of online conversation is that it matters less who you are than what you have to say.—Jay Allison

"It was slowly discovered that there can be no such thing as an objective documentary. However, it's such an attractive illusion that documentarians are always finding new ways to fake it. That's our job."—Larry Massett (independent radio producer)

"I'd say that what's left out is at least as important as what's put in. This is where the tension comes from. And if the overall tension of a story is just right, then it stands on its own, like a tensegrity structure—tension and compression, strings and rods. If there is too much or too little of one or the other, the thing falls apart."—Scott Carrier (writer, independent radio producer)

"Reality is just a bunch of raw data."—Carol Wasserman ("All Things Considered" commentator)

"For newcomers struggling to edit their tape down to manageable size, the best technique would be the old one of recording everything on reel-to-reel analog tape. This has one great advantage (assuming, of course, you were not silly enough to make a backup dub): at some point in the editing you will lose the tape…. It will vanish; or you'll step on it by mistake and crush it. Then, fate having made these decisions for you, you just work with what's left."—Larry Massett

"We work in documentary because we don't have enough money to hire good actors."—Scott Carrier

"It's one thing to write a piece of fiction and say, at the end, well, okay, that sure didn't turn out exactly as I imagined it would, and quite another to sit down to write about, say, grandma, and have grandma come out looking like nothing so much as a wet cardboard box filled with old issues of Reader's Digest, a sewing machine, and a pot of boiling cabbage."—Paul Maliszewski (writer)

"Sometimes I feel like I'm so much more manipulative on the radio. I know how to use my voice to make you feel a certain way. And that's not writing—that's acting. I get tired of acting sometimes. Which is why it's nice to be able to go back to the cold old page. Also, real time is an unforgiving medium."—Sarah Vowell (writer, editor, "This American Life")

"Think of comedic timing, where a pause after the punch line allows the audience to process the joke. Then think of some nervous humor-impaired friend who can't tolerate that tiny silence and jumps his own joke with premature explanation."—Carol Wasserman

"Reading most long sentences is like trying to nail Jell-O to a wall."—David Clark (writer)

"Nailing Jell-O to the wall isn't as hard as you'd think. Getting your mother to appreciate it is much harder."—Andy Knight (listener, critic)

"Radio is like food. You spend days and months and hours gathering the ingredients, cutting, mixing, making it cook. The minute it hits air/the table, it's gone—but it's transformed. The memory of it lingers, almost like a dream."—The Kitchen Sisters (Nikki Silva and Davia Nelson, independent radio producers)

"Throw out all the good tape. Keep only the great tape. Invent some artifice to string the disparate pieces of great tape together into something that sounds like a story. Invent many excuses to tell NPR why this works so well and not even a second can be changed. When NPR tells you to cut it to half the length, throw away all the great tape and keep only the absolutely stellar tape, then repeat above steps."—Barrett Golding (independent radio producer)

"We are committed to never altering the spirit or intent of what someone says, but we do cut the hell out of them."—The Kitchen Sisters

"I strongly believe that everyone has a story to tell. I also believe some are unwilling and others are unable to tell their story."—Andy Knight

"Look for the people in the funny hats. With some people, it's apparent that they have stories they want to tell. With others, you have to find out where they keep their hats."—Jay Allison

"People tend to spill their guts on long drives."—Scott Carrier

"It's hard to find unprocessed voices that are coherent and honest and clear."—Paul Tough (story editor, The New York Times magazine)

"Listening to the radio every day for an entire year was a prison sentence. It was the most depressing, annoying, debilitating project I have ever undertaken, and I have a master's degree in art history."—Sarah Vowell

"Public radio has always felt like the lecture hall of the world's greatest free university. You still need to get yourself dressed and down to the library to do the reading, but you can show up for the talks in your jammies. Which is a great convenience."—Carol Wasserman

"I still maintain excellence shows up more often in public radio because no one owns public radio, except the public."—Ian Brown (radio host, "This Morning")

"The BBC is like a beacon, it can turn a cool beam of light on a story anywhere in the world and people see what's going on. American public radio is more like a campfire, where we like to swap personal stories and feel like we're sharing the experience and the understanding."—Tony Kahn (radio host, "The World")

"You hear stuff you haven't heard before, from a stranger or from someone you know, and you think, 'Yeah, I am connected.' I think that's the goal, the responsibility, the challenge of public radio."—Studs Terkel (writer, oral historian, radio host)

"What would your ideal radio day be?"—Sydney Lewis (oral historian)

"I'd want the human voice expressing grievances, or delight, or whatever it might be. But something real"—Studs Terkel

"I still believe in public radio's potential. Because it's the one mass medium that's still crafted almost entirely by true believers."—Sarah Vowell ■

First-Person Narratives on Radio Document Historic Memory

While emotionally powerful, their production presents journalistic challenges.

By Sandy Tolan

Some stories are so good you just want to get out of their way. Or so it seemed with "The Lemon Tree," a documentary that captured, with two deeply personal stories, a slice of the last 50 years of Middle East history.

In July 1948, at the height of the Arab-Israeli War, Bashir Al-Khayri, six years old, fled with his family from their stone home in old Palestine. The family made its way on foot from Ramle to the tent-covered hills of Ramallah in the West Bank. They were among the 700,000 Palestinian refugees in a growing Middle East Diaspora; they lived in shelters and crowded into relatives' living rooms, determined one day soon to return to the family's home.

Three months later, Dalia Ashkenazi, six months old, embarked on a journey to the new state of Israel. The family, Bulgarian Jews who'd escaped the Holocaust, arrived in Ramle, now an Israeli city. Dalia would later be told that she was the only one on the boat who didn't get sick. Israeli resettlement authorities gave the family a stone home in the center of town.

For 19 years, Bashir's family lived as refugees in the West Bank, always dreaming of the future, when they'd return. Dalia's went about forging a new society, always haunted by the past, which they'd barely survived.

In the summer of 1967, just after the Six Day War, Bashir decided to try to visit his house—for which his father, now blind, still had the key and the deed. Bashir made his way to Ramle and to the front step of the family's home.

Bashir rang the bell.

Dalia answered.

Thus begins "The Lemon Tree," a 43-minute radio documentary broadcast on "Fresh Air" for the 50th anniversary of Israel's birth and the 1948 war. The story chronicles a slice of Middle East history through a difficult friendship, which began when Dalia invited Bashir in with the words, "This is your home."

This was precisely the kind of story my Homelands Productions colleagues and I were seeking when we embarked on "World Views," a series of first-person documentary narratives for public radio. Frustrated with the rise of corporate infotainment, my colleagues and I were looking for a way to cut through the stream of information and dehumanizing images absent of meaning, understanding or deeper context. Most absent, it seemed—and what radio was best at providing—was voice: stories told by ordinary people from the depths of their experience.

We started thinking about a series of stories to be told directly by the people in the midst of the news. These would be perspective-based narratives getting beneath the surface of daily events, telling the story from a deeper place than conventional reporting could. At this point (1993) there were a few examples of this emerging in public radio—Jay Allison's "Life Stories" series, Dave Isay's "Ghetto Life 101," along with public television's "P.O.V." and the BBC's "Video Diaries"—but our idea was to get reports from the ground, throughout the world, as stories unfolded and historical events were recalled.

We imagined, for example, a Cuban narrating her story from a raft bound for the United States. Or an African American traveling to the old slave house on Senegal's Goree Island, reversing the journey of his ancestors. Or a Moscow investigative reporter, one of the first to write publicly about the KGB, telling a personal history of the dissident movement in the former Soviet Union. Or a Ukrainian nuclear physicist recording an audio journal of day-to-day life in the aftermath of Chernobyl. Or a New Delhi poet and an "untouchable" rickshaw driver describing their chance encounter across vast barriers of caste, culture and life experience. (Some of these ideas were inspired by experiences of my 1993 Nieman colleagues.)

But what we didn't anticipate was how much the series—indeed the entire genre of first-person narrative—would present significant challenges not to be found in the standard news documentary. In the traditional form, the reporter (and/or producer) interviews, records sound, writes and narrates, balancing the story with competing perspectives. From Edward R. Murrow forward, this has been the style of choice for many an aspiring radio journalist. The style itself need not be dry, especially when accompanied by compelling interviews, vivid writing, a strong sense of place (Murrow's London rooftops come to mind), and evocative use of sound. Our Homelands documentaries had taken this more standard approach, be it with street kids in Rio, an Amazon chief in Bolivia, farmers in India, or while "interviewing" penguins in Antarctica.

With a first-person story, especially controversial ones or those narrated by someone with a strong point of view, issues of balance, representation and context emerge. What about the other side of the story? What is being left out that would ordinarily be filled in by a reporter/ narrator, and how can we put that context back into the piece? What happens when someone wants input, or even editorial control, in the telling of his own story? (For example, in adapting a writer's work for broadcast.) And how, ultimately, do you find a story that is both particular and metaphorical of a larger reality?

For "The Lemon Tree," balance was not an issue. In their own ways, Dalia and Bashir represented the fears and aspirations of their peoples. Far more complicated—for an assignment to identify a story that was somehow representative of the 50-year struggle between Israelis and Palestinians—was in determining this was *the* story among many to tell.

For the first two weeks, on the ground in Israel, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, I did no recording. Instead, I read and listened to history, including Israeli military accounts, Palestinian oral histories, Israel's "new" historians (who challenge the traditional Zionist accounts), the heroes of what the Israelis call their War of Independence and the sons and daughters of what the Palestinians call their Naqba, or catastrophe. Soon I began recording similar accounts, considering the chasm between them that had scarcely narrowed in the last 50 years. But still I searched for *the* story and characters that would connect the narratives and tell the larger truth. I felt as much like a casting director as a journalist.

Earlier my wife, Lamis Andoni, a Palestinian journalist who covered the Gulf War for The Christian Science Monitor and the Financial Times (and was a 1993 Nieman Fellow), had described the outlines of Dalia and Bashir's story. In 1987, at the beginning of the Intifada, Dalia had written an open letter to Bashir in the Jerusalem Post on the eve of his deportation from Ramallah. (Bashir was suspected of being an organizer of the Intifada and deported to Lebanon.) Dalia had urged the Israelis not to uproot Bashir a second time, while also urging Bashir to moderate his political views. From exile, Bashir had written a response, published in Arabic and eventually in Hebrew. Lamis knew Bashir and thought he'd be willing to talk to me.

One night, over dinner in Jerusalem, an Israeli filmmaker told me the story again. It was a powerful story, she agreed, but she didn't think Dalia would agree to talk. Dalia, she said, felt used by people trying to frame her history to suit their political purposes.

The next day Lamis and I ran into Bashir on the street. Sure, he said, he'd be happy to sit for some interviews. And though he hadn't seen Dalia in years, he thought she would be, too.

Bashir was right, and over the course of the next three weeks I shuttled from Ramallah to Jerusalem and back, recording five sessions with each, perhaps 15 hours of tape in all. I envisioned simply intercutting the stories: Bashir's invitation to Dalia to visit his family in Ramallah (nearly unprecedented in 1967); Bashir's father's subsequent visit to the house in Ramle and the tears streaming down the blind man's face as he touched the family's old lemon tree; Dalia's shock at Bashir's imprisonment in Israel on charges he had helped plan a supermarket bombing in Jerusalem; Bashir's revelation that his own fingers had been blown off as a child, picking up a booby-trapped mine in a field in Gaza. (Bashir had managed to hide this from Dalia for years, his left hand always in his pocket.)

In the end we decided that these stories, powerful as they were, could not be sustained for 43 minutes. I obtained archival tape (early radio accounts from the 1948 war; a CBC broadcast in the wake of the supermarket bombing) and approached a pianist to compose music to use at key moments. This gave breathing space between the words, varying the aural images and allowing time for the words to sink in. To add historical context and move the piece through time, and at the urging of Danny Miller, executive producer of "Fresh Air," I added snippets of narration at several points in the story.

But what made the narrative work were the voices that mined the history: Dalia's, in evocative English, and Bashir's, read by a native Arabic speaker, Walid Haddad, so as not, literally, to lose anything in translation.

These voices speak to the potential of first-person narratives for radio. Though they can be fraught with complication, and the producers must often struggle with issues of balance, historical context, and the ethics of who gets to tell the story, first-person narratives can cut through the sludge of endless information to the truth as it's felt on the ground. In this way they hold promise to be a democratizing force in media.

Of course it also helps when you have a narrative vehicle as powerfully simple as the one I encountered in "The Lemon Tree"—a stone home of shared memory. This is the house that Dalia, after the death of her parents, declared should be dedicated to the common history of the Ashkenazis and the Al-Khayris. Today the place is called Open House. During the day, it's a kindergarten for Arab children in Israel. In the evenings, it serves as a house of encounter for Arab and Jew: a place to discuss history and to look for a way forward. ■

Sandy Tolan, a 1993 Nieman Fellow, is co-executive producer of Homelands Productions, based in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Among other awards, "The Lemon Tree" won the 1998 Overseas Press Club Award for best radio news or interpretation of foreign affairs. Tolan is currently working on "Border Stories," a series of documentaries for public radio about the U.S.-Mexico border.

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A Festival to Celebrate Radio Documentaries

Organized by Chicago Public Radio, it happens in October.

By Johanna Zorn

Imagine a Sundance Festival for radio and you start to get the idea of what the Third Coast International Audio Festival is all about. This festival is designed to honor and enrich the world of documentary audio and create new opportunities for extraordinary work to reach audiences. It's a competition with monetary support going to the winners. It's a weekend conference, October 26-27, in Chicago. It's a program to be hosted by Ira Glass and featuring the award-winning works. It will be produced and distributed by Chicago Public Radio. And it's a Web site (www.thirdcoastfestival.org).

THIRD COAST
INTERNATIONAL
AUDIO
FESTIVAL
CHICAGO PUBLIC RADIO

Chicago Public Radio created this festival because there is a bounty of engaging work being produced today on radio and the Internet. Documentary programs are emerging from the networks (National Public Radio and Public Radio International) and also from stations (Chicago's "This American Life," WBUR's "Inside Out"), from independent radio producers and increasingly from people who never thought of themselves as "producers." Writers, artists and others in the last group share a fondness for radio and often have a powerful story to tell.

I suppose we should not have been so surprised when, instead of receiving 150 entries, our final tally is more than 300 from a dozen different countries. There is a renaissance of interest in the documentary form in print, film and in radio. Ira Glass, host and producer of "This American Life," recently explained it this way: "At this odd cultural moment, when we're inundated with stories all day long, it's still remarkable how few TV shows, movies, songs and magazines actually capture what our lives are really like. We hunger for something that puts our lives in perspective. That's what documentary is for."

The Third Coast festival is a new opportunity to celebrate the audio documentary form, revealing the power of radio and the Internet to document our world.■

Johanna Zorn has worked as a producer/director at Chicago Public Radio for 20 years. For the past 10 years she has produced the nationally acclaimed series, "Chicago Matters." As part of this series, Zorn has had the opportunity to work with many of the nation's top documentary producers.

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Exploring the Relationship Between Photographer and Subject

'Documentary photography is purity and freedom….'

By Denise Keim

Documentary photography is a medium of aesthetic expression in which form and content need to collaborate with the subject matter to capture an unchangeable image. This collaboration provides an active examination of contemporary society and a presentation of experiences to enhance historical and cultural awareness. For me, documentary photography is purity and freedom: the purity of the relationship between the photographer and the subject and the freedom to create images of life as it happens. With documentary work, I stretch the boundaries, nurture the subject matter, and communicate critical thinking on many layers.

To compare documentary photography to newspaper photography is to view them as a mirrored set. They appear to be the same, yet they live in two different worlds. Both mediums show aspects of a situation and each add creative tension as they convey images. As a news photographer, I felt honored to provide a community service, but constrained by the selection of subject matter, editing, deadlines and the standards of the publication and community. However, when I devote my energies to documentary photography, creative possibilities are limitless. I have the freedom to allow my uniqueness to permeate all parts of the process.

Frequently, when photographing, I am asked if I work for a newspaper. People react differently when confronted with the expectation of being "in the news." But when I tell them I am photographing them for myself, something natural and pure opens up. It becomes a more intimate experience, about me and them and the camera.

This reaction is not universal. When I spent a year in Poland as a documentary photographer, an intimate relationship was more difficult to establish because of cultural differences. I was met with more suspicion than I find in the United States. This experience in Poland taught me that a close relationship between subject and photographer is much easier established in an open society but, once established, the results are the same.

Ultimately, all photographers photograph for themselves. How they choose to use the medium and their vision dictates how pictures are made and seen. Both news and documentary photography have their own form of art and are interesting and rewarding career paths. News and documentary photographers are complementary in that together they provide a rich visual history of our time. ■

Denise Keim is a photographer whose work has appeared in The Village Voice, Ms. Magazine, The Washington Post, American Photo, and the Erie Daily Times. She was also a Fulbright Scholar, where she spent a year documenting life in Poland.

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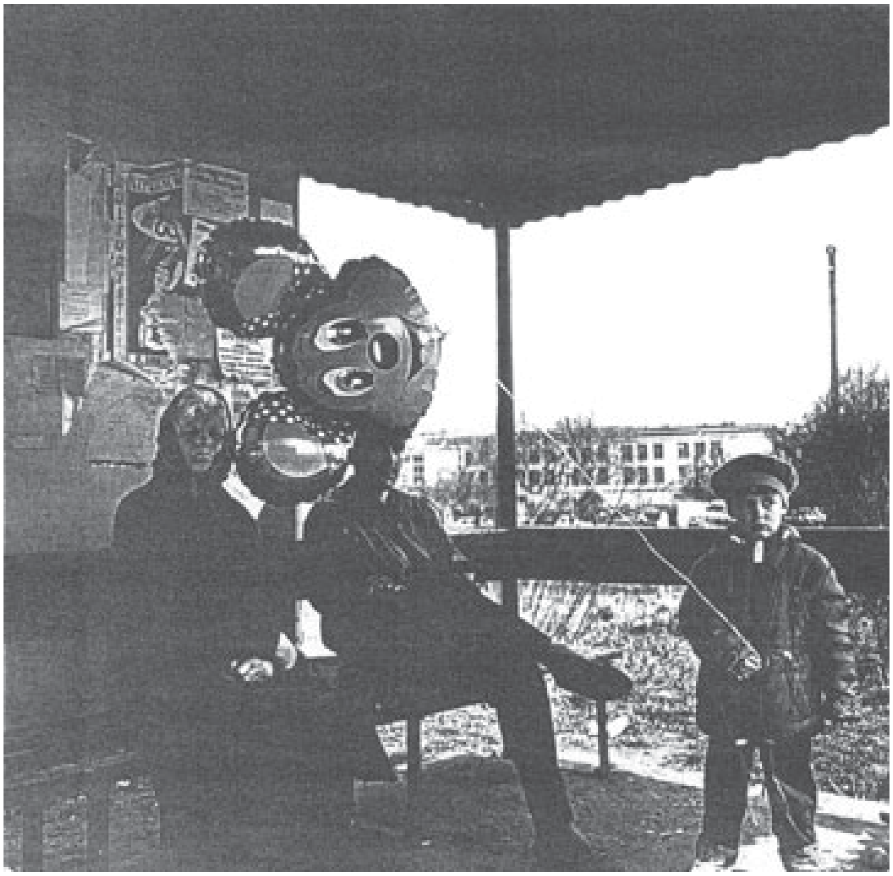
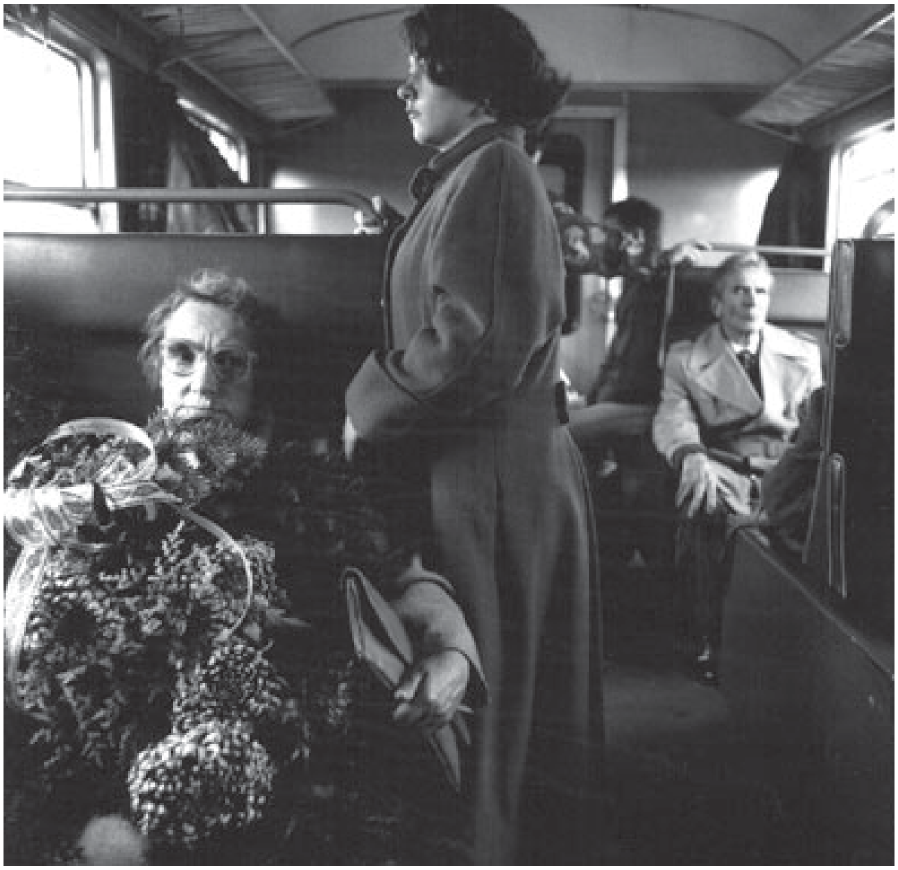
Poland, 1994. *Photo by Denise Keim.*©





Poland, 1995. ***Photos by Denise Keim.©***

Poland, 1995. *Photos by Denise Keim.*©

Photojournalism at a Crossroads

Technology, culture and economics will determine its future.

By Peter Howe

Although rumors of photojournalism's death have been substantially exaggerated during the last decade, it certainly isn't what it used to be. Its glory days are long gone, days when Life, Look, Picture Post and others employed teams of dazzlingly talented photographers and when Fortune regularly printed the work of icons of photography like Walker Evans. And the more recent display of hard-hitting, relevant documentary work in the pages of Paris Match, under the magical direction of the late Roger Therond, is mostly a memory.

What caused this decline is complex, with the whodunit qualities of an Agatha Christie mystery. The easy answer is that television killed photojournalism or, if it didn't inflict the fatal blow, seriously wounded it. The speed with which television news crews record, transmit and display their work to audiences of millions severely reduces the ability of photographers to compete for the attention of those same viewers. But it's also true TV's offerings are mostly unsatisfying 30-second segments that, at best, only skim the surface of stories. Common wisdom reminds us that a photographic image has a lasting value that television's ephemeral nature can never equal. What photojournalism gives up in speed, it more than makes up for in the power of its frozen image.

But there is more to this story. Technological developments rarely replace what precedes them, though they do force change. A more significant influence on photojournalism's declining appearance in mainstream publications is a cultural shift begun in the 1980's and continuing today. Financial rewards seduce many photographers into shifting their focus from documenting news to creating flattering images of the faces, bodies, homes and lifestyles of those celebrities whom our culture now deems worthy of attention.

The cult of celebrity worship is pervasive, and its effect on photojournalism has been devastating. InStyle, a publication that breathily brings to its readers a sanitized version of the lifestyles of the rich and vacuous, is the most successful recent magazine launch of Henry Luce's company. Not that Luce would have disapproved, given his embrace of the bottom line. And neither should we too sentimentally revere Time, Fortune and Life under his stewardship. After all, Life brought us such cutting edge features as "How to Undress in Front of Your Husband" and offered further assistance to the ladies of the time with a picture feature on how to smoke. But Life as a weekly also showcased superb work by Alfred Eisenstaedt, Carl Mydans, Robert and Cornell Capa, and W. Eugene Smith. Their likes are not to be found in the pages of InStyle, or anywhere else for that matter, except perhaps Mother Jones.

It is, of course, simplistic to argue that photojournalism's past was golden and its present leaden. What is more interesting and much more mysterious is photojournalism's future. My wife and I recently attended a private opening of the magnificent show by Sebastião Salgado, "Migrations," at the International Center of Photography [ICP] in New York City. She was standing in front of powerful and distressing photographs of starving women refugees in Africa when a waiter in a white jacket offered her a tray full of beef sirloin hors d'oeuvres topped with fois gras. She looked at him, then at the photographs, and politely declined. Her discomfort in many ways was a reflection of mine, a comment on what seems a trend in the way contemporary documentary photography is viewed.

Salgado has produced a body of work depicting the tragic consequences of migration around the world resulting from severe economic hardship, internecine wars, natural disasters, and other forces that cause families to leave their native environments. It took seven years and millions of dollars to produce and is a project of such power and enormity that it is impossible to absorb in one viewing. Its value as a document of witness is unquestionable. What is questionable is the value of having work of this quality and importance displayed on gallery walls where fewer people can absorb it and where its message is in danger of becoming muted.

In the way that painting in Italian society of the Renaissance was a part of everyday life for rich and poor alike, photojournalism once similarly was integrated into the lives of millions of Americans, British, French and Germans through its publication in popular magazines. Painting in contemporary society has become mostly the domain of the urban, educated and often wealthy elite. It would be a tragedy if this was the only future for photojournalism since one of its great strengths lies in its ability to communicate across linguistic, cultural and national barriers.

The "Migrations" exhibition is stunning, and the ICP must be applauded for being one of the few institutions dedicated to giving wall space to such photography. But the effect would be much greater if Salgado's photographs appeared not only on gallery and museum walls but also in newspapers, magazines and on television in America and across Western Europe, or in any other part of the world where people are able to actually mitigate the causes of displacement.

Salgado also offers another glimpse into the future of photojournalism, this time with a focus on how he works. He begins by identifying a theme that fascinates him, then raises the funds necessary to ensure that he leaves no photographic stone unturned in his coverage. His themes—migration, workers, children, landless peasants—are of global dimensions, so this requires considerable effort in fundraising, something he does with his wife and work partner, Lélia. They are now able to attract such corporate heavyweights as British Petroleum, but this was not always so. To fund the "Workers" project, they assembled a consortium of magazines: Each paid for territorial exclusive rights to publish the work as it was produced. As director of photography at Life, I purchased the North American rights. The (London) Sunday Times bought the UK rights; Stern the German, and Paris Match the French. Through their charm, passion and examples of their work, Sebastião and Lélia ensured that "Workers" would achieve the epic proportions that it eventually did.

When I hear photographers complaining that today nobody pays for work over an extended period of time or that magazines aren't commissioning meaningful stories (both of which are mostly true), I remember the Salgados in the early days and the efforts that they made to do work on their terms. It might be unfortunate that photographers have to jump through such hoops, but for those who do, the reward is work uncompromised by the demands of deadlines or the whims of editors. For the talented photographer it usually means photography that more accurately reflects his or her passions and sensibilities. Unfortunately, it also usually means the work only reaches the public through exhibitions or limited editions of coffee table books.

On the other end of the communication spectrum is the Internet. In those heady days before the dot-com crash, its potential seemed limitless. The possibility for the Web to become a major outlet still tantalizingly exists, but like so many other enterprises in the digital era, no one has found a way to make money. However, what pushes possibility into the realm of probability is the increasing availability of high-speed connections through cable modems or domestic DSL lines. No longer is there time to brew coffee while a large picture file reveals itself on the screen.

As with similar advances, turbo-charged access brings with it an interesting dilemma. The combination of a cable modem and sophisticated compression techniques will soon produce a media environment in which, for the first time, a viewer will be able to choose between streaming video and still photography. Experience tells us that the still image not only remains in the viewer's subconscious but also engraves itself upon the psyche of the culture. Think of memorable images: Eddie Adams' photograph of the Vietnam police colonel executing a Vietcong suspect, Carl Mydans' picture of General MacArthur wading ashore in the Philippines, and Joe Rosenthal's classic portrayal of the Marines raising the flag at Iwo Jima. These events were filmed, too, but viewers did not have the opportunity to choose which version they wanted to see. In the MTV era of video—with video's ubiquitousness among younger generations—the Internet could be the medium that finally kills photojournalism as a method of mass communication.

…a photographic image has a lasting value that television's ephemeral nature can never equal.

Right now, however, the Web is a much-used vehicle for documentary photographers, many of whom have developed their own sites, including online galleries and print sales. On MSNBC.com, there is a powerful project on aging in America by the photographer Ed Kashi. In the early 1990's, when I was a consultant for Modern Maturity, I commissioned a large part of this project, little of which was used in the magazine despite spending a significant amount of money on it. So it's possible that the Web can become a medium that exceeds the kind of display that once was the domain of magazines.

Another question mark in a profession already plagued by too many is the long-term effect of digital cameras. For wire services, the development of this technology is a blessing that potentially contains a poison pill. Armed with cameras and a laptop, the photographer can shoot, edit and transmit in a fraction of the time it would have taken to process and scan traditional film. It also empowers the photographer, who essentially becomes a front-line editor of his or her own work.

The danger lies in the potential loss of archival images whose importance is not apparent until years have passed. On many occasions, an image of lasting historical significance is found at the tail end of a roll of film or two frames away from the photograph originally selected. In the era of digital photography, for example, the picture of President Clinton hugging an insignificant intern would never have been found. It simply would not have been preserved.

Documentary photography will survive. While the craft might now be at a crossroads, there are simply too many practitioners—young and old, good and bad—struggling against great odds for there not to be powerful photographic images in the future, images that will disturb, enlighten, inform and invigorate us. Where we will find them, and who will pay for them, has yet to be determined. ■

Peter Howe was a working photojournalist for 13 years before becoming director of photography at The New York Times Magazine and Life and a vice president at the digital photo agency Corbis. He is now a consultant, providing assistance to several photographers and picture agencies as they adapt to the digital environment.

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Photojournalism and Documentary Photography

They are identical mediums, sending different messages.

By Antonin Kratochvil with Michael Persson

Time in photography isn't only about its passage, whether measured in hours, days or months. It's about its captured moments, be it in a second, or five hundredths of a second.

Increments of time are imperceptible to the eye, but not to light sensitive film. The difference between a fifteenth of a second and a hundred and twenty-fifth of a second alters the way in which what stands before the camera is depicted. A blending happens at slower shutter speeds. What can be seen as sharply defined objects turn to mood and atmosphere that could have come from an artist's brushstroke.

Shutter speed is just one technique photographers use to take visual information to a level beyond what, on its surface, it represents. To the viewer, the photographic image can invoke feelings, trigger thoughts, and project perceptions to be pondered. And when it does, a photograph achieves what imagery has always endeavored to do—it stirs emotion and leaves an indelible impression.

In photography, these captured moments aren't the only vehicles in which time works to bring about feeling. The days, weeks, months and years devoted to gathering visual information on a particular subject also contribute. It is this passage of time combined with the moments seen through the camera's eye that costitute a document known as a photo essay. It is in such documents that much of our recent visual history has been told. And it is these documents that are at the core of what began as photo-reportage.

Today, photojournalism is different from what it once was. Speed is what counts. Instantaneous reports about world events, stock markets, even sports have become the norm. And news photography keeps pace. But has speed changed the content quality of what we see and, for that matter, how life is portrayed? To these questions, I answer yes.

There is a division in photo reportage. There is photojournalism and there are photo documentaries: Identical mediums, but conveying very different messages. Documentary photographers reveal the infinite number of situations, actions and results over a period of time. In short, they reveal life. Life isn't a moment. It isn't a single situation, since one situation is followed by another and another. Which one is life?

Photojournalism—in its instant shot and transmission—doesn't show "life." It neither has the time to understand it nor the space to display its complexity. The pictures we see in our newspapers show frozen instants taken out of context and put on a stage of the media's making, then sold as truth. But if the Molotov cocktail-throwing Palestinian is shot in the next instant, how is that told? And what does that make him—a nationalist or terrorist? From the photojournalist, we'll never know since time is of the essence, and a deadline always looms. Viewers can be left with a biased view, abandoned to make up their minds based on incomplete evidence.

Through documentary work, the photographer has a chance to show the interwoven layers of life, the facets of daily existence, and the unfettered emotions of the people who come under the camera's gaze. When finally presented, viewers are encouraged to use their intelligence and personal experiences, even their skepticism, to judge. By eliciting associations and metaphors in the viewer, an image has the potential to stimulate all senses. But photographs that do not fulfill this potential remain visual data whose meaning is limited to the boundaries of the frame; the viewer is left to look, comprehend the information presented, and move on.

There are photographers who create exhibitions and books from their photojournalistic images, but what is achieved is only sensationalism. One extreme moment after another is cobbled together and made to look as though it captures "life." Having traveled to many of the world's disaster areas and having seen extreme tragedy, I can attest that these moments do happen. But around them there is more to see and more that must be understood. There is more than the angry mob: There is the "why" and the "how" behind their actions. There is more than the flood of refugees: There is what they leave behind. There is more than the funeral of a martyr: There is the space they leave empty in their family's life.

Because of time constraints the photojournalist doesn't often capture these more subtle but essential images. The documentary photographer does. Photojournalists look to add meaning or message to their pictures by employing contrasts and juxtaposition. In actuality, these are time and space savers. Juxtaposition implies an intersection where extremes or opposites meet. Contrast conjures up black and white. But what sits in the between—the gray, the similar, the normal? Documentary photography offers witness to these less obvious aspects of life.

The role of photojournalists is important nonetheless and, as a fellow photographer, I respect what they do under the difficult conditions in which they must produce. But the product they create comes from the need for speed, and this necessity simplifies (and sensationalizes) the images most people see. Should this be the way we process the visual information that we use to inform decisions we make in a democracy?

Separating the documentary photographer from the photojournalist is the reaction each has and the relationship each holds to the images created. One reacts almost instinctually, the other with more studied calculation. The journalist *takes* what the camera lens captures, while the documentary photographer *makes* the images as a form of storytelling, seeking to elevate understanding about what the camera's eye is recording. Given these distinctions in visual portrayal we, as viewers, need to be wary of the solo image and treat it in the way we do other bits of random information. Without a broader context, skepticism must be exercised as the sensationalistic photograph is handled similarly to unfounded words.

Documentary photographers walk in the wake of this instantaneous parade of visual information. They gather and create images that can look soft, speak loud, and transform the split second into an everlasting glimpse at the truth. ■

Antonin Kratochvil, a freelance photographer based in New York City, is with the VII photo agency. In nearly three decades of work, he has won many distinguished awards, including the Infinity Award from the International Center of Photography. His books include "Broken Dreams: Twenty Years of War in Eastern Europe," "Mercy: From the Exhibition," and a new book of portraits, "Antonin Kratochvil: Incognito."

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Michael Persson has worked for many of the world's news photography agencies in areas including the Persion Gulf, Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Africa and Yugoslavia.

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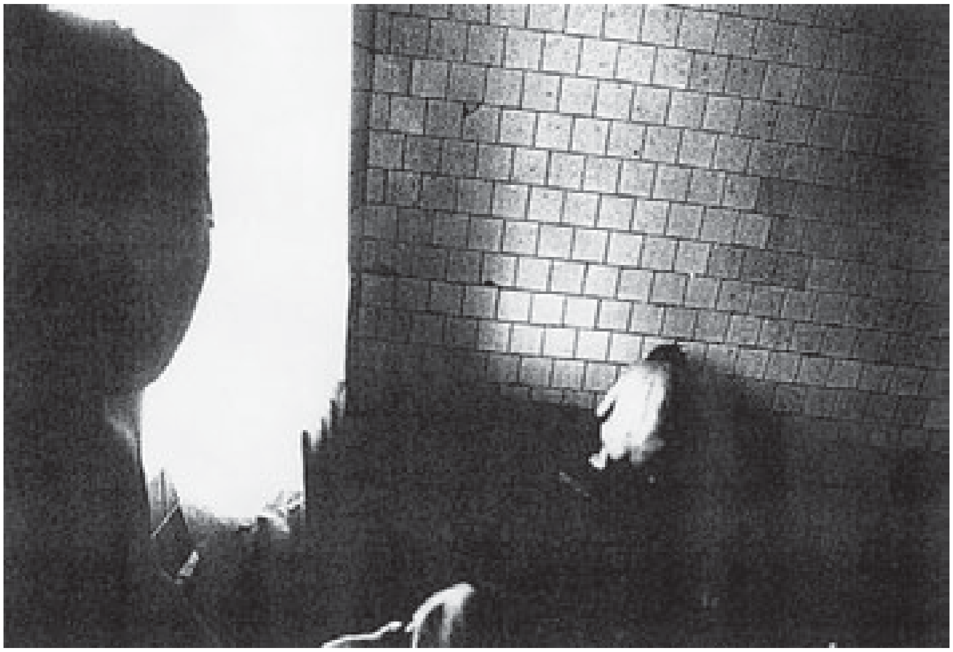


Mongolia, 1996.

This is one of the saddest of the many pictures in my collection. Captured street children in Ulan Bator, Mongolia's capital, are hosed down before being put into a youth detention center. A tiny child cowers against a cold wall, awaiting his violent shower. Cropping within the viewfinder helps to show how small and frail the boy is in relation to his environment. He is the main subject. But to the side, in a watery light, another boy looks into the lens, judging me or you and seeming to ask if we have the right or the guts to stare. He is ghostly, making his presence all the more ethereal.

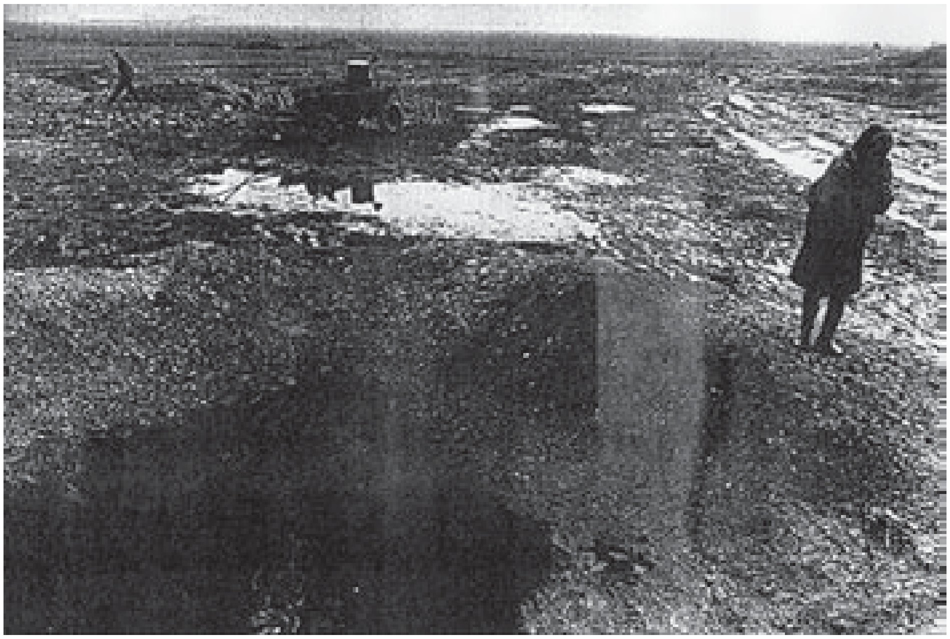
In a way, with this photograph I capture myself becoming the event I thought I was documenting. I am being assessed, and I am not afraid to show as much. So often, the press can become the event. Sweeping in, they drain a situation of its drama, unaware that their subjects are reacting to them and not their plight. Their subjects become simply figures to be photographed, filmed, quoted and forgotten as the press move to their next revelation.

It is doubtful that photojournalists would have taken this larger picture because the cowering figure is what matters to those who deal in shock value. But respect for people, respect for their lives, is as important as a reporter's duty to cover their stories. As I spent time with these children, they grew comfortable with me, perhaps to the point of trust. This shot was my way of giving them a voice that dares the viewer to enter their desperate world.

The Gazeris are the oil scavengers of Romania's crumbling infrastructure. Working the contaminated land, they salvage seeping, secondhand oil in order to survive. This story isn't shocking enough for photojournalists to cover. Why? No one is dying or dead, and no one is ablaze with oil. Where's the news? Yet what I found in these images is an excellent illustration of how humanity prevails in whatever pathetic capacity, in whatever terrible conditions, exist.

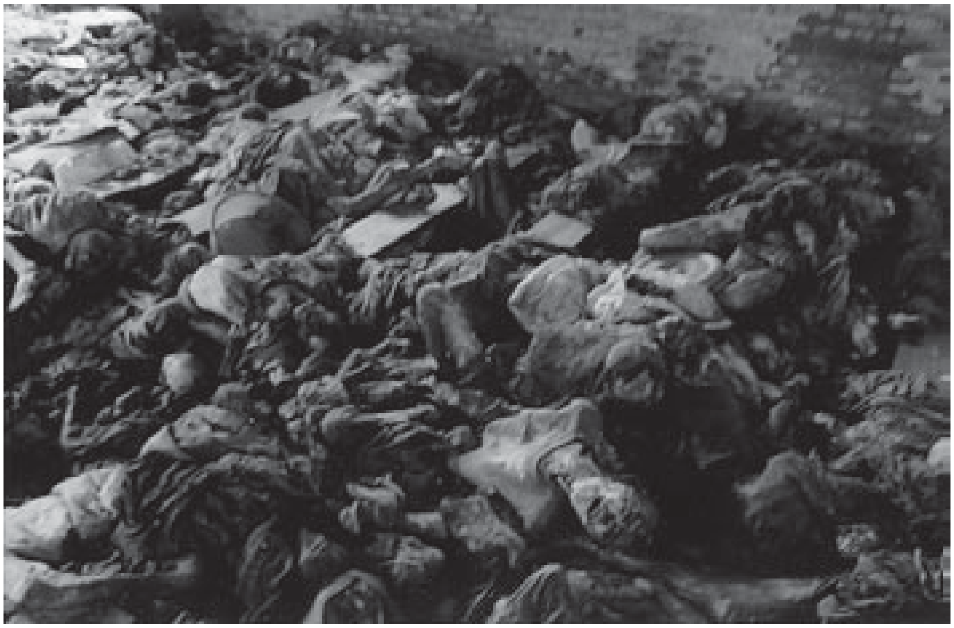
This picture comes together through the use of metaphoric symbols. There are no juxtapositions, no contrasts, just unrelated moments that come together to make a whole. The dilapidated, arcane trolley with a funnel tipping out from a solitary barrel seems to me to represent futility at rest. The two people walking in opposite and disconnected directions. The indistinguishable liquid on the land—is it water or oil? The way the woman in the foreground bows her head and folds her arms. This isn't the body language of someone who is happy.

Finally, there is the hole from which comes what allows the Gazeris to survive. Or the hole might represent a pit into which life's interminable crap is to be unloaded. In Czech we have a saying, "Je to v pytly." It's all in the bag. It means, what does it matter, it's all for naught. These observations and associations come to me when I shoot because I have time to think about what it is I'm doing and not simply react to what's in front of me. On the surface, this picture seems nothing much until you dig deeper and then, your prize. This is not dissimilar from the Gazeris and their labors.



Romania, 1995.

The bodies lie all about, two deep. Left in a church where their putrid smell was enough to make me feel I'd just passed through the gates of hell. I walked among them instead of shooting the rotting pile of flesh through the window. I chose to meet the image head on, not skid around the carnage. The body in the foreground confirms what the viewer fears. Yes, these are dead people. The image is shot in low light, giving the image a slight blur as if what's on view had been painted by Brueghel. This image would have been considered too abstract and technically unacceptable for photojournalism. But to the living, death remains surreal in spite of all we know. As I walked through the bodies, I apologized each time I accidentally stepped on an arm or a leg. Who was listening? I don't know, but perhaps this was a way for me to retain my sanity.

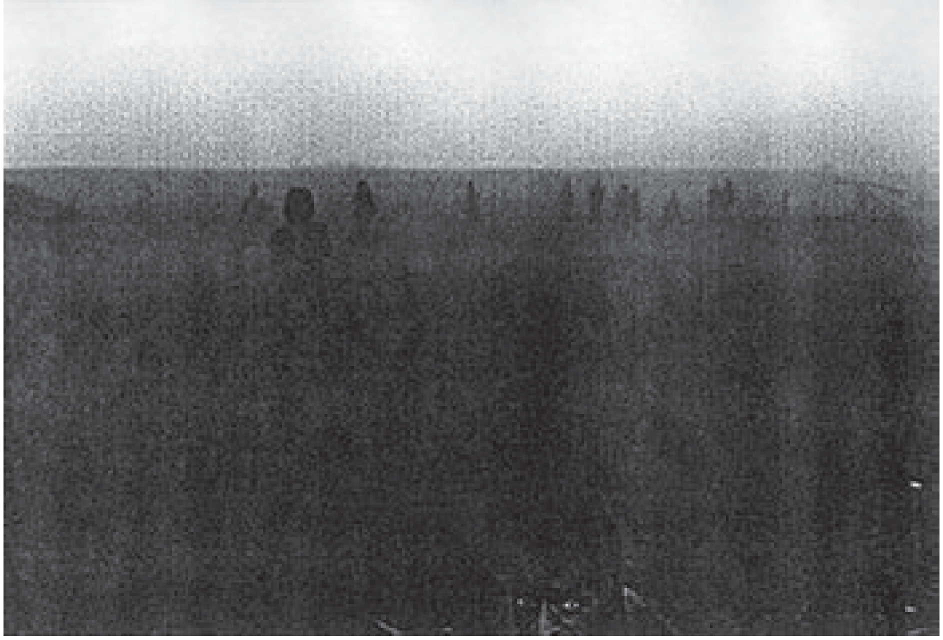


Rwanda, 1994.

Photos by Antonin Kratochvil. ©

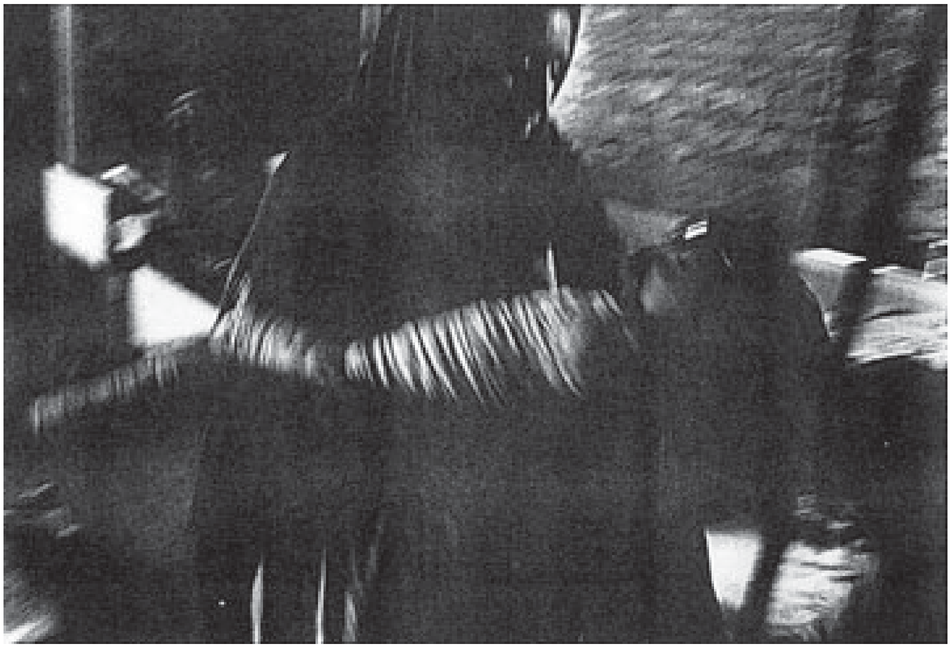
This shows the half-masked identity of one of the "Interahamwe," the death squads who carried out the mass slaughter of Rwanda's Tutsis during the country's genocide. Cropping allows for the concealment of identity and subtlety of message. Killers do not walk with signs saying "killer" on them. They look like you and me. It is what they do that makes them what they are. So their appearance inspires the mind to conjure thoughts of what it is they do and how. By hiding some of the information and allowing the mind to fill in the rest, the picture lays the foundation for deeper thought. In this image, the unidentified people in its hazy background help this process by raising the question about whether they are killers or survivors. There are no dead bodies, so it is even a more complicated question. We are left with an eerie feeling of concealment, bordering on the clandestine. In photojournalism, identity is everything: Faces must be distinguishable so viewers are able to relate to the subject.

But how can someone sitting in New York with a job and modern life have any affinity with a wounded or dying man from a place and culture so far removed from their own, or with a murderer of hundreds of countrymen? A galaxy of dissimilarity separates subject from viewer, and there can be no connecting across this chasm. By not forcing this connection, documentary photographers keep their differences intact while giving viewers the chance to feel and imagine on their own levels, engendering a response—no matter how vague. The main thing is that viewers aren't bullied or coerced into an emotion that they wouldn't naturally have. Perhaps the space in the shot is the distance between the killer and his victims, or the separation from the group, distinguishing him from the rest by his actions. These are all questions, not answers. Questions, however, do stir.



Goma, Rwanda, 1994.

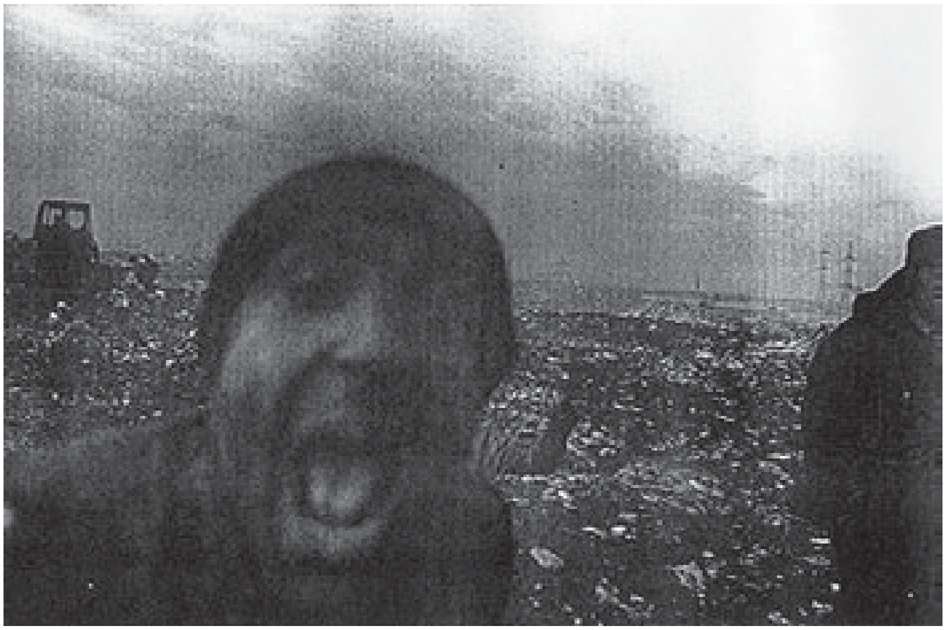
This shot is a prime example of using slower shutter speeds to create images that go beyond what they are. I call this my "Pieta." Brush strokes of light transform this mother carrying her dying child into a picture bearing an array of religious undertones. This is in no way belittling the fact of what is really happening. A mother with a dying child is one of the most desperate situations a human can face. Why, then, transform it into something that lessens this tragedy? To my way of thinking, literal images begin and end and have no other way of going beyond their literal self. A more abstract image can associate itself with other images or memories and isn't asking to be taken in as pure information. It is a prompt for the multitudes of links to come to life, thereby leaving a lasting impression through the memories and ideas it inspires.



Afghanistan, 1988.

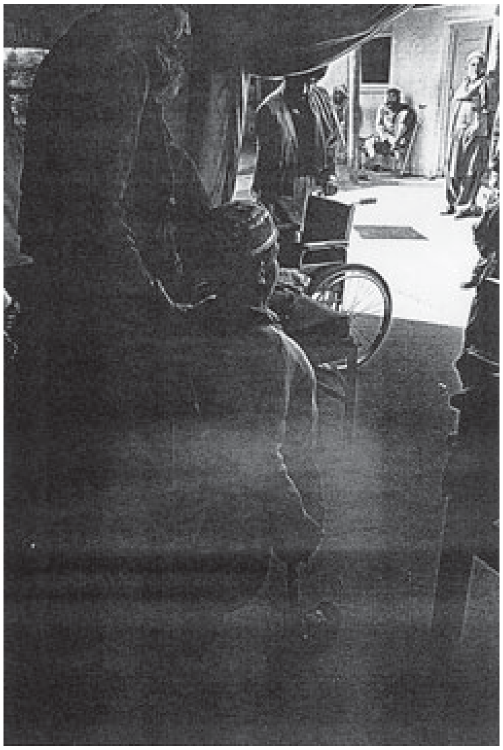
The screaming man in this shot reminds me of Edvard Munch's "The Scream." When I work, I see much of what I do as a personal journey, and the images I make are a reflection of my experiences and endeavors. Being a married man and a father, having seen my parents pass away, and thinking about my own death give me feelings of what it is to be alive. The older I become, the more I understand, and my photography reveals this changing comprehension of mortality. Many young photographers hit or miss with their documentary photography. When they hit, it might be a feeling they've stumbled on or a technique they've inadvertently mastered. But missing means life has yet to reveal its gifts.

In this photograph, "life" appeared while I was busying myself with the shot behind the screaming man. In fact, when this reaction exploded, my subject's arm seemed to grow out from the head as I pressed the shutter. This image speaks of how things in front of the lens can also react with the lens. It is a two-way street. As much as you look at them, they look back at you. One's personal journey of life is woven into documenting this particular moment.



Romania, 1995.

The little boy with the prosthesis may be a victim, but this photograph is not a "victim shot." Ravages of war are apparent, yet it is hope that jumps out of this image. It shows the various obstacles life presents—the boy's missing leg—and that with a little help from his grandfather who guides him, people can emerge from despair and walk in the light once again. It is optimism I show here, the healing process after injuries have been suffered and sustained. The boy's face is barely discernible. His identity is unimportant. There are perhaps thousands of boys like him with similar fates in Cambodia, Angola, Mozambique, not to mention his own country. It is a picture that speaks of something that will happen, not that has happened. Photojournalism concerns itself with results, not intentions. Intentions don't make for drama. Actions and their consequences do. This generic symbol speaks to all of us about the courage we find in the midst of adversity. It speaks to us of the human condition.



Afghanistan, 1988.

Photos by Antonin Kratochvil.©

Being Receptive to the Unexpected

A photographer immerses himself in a community to tell its stories.

By Eli Reed

I am in that place again of waiting for a documentary project's beginning moments and, as always, my stomach rumbles with anticipation. I've promised myself that I'm not going to fight the eternal battle that goes on inside of me whenever I am preparing to go somewhere I haven't been before. I try to imagine what is happening there, and then I wonder how I will, this time, get inside of the place and its people's lives.

Documentary photography is usually a series of single photographic images brought together to create a vision of someone or something. It may be accurate to a fault, or it could be the faraway view, revealing little but evoking an emotional response. What matters is that moments that are documented by the camera take viewers to places within themselves that they don't often visit.

A structured documentary essay also means searching for a way to begin, a middle to sustain, and a way to get to a natural ending. It is finding a way to move myself out of the way so I can let the images in. It also requires letting go of preconceived notions and withdrawing from the pull of predictable, safe and reliable images.

Beginnings of photo-essays are usually daunting. Entry into this vast and new environment can feel like hitting a wall of white noise. To break through, I try to locate what I call the quiet core, and this, more often than not, becomes my beginning. When I started work on the Indivisible project, I found this core within the quiet conversations I had with the people I began to meet in Eau Claire, South Carolina. [See page 32 for information on "Indivisible.]

I research a documentary project by being there. What I learn before arriving is put in a place I call "a compromised compartment" of my brain, considered flawed until proven otherwise. Everything is listened to, looked at, visually poked at and tasted as it gets mixed into this stew of information. Over time, I become immersed in where I am, and the rest of the world begins to drop away as I fall deeper into the mindset of my work in the here-and-now.

When I went to Eau Claire, people at the Indivisible project had given me names and phone numbers of people such as Reverend Wiley Cooper. When I called Reverend Cooper, he suggested we meet at a scheduled Rotary Club meeting. Since meetings never translate into very interesting pictures, I explained that I'd need different kinds of settings to connect with—and eventually to convey through photographs—what was happening in his community.

What matters is that moments that are documented by the camera take viewers to places within themselves that they don't often visit.

We did meet that morning at the Rotary Club. What else was I to do? Turns out his idea was a good one. It immediately struck me that the participants were not the usual older white men in suits; they were black and white, men and women who were from all kinds of professions and disciplines. Here they were, together, sharing their varied points of view and bringing cohesion to this community, and the photos I took that morning share this sense of something being different about this group.

Score one for the unexpected. And the project continued in that fashion. As I found myself asked to attend more meetings, I complained again about how static they are for visual portrayal. But then I'd stop by and listen for a while and frequently I'd get ideas of places to go outside of the meeting rooms. Being receptive to the unexpected was a critical component on this project, as was remaining close to the action, even if it seemed, at first, to offer little of interest for my camera.

In the nearly 20 days I was there, I also drove around a lot throughout the Eau Claire area looking for people doing things. Soon, days blended together as I got to know the people at work and in their homes. When my coworker, George King, who conducted the oral history interviews, arrived, I introduced him to the town's inhabitants. This gave me more opportunities to update and refine some images I'd been making of the residents. The photographs began to seem an almost natural byproduct of our meetings. My slow-paced stroll through Eau Claire, coupled with the generous help of the people there, enabled me to reveal through my photographs something new about their hopes and dreams for their community.

Documentary work can take years to develop and produce. The most satisfying part of the journey might be its quiet conclusion, when the photographer tries to tell a complete story without stumbling over the doubts with which he arrived. Much of the documentary work I've done has emerged from my personal interest in a particular subject. Once the interests come, questions are not far behind, and it is these questions that lead the camera into new and interesting places in the hope that more complete pictures—with concepts and ideas springing from them—will reveal themselves.

There used to be adequate time provided to take the photographs necessary for publishing a photo-essay in a monthly magazine. That time is gone. If the photographer receives three days for a photo-essay, that's a lot of time. Many photographers and editors don't seem worried about what is lost by compressing this time, or they don't take the time to recall what once existed and why it is so important to get through the thick layers of the surface and probe inside.

The best stories still seem to be ones the photographer has to fight for from beginning to end. This means finding the story and finding the place to publish it. Photographers are working more independently than ever, by grim necessity.

Though the market has changed, what makes a photo-essay work hasn't. The human element inside the photo-essay has always been the dominating factor, even when the core of the subject was its sense of place. The sense of place and urgency is and will always be what guides documentary photographers. ■

Eli Reed, a 1983 Nieman Fellow, has been a photographer for Magnum since 1983. His award-winning photographs have appeared in Time, Newsweek, Life, Vogue, Sports Illustrated, The New York Times Magazine, and many international publications. Reed's two books, "Beirut, City of Regrets," and "Black in America," both published by W.W. Norton, contain his photography, text and poetry. He is working on a book about the lost boys of the Sudan and also collaborating on a feature documentary film about the same subject.

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Documenting Democracy in America

The Indivisible project portrays grassroots activitiy in 12 communities.

What does democracy look like away from Capitol Hill? How is it created and maintained today among the individuals in one dot or another on the map of the United States? And who are those individuals? For such an inquiry, requiring an immersion in local detail to make a meaningful larger picture, a documentary approach seems apt.

"Indivisible: Stories of American Community" is a multi-media documentary project of the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University in partnership with the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona, and funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The project seeks to document grassroots democracy in 12 locations in the United States where community members are working together in local initiatives to address concerns such as race relations, health care, housing, environmental issues, and cultural development.

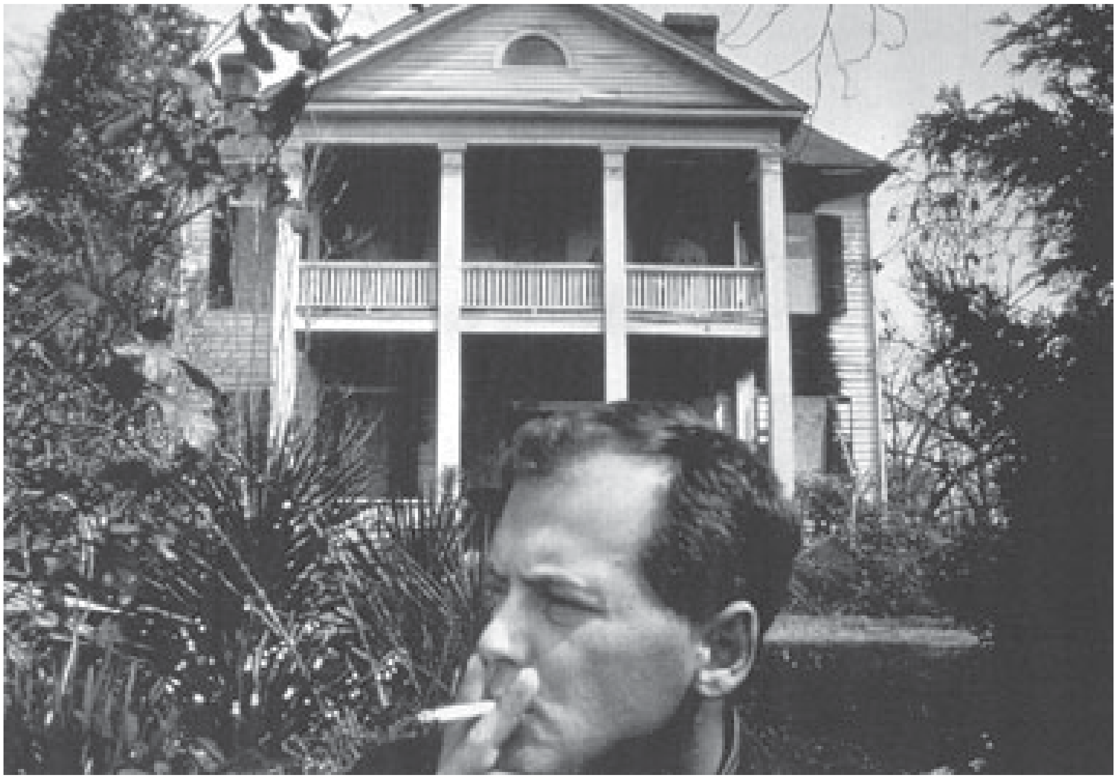
Among the efforts documented are marine conservation in Alaskan fishing communities, Haitian immigrants fighting drug use and crime in Florida, a Navajo Nation project to renew traditional knowledge and skills involving sheep and wool, and a Philadelphia neighborhood converting 87 abandoned properties into a local cultural center.

In each location, a photographer teamed up with an interviewer to record the community life in images and through the voices of individuals. Twelve photographers were chosen who "have made considerable contributions to social history and the art of photography, and bring their own artistic viewpoint to each community site," according to the project's press release. Those who participated were: Dawoud Bey, Bill Burke, Lucy Capehart, Lynn Davis, Terry Evans, Debbie Fleming Caffrey, Lauren Greenfield, Joan Liftin, Reagan Louie, Danny Lyon, Sylvia Plachy, and Eli Reed.

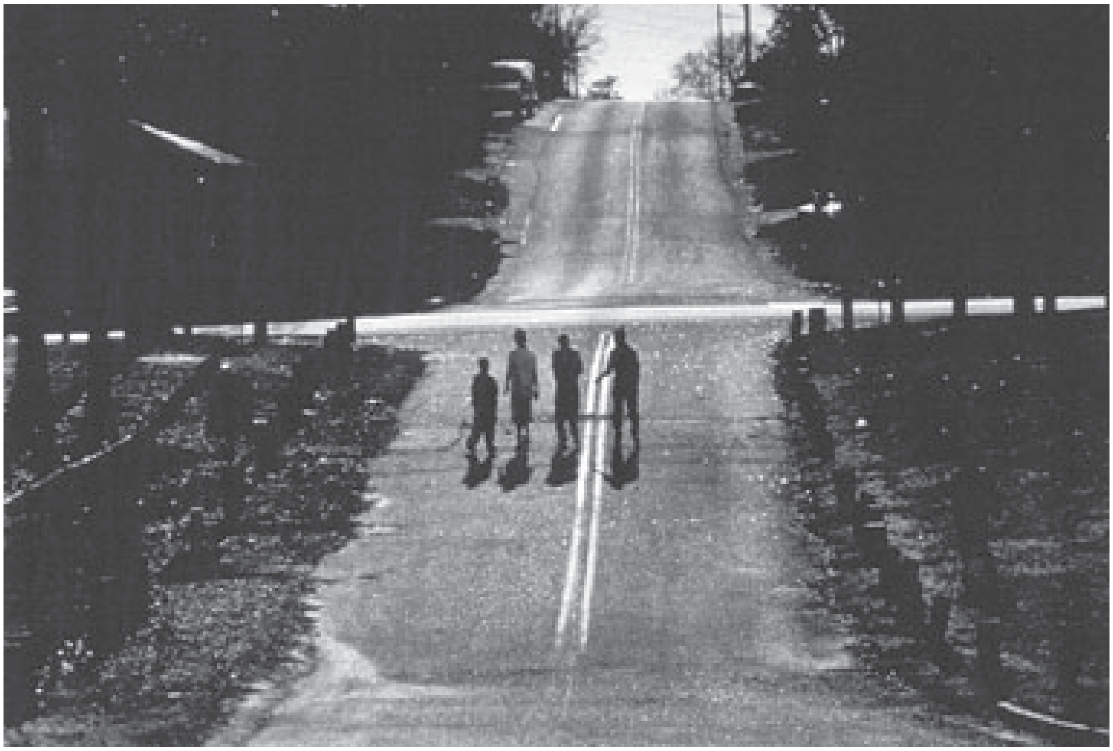
To gather the voices, journalists, oral historians, radio producers, and folklorists conducted extensive interviews. They were: Merle Augustin, Dan Collison, Barry Dornfeld, George King, Jack Loeffler, Jens Lund, Karen Michel, Daniel Rothenberg, Jeff Whetstone, and Joe Wood.

"Indivisible" is traveling as an eight-city museum exhibition. It can also be seen at the project's Web site, www.indivisible.org, in postcard exhibits, and in a book titled "Local Heroes Changing America" (W.W. Norton & Company, with Lyndhurst Books, 2000). The photographs, tapes and transcripts will be housed at the University of Arizona and Duke University, and made available to the public. ■

Indivisible: Eau Claire, South Carolina



Rhett Anders, Community Council president and real estate agent, in front of an historic property.



A street at dusk.

Photos by Eli Reed.©

Parishioners at Wesley United Methodist Church prior to a baptism service.

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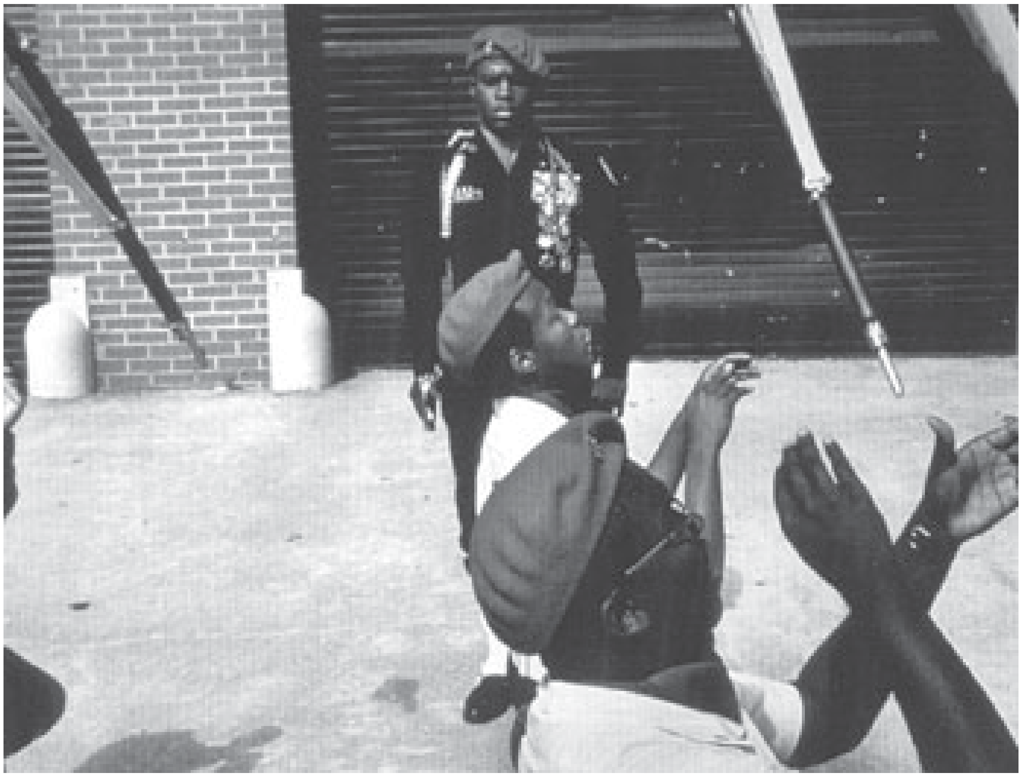
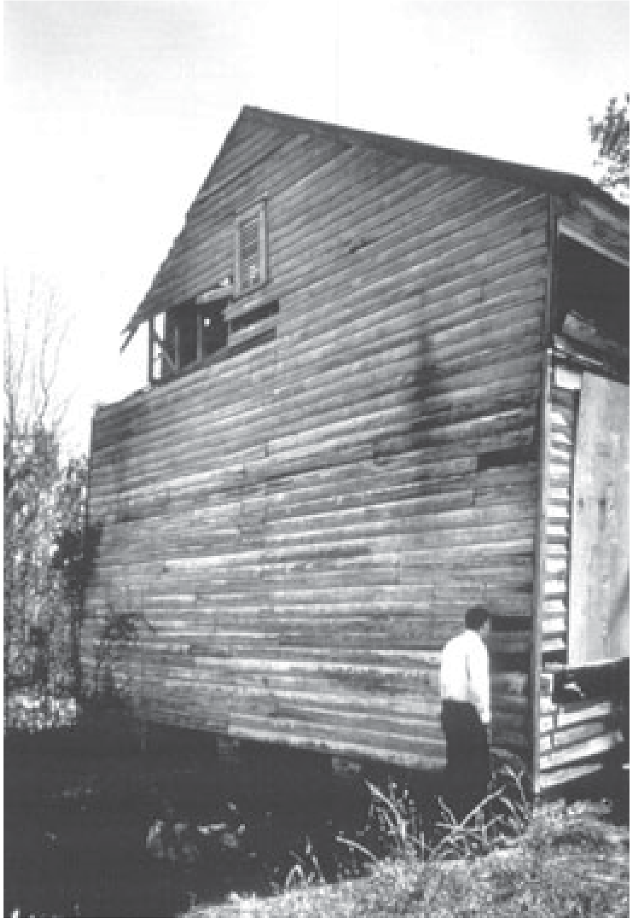
Toliver's Mane Event barber shop.



Eau Claire High School color guard practicing a routine.



Scott Trent peers inside Monteith School, the oldest black school structure in South Carolina.

Photos by Eli Reed.©

A Place for Words and Images to Call Home

At DoubleTake, photographers and writers document the human experience.

By Robert Coles

We who work at DoubleTake magazine try not to forget how our publication got to be and why we still want to remember fondly the spoken and written words of William Carlos Williams. In his words, we find his yearning determination to respect mightily the range and authority of American voices, to render them directly, and respond to them as the city doctor he was in Paterson, New Jersey.

In the pages of DoubleTake, documentary methods are used to convey stories to our readers in much the same way William Carlos Williams employed his many talents as an artist, poet and keen observer—all in the hope of capturing evocative moments from the human experience.

Once, at his home in Rutherford, New Jersey, Williams talked about his medical work while also addressing his passion for the world outside of the hospitals, the clinics, and the sick rooms of urban tenement buildings where he went up and down the stairs on his way to home visits. "I keep my eyes and ears open when I'm sitting with my patients, of course, but lots of times I'm walking the streets, watching what goes on, hearing what people have to say," he said. "There's a poetry of everyday life that we all miss—a poetry of words spoken by people as they go through the rhythms of their time spent here in this country of ours, or elsewhere, in other countries, and a poetry of life being enacted, of eyes widened or shut tight, of smiles or grimaces, of bodies bent or put to great and demanding use, a poetry of statement and of sights. The ears (and now the tape recorders) catch the sounds, and the camera catches the views, the human scenes waiting their turn to be noticed, and if someone is paying close attention, waiting to be caught on film—[well, all of that is then] conveyed to the rest of us hungrily curious folks, eager to take in what's out there."

... our task [is] to create and sustain a place where human stories are told in 'the full picture,' in their unfolding and complex dimensions, and where images add essential layers of understanding to the words.

An outspoken person, Williams was ever alert to the expressive life of ordinary people and also to the way they presented themselves to one another's eyes. As an artist and poet, he knew well (and championed the works of) artists such as Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, Charles Sheeler. He also had made the acquaintance of Edward Hopper and, once, talking of him, said, "His [Hopper's] pictures beg for words—he was a genius at showing us what we have to tell! There are silences in his pictures, but not in some of us who look at them, staring long and thinking of what we'd hear, if somehow, through some magic, we were there to listen!" Then Williams, too, was silent before he spoke tersely: "A big challenge, to connect what we see to what we might hear, if we were by some magic where Hopper's folks are sitting—his 'people in the sun,' for instance."

Williams had in mind a specific oil painting of Hopper's, done in 1960 and bearing that name. In it, men and women are sitting in chairs, one of them reading a book, the rest gazing at the sky's all-important, distant daily light. For Hopper, the point was a shared moment of stillness—he was exploring an act of self enhancement through the effort of devoted attention to one of nature's possibilities. His picture shows people waiting patiently for the warm light that can transform them, that can give them a heightened sense of themselves, as they (and presumably others) scan their sunned selves. But for Williams something else was afoot: "They could be mumbling to themselves or addressing the one sitting near them, the way we sometimes do on a bus or subway, never mind the beach—as in my old refrain: pictures and words, *both*."

Williams' old refrain—"pictures and words, *both*"—is now our refrain at DoubleTake, a magazine founded expressly to affirm and realize on its pages the reality of what is seen or spoken. Six years ago, photographers and writers who had worked together on documentary projects initiated this magazine in the South. In their work, they'd gotten to know people who were poor, or ones who managed to get by, if not all that well, or who were comfortable indeed, doing "right well," as Southerners like to say. In founding this magazine, they kept Dr. Williams' advice in mind, but also looked to others for guidance. In particular, they sought advice from several extraordinary Atlanta journalists—Ralph McGill, Eugene Patterson, and Pat Watters. Each of these men struggled in his own way during the 1960's to do justice to a changing South's efforts to end segregation in schools and in communities, or as McGill once put it, "across the board, wherever people come together."

McGill was the person who first mentioned the idea of a documentary magazine such as DoubleTake. As he put it, "Someday there will be a magazine that will have the space to put on the record all that's happening, a magazine that brings the stories of those going through ordeals like this one to the attention of the world. We try to do this all the time here [at the (Atlanta) Constitution], but there is so far we can go with a daily newspaper. I often tell my teacher friends that they sometimes underestimate the educational (oh, to be highfalutin', the cultural) value of newspapers; and even more so of magazines. A magazine allows for longer stories, for continuing stories. A book tells a story, but then it's published, though the story goes on. In a newspaper, there is today's story primarily. Magazines can keep at it, tell those stories, give them lots of attention, give the reader the full picture."

McGill was musing, trying hard to emphasize a newspaper's capability, but giving us a glimpse of what a magazine like ours could do. Now that DoubleTake exists (with the help of individual and foundation funding), we still recall this early vision of its possibility, just as we recall the words of Dr. Williams—we are minded thereby of our task to create and sustain a place where human stories are told in "the full picture," in their unfolding and complex dimensions, and where images add essential layers of understanding to the words. "Someday the pictures folks like me take will live side by side with poems and good essays, good fiction," the photographer Eugene Smith once told a writer for a profile in The New Yorker, a magazine that, then, didn't publish photographs. Today at DoubleTake photographs have ample room to show aspects of human experience, even as writers do their level best to say what is on their own minds, as well as those of others—a double take, as it were, that we hope does worthwhile, instructive justice to a magazine's given name. ■

Robert Coles is an editor at DoubleTake, a teacher at Harvard University, and the author, recently, of "Lives of Moral Leadership."

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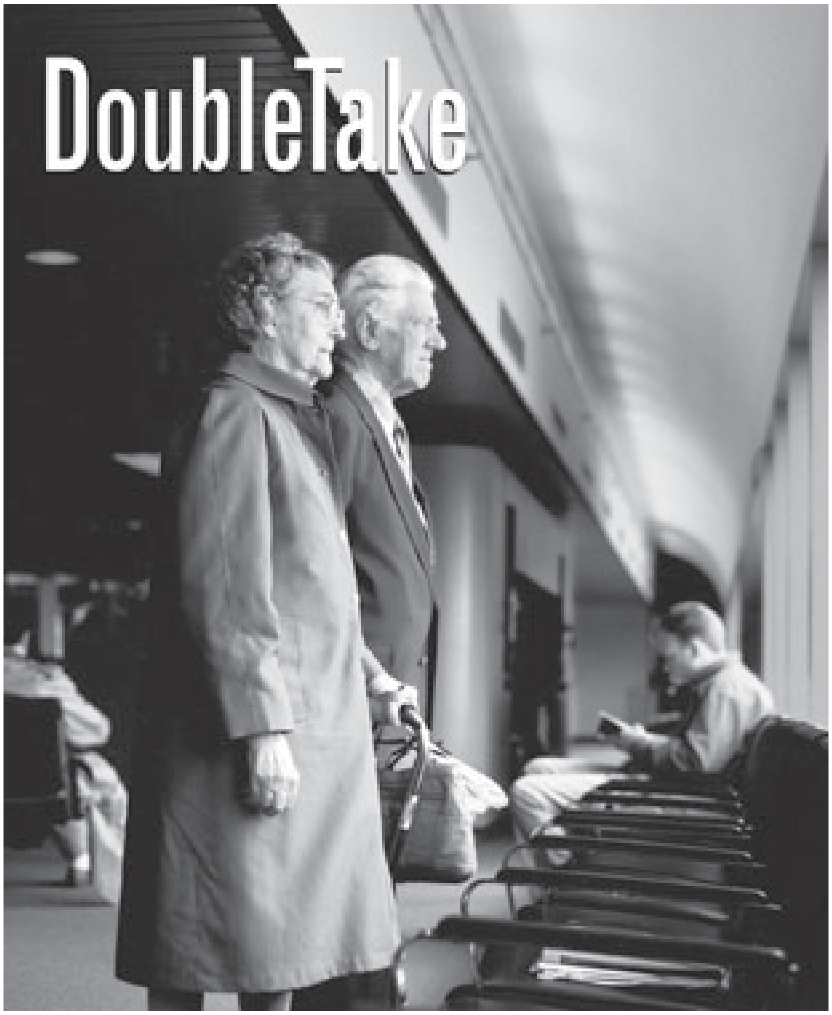


Cover from the Spring 2001 issue. *Photo by Adam Shemper.*

Revealing Afghanistan

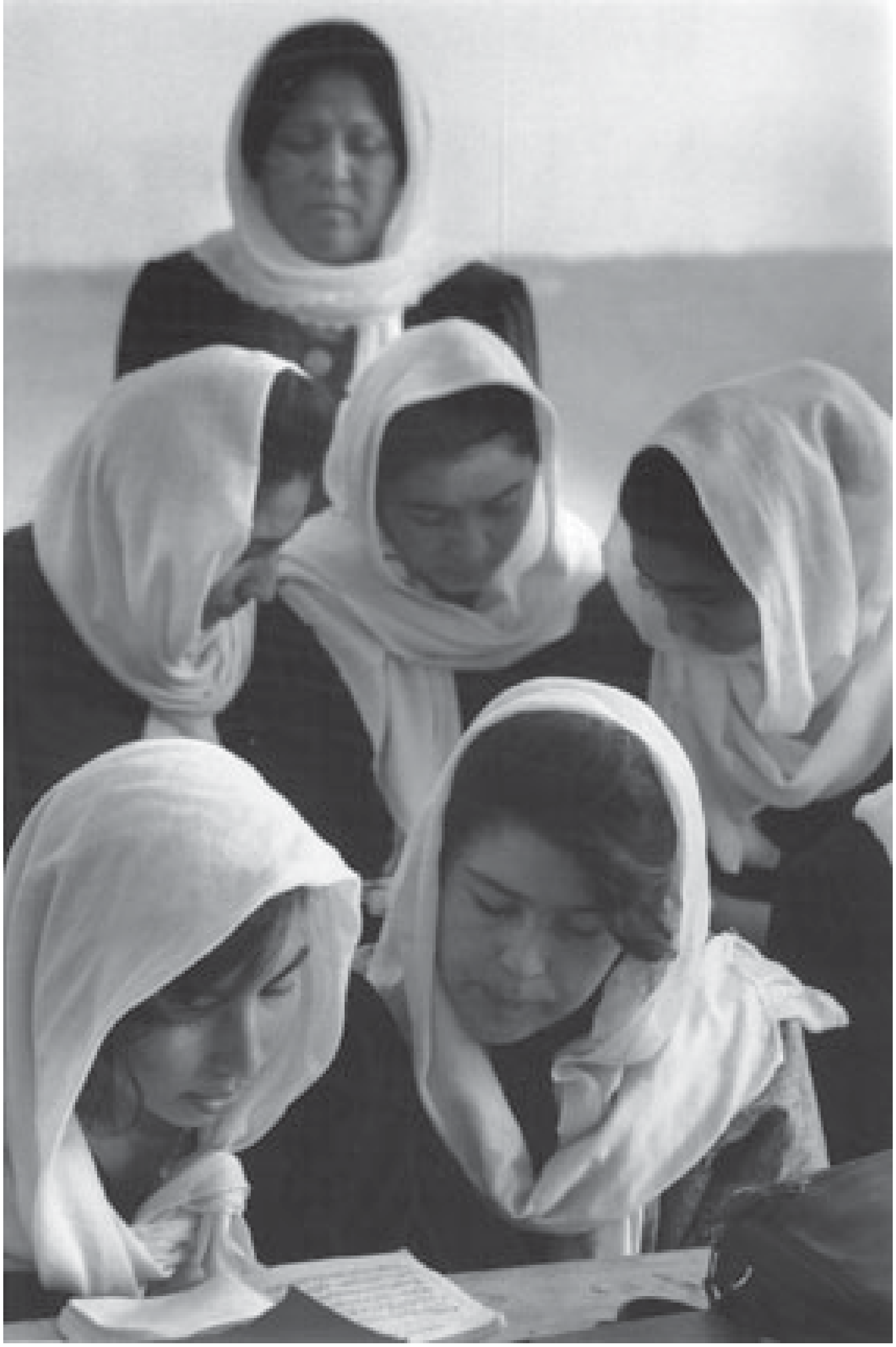
Chris Steele-Perkins captures a people's grace and culture.

"What then is the purpose of all this travel and photography in Afghanistan? Not to change the state of their lives, but to sate my curiosity, my wandering urge. So how do I differ from the hippy of my youth, bent on self-gratification and adventure? Perhaps I bring more understanding to the situation. I can bring my souvenirs back in the form of photographs and select and order them in a book for sale, rather than spout rambling tales amongst friends over beer and a shared joint.

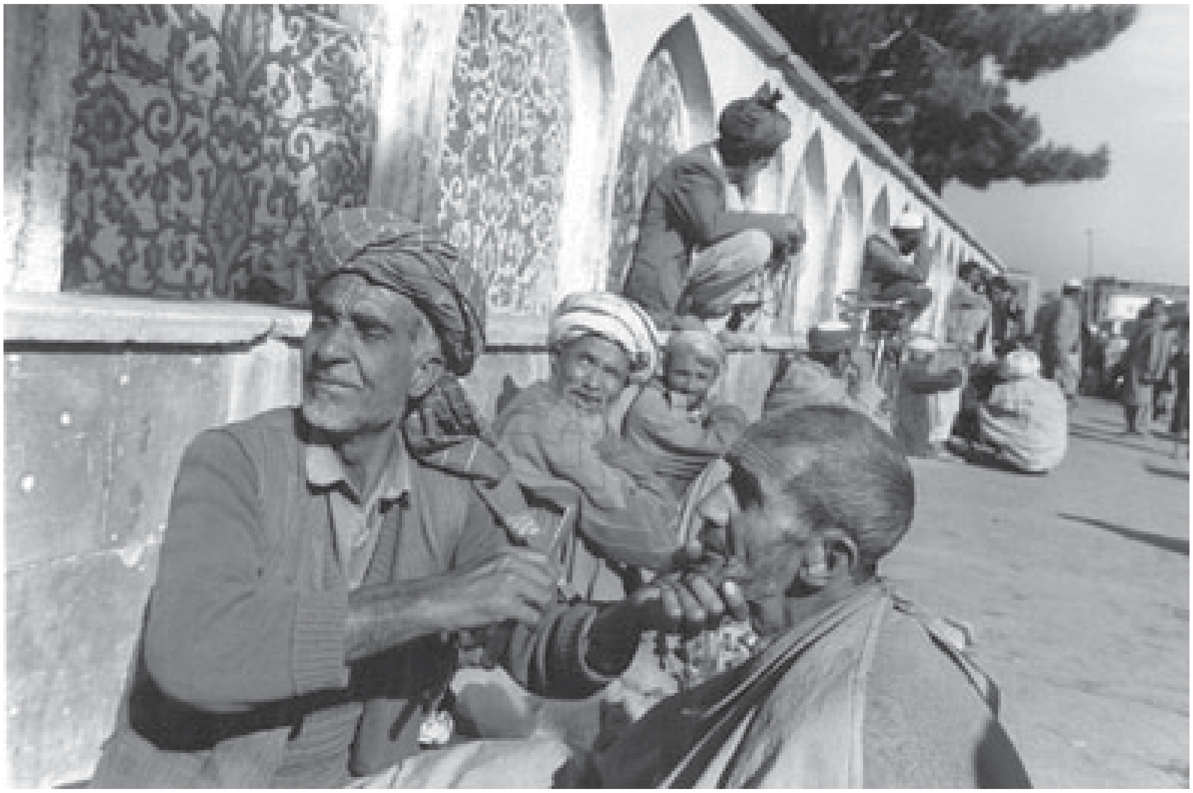
"Also, I was working. Someone paid me to be there to commit these people's sufferings, their crazy ways, their grace and culture to film. I did it, I believe, with more passion and engagement than the hired hand need bring to the task. Perhaps my pictures did make some difference. Raised some money for an aid organisation, raised someone's awareness. Awareness? So nebulous a word. If I am lucky this slim volume can enter as a trace of memory, a record of these people, of this time, this country. Afghanistan.

"But is that enough? I engage and then fly away. Taking their gifts, my photographs, to a distant land they will never visit. My country."—Chris Steele-Perkins

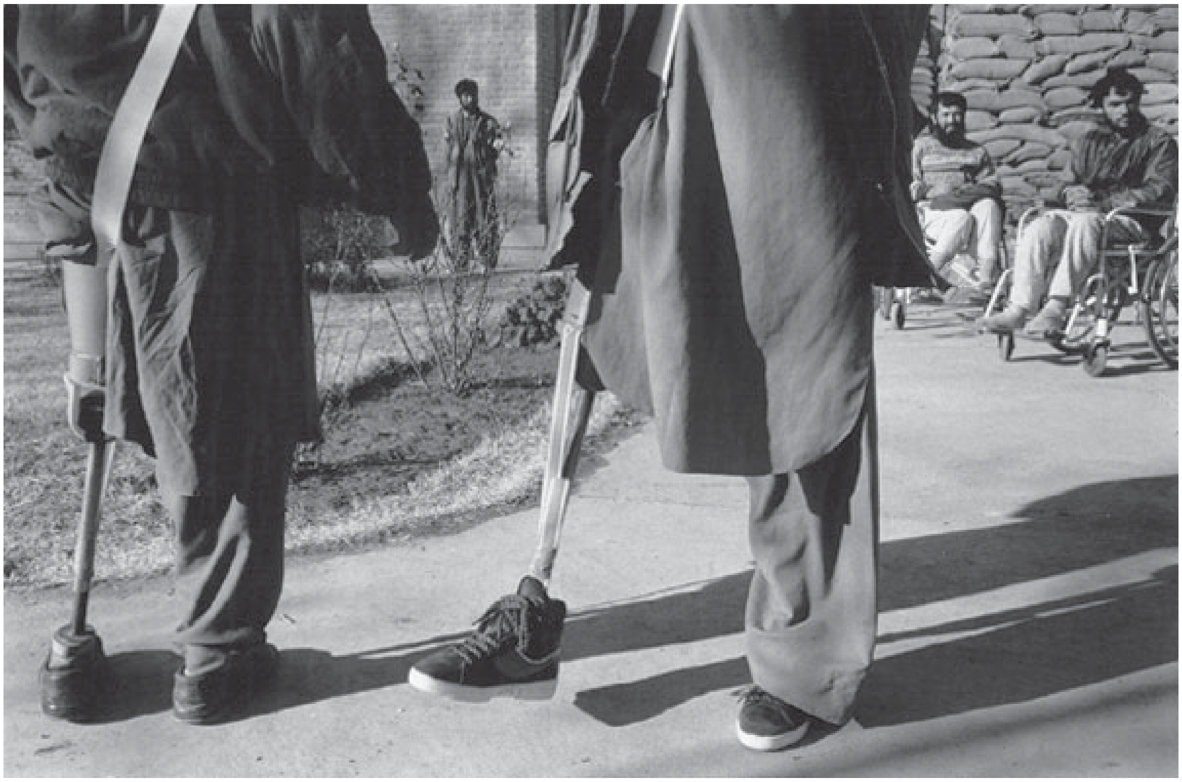
From "Afghanistan," published by Westzone (French version: "Afghanistan," by Marval). Steele-Perkins' work is found on The Magnum Photos Web site, www.magnumphotos.com.



Afghanistan, 1996. Teacher and pupils in Mazar Sharif, before the Taliban occupied the town. Under the Taliban, all girls schools have been closed. *Photo by Chris Steele-Perkins/Magnum Photos.* ©



Afghanistan, 1996. A man having a shave in Kabul. Although not liked, the Taliban have brought some stability and rule of law so that, for men at least, daily trade can continue.



Afghanistan, 1994. Amputees—mainly victims of land mines—are equipped with false limbs at the Red Cross center in Kabul.

Photos by Chris Steele-Perkins/Magnum Photos.©

A Photographer's Journey Begins With a Coffin

By documenting youngsters' lives, he hopes to understand what is happening.

By Andre Lambertson

My photographic journey into the lives of black youth in Baltimore began in an accidental way. The newspaper I worked for sent me to photograph a young woman for a column called "Candid Closet," and she was supposed to represent one of the most fashion conscious people in the city. Known for her Sunday-best dress hats, she had inherited part ownership of her family's successful funeral business in Baltimore.

As I was photographing her, I was having a hard time finding a good location with the kind of light I wanted. I backed into a large room, filled with daylight, turned around, and found myself staring into the face of a dead 13-year-old boy. He was dressed in an off-white suit and his tiny frame squeezed tightly into a narrow casket. He seemed ready to open his eyes at any moment.

Sweat was rolling down my arm and, after a long moment of silence, this woman said, "That's nothing new. It's happening all the time." She began to tell me about all the young people being killed and killing each other. She said that youngsters in the city had grown accustomed to death, to seeing its face up close, to visiting their friends in funeral homes, and talking about it as they might a social outing. It was one more party to dress up for, another occasion to wear black.

Her words shook me. It was after this experience that I began what was to become a five-year photographic journey into black neighborhoods of Baltimore, Chicago and New Orleans trying to understand and convey through images what was happening to their young. ■

Andre Lambertson is a photographer based in New York City with the photo agency Saba Press and is a contract photographer with Time magazine. He has received several awards, including a Crime & Communities Media Fellowship from the Open Society Institute to continue his work on children and programs involved in the juvenile justice system. He is also working on a book, "Ashes," a study of juvenile violence.

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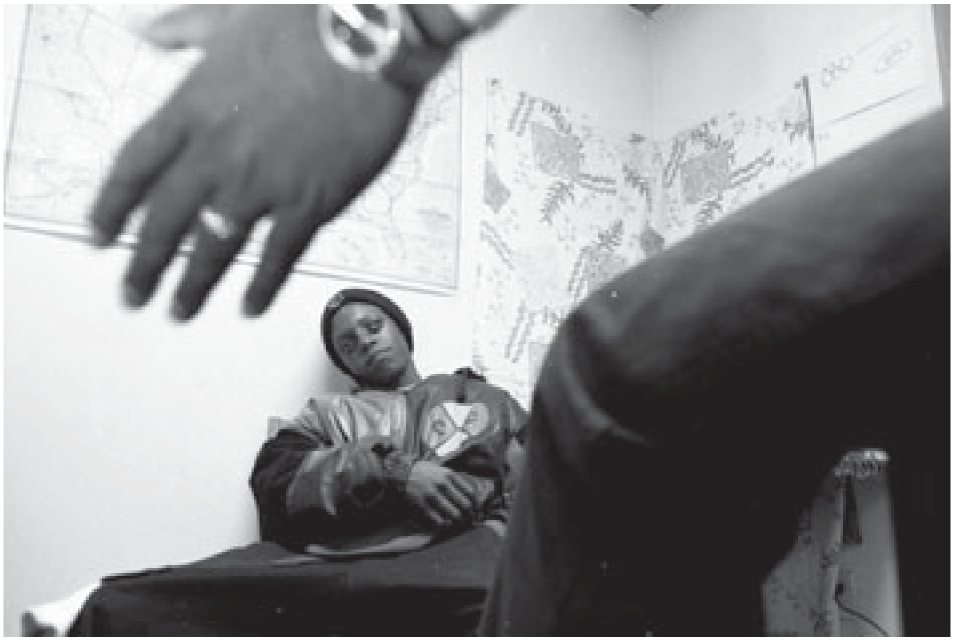
These youngsters endure the harsh realities of deprivation and racism. Many of these children attempt to shield themselves from an environment they find profoundly threatening. Beneath their stony exteriors there is trauma that outsiders rarely know. I was familiar with the work of some photographers who had tried to portray the poverty and despair within some black communities, but I didn't feel the photographs conveyed insights deeper than the obvious circumstances. I wanted my work to help me and others understand why these neighborhoods continued to devour their children, how children who lived there saw themselves, and where they found hope. Most deeply, I wondered how I could help. After all, I was drawn to photojournalism because I felt it was a tool I could use to bring about positive change in people's lives.

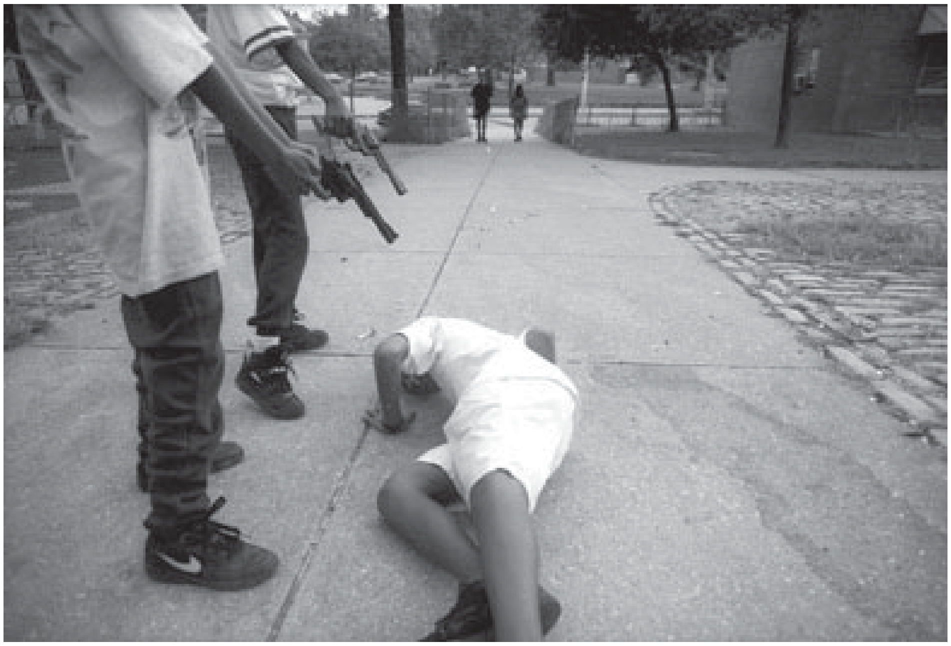
Robert Taylor Homes projects in Chicago. *Photo by Andre Lambertson.©*

I think that the best journalist is seldom subjective. Any journalist with enough curiosity and heart can tell any story if he asks the right questions of himself. To tell the best stories, he relies on his heart. He uses what he knows, often his own experiences, to get inside a story, to find its walls and penetrate them. Being black and adopted, I wondered how I would have fared in one of these communities. A loving and strong parent had helped me to find my path and stay out of harm's way, and perhaps this made me want to tell these stories about children who didn't have someone to do this for them. The biggest question I asked myself as I documented these children's lives was why people don't care more about why they are dying so young.



With a counselor from Gang Peace, a young man talks about available jobs.

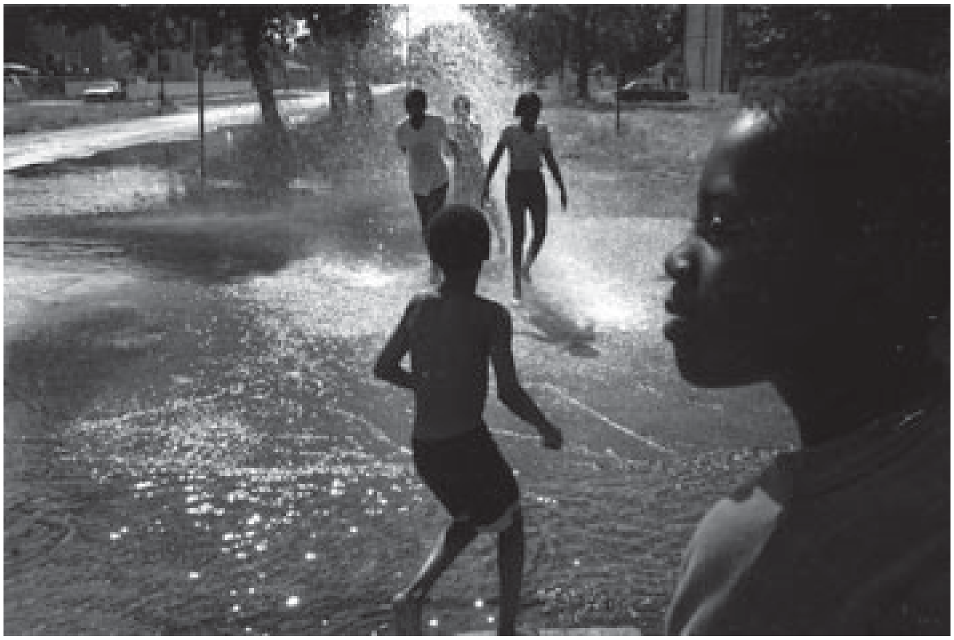
When I mentioned this idea of photographing these children and their communities, my editors back at the newspaper told me simply 'Kids killing kids is nothing new. The story has been done.' But I feel that it is the job of journalists to tell stories again and again in new and creative ways. By bringing a deeper, more complex way of examining the issues of juvenile violence, I wanted to shed light on the complicated conditions and issues that embraced these children. No one was born a killer. What happened along the way to make them do this? And I wondered how the mainstream press would have reacted if these children were white. Would this be considered an epidemic? Of course, this was before Columbine happened.



Boys playing cops and robbers at LexingtonTerrace, West Baltimore.

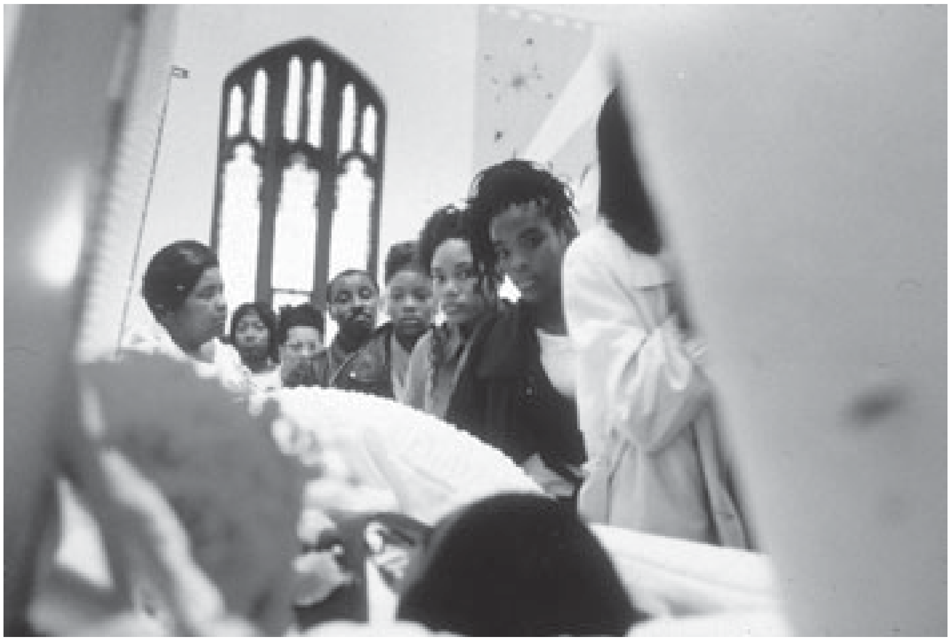
Photos by Andre Lambertson. ©

My burning desire to be a photojournalist was fueled largely by my desire to be seen and heard and to give voice to those who aren't heard. The apathy toward this story that I heard from my editors pushed me harder to do it. I wanted to show dimensions of these youngsters' lives that would portray them in more sensitive ways. I felt the mainstream press often demonizes these youth.



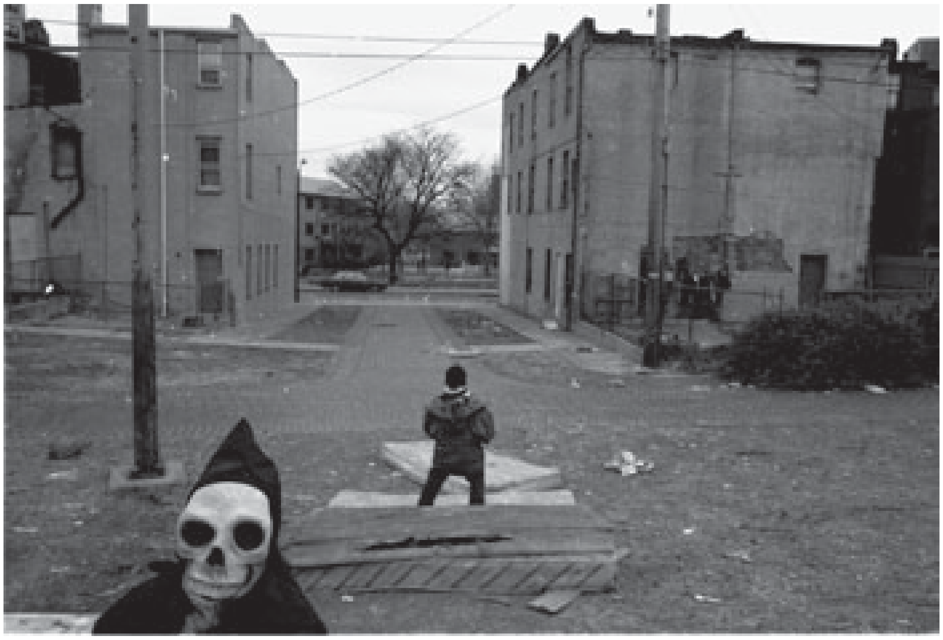
Cabrini-Green projects in Chicago.

The work I produced during these years often left more questions than answers. Indeed, there was light to be shed, but there was darkness, too. During the first year, I kept an eye out for reports of shootings or stabbings among youth. If I found an incident, I'd show up at the funeral and, with permission from the family, begin photographing. Some people wanted no part of me; others welcomed my presence as a way to bear witness to their pain and grief. One mother, unable to cope with the loss of her 12-year-old son, dove headfirst into the casket, knocking the body to the floor. To deal with this level of sorrow, I needed to cross into people's inner depths of pain. The ability to do this is only accomplished through intense documentary work, and this involves a great deal of time.



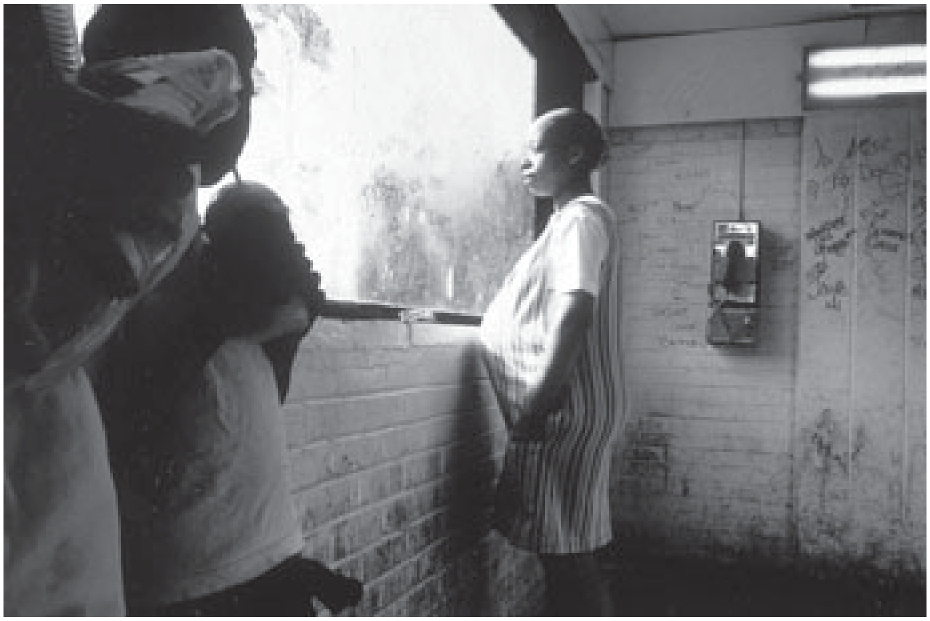
Funeral for a 13-year-old boy killed in a drive-by shooting.

After a year of working on this project, I had images attesting to the unrelenting violence, but another question lingered. What was producing it? I had befriended a young man who I knew had a drug problem. One day I asked him if he could take me into his community, a very tough project in West Baltimore. Through him, I met people who lived there. Often, when we'd arrive, we'd bring food from an organization I knew that collected food for the homeless. Neighbors began seeing my friend as someone other than a junkie, and they also began to trust me. Soon, they opened their doors—and their lives—to me. Deep documentary work is about sharing heart to heart. During this time I was with them, I was able to see and capture a much deeper perspective of their lives in this tough place. I understood that without light, without hope, dreams vanished. Love from someone, from anyone, remained the key.



Two boys play at the Lexington Terrace public housing projects in West Baltimore.

In the end, I felt this project became a prayer. For me, it was a daily vigil to remember the amazingly painful lives that a small community in this country bear. That suffering is a part of our lives, too, because everyone is touched. I've made a conscious effort to keep returning to these communities and doing my work there, trying to shed light on those who have had hardship in their lives but have found their way. Their lives show hope. I want people to meditate on life and to understand that answers are often found in places of complete darkness. To show the light among us sometimes means grappling with the dark as well.



A pregnant woman looks out the window at the Robert Taylor Homes projects in Chicago.

Photos by Andre Lambertson.©

A Nieman Year Spent Pondering Storytelling

'TV documentaries were dull because they misused the medium.'

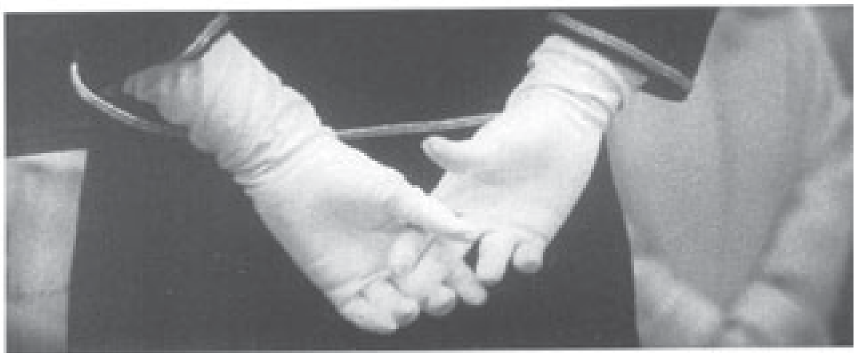
By Robert Drew

In the early 1950's, with television in its infancy, the ability to capture real-life moments as they happen and use those images to tell a story was little more than an idea of what the documentary approach on this new medium might become. I'd spent 10 years at Life as a correspondent and editor and experienced firsthand the powerful force that candid photography of real life can produce. And from my work on a magazine show for NBC, I knew that improving photography, writing and editing would not make *the* difference in creating this kind of effect on television.

What had to evolve was an editorial approach that valued reality captured with the intimacy of the still camera and the technology to allow this to happen in motion pictures. But once that happened—and we knew it would—those of us wanting to pursue this new type of reporting would need to know how to transform these sounds and images into documentary television.

During my Nieman year in 1955, I focused on two questions: Why are documentaries so dull? What would it take for them to become gripping and exciting? Looking for answers, several Harvard mentors steered me towards an exploration of basic storytelling. So I studied the short story, modern stage play and novel, and watched how some of these forms came across on TV.

By the time I felt I knew the answer, I was embarrassed at how long it had taken me to realize it. What I finally saw was that most documentaries were audio lectures illustrated with pictures. I watched Edward R. Murrow's "See It Now," but did so without sound, simply watching the picture. Its progression disintegrated. Then I turned the picture off and listened to the sound; the program tracked perfectly. Later, these TV programs were printed in book form and read very well.


Jackie Kennedy's gloved hands as seen in "Primary."

The storytelling problem was beginning to sort itself out for me. Stories could be told in different ways, using different means of communication, but each medium had its unique strength for doing this. And its unique strength was, not surprisingly, its best. TV documentaries were dull because they misused the medium. The kind of logic that builds interest and feeling on television is dramatic logic. Viewers become invested in the characters, and they watch as things happen and characters react and develop. As the power of the drama builds, viewers respond emotionally as well as intellectually.

It was also becoming clearer to me that journalism is not relegated to one medium or another. It is a task to be combined with the means to communicate that which is discovered. And in TV the nightly news, for example, is one "medium," doing what it does best, which is to summarize the news, often by lecturing with picture illustrations.

The prime-time documentary ought to be different. What it adds to the journalistic spectrum is the ability to let viewers experience the sense of being somewhere else, drawing them into dramatic developments in the lives of people caught up in stories of importance.

As my Nieman year progressed, my mission was becoming clear: convey experience. Leave the rest, the exposition, analysis, elucidation, to others in the media better suited to those tasks.

Then, one evening, Omnibus presented a TV documentary, "Toby in the Tall Corn," about a traveling tent show, that conveyed feeling and experience that was strong enough to overcome an inane narration.

I flew to New York and asked the executive producer, Bob Saudek, why "Toby" was so powerful. "Because I assigned Russell Lynes to write the narration," he said.

I asked Russell Lynes the same question. "Because I focused the narration on the economics of the tent show," he replied.

I found cameraman-director Richard Leacock at a moviola in the basement of a townhouse. Hardly looking up from his editing, he responded, "Because Russell Lynes wrote the narration."

Leacock and I went out for coffee. I wanted to know how he'd been able to make this film look like it had been photographed candidly and spontaneously, when the bulky equipment and mistrained talent available to him made this nearly impossible to do. What we discovered that day was our mutual interest in making the impossible possible.

My Nieman colleagues, all of them newspaper people, were not shy about offering me a challenge. Often we debated into the night the question of what, if anything, all of this stuff about storytelling had to do with journalism. Back then, for me, storytelling was about trying to envision a new television journalism that allow the documentary to do what it does best. This meant leaving to other media what they can do best. The right kind of documentary programming should raise more interest than it can satisfy, more questions than it should try to answer.

When my year ended, I wrote an article for Nieman Reports entitled, "See It Then," setting forth my ideas about this journey on which I was about to embark. It would take me five more years to conceive and develop the editing techniques, assemble the teams, reengineer the lightweight equipment, and find the right story to produce for my first TV documentary.

Finally, in 1960, with the camera hefted by Richard Leacock and the tape recorder carried by me, we set out to tell the story of a young man who wanted to be President. His name was John F. Kennedy, and our drama focused on his tough primary fight in Wisconsin. Though burdensome by today's standards, the equipment made it possible for the first time for us to move the sync sounds camera-recorder freely with characters throughout a story.

The film was called "Primary" and is regarded as the beginning of American cinéma vérité. ■

Robert Drew, a 1955 Nieman Fellow, is an award-winning documentary producer. As an editor at Life, Drew specialized in the candid still picture essay. Among some hundred Drew films, those that established cinéma vérité in America include "Primary," "On the Pole," "Yanki No!," and "Faces of November."

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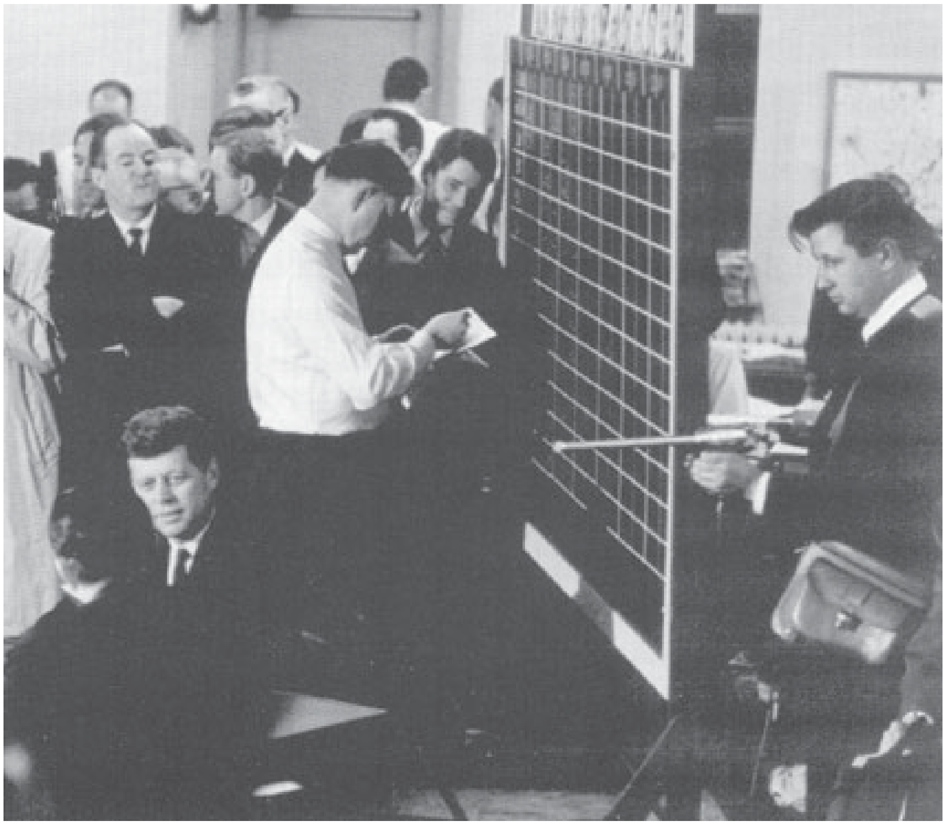
Robert Drew holds the microphone.

"For five days and nights we recorded almost every move the candidates made, the sights and sounds of the campaign, and the way the public responded. For one sequence at a senstive time, Leacock and I split up. He filmed alone the tension in Kennedy's hotel room as election returns came in. Four cameras converged on Kennedy's victory. With twenty hours of candid film in hand, I was able to plan the editing of a story that would tell itself through characters in action, with less than two minutes of narration."—Richard Drew

Richard Leacock holds the camera.

Documentary Journalism Vanishes From Network and Local Television

Withdrawal of advertising and emergence of news magazines were among the factors that killed it.

By Philip S. Balboni

This autumn, for the 12th year in a row, I will take my seat around a large conference table in the historic World Room at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, joining seven distinguished colleagues as we begin three long days of judging the best work in American radio and television. Weeks of individual screening lead up to these final deliberations, which often involve difficult and emotional choices as we glean 12 winners from an original roster of 600 or more entries. This vantage point as a juror for the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, the most selective and purely journalistic prize in television, has given me a valuable perspective on trends in broadcast journalism.

The picture that emerges is at times inspiring but more often distressing: inspiring because each year there is work that is intelligent, brave, historically important, and deeply moving; distressing because most entries fall far from this mark. Sadly, the commercial networks and the local affiliates have allowed their standards to drop precipitously—in most cases overwhelmed by the financial demands of corporate owners who have little appreciation for the sacred trust that goes with owning a news organization.

This trend is nowhere better or more clearly seen than in the near extinction of the television documentary on the major broadcast networks and their affiliated local stations. This trend has been developing over several decades, but by the mid-1990's it was clear that the documentary on commercial television was almost extinct.

Some might ask, "Why should we care?" After all, there is still PBS, and many of the cable networks, like Discovery, HBO and A&E, are presenting documentaries even if ABC, CBS, NBC and Fox are not. I'd argue that all Americans should care and care profoundly because the documentary, especially at an hour or more in length, is one of the most powerful forms of human expression. Nothing can take its place; no single report on the evening news, no glitzy television newsmagazine piece, and certainly none of today's endless TV talk shows have the depth, substance, detail and emotional strength of a well-executed documentary.

Moreover, while the cable networks may be an adequate substitute on the national level, there is virtually no entity to stand in for local broadcast stations in hundreds of cities across America. With local television's abandonment of the documentary, American communities have lost an important local voice in the examination of key social, political and economic issues. The broadcasting industry should be ashamed of this failure to serve.

The great American documentary tradition is rooted in such powerful progenitors as CBS's "Harvest of Shame," which exposed the cruel mistreatment of East coast migrant workers. According to A.M. Sperber, Edward R. Murrow's biographer, "'Harvest of Shame' burst upon the public, an updated 'Grapes of Wrath,' a black-and-white document of protest ushering in the sixties on TV." It turned out to be Murrow's last great work for CBS.

Sadly, we never see work as courageous as this on CBS today, or on any of the other major networks for that matter. And it is not just the great documentaries like Murrow's that are gone. In recent years, the documentary as a genre of work has nearly vanished from the traditional networks and the local affiliates.

In an effort to quantify this observation, we asked ABC, CBS and NBC to provide the title and a brief description of any hour long (or longer) documentary they broadcast in 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1999. Perhaps it is not surprising that none of the networks was able, or willing, to provide the information. We made a similar request of six local television stations that have historically been considered among the very best in the industry: WBBM-TV, Chicago; KRON-TV, San Francisco; WCVB-TV, Boston; WFAA-TV, Dallas; WCCO-TV, Minneapolis, and KING-TV, Seattle. Here, too, none could provide a useful amont of information, if any.

Fortunately for Americans, the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) has maintained a strong documentary presence. One standout is "Frontline," produced at WGBH-TV in Boston, arguably one of the most brilliant and substantive documentary series ever created. [See Michael Kirk's article about "Frontline" on page 50.] "Frontline" has been showered with major awards including the George Foster Peabody Award from the University of Georgia, often called the Pulitzer Prize of television, and two duPont-Columbia Gold Batons, its highest honor. Also "American Experience," the documentary series "P.O.V.," [See Cara Mertes's story about "P.O.V." on page 53.] and other independently produced but PBS-aired documentaries add further diversity and intellectual richness.

As for cable, I have screened some truly outstanding documentaries from the Discovery Channel and HBO, among others. But in my experience the cable network documentaries are, for the most part, much weaker journalistically, and they are packaged more for their entertainment value than for the enlightenment of the audience. Of the cable networks, HBO has probably made the strongest commitment to documentaries, for which it should be commended. However, HBO's documentaries lean heavily toward a cinéma vérité non-journalistic style which works well for some subjects but is not conducive to more complex issues.

Edward R. Murrow reporting in "Harvest of Shame" about the conditions of migrant farm workers. This "CBS Reports" program was originally shown on Thanksgiving evening 1960. *Film image courtesy of CBS Photo Archive, CBS Worldwide, Inc.* ©

CNN has also made worthy contributions to the documentary tradition, although it has never achieved the same level of performance here that it has in its breaking news coverage. Neither of the more recent entrants into 24-hour cable news, MSNBC and Fox News Channel, has shown any discernible interest in documentaries.

From the mid-1980's on, both the quantity and the quality of documentaries produced by the broadcast networks and local stations fell dramatically. Yet the seeds of the decline of the television documentary on commercial television can, in fact, be traced back to the late 1960's when professional observers began to notice problems. The duPont-Columbia Survey of Broadcast Journalism for 1968-69 asked nearly 500 television stations located in the top 100 largest markets to report on their documentary work during the prior year. Stations were asked to list locally originated documentary programming in 12 subject areas which the duPont-Columbia jurors felt were of major importance. The categories in this survey still read today like a lexicon of significant social issues, including international affairs, politics, birth control and population, disarmament, youth and education, the urban crisis, environment, poverty, crime and violence, medicine, psychology and religion, science and space.

The survey results were dismal. "Documentary programming in the traditional sense of the term had hit a new low," the duPont-Columbia jurors stated. "The decline of the serious controversial television documentary…can be traced at least in part to lack of advertising support. This reticence comes almost in equal parts from a fear of boring and of offending the public." In the year 2001, how quaint that sounds.

Sir William Haley, a former editor of the London Times and director general of the BBC, during a 16-month residence in the United States in 1968-69, agreed to serve as a duPont-Columbia juror. His observations about American broadcast journalism are fascinating to read in the context of today's even greater decline in standards. "It is not enough to say that news must never be thought of as part of entertainment," Haley said. "News must not be thought of merely as part of a television program. News—and in this word I include…news documentaries—is the lifeblood of democracy. Without free, full, and uncontaminated information on all things that matter, the people have no sound means of making choices and deciding."

Think of the important national and local issues facing the American public today: health care funding, missile defense, a sliding economy, grave energy problems, global terrorism, improving primary and secondary education, Social Security funding, campaign finance reform, poverty, immigration policy, and the list could go on and on. How can it be argued that we do not need, and need badly, the insight which well-researched and well-produced documentaries could provide?

Another survey, done in 1980, took note of an important factor behind the decline—the rise of the network television news magazine. It observed that, ironically, the success of "60 Minutes," in particular and "the rush to imitate it seemed to diminish the likelihood of any of the three networks finding primetime for the regular airing of hour-long documentaries." The reasons were that the magazine format was being given priority and "subjects worthy of extended treatment were appropriated for briefer magazine-length attention."

Remembering Documentary Moments

Looking back at television's more than 50-year history, the "golden years" for documentaries on both the networks and the affiliates came during a 20-year period beginning in the mid-1960's and lasting until the mid-1980's. A review of the archives of the Peabody and duPont-Columbia awards serves as a reminder of some of the excellent documentary work that used to be offered to the American people and also starkly highlights what we are missing out on today. What follows is a random selection of the type of documentaries that once graced the television landscape.—Phil Balboni

"The Slow Guillotine," by KNBC-TV, a documentary focusing on air pollution in the Los Angeles area (1969).

"Charlie Company," CBS News, the famous story of an infantry company on patrol in Vietnam (1970).

"This Child is Rated X," an NBC "White Paper" on juvenile justice and children's rights in America (1971).

"Justice in America," CBS News, a three-hour, four-part series on the inequities of U.S. courts and prisons (1971).

"A Seed of Hope," by WTVJ-TV, Miami, on drug addiction among middle-class youth in Fort Lauderdale, Florida (1973).

"Chile: Experiment in Red," by ABC News about President Salvador Allende's impact on Chile's economy, politics and society (1974).

"The Sins of the Fathers," NBC News, on the plight of American-fathered children left behind in Vietnam (1974).

"The Timber Farmers," KGW-TV, Portland, Oregon, a documentary examining the future of the Pacific Northwest timber industry (1978).

"Race Relations: Where Are We Now?" by WFAA-TV, a two-hour examination of race relations in the Dallas Fort Worth area (1978).

"Water: Arizona's Most Precious Resource," KOOL-TV, Phoenix, on the debate over the Central Arizona Project (1979).

"Blacks in America: With All Deliberate Speed," a two-hour CBS Reports special (1981).

"The Billion Dollar Ghetto," by WPLG-TV, Miami, an investigation of government projects in Dade County (1982).

"The Defense of the United States," CBS News, a five-hour long examination of America's nuclear defense policies (1982).

"The Gene Merchants," "ABC News Closeup" on the impact of genetic engineering (1983).

"People Like Us," "CBS Reports," on the impact of federal budget cuts on the poor (1983).

"The War Within," KRON-TV, about Vietnam veterans' struggle to re-enter mainstream society (1984).

"The Smell of Money," WJXT-TV, Jacksonville, Florida, on the economic and health effects of the city's major polluters (1985). ■

A similar problem was afflicting local television. The 1980 survey noted a decline in the number of documentaries getting on the air and in their place "was a dramatic rise in the number of mini-documentaries strung through regular newscasts." The jurors said that in some cases these reports "added up to worthwhile coverage of substantial topics," but more frequently they dealt with sensationalized topics.

Any viewer of television news in the intervening 21 years has seen a profound escalation of this phenomenon. Even a generation ago this survey noted that "these obvious appeals to the morbid interests of the stations' target audiences were habitually run during the ratings sweeps periods, which determined the prices management could charge for the subsequent quarter's commercials." That ratings were figuring increasingly into editorial decisions was admitted by two out of three news directors reporting to the survey. Today, the focus on ratings and the competition for viewers' attention totally dominate the newsrooms of America. Behind the ratings fixation lies the unceasing demand by owners for increased profitability—this in an industry that has enjoyed enormous profitability, especially at the local station level.

All of these forces have combined to crush the documentary on commercial television. Serious and important international, national and local issues are being ignored. The American people, and American democracy, are not being served.

The solution, however, is not government intervention because government has no place in the newsroom. It is true that the deregulatory fervor, begun under President Reagan and continued in both republican and democratic administrations and congresses since, has had an enormous negative impact on the quality of broadcast news, permitting vast consolidation of media power and placing news organizations in the hands of giant corporations that have little feel for the traditions of journalism. But asking for additional government regulation, particularly in the area of news content, is not the answer.

The solution, if there is one, must come from public pressure and from leadership within the profession and within the television industry. At New England Cable News, documentaries have been a part of our news production for several years, featuring such topics as a breast cancer patient's decision to choose hospice care over more aggressive chemotherapy and a yearlong exploration of the impact on a small Maine town of the closing of its major employer. This year a high-ranking news executive has been assigned full time to oversee long-form reporting and documentaries, and we added targeted funding for this in our budget.

If only one network and/or one station group would step forward and make a serious commitment to fund and broadcast a set number of documentaries every year, that would send a signal that would be heard loud and clear by its competitors, but more importantly by its customers and viewers. The first to step forward will be rewarded beyond measure both in public approval and in the knowledge that those who are taking it are also making an important contribution to the society in which they live. ■

Phil Balboni, a veteran journalist, is the president and founder of New England Cable News, the nation's largest and most honored regional news network. He is a board member and former chairman of the Association of Regional News Channels and a member of the editorial advisory board of the Columbia Journalism Review.

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Striking a Balance Between Filmmaking and Journalism

At 'Frontline,' the producers and their vision are front and center.

By Michael Kirk

Twenty years ago, a South African charmer named David Fanning and I were sizing each other up in a bar at the Century Plaza in Los Angeles. He was putting together a weekly PBS documentary television series, and I was trying to parlay a freshly minted Nieman year into some kind of honest work that didn't involve cranking out news pieces, or those things they call "segments" on so-called "newsmagazine" shows.

> **The truth is, in the early going, we weren't sure what a 'Frontline' was—but we figured we'd recognize it when we saw it and, of course, after a while, we did.**

Fanning's vision was infectious and, as it always has, matched my enthusiasm. He was promising a weekly, one-hour public affairs documentary presence on PBS unfettered by the usual death knell to ideas on Public Broadcasting: political deals between stations, independent producers, and other constituency-driven groups.

The series would be produced by the legendary Boston PBS station, WGBH—but Fanning's new idea was that the station would act more as a publishing house for independently produced programs ("authored works," as he put it). The individual programs would be made, said Fanning, by the best producers he could find, wherever they lived and worked. I lived and worked in Seattle.

Then, the big finish: We weren't, he whispered, going to succumb to that other TV beast—the 800-pound gorilla known as the face-time-demanding-on-air-correspondent.

"A producer's series," he said with satisfaction.

That did it, he had me. I was on my way back to Boston.

During the next 20 years, David and I (and dozens of producers) have made nearly 400 "Frontline" documentaries. It's been a wild ride.

I signed on as senior producer for the first seven seasons (Michael Sullivan ably followed me and is now putting together PBS's ambitious new magazine program). As those of us present for the creation of "Frontline" steered (some would say veered) among the remarkably complicated choices involved in inventing a new kind of television, the series began to take on a life and style of journalism all its own—slightly edgy, iconoclastic, politically perverse, and frequently surprising.

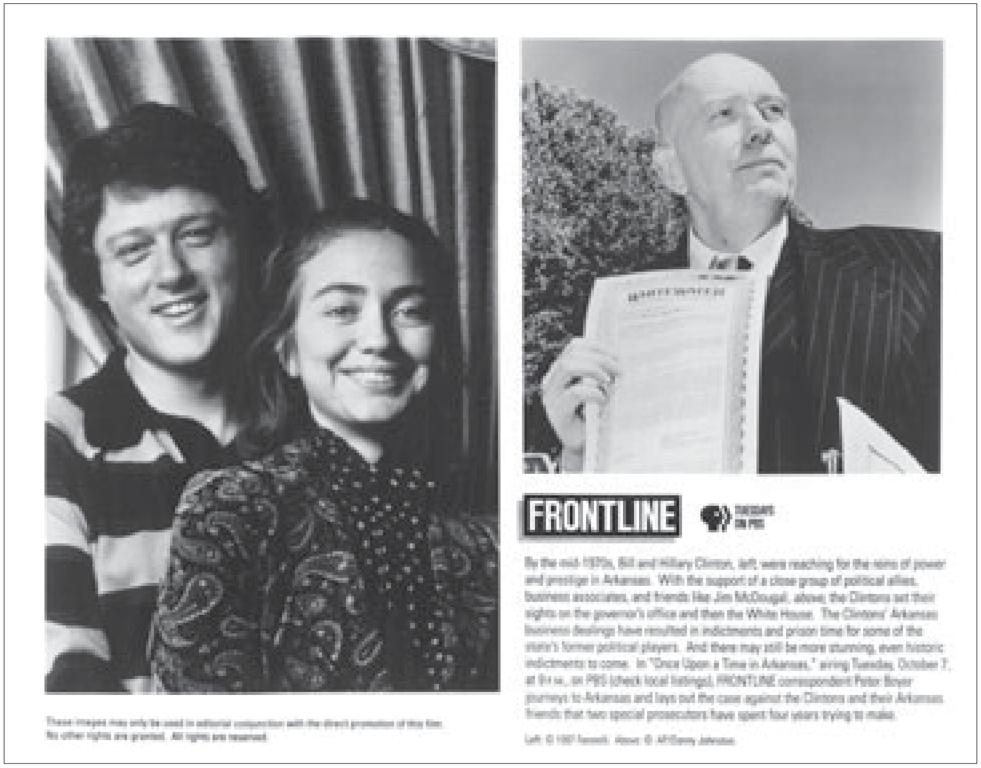
Of course, this business of inventing a new kind of TV show had its own peculiar learning curve. First there was the issue of picking the stories. The hundreds of aspirants that inundated us wondered when our "RFP" was going out. We didn't know what an RFP was. (A "Request for Proposals," our grant-writing friends taught us.)

"Back of an envelope," was the way David described the way we worked out our best film ideas. But try telling that to a producer who had spent years preparing 20-page treatments for the labyrinth formerly known as "PBS/Corporation for Public Broadcasting funding committees."

Then, of course, there was the daunting task of finding just the right producers. Louis Wiley, our founding series editor (and the ongoing conscience of the broadcast), wrote a paragraph that became our working definition of a "Frontline" producer: "We seek a proven track record with long-form documentaries; a willingness to work under the editorial direction of an executive producer, and a journalistic sense of fairness." The last two criteria were designed to publicly define us as a fundamentally journalistic institution and to define the difference between our producers and that other thoroughly worthy but undeniably different group of "independent documentary" producers (with an emphasis on the word independent).

We found some of our first colleagues languishing at the moribund "CBS Reports" and "ABC News Closeup" units. Others came from the BBC and that newly invented pool, downsized producers from local stations that were going out of the serious television journalism business (Westinghouse, for example). Bill Moyers had trained some, and so had WGBH.

Then, of course, there was the problem of getting an audience. For that, PBS and our board of directors clamored for a star—that 800-pound gorilla David so proudly eschewed during that first meeting in Los Angeles. After six months of kicking and screaming (and interviewing some very difficult people), we took the plunge and, in typical early "Frontline" style, we went all the way—and, in NBC News anchor/star Jessica Savitch, we got Godzilla *and* Fay Wray. As difficult as Jessica often was, we came to believe in her role as a kind of marquee figure and, when Judy Woodruff signed on after Jessica's death, that role actually grew to include a thoroughly legitimate journalistic function.


FRONTLINE
TUESDAYS ON PBS

By the mid-1970s, Bill and Hillary Clinton, left, were reaching for the reins of power and prestige in Arkansas. With the support of a close group of political allies, business associates, and friends like Jim McDougal, above, the Clintons set their sights on the governor's office and then the White House. The Clintons' Arkansas business dealings have resulted in indictments and prison time for some of the state's former political players. And there may still be more stunning, even historic indictments to come. In "Once Upon a Time in Arkansas," airing Tuesday, October 7, at 9 P.M. on PBS (check local listings), FRONTLINE correspondent Peter Boyer journeys to Arkansas and lays out the case against the Clintons and their Arkansas friends that two special prosecutors have spent four years trying to make.

Left: © 1997 [illegible]. Above: © AP/Danny Johnston.

These images may only be used in editorial conjunction with the direct promotion of this film. No other rights are granted. All rights are reserved.

Images from "Frontline's" Whitewater program.

Armed with the anchor, the producers, those back-of-an-envelope ideas, and our own early 30-year-old enthusiasms, we then set about creating (and defining for ourselves and the producers) exactly what a "Frontline" documentary was.

It was, as Wiley said, "designed to help the citizen perform his or her civic duties," but it was decidedly not one of those occasionally boring network "white papers," as they had come to be called. It was investigative, but not a piece of advocacy; stylized but not overdone (we had lots of rules about music and re-creation). The truth is, in the early going, we weren't sure what a "Frontline" was—but we figured we'd recognize it when we saw it and, of course, after a while, we did.

We lit the rocket with "The Unauthorized History of the NFL." That program's back-of-an-envelope description read: "The mob influenced the outcome of at least one Superbowl and L.A. Rams owner Carroll Rosenbloom was murdered as part of it." The program was a blockbuster premier and immediately put "Frontline" on the map. The program got the highest ratings of any public affairs documentary in the history of PBS.

But just as we rode the rocket up, we also rode it down. In that tension between good filmmaking and good journalism, many believed the filmmaking (some of it artful but sensational) got the best of the journalism. The program was savaged by TV critics, sports fans, and many journalists. The highly respected television critic of the Los Angeles Times, Howard Rosenberg, said the program was sufficiently flawed to bring into question the continued existence of the series itself.

Then, the very next week, we redeemed ourselves with "88 Seconds in Greensboro," a dark southern tale about the Ku Klux Klan and a shootout with some communist party members in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Rosenberg, writing again in the Los Angeles Times, said perhaps he'd signaled the death knell too early for "Frontline," and that this film showed real promise for the series. For our money, in "88 Seconds" the real "Frontline" had emerged. Both films, by the way, were produced and directed by Bill Cran (CBC, BBC). In "Greensboro," the writer Jim Reston's spare narration and Bill's instinct for narrative storytelling neatly matched. Now we knew what a "Frontline" looked like and where our journalistic aspirations should be aimed.

Over the years, the combination of writer and filmmaker has yielded some of the most powerful "Frontline" documentaries: Richard Ben Cramer and Tom Lennon's biographies of Bill Clinton and President George Bush, "The Choice;" Bill Greider and Sherry Jones's "Washington Behind Closed Doors," and their series on democracy. Peter J. Boyer and I have collaborated on a dozen stories ranging from Waco to Whitewater; Reston, Cramer, Grieder and Boyer appeared in the films—but they were hardly correspondents in the classic network model. Their contributions were intellectual, structural and collaborative. True to Fanning's original promise, the producers have always been the leaders of the teams, and the task of blending narrative, structure and content has always been our province. And, perhaps most importantly, those relationships have been developed personally, not imposed institutionally.

During these years, other models for classic "Frontlines" have emerged: Ofra Bikel's extensive body of work, including her stunning investigation of the allegations of child abuse in Edenton, North Carolina; Mark Obenhaus's trilogy about life in Chester, Pennsylvania, including the riveting "Abortion Clinic," and David Sutherland's epic six-hour mini-series, "The Farmer's Wife." "Frontline" has also thrived on the investigative work of producers like Lowell Bergman and Marty Smith and the quirky films of Marian Marzynski. In every one of these programs, the competing demands of filmmaking and journalism have been the central challenge.

Itching to try my hand at producing/directing and writing my own "Frontlines," I left the senior producer job in 1987. Since then I've made more than 30 documentaries for "Frontline," each and every time struggling to get the balance between good filmmaking and good journalism just right. While every experienced "Frontline" producer has his or her own method (that's part of the beauty of what Fanning created), I have some rules of my own particular road.

I live and breathe in the world of character-driven narrative. I also love chasing a story everybody in the pack thinks is dead and buried. If it has great characters and a story arc—and if the journalism circus has come and gone—my team (co-producers Rick Young and Jim Gilmore, correspondent Peter Boyer) and I turn the gravestone over and look for the things everybody missed: The Branch Davidian siege in Waco, Texas, turned out to be at least partly about an internal struggle within the FBI; Whitewater wasn't just about "a failed land deal" but also about a successful one named Castle Grande (speaking of character-driven narratives!); The Chief of Naval Operations Mike Borda's suicide wasn't just about some bogus medals of valor but about the struggle between men and women at the pinnacle of the Navy's all-male culture—the fighter pilots; the so-called largest police corruption scandal in the history of Los Angeles, Rampart, was really about a supercharged racial climate and a very slick misdirection by a cop and his buddies nabbed in a cocaine bust. The list goes on.

There are, naturally, limitations to the method. While we unearth documents, new footage, and fresh insights, I'm not really in the business of trying to make or especially break news (that's for my colleagues Marty Smith and Lowell Bergman). Because the stories aren't happening at the same time as I'm shooting them, the cinéma vérité style (the stunning access of filmmakers on the spot) isn't, as they say, in my toolbox. So I've developed a skill rarely talked about in so-called serious discussions about broadcast journalism: I actually direct my films. I think about image systems, lighting, scene setting, mood and music.

When I can, I employ the devices, film grammar, and time-honored structural sense of Hollywood movies. I know that sentence shocks my more sober colleagues, and it's often the cause of spirited debates inside "Frontline," but the truth is, in order to tell my stories, I'm pushing the boundaries—and challenging the conventions of straight-up-and-down documentaries. So in that "Frontline" struggle between style and substance, I find myself paying attention to the filmmaking as much as to the journalism.

In the two decades that I've spent trying to hone the craft, I am most proud of the films that raise questions, inspire debate, and sometimes even change policy. Critics don't always like the films, but audiences seem to—they are consistently among the highest rated "Frontlines." But these aspirations—and outcomes—are not mine alone. As my dear friend and colleague David Fanning and I—after several decades in the business and suitably less naive—now say, this business, if done right, doesn't get any easier. It gets harder—harder to stay the serious course in a television environment so littered with less. Harder to find the money but, most importantly, harder to satisfy our own quest for the perfect "Frontline." ■

"Frontline" has won the Gold Baton and several silver batons from the duPont-Columbia awards, six George Foster Peabody Awards, and dozens of Emmys. Michael Kirk, a 1980 Nieman Fellow, has won his fair share of those awards as a producer/director, as well as two Writers Guild of America Awards. He now serves as a consulting senior producer to "Frontline" and produces two films each season as an independent producer.

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Where Journalism and Television Documentary Meet

Connecting with viewers 'through personal stories and subjective approaches.'

By Cara Mertes

Documentary journalism is alive and well, contrary to reports of its early demise. Yes, funding is extremely difficult to obtain, and broadcasts even harder to achieve. Of the hundreds of documentaries made each year, most never get beyond family, friends and the core interested constituencies. But at "P.O.V.," PBS's nonfiction showcase, where I am the executive producer, we are seeing more and more documentaries that handily meet the criteria of journalism.

Journalists, like the French with their language, are highly protective of their unique domain. Their job is unusual. The social function journalism fills involves a combination of expertise and trust, and yet, in the end, the outcome is inevitably subjective. There are few hard and fast rules, but many suggestive guidelines. And journalists are constantly refining the definition of their work and patrolling the borders of their practice for interlopers.

Central to determining whether something is or isn't journalism lie questions about truth, accuracy, motivation and fairness. Print journalism's relationship to these qualities has a long and pedigreed history. However, journalism done with words and images is relatively new, and deep suspicion remains in many quarters when judging a visually based medium in terms of its journalistic qualities—particularly moving images and, more specifically, images broadcast on television. So deep is the power of images to move us that some believe everything they see on television that is presented as fact. Conversely, knowing the heightened power words and images have to manipulate, some trust in little or nothing they see represented as mainstream news today.

Both responses are extremes, but passions have always run deep when it comes to questions about truth and media—particularly when pictures are involved. Writing about photography only 30 years after its invention, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., in a much-quoted 1859 essay, was the first to identify photography's delicate dance with veracity. "Every conceivable object of Nature and Art will soon scale off its surface for us," Holmes wrote. "Men will hunt all curious, beautiful, grand objects as they hunt cattle in South America for their skins and leave the carcasses of little worth." This is an aggressive image, describing a world where content would always be sacrificed in the search for the most "curious, beautiful and grand" surface.

Holmes' statement is remarkably prescient. In today's television journalism, ever-new marketing goals and revenue-generating practices have become the standard by which all similar products are judged. These approaches frequently clash with journalism's goal to seek out and report informative, meaningful, verifiable stories about the world we live in. Yet surfaces dominate and content suffers daily in the broadcast journalist's world. And it's not as if this is an entirely new phenomenon.

Certainly, we can look back on "the good old days" when television news broadcasters worked with journalists on regular, in-depth, well funded productions about important social issues and didn't expect fact-finding to get mixed up with moneymaking. That era produced such classics as "Harvest of Shame." Of course, Edward R. Murrow complained of corporate interference in his work in the late 1950's and early '60's, so the tension between journalistic ideals and the reality of daily workplace politics is not new. Nevertheless, a fairly recent, radical shift has been widely noted in both the practice and reception of journalism.

Gone, too, are the days when what is printed is taken as "the truth," or at least generally believed, and what appears as news on television or radio is actually believed to be news by a skeptical audience. Today's journalists work under a cloud of public cynicism, pulling extra weight just to convince their audiences that their story is important, truthful and worth devoting time to. They work against the increasing time pressures on Americans, the innumerable media distractions passing as news or its close cousin, infotainment. Beyond the still-thriving "60 Minutes," broadcast documentary specifically has been relegated to the infinitely cross-linked and cross-promoted human-interest stories on "Dateline," "20/20," and other news and magazine shows.

Despite these much decried developments, or perhaps, ironically, because of them, journalism has seen new forms emerge in recent years, forms which attempt to connect with viewers through personal stories and overtly subjective approaches. These new forms don't raise the same questions or suspicions that the use of "objectivity" as a format invites.

Using this approach, journalists see themselves as active participants, attempting to connect with communities, to rejuvenate a sense of citizenry, to promote the operations of democracy, and even to suggest possible solutions to problems. Some refer to this as public or civic journalism, or journalism with a problem-solving focus. It is within this rubric that many of the point-of-view documentaries about contemporary social issues shown on PBS's "P.O.V." find their home.

After 14 years on the air, "P.O.V." is home to many journalists-turned-filmmakers. They have come to public television, often from commercial media (print and broadcast), for a chance to explore their stories from an explicit perspective, to work over a long period of time—sometimes as long as a decade—and for the chance to have total editorial control.

Through their work, "P.O.V." showcases much-needed antidotes to the superficiality endemic in so much broadcast media today. The work of two such filmmakers is airing in the "P.O.V." 2001 series: "Scout's Honor," by Tom Shepard, and "In The Light of Reverence," by Toby McLeod, co-produced by Malinda Maynor. These serve as examples of the kind of carefully crafted films that have expanded the craft of journalism into documentaries so effectively that "P.O.V." has been able to pioneer new approaches to audience engagement around both their online and on-air broadcasts.

"P.O.V." was created in recognition of the power that nonfiction film has in promoting civic dialogue and around controversial issues of common concern. Race and identity ("Blacks and Jews," "Tongues Untied," "First Person Plural"), health ("The Vanishing Line," "Complaints of a Dutiful Daughter"), labor ("Roger and Me"), education ("Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary") are just a small sampling of the spectrum of topics more than 160 films have covered.

"Scout's Honor" profiles the work of Petaluma, California, Boy Scout Steven Cozza who, at the age of 12, cofounded "Scouting for All," an organization working to change the stated Boy Scout policy of excluding openly gay members. The PBS broadcast stirred up a protest among several conservative groups adamantly opposed to not only the message of the film but the broadcast itself. People were drawn to protest by the claim that PBS should not be allowed to use taxpayer money to air point-of-view films. If the film isn't objective, they argued, it must be propaganda. The first is a familiar logic that quickly dead-ends if applied to all of the uses of taxpayer money. And the charge of subjectivity goes to the heart of what is or isn't journalism.

"P.O.V." and PBS accepted the film precisely on its merits as a fairly and accurately compiled story. It is a thoroughly researched, well-documented piece, and the filmmaker had approached the Boy Scouts numerous times requesting an interview, but was refused. As Shephard explains, "Because 'Scout's Honor' takes a position does not disqualify it as a piece of journalism. Quite the contrary: [I] took great pains to employ high standards of journalism—rigorous document and archival research, broad coverage of events and subjects, sensitivity to interviewees, special attention to the time necessary to comprehensively tell stories, engaged filmmaker/subject rapport. Ultimately, the test of 'fairness' and 'accuracy' is in the material; how does the filmmaker present the material he or she researches and collects? Does it fairly represent the positions of the characters who posit that information? Does it honor the integrity of the film's subjects and events?"

Today's journalists work under a cloud of public cynicism….

McLeod's film, "In The Light of Reverence," takes a different tack. Covering the story of three different locations where Native and non-Native communities are struggling over the use of lands sacred to the Native tribes, he uses journalistic techniques to focus on community and individual responses to the legal, tribal and economic repercussions of these controversies.

Less personality driven than issue-focused, the film nevertheless makes clear its goal of educating non-Natives about Native concerns. Meticulously researched and constructed, McLeod says, "My goal was to report a complex story of clashing world views accurately and fairly. It took 10 years to make the film so it's obviously different from daily deadline journalism and, of the two sides we portrayed, our commitment to clearly expressing the Native-American point of view might cause some to call it a 'sympathetic treatment.' But I feel strongly that it is a piece of journalism."

Both of these films used personal (and therefore subjective) testimony extensively. More than this, the films overall, because of their emphasis on certain characters or circumstances, support particular interpretations of the events. These techniques draw the viewer in and give them different ways to identify with the issue. Yet this doesn't destroy their claim as journalism. On the contrary, a point-of-view documentary is an incredibly powerful tool to bring people to stories and experiences they would otherwise never be exposed to, in ways that not only interest them intellectually but move them emotionally. Often people reexamine assumptions and attitudes in response to seeing these films.

At "P.O.V.," we encourage viewer response through online dialogues, specially produced Web sites, and a toll-free number. Our broadcasts have resulted in tremendous outpourings of sympathy for subjects of a film, offers of resources, in-depth discussions, and activities in response to the issues portrayed. We've also seen how discerning viewers are when assessing whether a film is fair and accurate. While not every "P.O.V." is journalism, or made by a journalist, the films—exploring the many and complex truths of our lives—generate a tremendous response and illustrate powerful and convincing arguments for keeping documentary journalism as a mainstay in American media. ■

Cara Mertes is executive producer of "P.O.V.," a project of American Documentary, Inc. Mertes is also an award-winning producer/director and has published in several media journals. She is a contributing editor to The Independent.

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Using Documentaries to Move People to Action

Films serve as powerful catalysts for the Television Race Initiative.

By Ellen Schneider

Storytelling has brought communities together and enabled them to pass on knowledge since the dawn of time. Yet only recently have we, using television, begun to tap the enormous power of stories to stir collective action. A finely wrought documentary can set pulses racing—striking an emotional chord elusive to other forms of journalism.

Viewers called "P.O.V.," the Public Broadcasting System's independent documentary series, to say that "Rabbit in the Moon," Emiko Omori's first-person memoir on the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II, helped them raise painful buried issues with parents who had been imprisoned. Others wrote to say that a documentary on AIDS motivated them to volunteer at a hospice. And the most successful stories resonate across racial and class lines. When "Frontline" aired a piece on the SAT and meritocracy, students from the most privileged group—organized by a white high-school student in California who was incensed by what he learned—traveled to Sacramento to oppose standardized tests that gave them an unfair advantage.

I'm fascinated by these reactions, having long wondered how these raw responses of individuals lead to public conversations, sustained inquiry, or even citizen engagement. At a time when media images are so ubiquitous, our challenge is to transform visual essays into energizing resources, ones that people not only reflect on, but act on, ones that move them from being passive consumers to active participants.

Today, facilitated by relatively cheap digital cameras and editing systems, scores of filmmakers are painstakingly researching subjects that mainstream media ignore. They're asking tough questions, searching for truth in claustrophobic editing rooms, and resisting pressure to dumb down their stories. Some cobble together the financial support to finish their work. A still smaller number find a national broadcast for their documentaries on one of few outlets for long-form journalism.

A young woman comments after a community screening of "Digital Divide," a Television Race Initiative documentary.

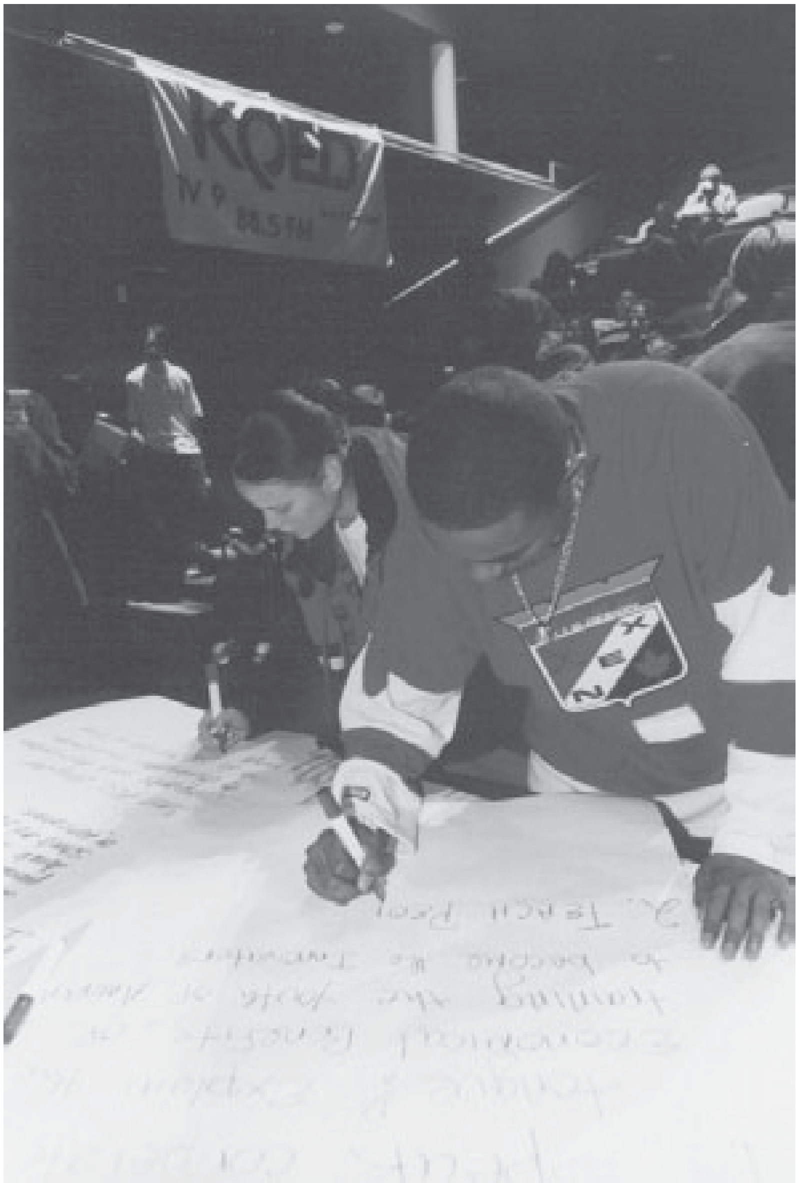
Understanding the potential such programming holds, in 1998 the Ford Foundation provided me with support to experiment with a media model that I called the Television Race Initiative (TRI). Since then, I've been working with a small team of facilitators and trainers to help a handful of communities and the public television stations that serve them use documentaries as powerful catalysts for addressing a range of local issues in which race is a factor.

The programs we've supported have been scheduled for broadcast on PBS and have ranged from long-form reportage such as "Facing the Truth with Bill Moyers," his unflinching look at South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to Orlando Bagwell's epic series, "Africans in America," to an upcoming series, "The New Americans," from the makers of "Hoop Dreams." With support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, we're now also working with documentaries that deal with issues beyond race, such as mental illness, the experience of being an adolescent girl, and handgun violence.

At TRI, we have two principal challenges: to identify documentaries and works in progress with the power to open up new ways of thinking about race or other neglected, critical and contentious issues, and to find ways of transforming raw individual responses into some group sensibility or conversation. We make a deliberate effort, in both cases, to work with as multicultural and diverse groups as possible—and, more importantly, the institutions that represent them.

In the process, we have found that the most effective films have an emotional honesty and personal voice that invite viewers to enter into a sort of relationship with the filmmaker. When we screened "P.O.V."/ Deann Borshay's film, "First Person Plural," about her U.S. adoption from Korea, for a "brain trust" of multicultural leaders, we learned that it resonated not only among people who had adopted children from other nations, but among Native Americans who protested the placement of children from the reservation into urban families.

To explore ways in which these documentaries might result in action within specific communities, we seek advice from a variety of groups. We also seek partners in commercial and print media, foundations, faith-based organizations, and community groups to host sneak previews, community dialogues, and events that help build long-term alliances.


Bay Area youth act on what they've seen in "Digital Divide."

All of these elements came together in "Well-Founded Fear," Shari Robertson and Michael Camerini's stunning, two-hour film about the process of applying for political asylum. Filmed almost entirely in offices of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), it focused on each person's effort to persuade an officer of a "well-founded fear of persecution on grounds of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion" in his or her home country. In case after harrowing case, a single interview determined who would stay in the United States and who would be sent home.

Our work with community leaders prior to the June 2000 broadcast of this documentary on "P.O.V." assured a wide range of responses afterwards. In the San Francisco Bay area, a group of clergy decided to meet with INS officials in an attempt to improve conditions in the holding areas and offices where those interviews took place. In North Carolina, asylum attorneys received offers from other lawyers to work pro bono on asylum cases. In Minnesota's Twin Cities, a community in which 75 languages are spoken, the program was the hook for organized dialogues among organizations that work with immigrant and refugee groups. In every one of these communities, conversations emerged about the "opportunity" to make one's home in the United States and about what this country could and should stand for in this new era of globalization.

Some of the documentary filmmakers who work with us do so because they are activists and want to inspire collective action. Others bring a journalistic background to their work and do not take a position on how or whether their work triggers a community response. Regardless of the filmmaker's orientation, our role in working with them remains the same: We want to encourage well-researched and powerful documentary work that offers people a way to engage in meaningful discussion about complex issues that have such an impact on how we interact with one another personally and politically. At a time when so many random bits of information are thrown at viewers from so many sources, there is abundant need for places to turn where thoughtful, engaging and sometimes provocative insights can be gleaned from visual storytelling. Those are the destinations that TRI is trying to create. ■

Ellen Schneider is executive director of "Active Voice," a division of American Documentary, Inc. She was with "P.O.V." for 10 years, most recently as executive producer.

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Documenting Social Ills With an Eye Toward Advocacy

Women's health, homophobia, domestic violence, and rape are topics mainstream media often ignore.

By Margaret Lazarus

My partner Renner Wunderlich and I approach the documentaries we produce and direct from a position of advocacy. Often a film idea begins as a roaring argument related to an issue that one or the other of us has been committed to either as an activist or supporter. We are not journalists, but what we produce arguably overlaps, in some respects, with the ways in which reporters and producers find and tell stories that touch on important issues of our time.

It was during the 1970's that Renner and I began producing and directing documentaries and public affairs programming for commercial television. It was a time when women were active in building a "movement," a time of antinuclear demonstrations and draft registration opposition. For us, there seemed too wide of a chasm between what we saw going on around us and what was considered "acceptable" television programming. We both quit our jobs and founded a nonprofit organization whose mission was essentially to create independent media that gave voice to opinions, ideas and groups that were ignored, misrepresented or trivialized by mainstream media.

We were also inspired by the "direct cinema" movement from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to create work that did not have the ubiquitous narrator, the person who told you what to think or who neatly framed the discussion in a "balanced" dance of pros and cons. This approach acted as if all questions had only two equally valid perspectives, as if very limited controversy needed to be resolved in a bicameral way. We wanted to create documentaries that challenged people to argue and express their points of view rather than passively receive information, believing that the controversy had been delineated, and then simply choosing one side or the other. We also unconsciously wanted to reproduce the far-reaching, vociferous arguments, often from many perspectives, that were part of our own learning process about critical social issues.

As we set out to do our first independent film, I was becoming interested in the growing opposition to radical mastectomy, the lack of adequate medical research on women, over-medicalized childbirth, demeaning advertising in medical publications, unnecessary hysterectomies, and in the growth of women-controlled feminist health centers. All of these interests coalesced in our documentary in an exploration of the women's health movement; our clear intention was to give "voice" to this nascent movement.

As a journalist might, we spent a lot of time researching and discovered groups engaged in similar but mostly unconnected activities. A common thread among those people we interviewed was their resistance to patriarchal medical practices. While we agreed with this sentiment (and wanted our viewers to feel the same way), frequently we decided not to include commentary by those whose research could not be independently verified.

Another journalistic approach might have been to document the absence of supporting evidence among the groups we, in the end, didn't include, but our belief was that there was already a great deal of discounting of the women's health movement, largely backed by the mainstream medical profession. What we saw as our mission was to document the serious and increasing efforts of women to regain control of their bodies from powerful forces within the medical community.

"Taking Our Bodies Back: The Women's Health Movement," our first documentary, generated great controversy. It was disqualified from the American Film Festival because members of the medical category jury believed that challenging radical mastectomies was promoting dangerous medical advice. It was not shown in medical schools and hospitals outside of coastal urban areas, but its distribution was supported by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, authors of "Our Bodies, Ourselves." They gave us their mailing list with the names of organizations that purchased multiple copies of the book, and we used it to get out word of our film.

Often our topics emerge out of our everyday experiences, as well as our curiosity. Our 1982 film, "Pink Triangles," about homophobia, emerged from an extended family argument about lesbians and gay men. Renner and I were surprised to hear otherwise "progressive" people feeling perfectly okay about labeling gays "abnormal," a term they would have been uncomfortable applying to other social groups. This seemed a useful topic to explore. We began our usual research process seeking out educators and activists engaged with this particular issue. We then decided to create a nine-member "collective" of lesbian, gay, bisexual and straight men and women to produce this documentary about homophobia.

In the past, Renner and I have been solely responsible for both the content and form of our work, but in the spirit of this project we believed the subject would be best served by opening the process to people with direct experience. For a year we met weekly and divided up the research. By consensus, we came up with a rough plan of what aspects of homophobia were important to include, then agreed on potential interviewees and image segments. After film was shot, we reduced the transcript to file cards and as a group arranged and rearranged the sequences. Even though this process took six months, it was the only way all nine of us could participate in the editing because there were too many of us to use the small film-editing table.

Renner and I were the only members of the group who had any prior filmmaking experience, and often the group deferred to our ideas about film subjects, interviewing and editing. But we'd never been on the receiving end of homophobia and deferred to others' ideas about the relative importance of particular issues, the credibility of interviewees, and the significance of the statements they made. We loved this collective process and sought it out again when we produced other films.

"Defending Our Lives," our 1993 documentary about the magnitude and severity of domestic violence, began as a request from Stacey Kabat, an advocate for the victims of domestic violence. Stacey and I were part of a women's organization, and she told me about her work at a local prison. She had found a group of female inmates who were incarcerated for killing their abusers, and she wanted some taped interviews from them that she could send to a national conference on domestic violence. She thought that this was important because domestic violence organizations were not particularly receptive to hearing about these women. Cases like theirs generated a great deal of controversy even within women's advocacy organizations.

Renner and I went to the Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Framingham to make an unedited tape for this conference. We left knowing that we had to make a film about these women's stories and about how severe a problem domestic violence is. Stacey became a co-producer and co-director with us, and she went on to found an organization that worked actively for the release of these incarcerated women. Using a human rights model, she also began to document, on a regional level, the extraordinary number of women who were killed by their abusers. Renner, Stacey and I clearly wanted to support the efforts to reduce domestic violence. But others who shared these goals had questions about applying the idea of self-defense to the actions of women who killed their abusers.

Debate raged within our production group as well. Was there such a thing as justifiable homicide? Did the women we were about to interview believe their lives to be in danger and felt they had no other option but to kill? Was battered woman syndrome a reasonable legal option? Or should the focus be self-defense? Most important, how did this relatively small number of women who killed their abusers relate to the thousands of women and family members who were being killed every year by batterers?

We spent a great deal of time with each woman and independently investigated what she said. No academic or legal experts were asked to comment in the film on their innocence or guilt. Though we had to edit many hours of interviews into a 30-minute film, we did not cut out sections that would reflect poorly on their credibility. Our editing goal was to convey to the viewer the essence of their experience.

As expected, this documentary also generated controversy. Despite winning an Academy Award, "Defending Our Lives" was rejected for broadcast by PBS because "one of the members of the production team [Stacey] was a member of an advocacy organization [Battered Women Fighting Back, composed of Stacey and eight incarcerated women] who had a vested interest in the subject of the documentary." Of course, the irony of this is that PBS airs countless programs produced by former and future industry consultants and political operatives. I believe what PBS really objected to was the fact that our bias was not hidden behind a careful selection of experts and a "pro and con" narration. What we thought, as its producers, was up-front and obvious for the viewer to support or reject.

Bias in mainstream media is something we've addressed in a series of documentaries. "Beyond Killing Us Softly," produced in 2000, explores the connection between negative representations of women and girls in the media and their sense about themselves, their body image, and possible connections to violence against women. Clearly, this film was not about presenting the good and bad and arriving at some kind of consensus opinion. We were tackling head-on what we saw as embedded ideology in media images, then commenting on them from the perspective of recent writings about girls' and women's psychological development by researchers such as Drs. Carol Gilligan, Valerie Batts, and Catherine Steiner-Adair.

We are currently in production on a documentary about rape. Our approach is to explore new developments, such as the first-ever classification of rape as a war crime by the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague. Rape as a crime against humanity has now found acceptance when rape is committed as an act of war. But what about rape by an acquaintance or the rape of a child by a family member? As in the past, we will do the research necessary to make certain our potential subjects are credible and honest. Once they pass that scrutiny, we will not alter their stories to make them more believable or appropriate.

As with all of our documentaries, no one watching will emerge from the experience not knowing our viewpoint as producers and as advocates. If objectivity and balance are the test of journalism, then our work doesn't qualify. But if fairness and solid reporting are the benchmarks of journalists' work, then our work as documentarians has a home in this community of those whose job it is to question what we see and hear around us. ■

Margaret Lazarus is an independent documentary filmmaker who works in Massachusetts. The films she has produced and directed with Renner Wunderlich include, among others, the "Killing Us Softly" series, "Strong at the Broken Places" (1998), and "Defending Our Lives" (1993).

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Long-Form Documentaries Serve a Vital Journalistic Role

Today's complexities don't fit into tidy news magazine packages.

By Robert Richter

If the famous Edward R. Murrow/Fred Friendly documentary about Senator Joseph McCarthy had been merely a 10- or 12-minute segment of a newsmagazine show, the Wisconsin "Commie-hunter" today might rival Strom Thurmond as the oldest member of the U.S. Senate. Instead, that one-hour McCarthy exposé is credited by historians with helping put the nail in the political coffin of a man, and the era named after him, for his demagogic ways. It is a great example of the adage about an informed citizenry being necessary for democracy to work.

I found the McCarthy investigation so powerful when I first saw it back in the 1950's that I swore to myself I would do everything I could to become a Murrow/Friendly documentary producer. In my youthful fervor I had no doubt I was destined to become part of their team. It took 10 years for my dream to become reality.

I believed then, and still do, that the best of those CBS documentary hours exemplified one of the most important ways of alerting people to the vital issues and realities of their time. I remain convinced that a major responsibility of broadcast journalism is to present this kind of documentary programming, especially in today's increasingly complex world.

Of course, that McCarthy program was telecast when there were only three or four channels to choose among. With fewer television choices it was a lot easier to get the nation's attention. Today, with the explosion of communications technologies, media mergers, specialized cable outlets, and the growing role of the Internet, it is virtually impossible to expect Americans to sit up and take national notice of almost anything except scandal.

The media masters who control broadcast journalism are failing in their incredibly important responsibility of informing the American people about major issues in meaningful ways. It clearly is more essential for Americans to learn about and understand tough, complex realities than to be dumbed down to with a million pieces of commercially profitable trivia that fill the airwaves.

As a broadcast journalist, I love the challenge of "connecting the dots" so that the big picture is revealed and the audience can gain greater insights into what is a prime mission of journalism: to report on how important institutions really work—and why. That's become my mission, as well.

The first two-hour documentary on PBS's "Nova" was my "A Plague on Our Children." It was about toxic wastes like dioxin and PCB's, how they are created and how communities around the country (Love Canal et al.) were trying to deal with these poisons. The program raised so many industry hackles that a Wall Street Journal editorial questioned my patriotism. This effort to inform, explain and question what was happening and why won a duPont-Columbia Broadcast Journalism award.

Similar documentary efforts I've made tackled other perplexing problems and did so in ways that revealed the complexities of both the actions and potential consequences.

- A two-hour PBS independent special, "Can Tropical Rainforests be Saved?" traced the complicated causes and effects of what it means to try to save these extraordinary forests.
- A 90-minute PBS presentation, "Hungry for Profit," peered into global agribusiness and how it affects farmers, consumers and the land in Asia, Africa and Latin America.
- "Do Not Enter: the Visa War Against Ideas" explored the McCarran Walter Act's denial of U.S. visas on political grounds to a variety of individuals in many countries.
- "For Export Only" investigated the export to the developing world of pesticides and pharmaceuticals that are banned for use in our part of the world. It also won a duPont-Columbia award.

Each of these documentaries began with a central premise: a belief there is journalistic value in "thinking globally" and comprehensively demonstrating how people are affected and act in these kinds of situations.

Today there probably is no better way to reach a large audience with vital information than with Ed Bradley, Steve Kroft, Morley Safer, Mike Wallace, Leslie Stahl, and the rest of that venerable "60 Minutes" news team. They represent present-day broadcast journalism at its best. But I am certain that each of them—and Andy Rooney—would acknowledge that the format they employ is not the only way, or even the best way, to deal with some issues. At times, it seems, they are trapped in a style of reporting that exploits who they are more than it reveals the subjects they cover. Show business has always been an element of broadcast journalism and, while it probably always will be, there are other valid and valuable ways to deal with what journalism should be about, ways that have gotten lost in the quest for ratings and profits.

The world is not getting simpler to understand, but most of those who control what is reported are not interested in complexity. The reason: To make what is complicated able to be understood, and potentially acted upon, eats up valuable airtime. There are incredibly important issues, such as the debates about global warming, or ethical dilemmas such as stem cell research, that deserve major attention and are ill-suited for today's shorter news magazine segment, a format designed to incite rather than provide insight. The result: Virtually all of today's broadcast journalists either completely ignore in-depth stories on such issues or touch on only a peripheral or sensational angle.

There are all kinds of prime-time television shows today that cover snippets of reality, and the commercial success of "60 Minutes" or its many clones, ranging from their own "60 Minutes II" to "Dateline" to "Inside Edition," can't be ignored. But too often their "investigations" are little more than "featurettes." What the long-form, prime-time documentary offers is the unique opportunity to weave together facts and present patterns of activity—in short, to create an understandable context—that simply cannot be as reliably constructed or communicated in briefer segments. The public deserves and needs to know more than they can learn in isolated presentations of news.

To take one example, there is a little known and often hidden history connected to what the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and World Trade Organization (WTO) have been doing, good or bad, and their actions that affect billions of people. Since November 1999, more than 50 protests about their policies have taken place in more than 15 countries with well over one million people protesting those policies. They're not all loonies or radical anarchists as one might conclude from watching snippets of broadcast reporting, in which demonstrators are seen breaking down fences and the police are seen responding. These pictures and sound bites have been squeezed into 60-second or shorter news reports, one demonstration at a time, wherever in the world it has happened.

Is this good enough? Do these reports help viewers understand what the real issues are that these people are protesting? Do they tell us who is behind the protests and what links protesting groups in different countries? And what do these protests mean for Americans? It is increasingly dangerous to claim the American public is not interested in learning more about these global power brokers and their dissenters. And if the public was to begin to understand how these issues fit together, they will have more interest in learning how the World Bank, IMF and WTO policies and practices affect them and other countries and what others are doing about it. When, as citizens, we don't know how major institutions like these really work—and their powerful effect on the lives of ordinary people—we are unable to play the necessary role of watchdog that our democracy demands.

Focusing on one country, making it representative of the issue, could be an interesting approach, but that ignores a major aspect of the story: The pattern of actions by these financial giants is global in nature and should be understood in global terms. Investigating and documenting that pattern is a journalistic challenge. More than 10 years ago, before the protests, I took on that challenge, but PBS said my documentary had "a bias in favor of the poor" and wouldn't run it. But that 90-minute documentary, "The Money Lenders," ran in prime time all over Western Europe, the Middle East and Latin America, and is still being seen at hundreds of universities all over the United States.

Another example: The Bush Administration has been calling for more nuclear power to relieve what they claim is an energy crisis. Since that White House plea, has anyone in television put together a documentary on how nuclear power really works, how "safe" it has been or may be in the future, and what can be done to cope with the radioactive materials that are accumulating? A skilled producer and editor might tackle aspects of this story in a shorter format, but to present this story with a well-rounded and clear account would require, in my view, at least an hour.

In the mid-1970's, I examined these questions for the PBS "Nova" series, and the manufacturers of nuclear power plants tried to keep my report off the air. One of those manufacturers, General Electric, now owns NBC. For viewers who saw my documentary, "Incident at Browns Ferry," the disasters a few years later at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl would not have been a surprise.

PBS, the last bastion of the occasional long-form documentary, is torn between airing an occasional gutsy documentary and trying to build audiences. Perhaps there should be two PBS networks. One would be geared toward entertainment and audience ratings, and its profits would fund the other, which would be for ITVS [Independent Television Service] and other independent programs. This would provide a home for the many issues that PBS now will not squeeze into its ratings-driven schedule.

In a nation in which the quality of public education has been arguably declining, there must be more airtime made available for long-form documentaries that focus on the vital issues of our time, regardless of the possible short-term loss in advertising revenue. Only with this kind of responsible reporting can democracy be made to work better for all of us. ■

Robert Richter is the last producer from the Murrow/Friendly "CBS Reports" unit actively making documentaries, long-form when possible. A former New York Times reporter, his documentaries also have been on NBC, ABC, PBS, TBS and Discovery. Three were duPont-Columbia Broadcast Journalism award-winners and two received the Science Journalism Award from the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Information about his documentaries can be found at www.richtervideos.com.

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Using the Drama of Cinéma Vérité to Tell Real Stories

It often conveys news, but is it journalism?

By Chris Hegedus

Since the mid-1970's, I've collaborated with D.A. Pennebaker on movies that follow the drama of real life stories. Being immersed in people's lives when they're doing what they care passionately about, when risks are great and stakes are high, is a thrilling adventure. Whether our "cinéma vérité" filmmaking approach is related to what journalists do, I'm not sure. But what we share with every reporter is the desire to pursue and tell real stories. And how our films portray these stories seems quite similar to how narrative journalists convey theirs.

My first film job was photographing burn surgery for a doctor regarded as one of the best in his field. Suddenly I was thrust into a world I knew nothing about, and I realized that my camera was granting me access to situations I would never normally have been allowed to watch. The operating room was raw, chaotic, intense and often funny. But I was not there to evoke the kind of drama seen on ER: My job was to record accurately, as only the camera can, the surgical processes so they could be later studied. I was showing what happened as it happened and not trying to recall it with words.

Yet the natural drama of the operating room—its tension broken by occasional jokes—was not lost on me or by the camera. With neither script nor actors, what I was recording was as exciting as anything I had ever watched on television, with one important addition—it was not created but real. That's when I knew that I wanted to make films about real events with characters that people could identify with, who spoke naturally rather than memorizing scripted dialogue. There were stories with an inherent dramatic structure, the kind that writers of fiction struggle mightily to design.

I knew drama was essential to making films work, so in this respect I wanted mine to be theatrical. And, like great narrative theater, I wanted drama, not information, to be its goal. To create our films, we edit images together, constructing scenes and condensing time to tell the story. In this sense, our films become works of the imagination, though they are driven by reality. And when they are finished, they take the audience into situations they could never envision without the camera taking them there.

Our films—such as "The War Room" (a portrayal of the political hub of Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign)—resemble journalism because the characters we follow are real, not invented. Our stories happened. Our characters exist. Perhaps the strongest aspect of our method is that we allow the audience to experience for themselves what is taking place in front of them. We seldom interview; instead, we let our characters define themselves by their own words and actions. The stories follow real time events, with little or no narration, and the climax and resolution are motivated by the drama inherent in witnessed events.

We differ most from journalism in our reluctance to retell the story through a narrator, or even a witness, whose version we would have to accept as the truth. When viewers watch "The War Room," they are not being told what it was like to be in that situation. They are there, in that room along with James Carville and George Stephanopolous. The film doesn't tell viewers what to think about Carville; it lets each form an opinion by watching him confront people and events.

"Startup.com," a recent film co-directed with Jehane Noujaim, follows the adventures of two young aspiring entrepreneurs. Despite the barrage of stories by journalists about the dot-com mania, I think our film caught people's interest because it put a dynamic human perspective on the news stories. Viewers feel as though they are there with the film's protagonists as they raise millions of dollars, then struggle to fight off the competition that could bring down their fledgling company. Some might root for their success while others might hope for their demise. For us, the power of the camera—peering into lives in ways that reveal intense emotion—provides all the explanation their story needs. The film *is* their story.

An aspect of our filmmaking that sometimes makes journalists uneasy is the relationship we have with our subjects. What is most important to us is access, the kind of open access many people are reluctant to offer. Without securing this access, we'll be able to do nothing that most TV or print journalism doesn't already do. This access cannot be bought. It is a complete compliance between the filmmakers and their protagonists. By letting us witness their lives, our characters have the possibility of watching themselves in their careers when the ride is roughest and their bets the highest. We do not consider our arrangement to be adversarial. We look for people who know how to do whatever they do very well, perhaps better than most.

To induce them to allow us into their lives, they must trust us. They must also be convinced that the film we are making will be their film as well, so when we offer to show them the final version before its release, which we always do, we are not asking them to re-edit or remove embarrassing things from it. We want them to look at it for accuracy and to point out errors and possible mistakes that we can correct.

The intimacy we were able to capture in "Startup.com" that so intrigued audiences was the result of the access provided by Jehane, who had been a roommate of one of our main characters. This sort of situation might easily compromise the integrity of the film, so we approached the process carefully, aware of the benefits as well as the pitfalls. However, we remain convinced that when our characters are focused on what they are doing, especially when the stakes are high, our presence has very little effect on their actions.

Our arrangement with our characters is almost always a handshake, but in some instances, where the legal risk is high, we have signed agreements limiting their exposure and ours. In "Startup.com" our agreement with the two characters and the corporation limited their objections to any scenes that inadvertently revealed company secrets or something that would be demonstrably injurious to the company in a major way. This was a broad, somewhat ambiguous right of approval, but since the company had just raised $60 million—and our subjects were responsible to board members and investors—this type of vetting was necessary to get the access we needed. The agreement was risky for us as filmmakers, especially if the subjects had decided later on to be uncooperative. In the end, the stock market crash worked to our advantage. When the company went into bankruptcy and was sold we no longer needed to be as concerned about the company's right of approval.

With "The War Room" we simply agreed to show the finished film to Carville and Stephanopolous before we did anything with it. Our main concern was with matters of accuracy. We had no intention of having them re-edit anything else in the film, nor of course would they. No clear-headed politician wants to get caught with his hand on the editing machine.

As filmmakers, it is crucial to be able to function independently and not be tied to a network. This gives us the freedom to find and follow the story and characters as we go along. For example, our original intention in "The War Room" was to watch a man become President. When it became clear that access to the candidates (both George Bush and Bill Clinton) would be limited and that our story would be relegated to the Clinton campaign staff, we were initially discouraged. How saleable would a film be about the staff of the losing candidate? It's always a gamble for us because we don't know what is going to happen. But if we're lucky, a character will emerge who is as charismatic as James Carville.

During that election, the majority of broadcasters were content to aim their cameras at candidates walking in and out of hotels and airplanes for nightly news coverage. We took a different path. Our access in "The War Room" was unique because that room was off limits to the press, so that we had to identify ourselves as guests and never step outside (if we could help it) for fear of not getting back in. In the end, the film was interesting for this very reason. No one had bothered to tell this story, and audiences were curious to see the people who had engineered this incredible campaign.

It is also important to remain independent in order to film the whole story and not be pressured to compromise a story because of programming constraints. I learned this the hard way in a film we made for British TV about auto entrepreneur John DeLorean, who was building his stainless steel, gull-winged car in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, life does not always progress at a pace that is convenient for broadcast schedules. A month before British TV was set to air the DeLorean show, we were warned that something crucial was going to happen to the company. Unable to reschedule the broadcast, the station aired the show as it was. A few days later the papers exposed a financial scandal that eventually destroyed the company. A year later, DeLorean himself was busted for dealing cocaine. Missing the end of this story was a painful lesson, one that I did not want to repeat.

"Startup.com" was accepted in the prestigious Sundance Film Festival, a valuable launching forum for independent films seeking theatrical distribution and critical exposure. We were delighted and proceeded to complete the film technically. At this point, our film had a different ending. Within the next few weeks, it became apparent that the company was in trouble. I knew that we had to continue filming the story and see our characters through to the end, even if it meant giving up the opportunity to launch the film at Sundance. The company's future was decided on January 1, two weeks before the film festival began. Fortunately, Sundance allowed us to project the film in video instead of the normally required 35mm blowup. This was fortuitous because not only were we able to tell the story that happened, but the festival gave the film the boost it needed to compete in the marketplace.

We try to release our films in theaters, where they will be dealt with seriously by film critics and given, we hope, a leg up the highly competitive ladder of distribution. There, people expect to see drama, not news, and this creates an aura about the film that helps in its promotion. A danger of this strategy lies in the temptation to overdramatize our story to help it compete with other films. This, I believe, is precisely the challenge many in print and TV journalism confront today because of demands of ratings and advertising—how to ensure the integrity of material while pushing for broader distribution.

Releasing a film theatrically allows us to show it the way we intended artistically, without censorship or editing by layers of management along the way. And theaters do not get the same government scrutiny as radio and television. This is, of course, particularly important for films with politically controversial subject matter. However, it also affects subjects as apparently harmless as music. "Monterey Pop," a film we did in 1967 that was funded in part by ABC television, was screened in rough for people at ABC. They deemed Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin's performances unsuitable for family viewing and told us they would not show the film on their network. We bought the film back and turned to theatrical release to earn our expenses back. "Pop" was one of the first concert films to have a successful theatrical exhibition—

and launched the careers of Hendrix and Joplin—as well as paving the way for the movie "Woodstock." Ironically, a year later, after a popular theatrical run, ABC bought the film for showing on their movie hour.

Without a theatrical distribution, both "The War Room" and "Startup.com" would not have had such wide and positive critical response. When looking for funding for these films, all the major networks rejected our proposal, and in the case of "The War Room" we were also turned down by every foundation we turned to, including the NEA. Because television did not welcome our independent production, we were forced to film the stories on our own. But with no network to overrule us, we were also able to release them ourselves in theaters. Again, this distribution brought a special value to all of their eventual sales.

One interesting aspect of distributing a film theatrically is its effect on the film's longevity. After their initial run in theaters, films are often sold to television in this country as well as abroad. Home video and DVD extend their shelf lives for years. Unlike news reports about the Clinton campaign or the Internet revolution, our films are viewed for years, transforming them into historical retrospectives. And, as time passes, films are seen differently. For example, "The War Room" begins with Clinton denying an affair with Gennifer Flowers. Now that we know, by his own admission, that he did have such an affair, the beginning of the film takes on a new perspective. "Startup.com" was similarly overtaken by events. When the film was test screened for the distributor, dot-coms were the epitome of successful investment. By the time the film went into theatrical distribution six months later, the majority of Internet startups had failed. This gave us valuable marketing relevance; it transformed a "Will they succeed?" story into one in which every action of our young entrepreneurs seemed like a prelude to failure.

I suspect that our films and journalism share similar goals. Both want to inform, challenge and move audiences. The art of our work lies in letting audiences experience life through the lives of others as seen through the vigilant camera and the observant eyes and ears of the reporter. ■

Chris Hegedus is an independent filmmaker based in New York City. In 1994 "The War Room" was nominated for an Academy Award and cited as Best Documentary by the National Board of Review. "Startup.com" continues to play in theaters around the country and will be released on video and DVD in the fall. Her company's Web site is PennebakerHegedusFilms.com.

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Documentary Filmmakers Decide How to Present Compelling Evidence

Using film to tell a story changes nearly everything.

By Michael Rabiger

Similarities abound between the reporting methods used by documentary filmmakers and print journalists. But the results are regarded differently, with more people believing the documentary is more objective. The information on the screen often seems unmediated and more reliable. This perception is in part a holdover from television's early years when its elder statesmen—Edward R. Murrow, Walter Cronkite—assumed the stance of objectivity. Documentary also seemed impartial because an inanimate instrument like a movie camera, taking "truth 24 times a second," seemed incapable of deception. Film (including video) is always in the present tense, while print journalism tends to reside in the reflective past tense.

But this perception of impartiality omits the human element. It is, after all, a human decision—an insertion of subjectivity—that places a camera in a particular location, chooses a lens by which to render space and perspective, selects a recording medium, each with its own bias in color and contrast, and decides when to turn the camera on. In the editing room, there are choices to be made about what material is significant and the order and juxtaposition of segments on the screen.

Documentary journalists use a variety of techniques to try to effectively bring viewers into contact with a subject, whether it be famine, family ordeals, or farmers confronting hoof-and-mouth disease. At the core of any approach is the presentation of compelling evidence, and this evidence can be gathered differently. Filmmakers working on issue-oriented documentaries might use a passive, observational style for events that tell themselves, use active, probing interviews where useful, or even bring two parties into confrontation to develop and present the crux of the information. In character-driven documentaries, a particular character or group is chosen to generate the basic situation, then followed and perhaps interrogated over time to illustrate the situation's causes and its consequences.

What emerges, after editing, is never actuality but an artfully constructed impression of it, for all documentaries, even the most spontaneous, are constructs. Typically, authorship of a documentary rests with a team, the film ultimately representing their shared experience and perspective. This process starts as soon as they decide what images to collect for their film's bank of visual and aural records, which are infused with the values, beliefs, circumstances and instruments current at the time of recording and editing.

Nearly every documentary relies on people who appear on camera as part of the story. From their perspective, the hope is that pertinent truths—as they understand them—survive the process of filming or reporting. But can the journalist or documentarian be trusted to accurately represent these truths?

When film is an intermediary, this question can become more difficult to answer. While a reporter *conducts* an interview, a camera *takes* footage. Taking and using is at the heart of documentary filmmaking and so, unfortunately, is misrepresenting, though it happens differently with film than it does in print. In reading an article, actions are described, voices are imagined. What gets lost are dense layers of meaning that the person conveyed vocally, facially and bodily. In the hands of skillful writers, these will be selectively implied, but to exist they depend on a writer's sensitivity to nuance. The same transaction, captured by the camera, gets it all the first time, and the footage can be searched afterwards for deeper layers of meaning.

In making the BBC film "The Battle of Cable Street," about the 1930's British fascist leader Sir Oswald Mosley, I learned most from running and rerunning sections of the interview. His paternal habit of widening his eyes when telling you certain things became more and more sinister as my editor and I realized when and why he did it.

A most extreme case of what a documentary can reveal—and perhaps set in motion—was Alan and Susan Raymond's series in the 1970's, "An American Family." While filming the daily lives of the Louds, a family chosen as representative of American white middle-class life, the son announced that he is gay, the husband proved a compulsive womanizer, the wife filed for divorce, and the family went into meltdown.

When the series went on the air, critics and audiences alike were convinced that manipulative filming and the family's desire to make a high dramatic impression had colluded to create these changes. And who knows that they were entirely wrong? All observation changes what is being observed, but being filmed 14 hours a day for seven months probably changes it more than most. When the Louds signed on, they were unaware of the crucible they were entering, although the Raymonds insist they duly warned them.

The public outcry surely affected how family members saw themselves on the screen. The Louds did not see the filmmakers' perspective emerging until the programs were broadcast and, as a result, began to see each other in a different light. Shocked to discover what had been created from their input, some of the family objected bitterly, saying they felt like victims of alchemy and treachery. Lives were wrecked, careers broken, and for years the cause of the intimate TV documentary seemed irretrievable.

Like journalism, documentary filmmaking relies on distilling a story from what is remembered or recorded and involves reduction, simplification, rearrangement and re-creation—all hazardous to the truth. Who is to say that my notes and memories of an event coincide with those of anyone else who was present? Journalism is research and memory, assisted by notes and resting on subjectivity. Diligent journalists check facts and consult numerous sources to gain the increased perspective of multiple versions, but the writer's point of view can only be minimized, never eliminated.

It is less easy to quarrel with a filmed record, but responsible documentarians feel accountable for fairness *to* their subjects and being fair *about* them—seldom the same thing, as the Louds found out. By their nature, documentary films often transform what is messy and contradictory in life into tidy and effective narrative. For example, if a film crew follows a person who is trying to buy a house, and a second film crew concurrently follows the sellers, there are now two strands of story to be intercut. Placing the salient parts of each story against one another—the buyer deliberating while the seller decides on the price—creates a juxtaposition for which no arbiter exists. A single decision during editing can make the seller appear venal and the buyers naive, or vice versa. Films contain dozens of such juxtapositions, and similar ones are certainly possible in print, as well.

The impulse to record and transmit truth always faces compromise because it rests on the quirks of memory, on ethics, on the ability to draw a wider perspective, and on the enduring need to tell a good story even when representing the real world. Knowing this, during the past two decades some documentarians have tried to show not only the result of their work but how they created it, and so have examined and shared the deceptions that reality, and films about reality, practice upon their makers and audiences alike.

Such transparency of the process by which documentaries are made is encouraging since, as with journalism, the more the public understands how a story is constructed, the more likely they are to ascribe fairness to it. And this is, after all, more than objectivity—is, after all, what journalists and documentary filmmakers should strive to produce. ■

Michael Rabiger was a founding member of the BBC Oral History series "Yesterday's Witness" and is the author of "Directing: Film Techniques & Aesthetics," "Directing the Documentary," and "Developing Story Ideas." During the past four years, he has chaired the film/video department at Columbia College in Chicago.

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Journalist's Trade

Cutbacks. Lay-offs. Buyouts. Early retirement packages. Offered under different names and circumstances, the bottom-line objectives are similar: trim the staff to keep the enterprise afloat. Few journalistic homes have been spared cuts in staff during this economic slump, though newspapers, especially those belonging to the Knight Ridder chain, are experiencing deeper and more rancorous downsizings. We ask, in this issue, whether such cutbacks mark the correct path to long-term survival and what effect they have on the content and quality of the journalism being produced.

Thrity Umrigar, who writes for the Akron Beacon Journal, a Knight Ridder newspaper, takes us inside the newsroom during this year's second round of staff cutbacks. She writes of its funereal atmosphere: "And, indeed, something had died—that naive and idealistic belief that the folks who ran newspaper companies realized that theirs was more than a business—it was a sacred charge." **Jim Naughton**, president of The Poynter Institute who held numerous editor positions at The Philadelphia Inquirer (a Knight Ridder paper), tallies up the losses from cutbacks at his old paper and shares concern about how they jeopardize that paper's high-quality journalism. **Chuck Laszewski**, a projects reporter at the St. Paul Pioneer Press (a Knight Ridder paper), reports that the corporate decisions to reduce the newshole size, cut sections, and remove bodies "to keep profit margins astonishingly high, won't leave much of a newspaper for our readers to use." **Deborah Howell**, Washington bureau chief for Newhouse Newspapers, describes Knight Ridder budget seminars she attended as an editor at the St. Paul paper. Though she knows more about how journalism is financed, "it's not the reason I got into it. It's not the reason I stay in it," she writes. Working now for a privately held company, she reports that "I am lucky. I haven't had to do anything this year that I think is wrong or long-range stupid…." **William W. Sutton, Jr.**, a deputy managing editor of The News & Observer in Raleigh, North Carolina, urges corporate media leaders to keep the value of staff diversity in mind as cuts are considered.

Media analyst **John Morton** examines how newspaper owners react to the tug of Wall Street pressures and the consequences that decisions made today might have a few years down the road. McClatchy Company president and CEO **Gary Pruitt** explains why pleasing shareholders at his company has meant neither newshole nor staff cutbacks. And **Jay Smith**, president of Cox Newspapers, describes how a privately held company reacts to economic hard times with fresh approaches to news coverage. Michigan State journalism professor **Stephen Lacy** links changes in societal trends—public ownership, decline of newspaper competition, societal diversification, and growth of electronic media—to the financial decisions that confront newspaper executives today. **Gilbert Cranberg**, co-author of "Taking Stock: Journalism and the Publicly Traded Newspaper Company," suggests workable ways that issues of journalistic quality can be become central to the decisions made by corporate directors. **Joseph Bower**, professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, describes the special strengths of newspapers and writes that decision-making by corporate leaders should never imperil newsgathering that lies at the heart of its enterprise's unique mission within its community. "Credible news presented to attract readers is the golden goose," he writes. "For that reason it should be at the core of any sensible economic decision-making about the newspaper business." ■

A Feeling of Being Set Adrift

At the Akron Beacon Journal, more buyouts create more uncertainty.

By Thrity Umrigar

The atmosphere is carnival-like. There is a joviality in the room, an hysterical hilarity that has been missing from my newsroom for many months. For a few minutes, I am stunned, angry even, at this abrupt change in mood. We have just been told that the Akron Beacon Journal is looking to offer buyouts to 14 newsroom employees in an attempt to further reduce staff. And yet the atmosphere is totally different than it was at the staff meeting a few months earlier when tearful, grim-faced editors announced the first-ever layoffs in the paper's history.

Cynically, I think, "Nothing like tossing around a few thousand bucks to make people forget that this buyout is merely a layoff with sugar coating."

We are in the J.S.K. room, named after legendary Beacon Journal editor John S. Knight. I turn to the person sitting behind me. "Wow," I say, with the proper degree of sarcasm. "Can't remember the last time we had so many folks in this room without anyone luring us with free food."

My colleague's eyes are steady and serious. "Take a good look around," he says. "It's probably the last time there will be so many people gathered in this room."

His words land like a punch to the stomach. Now when I look around the room, I see it with new eyes. I hear the bitterness behind the jokes, see that what I thought was hilarity is actually a kind of desperate fatalism. The truth is this: By the end of July, our newsroom will lose 14 more people. This, in addition to the eight laid off in April and the nine others who took voluntary resignations. Since the buyout rewards seniority, we will lose the kind of experience, wisdom and institutional memory that make newspapers great. The thought saddens and scares me.

To some degree, the buyout announcement alters the landscape of the newsroom. For the first time in months, the heavy depression that descended like a fog after the first round of cuts seems to lift. I'm not sure why that is. Perhaps it is the thought that, unlike the first round of layoffs, which affected the newest and most vulnerable hires, this buyout will benefit some of our colleagues. Whatever the reason, the mood is different.

Earlier this year, coming to work daily had felt like attending a close friend's funeral. And, indeed, something had died—that naive and idealistic belief that the folks who ran newspaper companies realized that theirs was more than a business—it was a sacred charge. A fellow reporter said it best: "How strange it is," she mused. "This paper made it through the Depression and World War II without laying anyone off. And now we can't survive a lousy recession."

My colleagues spoke openly about seeing therapists and starting to take antidepressants. Editors told reporters they would help them find jobs if they wanted to leave, and reporters shared information about available jobs. The lines between "us" and "them" blurred and disappeared as senior management walked around looking as ashen and shell-shocked as the rest of us felt; like us, they admitted to anger, disillusionment and powerlessness.

There was a feeling of having been set adrift, as if some invisible hand had cut loose our belief in the invincibility of the press. Our shoulders sagged and that defiant, optimistic spirit that had always made the Beacon Journal "The Little Paper That Could" seemed to disappear. With apprehension, we watched our shrinking newshole—we had already lost our beloved Sunday magazine in January—and wondered about our new, scaled-back role. Reporters complained about how light and flimsy the Sunday paper felt compared with that of our competitor, The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer. The news staff was reorganized; beats such as social issues were folded in with other beats. Some reporters were suddenly told to cover ludicrously wide geographical areas. The worst part was looking in the eye the eight colleagues who were to be laid-off, knowing that the day of their departure was fast approaching.

Spurts of defiance occasionally tore through our despair. The entire newsroom wore black the day Knight Ridder executives visited the newsroom. We handed these same officials a long list of concerns and pointed questions. We sent Tony Ridder letters and a stack of clips of work done by our laid-off colleagues. When Jay Harris resigned as the publisher of the San Jose Mercury News, our newsroom sent him flowers. But once it was clear that Knight Ridder would not even extend us the courtesy of responding to our questions in a respectful way, our spirits sank again.

Some of us told ourselves that the whole process was an invaluable political education—an insider's look at the workings of a system based on pleasing the masters of Wall Street. After all, what was happening was being replicated throughout the industry. Reading Kamala Markandaya's "Nectar in the Sieve" I was struck at the parallel between the feudal system that allowed Indian landowners to take the same percentage of the sharecroppers' yield, regardless of famine or flood, and the capitalist system that allows Wall Street to expect the same percentage of profits through good times and bad.

But cynicism and disillusionment is against the nature of most journalists because journalism is ultimately an idealistic profession. It is based on the hopeful belief that if readers know the truth, they will make intelligent, informed decisions that will change things for the better. The power of the pen, the freedom of the press, the First Amendment, are optimistic, even joyous, ideals.

And so it was that the winter of our discontent passed. No, that is too simplistic a reading of our current situation. Rather, our discontent has changed to a different kind of defiance, a kind of self-reliance. The Society of Professional Journalists recently named us "Best Newspaper in Ohio." Even while we celebrate the honor, we realize that the award was based on last year's work. But we're going to try to bring home that prize next year, too, with or without corporate's support. After all, it is those of us who are in Akron who have been charged to uphold John S. Knight's proud legacy.

Yet there can be no question that our coverage has shrunk. Most of the time, reporters don't even bother to ask if we can report on out-of-state events because the answer is inevitably no. And there is a real fear that once the 14 people leave, we are going to have to redefine who and what we are. Indeed, we are living in a state of suspension, waiting for the other shoe to drop as the deadline for the buyouts looms.

But there's an old rule in urban planning—when you can't build out, you build up. The Beacon Journal may no longer be able to build out—the entire state may no longer be our trampling ground, as it once was. But nobody can stop us from building upward. And when you do that, the sky is the limit. ■

Thrity Umrigar, a 2000 Nieman Fellow, writes about medical issues for the Akron Beacon Journal. Her new novel, "Bombay Time," was recently published by Picador USA/ St. Martin's Press.

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The Philadelphia Inquirer: Cuts Jeopardize Quality

'One of journalism's top destinations has become a departure lounge.'

By Jim Naughton

Despite a reputation for puckish behavior, the reason I wore a brown dinosaur costume at The Philadelphia Inquirer in late 1995 had nothing to do with our newsroom antics. Nor did I intend to symbolize acceptance of the muddle-headed view that newspapers are becoming extinct. I needed something in which I might hide while announcing that I would step down from a job I loved as an editor, the hardest thing I've ever done. I didn't want anyone to notice if I started bawling.

One of my stated reasons for resigning was to get out of the way of younger leaders. The Inquirer was full of them: brilliant editors who understood that it took time, resources and encouragement to gather and tell the most important stories, the kind that Gene Roberts used to say oozed rather than broke. The stories Roberts led and inspired had enabled the paper to attract more and more of the most remarkable talents in journalism. An assignment at the Inquirer had become one of the craft's coveted jobs. A few people left The New York Times or The Washington Post for the Inquirer. Properly ambitious editors like Bob Rosenthal and Butch Ward deserved a chance to lead.

Another reason I gave but soft-pedaled was that it had become less fun being a journalist in Knight Ridder than it ought to have been. After decades as the big newspaper company that cared about quality, Knight Ridder had become more avaricious, determined to rank toward the top rather than in the middle of the most profitable public media companies. At Philadelphia Newspapers Inc., it had become commonplace to be ordered to re-budget several times each year, and we were under pressure to ramp up the margin in 1996 from eight percent to 12.

By the end of 2000, Knight Ridder had figured out how to wring 20 percent out of Philadelphia. There are three ways to get from eight to 20 in five years: develop substantial new sources of revenue, dramatically increase rates, or cut expenses, including staff. There was no huge new revenue source. Rates went up, but not startlingly. That left cuts.

When I contemplated leaving, we thought we were running out of places to trim without doing lasting damage. We were just cutting capillaries then; now they slash arteries. Foreign and national bureaus are dark. Suburban zones tailored to communities of interest across a tapestry of more than 500 municipalities have been supplanted by the cheaper, easier and less relevant countywide zones of the 1980's. The Sunday magazine, once a showcase for international photojournalism, was merged with the TV book into one publication whose attractive design cannot mask its vapid content. Circulation plummets.

And what of those talented editors? Butch Ward, who rose to managing editor, just took the mid-2001 buyout. With family reasons to remain in Philadelphia, that means he's probably out of journalism, a tragedy. David Zucchino, who won a Pulitzer as a foreign correspondent and later coached other talented writers through enterprise projects, took the buyout, too. So did Marc Duvoisin, one of the smoothest deadline writers in the business and more recently assistant managing editor for enterprise. As did Gil Gaul, whose analytical skills and single-minded purpose animated his own and others' ambitious accounts of systemic problems in our society. And while he was no youngster, Don Drake at 66 was still the most energetic apostle of narrative journalism in the business, but he took the buyout and went off to write stage plays.

If those had been the only departures in the only staff reduction at the Inquirer it would have been bad enough. But there were previous buyouts, including one earlier this year that ended the career of Lois Wark, who'd spent a quarter-century nurturing complex and important national enterprise projects and their reporters. That same buyout sidelined Jonathan Neumann, who'd won a Pulitzer as an investigative reporter and for two decades had coached other Inquirer writers through the intricacies of investigative coverage.

Before that, the newspaper lost Steve Lovelady, a gifted story editor whose lasting contribution to journalism will be his editing of groundbreaking investigative reporting of Don Barlett and Jim Steele. Barlett and Steele, of course, also left the Inquirer. So did Steve Lopez, the best local columnist in America. So have fine young staffers of promise, like graphic artist Archie Tse, or foreign correspondent Barbara Demick, or national correspondent Richard Jones, or rising managers like David Tucker and Fran Dauth. All gone in the five years since I'd intended to get out of their way. One of journalism's top destinations has become a departure lounge.

Here is one way to gauge what has happened to The Philadelphia Inquirer: Every editor whose leadership had a direct effect on reporting that was honored by a Pulitzer Prize is gone—except two, Dorothy Brown, who directs science and medical coverage, and Executive Editor Bob Rosenthal, whose great instinct is for jumping on big stories. Rosey spends much of his time going to meetings.

There still are talented people in the white-spired building on North Broad Street. Many are dispirited, some broken. I once heard a senior vice president of Knight Ridder say, without realizing I was within his hearing, that the company meant to "get control" of Gene Roberts' newsroom. Roberts has been gone 11 years. Maybe, in the end, the tribute is how long it took. ■

Jim Naughton, president of The Poynter Institute, spent 18 years as national, metro, managing and executive editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer after 15 years as a reporter for The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer and The New York Times.

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When the Cheering Stops and Anger Sets In

At the St. Paul Pioneer Press, beats will disappear and photos won't be taken.

By Chuck Laszewski

When John Schueler resigned on May 22 as publisher of the (Minneapolis) Star Tribune, I cheered. At last, our competitor, 10 miles away, would begin cutting staff and resources. Three weeks later, I applauded again when our editor announced we would have to cut only eight staffers from the newsroom, not the 23 originally announced by Knight Ridder.

It took me a few days, but when I finally snapped out of it, I couldn't believe what I was doing. Instead of being angry at the short-sightedness of the Knight Ridder corporate bosses in San Jose, I was cheering when others followed our lead or we were given a slight reprieve. I was falling victim to some kind of business version of the Stockholm Syndrome. I had been taken hostage and was now identifying with my corporate captors.

The situation reminds me of the story former Arizona Congressman Morris K. Udall used to tell about the wealthy man who was getting ready to leave for a month. He asked a neighboring farmer how much he would charge to board his horse. The farmer said it would be $50 a month, and he would keep the manure. The rich man thought that was too high, so he went to the next farm. There, he was told the fee would be $40 a month, and the farmer would keep the manure. Noting the downward trend, he went another mile to a ramshackle farmhouse, and the farmer there said the fee would be five dollars. The wealthy man agreed immediately, but before leaving, asked why the farmer hadn't demanded to keep the manure. "Well, mister, at five dollars a month, there ain't going to be much manure."

The rush by the newspaper chains—not just Knight Ridder—to reduce the size of the newshole, to cut sections, to remove bodies in order to keep profit margins astonishingly high, won't leave much of a newspaper for our readers to use. And make no mistake; the readers are not fooled.

In St. Paul, in Minneapolis, and across the country, newspaper publishers are distraught over stagnant or declining circulation. They look everywhere for the scapegoat. They blame television, the Internet, the busy two-worker families. Seems to me it's readers saying they will not be played for chumps. At the same time the St. Paul Pioneer Press cut back the newshole and reduced the scope of our successful suburban zoning, we were also raising home subscription prices. I don't have an MBA, but I've lived in the capitalist culture my entire life. I am sure very few companies enlarge market share by giving the customer less and charging more.

The mantra of newspaper CEO's that these latest cuts will fatten profits while not hurting our coverage is a lie. You cannot cut newshole without leaving out stories.

We've been locked in a classic wrestling pose with the (Minneapolis) Star Tribune for years, hands on each other's arms, looking for a way to throw the other to the mat. In 1987, the Star Tribune announced what they thought would be a double-leg takedown. They would pour money into St. Paul circulation and open up a full-scale St. Paul bureau. The advertising and journalism gurus in the Twin Cities soon pronounced that there would only be one newspaper left in 10 years. The betting was heavily in favor of the Minneapolis paper surviving.

Those bets didn't pay off. At our paper, editors and division heads came up with innovative ways to make the paper competitive and a must-buy for advertisers and readers alike. Knight Ridder allowed us to keep more of our money for the improvements. Circulation held and even grew for a while. We won Pulitzer Prizes. The Star Tribune quietly retreated. The readers were well served. They had a choice of which paper to buy, based on anything from the comics to the editorial stances.

All of this began to change last fall. First came the word that positions at our newspaper were being frozen. Then the news trickled down that Knight Ridder corporate was requiring the publisher to redo his budget with new figures that would keep the profit margin obscenely high, especially at a time when advertising was tumbling. Finally, in late April we were told there would be early retirement and buyout packages. But if not enough took it, the least senior people would be laid off.

The newsroom essentially stopped functioning for weeks. The younger, least senior people couldn't concentrate because they were hurt and worried that they would soon be fired. The oldest hands had visions of jackpots dancing in their heads. There was low-grade sniping between the generations. And everywhere was the question, why doesn't the Star Tribune seem to be cutting back?

When Schueler turned in his resignation, the rumor spread rapidly that it was because he was unwilling to make the cuts corporate owner McClatchy was seeking. The new guy undoubtedly would cut bodies and newshole. I, and many of my colleagues, were now cheering on a race to the bottom of the journalistic barrel. In early July, a new publisher was named. A hiring freeze is in effect and everyone is waiting to see what else might happen. Meanwhile, at our paper, when the early retirement package finally was announced in late May, it was generous, and the eight bodies that would be permanently cut from the newsroom would be reached without layoffs. The younger staffers were spared.

We are wrong to applaud. We already have lost too many newspapers and newspaper jobs during the past 20 years. The loss of any more weakens our craft and hurts the millions of readers who still look to us for information and perspective on their towns and their world. Walker Lundy, the St. Paul Pioneer Press editor, has been candid about how the loss of eight bodies will affect our paper. While he hasn't yet determined exactly how the newsroom will be reorganized, he said there will be beats we cover now that will disappear in the coming month or two. There are photos that won't be shot.

It must stop. Newspapers are a different business than building computers, cars or refrigerators. We have an obligation, protected by the First Amendment, to inform the public. Newspaper companies are handsomely rewarded while doing that. The mantra of newspaper CEO's that these latest cuts will fatten profits while not hurting our coverage is a lie. You cannot cut newshole without leaving out stories. Indeed, in order not to pay overtime, we missed a committee vote on a volatile gun issue during the legislative session in March. The Star Tribune stayed and reported the vote. Our readers noticed the omission.

Finally, we all know Wall Street is never satisfied. Give them 50 percent profit margins and they will want 55. It's time for the people running the newspaper companies to tell the analysts and investors that they will get bushel baskets full of money during the good times, but only buckets full of money during the down times. Whether the times are good or bad, we will tend the franchise, putting money into it so it will be strong, vital and profitable for years to come. If we don't, there not only won't be any manure left, there will be darn few horses. ■

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Editors Need to Care About Words *and* Budgets

Journalists rarely talk about the business, except when it's bad.

By Deborah Howell

I know exactly when it was that I realized I needed to be more savvy about the newspaper business. It was late one afternoon in the 1980's, and all the lights had gone out in a power failure at The Miami Herald. And the teacher was getting totally exasperated with the few of us who still didn't understand break-even analysis.

I was struggling through a Knight Ridder seminar called "Financial Management for Nonfinancial Managers." There were production and circulation and advertising people and a few editors—John Carroll, now editor of the Los Angeles Times; Jerry Ceppos, now the vice president/News of Knight Ridder, and Lou Boccardi, now the president of The Associated Press.

We were separated into teams to do simulated computer exercises on newspaper budgets. We had to come up with the right, profitable answers. I remember looking at my team member Boccardi as we realized our team had to cut newshole, and I knew this was going to be the hardest part of my new job as executive editor of the St. Paul Pioneer Press.

I knew then and I know much more now that the newspaper business is a business. But it's not the reason I got into it. It's not the reason I stay in it. I care deeply about the business; all good editors do. We care about our newspapers being prosperous. We care about increasing circulation and advertising. We want to be team players, though we need to curb the arrogance that we could run all the business departments better than the people in them.

But, hey, admit it, business sometimes bores our collective ass unless we're writing about it. It will never thrill us like a great story. We say it interests us when we're around business-side folks, but it's almost never what we talk about among ourselves except when business is bad.

Business sucks this year, so we talk about it a lot.

Lots of editors are having to do things they don't want to do. I am lucky. I haven't had to do anything this year that I think is wrong or long-range stupid and neither have other Newhouse editors I talk with daily. We have the luxury of working for a private company that doesn't have to meet Wall Street expectations.

I think the issue that most disheartens editors under intense financial pressure is this: When the pressures are too strong, it is hard to make decisions on what is right or wrong journalistically. We make the decision on how much something costs. We worry about having a big story break, because we know it will demand overtime and newshole that will break our budget. We are often caught between a newsroom that resents the cuts and a publisher or a corporate manager who thinks the newsroom is not doing its part.

So when the crunch comes, editors have to understand business or lose all control over how the money is allocated. We can't slough off the publisher or corporate management. Our newsrooms expect us to do battle over budget cuts and might even blame us for them, but we know there's only so many battles we can wage.

I do not know one editor who loves budgeting. We do it because we have to do it, and if we're clever enough, we can use it to help our journalistic purpose. I think my present employers are princes for knowing I'm an editor first.

Besides my present employers, one of my favorite people in the newspaper business, Larry Jinks, talks about "unifying the enterprise." Jinks, a retired Knight Ridder editor, publisher and corporate executive, is fond of saying there are ways to bring journalism and business together productively. And, indeed, he is right. I've participated in several of them—dreaming up special sections with the advertising department, having the circulation folks involved with news and deadline decisions.

But editors are editors, and they'll never be as good at business as business people. And I don't expect business people to be good editors. After that long-ago seminar, I was proud that I learned how to do the newsroom budget on my own, but it never came anywhere near the pride I felt in breaking good stories, investigations that mattered and, frankly, in winning a couple of Pulitzers.

But then, at Newhouse, I was given both the financial and journalistic oversight over Religion News Service, a wonderful little band of journalists who cover the world of faith and morals better than anyone in the world. And I care deeply about it. I was and am in charge of making sure it is at least a break-even enterprise. I tell the editor when he is spending too much money. I worry about new sources of revenue. I don't want to lose a customer.

It took a few years but, thank God, we are mostly in the black. Break-even analysis, don't fail me now. ■

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Diversity Can Be Improved During This Economic Downturn

For that to happen, a diverse newsroom must become a focus of corporate leaders.

By William W. Sutton, Jr.

The media industry should be ashamed of itself. All of this talk about the economic downturn has, once again, caused publishers, top editors, general managers and news directors to review the options and implement buyouts, cost-cutting, hiring freezes and more as advertising has fallen. It's not a shame that people with the best interest of these enterprises in mind are focusing on such actions to prevent a painful situation from becoming even more painful. No, what's a shame is that the potential impact on diversity is not receiving much attention as all of this takes place.

Ask black journalists how they perceive their situation in the midst of these cutbacks—as we did in July on the Web site of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ)—and their dissatisfaction becomes quickly apparent. About 80 percent of those who responded to our unscientific poll felt black journalists are bearing the brunt of the buyouts, hiring freezes, and layoffs. There were no written responses, but many black journalists have expressed their view that the few among us who have been affected by these cutbacks are being affected disproportionately because of the size of our representation in the larger mix.

I won't pretend there is any hard data to back up this perception. But I can confirm that when we see a black person walk out the door, it has greater impact because there are so few of us. And if that person covers an important beat, or holds a critical production job, or has an important supervisory job, the impact is more dramatic. We feel as though we're losing a game that was stacked against us.

...when we see a black person walk out the door, it has greater impact because there are so few of us.

As corporate leaders at media companies consider what they can do to improve the bottom line, they should also consider what they can do to improve the quality of employee relations and of the content they provide readers and viewers. At the heart of that consideration should be diversity. It is not the answer to the economic downturn. Nor is diversity the answer to the future success of all media. But it surely is an important part of the answer to both, and too many media leaders are either ignoring it or not understanding its significance.

This industry has done a woeful job in newsroom diversity staffing during economic good times. This leaves journalists of color feeling distrustful: How can we expect good things to happen during these more difficult times? But it doesn't have to be that way. Media leaders can change that perception by creating a new reality.

Some might think the suggestions I am about to offer are outrageous. To them, I ask whether they are any more outrageous than linking editors' compensation to gains (or decreases) in circulation and readership? Or more outrageous than tying some of an editor's income to top quality coverage? I don't think so, but take a look at what I suggest and, if you see some merit in these suggestions, talk about them with your publisher, editors and staff, particularly with staffers of color.

- During this economic downturn, every publisher and general manager should require top editors to have at least two out of three finalists for every position be journalists of color. Normally I'd require one, but with the few chances anyone has to be hired this year, two seems more realistic. Not enough diversity in the pool? Sorry, no hire. Or a news outlet could link an exception for this hire to a commitment to hire someone of color for the next opening in that department.
- Every publisher and general manager should require top editors to fill at least 50 percent of all vacancies with journalists of color. Why so many? Because we are so behind, and we can't afford to fall farther behind during these rough times.
- Publishers and general managers should tie more of an editor's income or a news director's income to diversity through management-by-objective or bonus/incentive programs. Make it at least 15 to 40 points and there will be results.
- Don't get rid of summer internships at newspapers and television stations; enhance them. Newspapers should refocus their paid summer internships on those newsroom areas where journalists of color are needed most: copy editing, design, graphics and photography. Broadcasters should change their industry

culture and start paying for summer internships, identifying the students of color they want in their shops, and giving them a valuable, hands-on experience in broadcast writing and producing—the two areas in which journalists of color are needed most. Make a commitment to having at least 50 percent of all internships filled by students of color as a way of significantly improving the chances that the industry will become more populated with journalists of color.

- Support journalists of color as they seek training and development opportunities through various in-house programs and elsewhere. Support your staffers by supporting their attendance at conferences and conventions of the Asian American Journalists Association (AAJA); the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ); the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ); the Native American Journalists Association (NAJA), and the National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association (NLGJA). If you can, offer them conference registration, time off, and some travel money. If you have to do something less than that, give them time off and a stipend of enough dollars to cover a night or two of hotel bills and/or the registration. Don't make the mistake of thinking that because a lot of people "look like each other" or "act like each other" or "think like each other," that these are not professional development opportunities. Like the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), the Radio-Television News Directors Association (RTNDA), the Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE), and other media industry groups, there are those conference-goers who go to play and others who attend to learn. Don't assume the worst for your own staffers. Ask them to bring something back as you invest in their professional development. If they fail to do so, consider that the next time they ask.

Diversity is critically important. Nonprofit media organizations can't make diversity happen and work in newsrooms. It remains the job of individual media outlets to make these critical hiring and promotion decisions one by one, position by position. Of course, it is important to assess the overall picture as portrayed by newsroom census reports of such organizations as the ASNE and the RTNDA. But that tells only part of the story, because some publishers and editors and some general managers and news directors don't participate in those surveys. And there will be other outlets that should have an even greater focus on diversity because of the market in which they operate. Individual market leaders must be held accountable for diversity, as must the corporate executives who decide whether and how to make diversity a primary focus of their organization, in both good times and bad.

There are too few black publishers and top editors, too few black general managers and news directors. The same is true when it comes to our colleagues of color who are Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American. We are, of course, proud to see Paula Madison as an NBC vice president and general manager of KNBC-TV in Los Angeles and Dean Baquet as managing editor of the Los Angeles Times. We're proud to see Phil Dixon as managing editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer and Gerald Boyd as managing editor of The New York Times. Each of these promotions sends important signals to those of us who aspire to do more to help our people and our industry at a higher level. But still it is not enough.

Some of these news organizations are making great strides. Madison, Baquet, Dixon and Boyd are not alone. There are others of color in their newsrooms, and they helped get them there. Their newsrooms still need more diversity and they know it. But what about the rest of the newsrooms that remain much too lily-white? It is critical that efforts be made in those newsrooms during these difficult times.

This industry has done a woeful job in newsroom diversity staffing during economic good times. This leaves journalists of color feeling distrustful: How can we expect good things to happen during these more difficult times?

There were more than 1,700 daily newspapers in 1950 and now there are about 1,480. In 1950, there were 98 television stations; now, there are 1,290. There were no cable systems in 1950; now, there are 10,481. These media outlets provide plenty of opportunity for journalists, but as we emerge from this economic downturn, the true measure of success for journalists of color will be whether and how well the corporate leaders managed to turn things around with diversity as a central focus. That means having more of us in positions of newsroom leadership and on staff than when the downturn began and with more accurate, balanced and fair coverage of our communities. ■

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Ownership Guides a Newspaper's Mission

Responding to Wall Street's demands can erode long-term quality.

By John Morton

The current fear about the impact on newspaper journalism of this year's wave of newsroom reductions and other cost-cutting—in response to lowered profits—is rooted partly in differing perceptions of ownership responsibilities.

Conventional wisdom, especially in newsrooms, is that after making a profit the primary function of a newspaper is to be a guardian of democracy, with protection under the First Amendment to provide the citizenry with the information it needs to make responsible decisions. This traditional view of a newspaper's role is perhaps best exemplified by the policies of The Union Leader and New Hampshire Sunday News in Manchester.

The Union Leader persists in delivering its daily editions throughout New Hampshire at great cost to its potential profitability, since readers distant from Manchester do not attract much advertising. The Union Leader also prints every letter to the editor it receives—literally pages of them—so long as the writer does not libel another or criticize another's religious views. This too is costly, in newsprint and editing time. These policies are followed because the paper's publisher, Joseph W. McQuaid (and his predecessors), believes it is the newspaper's duty to provide its journalism to as many citizens as possible and to allow every citizen the chance to speak out. It is worth pointing out that the Union Leader is not owned by a large media corporation; its ownership is vested in a family trust designed to keep the newspaper forever independent.

Most daily newspapers today, though, *are* owned by a large corporation; fewer than 300 of the nation's 1,480 dailies are locally owned. For these corporately owned papers, the notion of a newspaper's duty is vastly different from conventional wisdom. While these corporate newspapers still give a nod to the duty of informing the citizenry, they now also emphasize the need to satisfy shareholders. And if satisfying shareholders in difficult times means shorting the traditional notion of what newspapers should be, so be it.

This brings us to 2001, a year which corporate owners are decrying as the worst for the newspaper business in a decade. Advertising revenues are down, newsprint costs are up, profits are plunging, and the prospects for recovery are uncertain. These are the reasons given for buyouts, early retirements, outright layoffs, cutting back on news space, and other reductions. Especially aggressive in these actions are most of the publicly owned newspaper companies, which account for 50 percent of total national daily circulation.

How bad a year is this for the newspaper business? It is true that lower advertising and higher costs are producing lowered earnings. In the first six months of this year, the publicly reporting companies suffered a 21 percent decline in operating earnings at their newspaper operations. And, indeed, operating profit margins (the percent operating earnings are of revenues) have dropped as well—by five percentage points on average, down to 19 percent. One wonders if Ford Motor Company or General Motors or any number of other nonmedia companies would be happy with that. They would. In a good year, which this one is not, U.S. companies on average achieve an operating profit margin of about eight percent.

Thus the financial fortunes of the newspaper industry have not collapsed this year. They just are not so strong as Wall Street would like. Of course, the year is not over, but even if advertising revenue does not improve notably the rest of the year, comparisons with last year's revenue and earnings performance will be significantly easier during the rest of the year. The reason: Last year brought booming performance, but most of it was concentrated in the first half of the year.

The easier comparisons and the fact that newsprint prices have started to decline should ensure that the newspaper industry in this year of downturn will perform much better than in 1991, the core year of the worst recession for newspapers since World War II. In that year, the average operating profit for the publicly owned newspapers was 12 percent. That too was a year in which there were widespread hiring freezes and layoffs, increases in circulation prices, and deliberate cutbacks in distant circulation to save newsprint. All these actions set up the newspaper industry for a decade of declining circulation, but they also brought a decade of steadily improving profit margins.

There was a time, before the 1990's, when it was almost unheard-of for newspapers to impose layoffs or reduce news space for economic reasons. There might have been some slowness in filling vacancies and other modest steps to reduce costs, but generally newspapers just carried on and waited for an improvement in local economies. That there is such a marked change in how the large newspaper corporations react to economic slowdowns speaks to great changes in the nature of newspaper ownership and an increased sensitivity to the short-term orientation of Wall Street investors. Newspapers now are more focused on the bottom line than ever before—at the publicly owned companies because of the need to please Wall Street, and at almost all companies because of the need to pay for the high number of acquisitions of recent years.

Newspaper ownership has been consolidating into larger and fewer companies, a process cheered by some executives as long overdue in an industry with a long tradition of fragmented ownership. Managements of the large newspaper companies, for example, recognize the economic and marketing efficiencies in clustering of ownerships in specific geographic regions and do not hesitate to buy and swap properties toward that end as if they were so many pork bellies. And there are undeniable benefits from economies of scale as companies get larger. Gannett can buy everything that a newspaper needs, from paper clips to presses to newsprint, at prices far lower than paid by smaller companies. Bigness by itself has significant economic rewards.

Many newspaper companies, of whatever size, still produce good journalism despite the current cost cutting. But in this era of falling circulation, with newspaper readers dying off faster than they are being added to, investing less rather than more in journalistic quality is not a smart strategy for the long run. But it is a strategy that most of the industry is stuck with.

One can hope that once the economy improves newspaper companies will shift their emphasis more toward the traditional notion of serving the public weal and less toward pleasing shareholders. Indeed, even some of the publicly owned companies have not taken their eyes off this central reason for the existence of newspapers. McClatchy Newspapers, while tightening in some areas, has eschewed taking steps this year that would undermine journalistic quality in the conviction that in the long run good journalism is good for business.

The Washington Post Co. likewise has refrained from reacting strongly to the ups and downs of the economy. Katharine Graham, in the early years of her company's public ownership, alarmed Wall Street investors by telling them she would rather the company reached a higher value of its assets in zigs and zags than reaching a lower level in a steady progression. This so upset some institutions, devoted as they were to steadily rising profits, that they immediately unloaded their holdings. This turned out to be a big mistake: When she spoke, the company's stock sold for $19; recently it was $576.

When it comes to ownership, perhaps Ben Bradlee, retired editor of The Washington Post, said it best when he eulogized Graham at her funeral last July: "Maybe not all of you understand what it takes to make a great newspaper. It takes a great owner. Period." ■

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Newspaper Economics 2001: The McClatchy Way

The company is weathering the financial storm with a different strategy.

By Gary Pruitt

The sudden reversal of fortunes that befell the newspaper industry with the economic slowdown of 2001 appeared largely without warning, turning boom into gloom for many companies within the span of a single quarter. It has since asserted itself with unfamiliar ferocity: Thousands of jobs have been lost and hundreds of pages have disappeared from American newspapers. These layoffs and newshole reductions are now commonplace announcements and the frequent focus of Web pages created with the exclusive mission of chronicling this newspaper retrenchment.

Almost alone among our publicly traded peers, McClatchy has eschewed both of those management options for handling the downturn. We've opted to steer a course intended to avoid across-the-board layoffs and to maintain newshole space at 2000 levels. We have chosen our strategy not because we are naturally contrary—though there is some reason to believe we are—but because we're convinced that by doing what is best for readers and the communities we serve will prove, once again, to be best for McClatchy shareholders.

While our reluctance to go the route of cutbacks remains a distinctly minority point of view in the industry, there's ample evidence and solid theory to support it. Indeed, our behavior now is simply a continuation of the strategy we pursued when advertising dollars were flowing freely. At our strategy's core is a belief that in an unavoidably cyclical business, the best course is to manage consistently and operate efficiently in good times and bad. The payoffs of avoiding the boom-or-bust roller coaster ride show up in employee morale, the newspapers' momentum, and corporate profits.

We're fortunate to operate in a country in which economic expansions far outdistance contractions, but experience shows there are bound to be some of each. To safeguard and accomplish newspapers' essential First Amendment mission requires independence, so it is imperative that we operate stable, profitable businesses. To do this requires continuous balancing of support for quality journalism and awareness of financial demands.

Commitment to quality journalism comes easily at McClatchy; it's been a prominent part of our corporate DNA for 144 years. Financial success can sometimes seem a more elusive objective, but our experience suggests that the two reinforce one another over time. Fortunately, many investors seem to recognize this, too.

But while such results can be congruent, they aren't automatically so. Balancing these sometimes opposing demands has led us to design an operational structure we refer to as "athletic." This means we strive to keep our operations trim and fit overall, but strengthen our muscles at the points they're needed most—in reporting and sales. When done right, we put sales people on the streets and phones to keep the revenue engine churning while supporting the journalistic needs of reporters, photographers and copyeditors necessary to ensure high-quality newspapers.

Financial discipline means that to some events we won't send as many reporters as we might have during more prosperous times. And we won't add pages as rapidly as we might have. But we haven't pulled back from the public service journalism that defines McClatchy. This is evidenced in our newspapers devoting time and space to unraveling a complex subsidy arrangement for a private developer in Minneapolis and the publishing of dozens of stories to cover the world games of the Special Olympics in Anchorage. Meeting reader needs for consistent, quality information isn't optional.

How have we gone about doing that in the current economic climate? The answer is in a five-part strategy we believe will see us through the downturn intact and position us to take quick advantage of the recovery when it arrives. In fact, we think there are opportunities that can leave McClatchy in stronger shape after the downturn than we were heading into it.

First, we need to keep the muscle needed for sales and service, focusing particularly on those revenue categories over which we have greatest control and influence, even in down times. In current conditions, that means retail and classified display advertising.

Second, we seek to extend our market share during this period. Yes, the total advertising pie is shrinking, but by accomplishing goal number one, we can ensure that our share of the smaller pie grows. Our newspapers are the primary advertising buys in their local markets, and they should suffer less than should the secondary providers competing with them.

We also believe we can extend our Internet publishing leadership in our local markets. We operate the leading local Internet sites in all our regions, which puts us in an especially strong position as online competitors either fold or retrench in tough times.

...we strive to keep our operations trim and fit overall, but strengthen our muscles at the points they're needed most—in reporting and sales.

The emergence of the Internet as an alternative publishing medium undeniably complicates economic life for newspapers; its presence represents the biggest single difference between this economic contraction and some of the tough times we've weathered in the past. But interactive media also present opportunities. Unlike earlier recessions, this time newspaper companies must manage more than one business and need to balance competing demands. Failure to do so forfeits important advantages that we will need later on.

Our fourth imperative is a familiar one: to cut costs aggressively wherever possible, consistent with our continuing strategy. Like other media companies, our profits are way down this year. There is no responsible alternative to determined, line-by-line cost reductions to help make up the difference. All our businesses are avoiding non-essential hires, allowing vacancies to remain open, cutting capital spending, limiting travel, and so forth. What we don't intend to do is allow short-term savings to affect the quality of what we offer customers or our ability to generate revenue.

For example, we think resorting to buyouts and layoffs in response to cyclical economic conditions is often a mistake. The Harvard Business Review recently highlighted a study by Bain & Co. of how 377 Fortune 500 companies navigated through economic downturns during the past two decades. The authors questioned the financial sense of using layoffs to trim costs. They wrote: "Consider that voluntary employee turnover averages 15% to 20% per year in the United States, that sales volume was depressed by less than 10% in 85% of all industry downturns from 1977 to 1999, and that the average recession during that period lasted only 11 months. Given those facts, you have to wonder why there was such a scramble to fire—and then rehire and retrain—so many employees."

The roller coaster response usually proves costly in terms of money spent on severance, and it also damages morale within the company. And that can retard momentum needed to respond when economic conditions improve.

Similar logic applies to the tactic of trimming the newshole to save money in the short run. What is the long-term rationale for cutting the quality of the product at a time when readers need good journalism more than ever, forcing them to turn elsewhere for information? As veteran newspaper executive David Laventhol argued recently, "Cutting back [sends] the wrong message—not to journalists but to readers, who don't need more reasons not to buy a newspaper." As lineage falls, we'll use less newsprint, and if the downturn is prolonged, newsprint prices will generally fall—just as they are doing today.

As the Bain study concluded, "Costs do have to be managed carefully, but the key is consistency. A company should not act one way in good times and another way in bad times."

Finally, we're determined to find

ways to do more than preserve our products; we want to continue to improve them wherever possible and to grow circulation. Economic conditions foreclose some costly investments in quality, but others remain available. For example, when we made the move to the narrower pages—now becoming an industry standard—we coupled the change with redesigned newspapers that improved readers' navigation through them and with added features. Reader reaction was positive in all our communities.

We haven't abandoned the quest for continued circulation growth, either. The Readership Institute at Northwestern University has turned insights from our industry's best research into a blueprint for increasing newspaper readership. The recommended focus includes specific improvements in content, promotion, service, presentation, brand and workplace culture. It offers us ideas about how to build circulation despite economic constraints—especially if we preserve vital, high quality operations that continue to meet readers' needs. We're working hard to extend McClatchy's industry-leading record string of 16 consecutive years of daily circulation growth. We consider this growth a central barometer of community service and franchise health and, not incidentally, a key to maintaining flexibility of advertising rates.

While our response to this economic downturn is somewhat contrary, we believe it is based on sound business strategy and provides the foundation for McClatchy to be a stronger entity once the economic recovery begins. ■

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Making Change Work Away From Public Pressures

At Cox newspapers, economic hard times bring fresh approaches to news coverage.

By Jay Smith

Tough economic times hit privately owned newspapers, too. How they respond—especially when employment ad revenue falls 40 percent, newsprint prices grow by double digits, and there's no elasticity left in circulation rates—explains why I wouldn't trade my job as president of Cox Newspapers with any of my peers in publicly owned companies.

We might not have to answer analysts' questions or issue quarterly financial reports, but we watch the bottom line every bit as closely as they do at the public companies. Our newspapers deserve nothing less. Poor newspapers whisper; healthy newspapers speak in a firm, clear voice. Put another way, a financially healthy newspaper can afford to take risks, to do the brave things that great newspapers have always done. Neither public nor private newspapers are immune from this journalistic fact of life.

Our owners, enlightened by 103 years in the business, know good times follow bad. That's why they stress the long term, doing what's prudent to weather a recession until the economy clears. We're equally fortunate to be part of a company with broadcast and cable holdings and the world's largest auto auction company among its assets. When one part of our company suffers, there's another one doing well enough to pick it up.

A long-term view and a diversified portfolio may provide comfort, but they don't ease the challenge of publishing financially strong newspapers in a downturn. If anything, sibling pressure can be as intense as anything Wall Street offers. Who wants to be the laggard at the next board meeting?

The pressure to perform is there, but it is self-imposed. It is private, and that makes all the difference. Not having to please an outsider every 13 weeks allows plans to develop into reality before they must be sacrificed on the altar of investor expectations. Fear, the greatest impediment to success, gets replaced by careful risk-taking—something encouraged, not punished, by wise owners like ours.

Ten years ago, in the depths of the worst advertising recession any of us had known, I guided our flagship newspaper, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, to its worst-ever year-over-year performance. We were fighting a New York Times-owned newspaper that invested mightily and vowed to drive us out of Atlanta's rich northern suburbs. Our owners' instructions were clear: Win the battle and weather the storm.

We accomplished both tasks by asking ourselves what we could live without, and we controlled costs by eliminating those things. For example, we saved five million annually by ending subsidies that supported distant circulation. We cut some jobs because they were no longer needed to sustain circulation that neither Atlanta readers nor advertisers valued. Our egos were bruised, but we used these savings to beat this competing newspaper while insuring a brighter, better future for the Journal-Constitution.

Subsequent years of record-setting performances were reward aplenty. A lesson learned, it spread throughout our newspaper group. The people who run our newspapers today are the same people who ran them 10 years ago. That's another feature of privately owned newspaper groups. They didn't wait until the first hint of economic softening to prepare for this downturn. Their work began even as they were enjoying the boom years of the 1990's. Newspaper publishers and editors learned from each others' successes and failures. They identified best people and best practices and shared them liberally. They built an Intranet that links our 18 daily and 30 non-daily newspapers. Work that appears in Atlanta, Austin, Palm Beach or Dayton can run simultaneously in Waco, Texas, Grand Junction, Colorado, or Greenville, North Carolina. It's a way of sharing quality and spreading costs.

Leaders at our newspapers spent the past decade getting better and getting ready for the next slowdown. When it became apparent as early as the late summer and early fall of 2000 that tough times were ahead, they were prepared. Without fanfare, they battened the hatches, yet continued to publish newspapers every bit the equals of those produced in good times.

Two examples illustrate how cooperation ensured quality and promoted efficiency, even as belt-tightening had begun.

Our Austin American-Statesman had more than a passing interest in last year's presidential election which, with Texas Governor George W. Bush running, became as much a local as a national story. As the south's largest newspaper, our Atlanta Journal-Constitution could stake its own coverage claim. And, as events unfolded, our Palm Beach Post found itself in the center of, perhaps, the greatest vote-counting story ever. Perhaps in another time, egos would have won out and three or more Cox reporters would have covered the same campaign trails. Not this time.

Because our large newspapers, including the Dayton Daily News, agreed to an approach coordinated by our Washington bureau, our journalists seldom tripped over each other. Zone coverage of the candidates freed reporters to pursue other important election stories. Reporters like Austin's Ken Herman, who covered Bush as governor, provided a talent that benefited all of our newspapers. Never, our editors later agreed, had our election coverage been better.

On a lesser scale, our newspapers' sports editors met earlier this year and made some unprecedented coverage decisions. Atlanta's sportswriters would cover the Masters Tournament on behalf of our newspapers, while Palm Beach would cover Wimbledon. No doubt, some reporters and columnists grumbled, but did coverage suffer? Were the $40,000 saved in air fares and hotels on these events worth it? Ask that question of a recently laid-off person at another newspaper, and the answer becomes obvious.

Again, there is nothing extraordinary about such cooperation. It's just easier to achieve free of the distractions so many public companies face.

Smart newspaper people know what to do. And that is to remain an indispensable part of readers' lives. The best private and public newspaper companies recognize this and provide the resources, latitude and protection to let it happen.

It's never easy to stare down tough times. But it's a lot less lonely when you are certain of what your ownership wants and can move with confidence. For me, that is the way it has been for 30 years with Cox. It's something I appreciate, but never take for granted—especially in times like these. ■

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Newspapers Confront a Barrage of Problems

Societal trends make business decisions more difficult.

By Stephen Lacy

In the media maelstrom that followed Jay Harris's resignation as publisher of the San Jose Mercury News, writers and critics most often have framed the issue behind his leaving as a battle between profit and journalism. They have expressed a concern that resources flowing to stockholders come from the newsrooms and reduce the quality of journalism. Though this is a legitimate way to define the debate, it concentrates attention on corporate managers' decisions and downplays the impact of four important trends that are currently reshaping the newspaper industry.

These four trends—two within the newspaper industry and two outside of it—involve increased public ownership of newspapers, a decline in competition among newspapers, greater diversification in society, and the growth of electronic media. Let's briefly examine each.

- Public ownership: Led by Gannett during the 1960's, most large newspaper corporations now trade their stock publicly. This has moved control over a corporation's goals from a relatively few family members to managers of large institutional investment funds and to stock analysts who advise investors. As a result, publicly held newspaper corporations must produce consistent, high profit margins. If expectations are not met, stock value declines.

- Decline of newspaper competition: Because of economic factors, competition between dailies in the same town or city has practically disappeared, and competition across city and county lines is declining because of clustering. While this provides more profit for companies, it reduces the perceived need to invest in the newsroom and diminishes competition among individual journalists who thrive on it.
- Diversification of society: During the last half of the 20th century dramatic changes occurred in U.S. women's lives. Career options and lifestyles choices are much greater for them today. In addition to increased gender diversity in the workplace, a higher birth rate for minority groups and immigration have created more racial diversification. By midway through the 21st century, no racial group will be a clear majority of the U.S. population. This diversification leads readers to demand that newspapers offer a greater variety of news and information, something more difficult and expensive to do than when those needs emanated from a relatively homogeneous community. Increased coverage of a particular group of readers requires either more space to be added to the newspaper or space to be taken from the interests of other groups. The former is expensive; the latter tends to lead to lower circulation.
- Growth of electronic media: People have more ways of getting information now than at any time in history. The boom in cable and the Internet gives individuals the ability to focus on narrow topics of interest and avoid spending time sifting through more generalized news presentations, thus fragmenting the audience. Shrinking audiences and circulations cause businesses to buy advertising from a larger number of media outlets to reach the numbers of people they want as customers. Newspapers increasingly must compete with other media for the advertising dollar. And this intermedia competition comes at a time when newspaper managers felt they were gaining more market power because of declining newspaper competition. Understanding the nature of and responding to intermedia advertising competition remains difficult for newspaper managers.

Industries constantly face change, but the current newspaper situation is unusual because the two industry trends are pushing newspapers toward higher profit margins, but the two society trends are working in the opposite direction. At this point, it seems likely that the two social trends will overpower the industry trends.

In such a time of fundamental market and societal change, the critical issue concerns whether the desire for short-term profits will force some current companies out of the newspaper business. The demand of institutional investors and stock analysts for consistent, high profit margins is well documented. Newspapers initially were able to meet these profit demands because of increasing technological efficiency and declining competition among newspapers. With declining competition, newsholes and newsrooms shrank and newspapers became more aggressive in hiking advertising prices. Declining cost and savings from technology offset losses of circulation and the decline in the percentage of all advertising dollars spent on newspaper advertising.

But the ability to cut costs and increase revenue will decline as the impact of the social trends accelerates. If newspapers expect to attract advertising dollars in increasingly fragmented and competitive markets, they must maintain their circulation relative to the audience of other media outlets. In a diverse society, this requires larger newsholes, as well as larger and more representative newsrooms. People seeking more narrowly focused news and information will find little of interest to them if newspapers cut space to save money. The loss of readers will limit the ability of newspaper managers to be aggressive in advertising pricing. Businesses already have expressed a reluctance to pay these aggressive ad prices as circulation declines. This reluctance will only increase.

Newspaper corporations face a choice. They can try to reduce profit expectations to reflect the changing nature of society. Or they can maintain short-run profit margins at the risk of losing their readers and permanently damaging the value of their companies. Thomson chose the latter for its U.S. newspapers and ended up selling them when management could not raise profit margins above 17 percent. The profit margin declined to 17 percent in the early 1990's after more than a decade of 30 percent or higher margins. Thomson paid for its aggressive cost cutting to maintain high margins with a significant decline in circulation and penetration during the 1980's.

Neither of these choices will be easy, and it is impossible to predict accurately when a newspaper company has cut so deep into its newsroom that it permanently damages its franchise. However, research and experience support three propositions:

- First, the smaller the newspaper market, the more quickly permanent circulation damage will occur from cost cutting. Losing 2,000 circulation from a base of 14,000 will have a greater impact than losing 2,000 from a base of 100,000.
- Second, the higher the profit expectation, the greater will be the negative impact on the quality of the newspaper over time. It is true that monetary investment in a newsroom does not necessarily result in a proportionate increase in quality. Newsrooms have waste and diminishing returns on investment after a point. But even if the outcome is not proportionate, research supports that investment in content that meets the needs and wants of its community will increase circulation, all else being equal.
- Third, no one really knows how much newsroom investment is needed to maintain and/or expand circulation. If we did, it would be easier to make a case to investors for

some balance in the distribution of profit between making such investments and returning money to ownership. It is this uncertainty that allows Wall Street to press for the high margins it demands.

In the long run, newspapers will not be able to sustain the current level of profit margins. One economic rule remains clear across time and will affect newspapers—as intermedia competition for advertising dollars increases, newspaper profits will decline. The markets, driven by the two social trends discussed above, will force smaller margins on newspaper companies. The question will be whether management invests enough in the newsroom, and does so in constructive and strategic ways, to maintain a profit that will sustain the newspaper across time, or whether high short-run profits result in the company being forced out of the newspaper business.

A strong point of the market system is that demand will be served. The public wants journalism that meets its information needs and desires. In the long run, companies will meet that demand or they will falter. At issue is which of today's newspaper companies will continue to meet those needs 30 or 40 years from now. ■

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Working Together, Journalists Can Have a Say in Corporate Policy

It is important to redefine what constitutes a 'journalism issue.'

By Gilbert Cranberg

Jay Harris brought editors to their feet at the annual meeting of the American Society of Newspaper Editors in April with an on-target attack on the profit pressures that make so many of their professional lives miserable. The question now is whether journalists will back the applause with action.

Harris quit as publisher of Knight Ridder's San Jose Mercury News to protest company orders for bigger margins. Geneva Overholser's experience as editor of The Des Moines Register a decade or so earlier illustrates the limits (and perils) of plain talk to influence policies that produce the orders. At a 1990 meeting of Gannett bigwigs, who had just honored her as Gannett's Editor of the Year, Overholser spoke boldly of her journalistic vision. [Please see her remarks on page 81.] The Register recently had won for Gannett an all-too-rare Pulitzer (for public service). Nevertheless, Overholser's plea, as pertinent now as it was then, went over like the proverbial lead balloon. Overholser, for personal and professional reasons, left Gannett five years later. The company's newspapers have pretty much shunned her nationally syndicated column.

Randall Bezanson, John Soloski and I interviewed many newspaper editors for our recently published book, "Taking Stock: Journalism and the Publicly Traded Newspaper Company" (Iowa State University Press) and found them, by and large, not to be happy campers. "I have a fantasy," one told us, "that I win the lottery, buy the paper, and reduce the profit margin. I need a bigger newshole." Another bridled at the "micro-managing bunch" at headquarters who put him through "agony." It would be surprising if very many of these and other working journalists, who voiced their frustrations to us on condition that they not be identified, publicly bite the hands that feed them—at times very well.

Overwhelmingly, editors told us they never think about stockholders: Their constituents, first and foremost, are readers. Editors know the needs of their papers and know how best to serve readers. Since knowledge is power, they are in key positions to shape the future of newspapers. Despite obstacles to activism, there are effective ways for editors and other journalists to work for change, individually and collectively, without putting their heads on a chopping block.

The focus of "Taking Stock" is the publicly traded segment of the newspaper industry. By both reach and influence, the companies are a major and important part of the journalism business, accounting for more than 40 percent of daily and about half of Sunday circulation. What sets the segment apart, of course, is that stock in the companies is a market commodity, traded mostly by large institutional investors. Thus, this "different kind of business" is evaluated and treated in the marketplace the same as any other enterprise, and it behaves, for the most part, accordingly. A number of our recommendations, therefore, are peculiar to publicly traded companies but many are applicable to the press generally.

We found this "different business" actually to be little different in the way it is governed than other non-newspaper corporations. While journalism is at the heart of the publicly traded newspaper enterprise, seldom do people with journalism backgrounds serve as corporate directors. Thus, rarely is anyone acquainted with newspapers a member of the board's compensation committee, the panel with critically important responsibility for the incentives for management that denote the values of a company. And these values are what drives corporate decision-making. If quality of news presentation, for instance, is a goal, then salaries, bonuses and stock options should be awarded in significant part on achieving certain measurable quality-related goals, such as non-advertorial newshole or training. Instead, we found that the incentives in place are so top-heavy with rewards for achieving financial goals that "it is possible to study a [compensation] committee report of how top managers are rewarded and not realize that the enterprise discussed is engaged in journalism."

A noteworthy exception is the McClatchy Company, in which four of the company's nine outside directors have worked as journalists and one of them, veteran editor Larry Jinks, serves on the compensation committee. At McClatchy, compensation rewards individual achievement and company performance, which is measured by financial results as well as other criteria. These include "growth in circulation, product excellence and market acceptance, sound strategic planning, development of new products and services, and community involvement and good corporate citizenship."

Even if they are inclined to speak out like Harris and Overholser did, individual editors can have little influence on needed structural changes in corporate governance. Not so with organizations that represent journalists. The American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), for one, founded "to work collectively for the solution of common problems," has among its missions "helping editors maintain the highest standards of quality." Few decisions have a more direct bearing on newspaper quality than the choice of policymakers for newspaper company boards of directors and the compensation policies they adopt.

ASNE and other journalism groups that usually concern themselves with nuts and bolts journalism issues need to act on a cardinal reality: What goes on in boardrooms directly impacts newsrooms. They should, therefore, scrutinize the composition of the boards of newspaper companies and campaign for journalists to be placed on the boards as outside directors and also as members of compensation committees. Similarly, compensation committee reports, now buried in proxy statements, should be publicized by journalism organizations and by the trade press.

The incentives adopted for upper management too often are carried over to the newsroom. Almost all the editors we interviewed receive bonuses, many of them sizable, and they often are tied at least in part to financial yardsticks, such as meeting profit targets or staying under budget. The bonuses of only a tiny minority of editors were geared to strictly editorial objectives. Many editors have a voice in shaping the criteria for their bonuses. That gives them the opportunity to make a strong pitch for bonuses related to achieving journalistic goals. Inasmuch as many editors told us that they regarded circulation to be an important measure of their paper's quality, we concluded that circulation is properly such a goal—as it also should be, but seldom is, for CEO's and other higher-ups.

What goes on in boardrooms directly impacts newsrooms.

About three-fourths of the editors we spoke with received stock options. Editors who make their views known on compensation should say thanks, but no thanks, to the options. Stock options are intended to align the interests of recipients with those of stockholders, thereby to encourage measures to boost profits, hence the stock price. Editors have no or negligible influence on stock prices, and if they attempted to they could be brought into conflict with their obligations to readers. For instance, ASNE's Statement of Principles ("The primary purpose of gathering and distributing news and opinion is to serve the general welfare by informing the people and enabling them to make judgments on the issues of the time. Newspapermen and women who abuse the power of their professional role for selfish motives or unworthy purposes are faithless to that public trust.") can be understood to frown on stock options; ASNE and other journalism groups ought to object to them on principle as inappropriate for news personnel.

For better or worse, editors nowadays do not just attend news meetings. Often, as members of their paper's operating committee, they have a place at the table that deals with company-wide issues. Therefore, they have a voice that ought to be heard on the subject of audience segmentation. "Taking Stock" chronicles how the pressure for profits has led newspapers to focus on the affluent readers most desired by advertisers. The consequences are zoned editions—news coverage and marketing targeted at the well-heeled to the neglect of the inner city.

Journalism groups have been aggressive in urging employment by newspapers of minorities, but entirely too passive about the short-changing of the less affluent in coverage by refusals to deliver to public housing and by such marketing practices as denial of discounts in low-income areas. These and similar strategies amount to a form of redlining. Journalism organizations, not least those representing minority journalists, ought to be critiquing newspaper circulation and readership practices and encouraging editors to use their clout to advocate for service to the whole community.

"Taking Stock" makes a variety of other recommendations, many of which would be altogether appropriate for organizations of journalists to advance. Some recommended steps, such as those concerned with corporate boards and compensation, would take old-line journalism groups into non-traditional territory. But in a journalism world awash with stock analysts fixated on financials, incentive packages, excessive profit goals, and pressure for short-term results, it would be myopic to remain mired in the status quo and not redefine what constitutes a "journalism issue."

The publicly traded newspaper, which first came on the scene in 1963, is a recent phenomenon to which journalists, individually and collectively, are still learning to adapt. The decision by ASNE to give Jay Harris a forum, and the enthusiastic reception to his message, are signs of an evolution in thinking about journalism. The are evidence also of the relevance to editors of measures to reform the way journalism corporations perform. It remains now for groups like ASNE to update their agendas and take the next logical step by joining, if not leading, a reform movement. ■

Gilbert Cranberg, former editor of The Des Moines Register and The Des Moines Tribune editorial pages, retired in 1982 to teach journalism at the University of Iowa. He is the George H. Gallup Professor Emeritus at its School of Journalism and Mass Communication. Coauthors with Cranberg of "Taking Stock" are colleague Randall Bezanson, a professor at the College of Law, and John Soloski, former director of Iowa's journalism school and now dean of the University of Georgia's Henry W. Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication.

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Prescient Words Delivered a Decade Ago

On December 10, 1990, Geneva Overholser spoke to a gathering of Gannett executives. At this dinner, she was presented with an award as Gannett's Editor of the Year. At the time, she was editor of The Des Moines Register. Overholser now writes for The Washington Post Writer's Group. Excerpts from her remarks follow.

…Gannett, I am proud to say, is a risk-taking, history-making company. When all other newspaper companies were solidly fitted with blinders that kept them from seeing anything but the old traditions, Gannett launched USA Today—and remade the face of American newspapers.

And, while everyone preached but no one acted as to how white and male our newspaper staffs were, Gannett put its policies where its mouth was—and remade the shape and complexion of American newsrooms.

Well, here's my dream for the next risk-taking, history-making endeavor: Let Gannett show how corporate journalism can serve *all* its constituencies well in hard times. As we sweat out the end of the ever-increasing quarterly earnings, as we necessarily attend to the needs and wishes of our shareholders and our advertisers, are we worrying enough about the other three? About our employees, our readers, and our communities?

I'll answer that: No way. And we're not being honest about it. We fret over declining readership and then cut our newsholes so that we have insufficient space to do the things we know readers like.

We fret over a decline in service to our customers and then pay reporters (and others throughout the company) wages that school districts would be ashamed of. (That's one way to make sure we'll have fewer men and more women in the newsroom, I'll tell you.) And we fret about our lack of connectedness with our communities and then cut the support that we once gave for cultural and social activities in them.

Our nation is crying out for leadership, our communities are crying out for solutions, and newspapers can help—newspapers that are adequately staffed, with adequate newsholes. But not newspapers where underpaid people work too hard and ad stacks squeeze out editorial copy.

I'm blessed to be the editor of a great newspaper, but too many people in my newsroom think the greatest years are passed, and we're just hanging on by our fingernails. Too often by far, being an editor in America today feels like holding up an avalanche of pressure to do away with this piece of excellence, that piece of quality, so as to squeeze out just a little bit more money.

Yet we work in a business in which hard times mean a 25 percent profit margin cut to 18 percent. We need to be honest about the impact of this fact on our communities, our employees and our readers, as well as our advertisers and our shareholders.

I want to see Gannett prove that corporate journalism can serve all these constituencies just as well as family-owned newspapers did.

I say, who better than Gannett to lead the way on reinvestment in an era when reinvestment seems crazy? Who better than Gannett to prove that corporate journalism needn't bring the ills its critics call inevitable?

I want Gannett to be the company that shuns lip service, rewards brutal honesty, and goes against the grain in hard times. Bold, risk-taking? Daring? Foolhardy? A hare-brained idea? Naive? From what I've heard, they said that and more about USA Today. And now, most of its critics are copying it.

Thank you. ■

News is Strategic in the Newspaper Business

Newsroom cost cutting should not imperil its special strengths.

By Joseph Bower

The headlines sound grim. "U.S. newspaper groups cut costs as ad revenues fall" in the Financial Times. In the United States, the words were more precise: "Knight Ridder To Cut 1700 Jobs; Cuts Follow Earlier Losses of 400." The stories reveal that in response to drops in advertising revenue and increases in the cost of newsprint, papers are cutting staff in order to reduce costs. The subplot is that they might be cutting newsroom staff and thereby cutting quality. But a New York Times story on this topic by Felicity Barringer, appearing as a front-page business story, concludes that papers—publicly or privately owned—have displayed varying strategies as far as commitment to quality news, and those differences continue to play out over this business cycle as in the past.

What is the appropriate investment in gathering and presenting news remains a continuing question of importance for newspapers. And the correct answer is not independent of the economic equations that newspaper publishers must confront. If the dissemination of news is not going to depend on the philanthropic spirit of wealthy individuals, then the newspaper business has to generate profit. Since 75 percent of newspaper revenue comes from advertising, and staff at 16 percent (of total cost) is the most important cost after newsprint, it is not surprising that publishers resort to layoffs when advertising turns down. And since a large proportion of a newspaper's staff is in the newsroom, it is also possible that some of the cuts occur there. The questions, of course, are how deep and where are the cuts, and whether they are really necessary.

A look at the numbers suggests that the industry is healthy but facing challenges. The balance sheets are strong when judged against history. But circulation is declining, readership is declining, and classified ads—the core revenue source for the local newspaper—are also declining. Young adults do not get their news from newspapers, middle-aged adults have less time to read, and the Internet has proved an important competitor for employment listings and person-to-person sale of items. These trends suggest that publishers should examine their long-term strategies as well as their income statements. The current downturn hurts, but a look into the future reveals fundamental challenges to present-day revenue streams.

Three questions appear central: Will people continue to buy newspapers? Will advertisers continue to believe that newspapers are a good place to reach potential consumers? And how will news reporting at newspapers change in response to these economic and cultural pressures?

Why do people buy newspapers? To begin, they are a uniquely good place to get easily accessible, timely information necessary for everyday life. Within their pages, most papers offer reasonably comprehensive local news, retail and entertainment ads, radio, TV and other schedules, interpretative sports reporting, and the comics. The latter two may not be necessities, but they are a regular aspect of everyday life. Along with this package of information come investigative reporting and national news. Former Washington Post publisher Katharine Graham captured the relationship between the two packages neatly when she explained to me several years ago that it was the wonderfully intrusive and gossipy Style section of the Post that attracted the readers who, in turn, attracted the advertisers that paid for the first section of national and international news.

But another point is clear from Graham's autobiography. The mission of a newspaper goes beyond simply making money and to earning credibility through its content. The Post is not People magazine precisely because of the dedicated readership of its front sections.

For local advertisers, retailers and purveyors of entertainment and sports, newspaper readers are their target market, and papers provide a cost-effective way of reaching them. If Internet sites become "friendlier" places to buy food, household goods, and tickets, that relationship could change. Newspapers are also a natural place for classified ads—especially when it is easier to find what one is looking for. But Monster.com and eBay pose real challenges. Their search engines are a competitive advantage over the crowded small print of the classifieds. Papers might need to create friendlier formats.

In this broader business context, what is the role of news? Pretty fundamental. Properly selected, edited and presented, news differentiates the newspaper from other sources of useful information. Comprehensive local news is what TV news doesn't have. Nor does television devote special coverage to sub-sections of a metropolitan area. And investigative reporting is not the strength of either TV news or the Internet. While some of the TV news analysts provide useful analysis—CNN carried a marvelous 15-minute interview with Robert Zoellick on trade matters the weekend that I am writing this article—it cannot compare with the featured and in-depth analysis possible on a daily basis in a newspaper. The Internet has developed a reputation for carrying anything, anywhere, which has made it difficult to establish credibility. With newspapers, credibility has been established through decades of reporting and editing.

Now, consider the budget for news. My conclusion would be that most of the news gathering, writing and editing that does not contribute to a newspaper's unique mission for its community of readership is strategically vulnerable. For example, it is hard for me to understand why any newspaper other than those competing for the national audiences would assign its own reporters to gather national or international news. This is particularly true for those who belong to a large group of papers, as well as for newsmagazines. As long as there are three or four high quality international/national news services, why create a small reporting team of one's own? It is, however, essential to have local figures—byline reporters or the equivalent—who can interpret these national and international events in local terms. But not reporters in the field. The typical news conference in which hundreds of reporters compete to ask questions of the same celebrity, politician or entertainer is economic nonsense. Quality is not enhanced by these huge numbers of journalists assembled to hear and disseminate similar news.

In business, we are entering an era in which General Motors and Fiat will compete with each other by selling cars that use identical engines and power trains made in jointly owned factories. A Gateway computer is an Intel motherboard with Microsoft operating systems and application software, assembled in a third party's factory. Compaq might or might not use precisely the same components. In this kind of an environment, companies have had to be very clear as to what activities they should conduct for themselves; it is those activities, and only those, that create value.

Newspapers are no different. There is no reason for the fifth or the 35th report of a political crisis in Indonesia, usually written by a journalist far less skilled and experienced than those writing for Reuters or the Far Eastern Economic Review. Newpapers can contribute unique value through their reporting of the events in their territory, especially when it comes to helping readers judge the quality of local governance.

If the cuts in staff include cuts in the newsroom made in response to strategic conclusions of this sort, then whether or not they work out, they can be judged sensible by intent. But if they are simply cost cutting, and they actually reduce that paper's ability to differentiate itself as a source of information, then it will be the owners, the journalists whose jobs are impacted, and citizens who are dependent on an effective press who will pay the price.

A recently published exploration of this very question, "Taking Stock: Journalism and the Publicly Traded Newspaper Company," [See article on page 79 by one of its authors, Gilbert Cranberg] provides no grounds for optimism. The authors[1] conclude that in response to the pressures of public ownership, particularly by institutional investors seeking short-term financial return, newspaper groups have tailored their product and cut their expenses with revenue in mind, not focusing on their unique abilities to gather and disseminate news. With reporters and editors motivated like business managers by incentive compensation structures, owners have focused on the profitability of the news business, increasing profit margins to new heights.

Like banks that do not provide loans or automated teller machines for those who live in poor neighborhoods, newspapers have adjusted their product and circulation to address the needs of advertisers. Where they have enjoyed a local monopoly, it is the local news that has borne the brunt of cost cutting. These authors argue that economic incentives have led papers to seek a target audience of consumers rather than the "public audience" and that the news is chosen for these audiences based on their stated preferences. In places where audiences are not attractive to advertisers, that segment of circulation is not sought.

The logic of their analysis is pretty powerful, and they use cases to document how the pressure for earnings penetrates the structural arrangements of certain publishing groups. But they offer no systematic assessment of the quality of the news. Nor is there any empirical study of the size of the newshole. The authors argue these points without providing specific examples or references to their data. This is a problem, since a strategic focusing of news resources and imaginative use of technology could be associated with better news, lower costs, and variable compensation based on profit.

Neighborhoods and communities do get involved in civic activities when they are informed about forces affecting their situation—a polluter, a new road, new opportunities to shop, and the accomplishments of their neighbors. In some localities, this need is currently being met by local newspapers or Web sites. It is not the fate of the nation that is in the balance, but strong local coverage might be a first step to restoring public interest in politics. And if national and international news were assessed for local impact, rather than just packaged as small news blurbs, that could also make a positive difference.

Gathering and interpreting news is a distinctive competence of newspapers. Intelligent business management should not pose a threat to that activity, but that certainly doesn't guarantee that any particular newsroom assignment is safe. Credible news presented to attract readers is the golden goose. For that reason it should be at the core of any sensible economic decision-making about the newspaper business. ■

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[1] The authors of "Taking Stock" are Gilbert Cranberg, Randall Bezanson and John Soloski.

Words & Reflections

Washington Post editor and columnist Meg Greenfield put it this way in her posthumous autobiography: "Few journalists have much appreciation of the enormous impact we have on the lives of those we write about." In a speech "NBC Nightly News" anchor Tom Brokaw gave earlier this year at Harvard University, he said: "If I could, I would take anyone who comes to power in American journalism and make them subject to a [front-page] news story. Then they would have a keen understanding of what so many interesting people go through."

In this issue of Nieman Reports, we feature the perspective of people who, because of extraordinary circumstances, found themselves in the glare of the national media. What happens, we wondered, when journalists arrive? We pair these stories with those of journalists who have explored this topic in their reporting. And we also examine what happens when information about an issue that is as sensitive and explosive as the effects child care has on children's development erupts into the media's spotlight.

On Saturday, January 27, **Audrey McCollum's** life was transformed by the murders of her neighbors, Dartmouth College professors Half and Susanne Zantop. For the next few months, as she mourned the loss of her friends, she also became someone to whom journalists turned for information and comment. She recounts her experiences as she explores whether her attempt to "honor dear friends actually caused harm?" As Chandra Levy's disappearance became the summer's biggest story, **Kim Petersen**, executive director of the Carole Sund/Carrington Memorial Reward Foundation, helped Chandra's parents deal with the avalanche of media requests. She writes about this and about how the coverage affects the Levy family. **Robert Salladay**, a political reporter for The San Francisco Chronicle, observed coverage of the Santana High School shootings from a different perspective as he sat in the hospital room of his nephew, who was injured in the shootings, and fielded calls from the media. **Barbara Schardt**, the mother of a junior at Santana High School, writes about what it is like to watch her 17-year-old son, John-David, become a source on which many in the media relied.

Barbara Willer, deputy executive director for the National Association for the Education of Young Children, writes about what happened when preliminary findings from a long-term child-care study erupted into misleading headlines and sounds bites. In his work as television writer and media critic for The (Baltimore) Sun, **David Folkenflik** realized that some of the toughest people to interview were TV reporters, who expected others to answer their questions, but were muzzled when it came to answering his. As he writes, "I am not suggesting that anyone should be *required* to speak. But for journalists, in particular, I think it can help restore trust with the public." And **Ike Seamans**, a senior correspondent at WTVJ (NBC) News in Miami, reveals what he learned when he reported a story about what people don't like about local news.

In our Books and Commentary section, journalists write about either a book they have written or a book they've read. **Carol Polsgrove**, a former Associated Press writer and now professor at Indiana University's School of Journalism, borrows from research she used in writing her book, "Divided Minds: Intellectuals and the Civil Rights Movement," to describe the ways in which editors at influential national publications all but silenced the voices calling for racial integration after the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954. As she writes, "At a time when national magazines might well have been leading the way to change, they instead opened their pages to those who resisted it."

William F. Woo, former editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch who teaches journalism at Stanford University, writes about Jack Lule's book, "Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism," in which he examines how a lot of newspaper stories can be read as versions of our oldest myths. But Woo wonders (and worries) aloud about how these eternal stories are also journalism. "How will this theory be reflected in the news product?" he asks. "How will they play out in the day-to-day work of assigning, reporting, writing and editing stories?" **Warren Watson**, a newspaper reporter, editor and designer for 26 years, observes that Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone's book, "The Form of News: A History," examines "how social, economic and cultural forces led to the development of the modern, professional product we call today's newspaper." **Nancy Day**, director of Advanced Journalism Studies at Boston University and a freelance editor and writer, describes what makes "Beyond Argument: A Handbook for Editorial Writers," a worthy companion for "editorial writers [who] enter the craft suddenly and without formal preparation."

Dallas Morning News writer **Dianne Solís**, who reported from Mexico City from 1991 to 1997 for The Wall Street Journal, read "Looking for History: Dispatches From Latin America," a compilation of essays by Mexican journalist Alma Guillermoprieto and reports that the author is at her best "in her psychological portraits of Latin America's unconventional politicos." **Wilson Wanene**, a Kenyan-born freelance journalist in Boston, introduces us to "This House Has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria," a book by Karl Maier, the Africa correspondent for The Independent of London from 1986 to 1996. "The reporting is a skillful mixture of recent Nigerian history, carefully selected interviews, and vibrant local color," Wanene writes. **John Herbers**, who for 24 years was a reporter and editor at The New York Times, reveals what he learned about Daniel Schorr when he read his autobiography, "Staying Tuned: A Life in Journalism." ■

A Neighbor Wonders About Her Role as a Media Source

'Had my attempt to honor dear friends actually caused harm?'

By Audrey McCollum

Tears well up as I start writing this—sadness and horror surge through a veil of persisting disbelief.

On Saturday, January 27, my husband, Bob, our daughter, Cindy, her husband, John, and I gathered around a gently bubbling cheese fondue in celebration of Bob's 76th birthday. As we toasted his future, someone pounded on our door. When Cindy flung it open, a Dartmouth College professor—almost incoherent—begged for help. She had gone to our nearest neighbors for dinner and found them, Half and Susanne Zantop, collapsed on a bloodied floor.

Cindy and Bob, a physician, sped over while I called 911. Then I waited, wondering what had befallen our cherished friends and whether my family was in danger, too. I waited until my dread spurred me to phone the one person who might tell me something—the Sunday editor of our regional newspaper, the Valley News. Since I wrote occasional features for the paper, I knew about scanners that monitor police communications.

"Steve, something awful has happened next door; have you heard anything on the scanner?"

"No," he said. "Oh, wait a minute." Silence, then his somber voice.

"They are saying 'two down at 115 Trescott.'" "Down" is police talk for dead, I think he added.

An eternity passed. I looked out the door every few minutes, as though I could will Bob and Cindy back. Then I saw them dragging along the driveway, heads bowed, shoulders slumped. A policeman walked behind them, but when I rushed out calling, "Don't tell me they're dead," he turned away.

"Mom, come in the house," Cindy said, and she told me Half and Susanne had been murdered.

We went through robotic motions until the Valley News editor phoned to ask if I would give an interview. Without hesitation, I agreed. I wanted to shield Bob and Cindy, who could barely speak. And I believe in the mission of the press: to inquire, to inform, to foster understanding.

In 1945, I was the editor in chief of my college newspaper, aiming for a career in journalism. But my mother's puzzling psychiatric illness steered my inquisitive mind toward psychology instead. I practiced psychotherapy for 50 years, but continued writing, too. My Valley News editor was a strict mentor, insisting on clarity and accuracy in every phrase. His high standards, along with daily perusal of the Valley News and The New York Times, shaped my confidence in the press.

"I'm sorry to have to ask you about this," the reporter said when he arrived.

"It's really alright," I reassured him. Me, the mom, me, the therapist, me, the fellow writer. Me, still strangely composed.

His story, published the next morning, was factual and dignified. That day, requests for interviews began coming in by phone, e-mail, fax and by knocks on our door—we finally lost count at 47.

"Mom, write a statement to hand out to the media," Cindy advised before she and John left for home, but that sounded too mechanical. I wanted to honor Half and Susanne with spontaneous, heartfelt words.

At five a.m. on January 29, the technical crew for "Good Morning America" began setting up satellite connections. At 8:15 that morning, Bob and I were being interviewed live.

"Ms. McCollum, you were friends of the Zantops, you've been neighbors for a number of years. Tell us something about them, if you would," said Jack Ford, the host.

"A few minutes ago, they were described as active members of the Dartmouth community," I said. "They were, in fact, active members of the world, and I think for that reason the loss is an international loss, a tragedy for the world. What I mean by that is—partly because of their background as Germans, their learning about the Holocaust, their awareness of what can happen to a country if the citizenry are complacent about what goes on—they were passionately involved in every aspect of life. They were politically extremely aware, astute; they were catalysts; they energized a wide circle of colleagues and friends to learn about the political process, to learn about the significant issues—to get out and vote. And they became citizens of the U.S. only three years ago after agonizing over it because they were deeply rooted in Germany."

Jack Ford broke in: "It sounds like it's not an understatement to describe them as beloved members of the Dartmouth community." He didn't get it. This intelligent, experienced newsman didn't comprehend. I pounded the sofa in frustration.

But when I viewed the tape as I prepared to write this article, I saw him glancing at his watch, perhaps scarcely hearing my words. Yet he had allowed me one minute, 16 seconds for my message. I thank him for that.

In contrast, we worked with "Dateline" for five and a half hours, resulting in a glimpse of my tearful face and very few words. Other interviews were scheduled, cancelled, rescheduled, then some shows were never aired. I didn't see all the coverage, but in terms of my aim of portraying two remarkable people, our grueling TV time seemed mostly squandered.

Much of the early print coverage that I saw was responsible and broadly accurate, although words I never used were attributed to me: "pool of blood," for example—the image revolts me. But a grievous miscommunication was published in The (London) Times. Combining material from our 90-minute interview with information from others, the reporter wrote a detailed story that I read online. My gaze froze on these words about Susanne: "This vigilance took the form of a lifelong determination to dissociate herself from Germany and its history."

Wrong! Susanne dedicated her scholarly life to exploring German literature and the history that shaped it; she took students to Germany on terms abroad; she visited her family. I was angry and embarrassed that this misconception seemed to emanate from me.

Worse, though, was my sense of betrayal in an interview with a Boston journalist. I told all reporters that the police had asked my husband not to describe what he saw that dreadful night and most accepted that. This writer guided me through a thoughtful discussion of the Zantops, her manner earnest and respectful. Then, after an hour, she suddenly blurted, "Is it true their throats were cut?" I almost threw up. "For God's sake! These were my dear friends!" I protested.

She flushed, apologized and described the relentless pressure she and colleagues were under to supply every detail to their editors. Her newspaper and others were competing intensely to attract the most readers.

Relentless pressure for us all.

Most mornings, my husband and I went skiing, renewing our sense of life in the bracing air, enjoying our rhythmic body movements, spotting tracks of tiny critters in the snow. But our 46-year marriage was strained by the media demands. The interviews tortured Bob, reviving the ghastly memory of the sight he had seen next door. They interfered with his style of coping: compartmentalizing his pain, not allowing it to engulf him. I urged him to avoid the sessions, and at times he did. Still, he was bombarded by phone calls: "Just one question, Doctor McCollum," a frenetic reporter would plead.

For me, the more thoughtful interviews were therapeutic, allowing me to go over and over the tragedy like a traumatized child after surgery. The reiterations slowly anchored my sense of reality; I'd been sliding in and out of disbelief, as though this must be a film like Alfred Hitchcock's "Psycho"—a film that would end.

'I find the media spins hurtful, painful and your participation seems to me to feed the frenzy.'

Yet the intense discussions took their toll, and Bob worried as I developed what I called "mediatitis": a hoarse voice and dry cough. I kept misplacing things and, normally fleet of foot, I began staggering. One evening I slid into a hot bath to soak the aches away, and 90 minutes later Bob found me slumbering in an empty tub. Fortunately, the drain had slowly leaked.

"Why are you doing all this?" His voice was harsh with irritation.

"Because I need to," I snapped. Since late childhood, when I tried to be the linchpin holding together a severely troubled family, the capacity to meet challenges has been a foundation of my self-esteem. This seemed like another traumatic time in which I could be useful, and I had received notes of appreciation, one from Dartmouth's president and his wife.

Yet I couldn't fully answer Bob's question. I needed to sort through the media experience, so I began working on an article that ran in The Dartmouth on February 22.

But on February 16, The Boston Globe published a story that sundered the community. In part, it read, "Investigators believe the killings…were crimes of passion, most likely resulting from an adulterous affair involving Half Zantop, according to authorities close to the case."

On February 21, a retraction appeared on the front page of the Globe. But those words failed to assuage the anguish stirred among the couples' friends and daughters. There was outrage, too, and some of that leaked on me.

"Audrey, I think it is really best not to talk to the media at all. They sensationalize absolutely everything and misquote everyone." This e-mail message came from one of the Zantops' intimates, a brilliant scholar, a wise and warm mentor to students, and a friend of mine. "I do think you should know that the response to your statements has not been uniformly positive…. I find the media spins hurtful, painful and your participation seems to me to feed the frenzy," she wrote a few days later. "I don't see what can come out of telling the press and TV that Susanne and Half were wracked by professional anxieties—the Globe uses that to imply that Susanne's work habits drove Half to affairs…."

Reading her words, I felt drenched with shame.

I searched the Globe. For a background story, I had indeed mentioned the Zantops' academic worries. But so had others. "The way [Susanne] pushed herself all the time was very hard on a lot of us, including Half," said a colleague. I felt relieved that I wasn't alone in painting a realistic portrait of their lives.

Had I stoked the media frenzy? Had my attempt to honor dear friends actually caused harm?

Frantic, I put these questions to a Newsweek correspondent who had interviewed me, then stayed in touch by phone and e-mail. In his communications, I had sensed integrity. "Here are my thoughts about whether your comments 'feed' the media frenzy," he wrote in reply. "I don't think they do. What they do is feed the frenzy surrounding you specifically, because once reporters see you quoted, more will call…. But as to the story as a whole, your participation…has no effect…on the media's appetite for reporting the story. If you don't talk, they move on to the next potential source…. We've already seen the sorry effects of an information vacuum…. Sadly, the lack of information fuels speculation and rumor and, inevitably, error. That's a problematic dynamic in the media, but one that persists independently of your choice to take reporters' questions…. No, you have not abetted the media's intrusions into the community." I sent him an e-mail hug.

But after the Globe fiasco, I felt wary of the press. And when two teenagers were arrested as suspects in the murder, and media spotlights shifted toward them, I was relieved. Yet the self-doubt stirred by my friend's reproaches lingered on and infiltrated my grief about Half and Susanne. Grief is composed of sadness and longing, and often anger, too. When guilt is stirred into the psychic stew, clinical depression takes over. For two months, I teetered at the edge, ruminating often.

I hadn't experienced "the media" as a juggernaut: Nobody forced me to speak. Others in the community did feel harassed, especially when reporters began tracking rumors. I don't know if those distressed people exercised their options—to hold a press conference, hand out written statements, say "no comment." One group did hire a security guard.

For me, it was startling to discover that in speaking with one reporter I might essentially be speaking to 20; that is, I was unaware of the transmissions of wire services and of affiliates within TV. Each time my comments were relayed, changes of context or wording could occur. Quotation marks were excessively and carelessly used.

Most reprehensible, though, was the Globe's choice to publish a defamatory story attributed to anonymous sources—an account of alleged adultery that some readers still believe. True, I cite unidentified persons in this article. Yet their comments were private communications to me. Their viewpoints and roles are important, but not their names. In contrast, the Globe's informants made statements for public consumption, but were unwilling to accept responsibility for them. Combined with market pressures to attract readers with sensational content, the use of such sources leads to a serious blurring of fact and fiction—an abrogation of responsibility to the public.

For my part, in identifying with journalists and in using reporters as quasi-therapists, I had been somewhat self-serving. Yet I also did some damage control, quashing at least one vicious rumor and diverting some pressure from those unwilling to speak. And I did contribute to several richly textured portraits of two remarkable people.

In crisis, I did the best I could. That realization brought peace. ■

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The Chandra Levy Story

What does media coverage look and feel like from the other side?

By Kim Petersen

As executive director of the Carole Sund/Carrington Memorial Reward Foundation, I found myself in the midst of the top story in the nation—the missing Washington, D.C. intern—when the family turned to us for help. Our organization was established in memory of the three women murdered outside Yosemite National Park in February 1999 to assist families whose loved ones are missing or have been murdered. While our primary function is to post reward money for families in these circumstances who don't have the resources to do so, we also act as a media liaison.

Our work with the media encompasses anything from providing a family spokesperson when the family is unable to speak with members of the media to assisting with fielding media calls and scheduling interviews for the family. Families who find themselves in these circumstances have no idea what to do or where to begin. So it was for the Levys when they contacted us only a few days after reporting their daughter missing.

Our experience with missing persons' cases has taught us the importance of getting the media involved as quickly as possible. Time is of the essence, and often someone who might hear or see a report might have heard or seen something that could help locate this person. Within hours of our foundation being contacted, local broadcast media began calling me on my cell phone to cover the story at the request of their affiliates in D.C.

A press conference was quickly scheduled in the Levy home that afternoon. Two days later Mrs. Levy was sharing her daughter's story with the country on "Good Morning America." Soon the case of the missing 24-year-old intern was being aired across the nation as rumors of a potential romantic relationship with a congressman surfaced. I'm not certain how the rumors started, although many reporters called to ask me why Congressman Gary Condit posted a $10,000 reward.

As word traveled that a trip to Washington, D.C. was scheduled for her parents and myself, the story skyrocketed. We received a glimpse of what was to come when, just before our departure from California, we were paged and asked to deplane to take a phone call. Airline agents in Baltimore stated that they were being besieged with media calls and crews wanting to speak with the Levys upon their arrival at the airport. Baltimore airport officials worked diligently during our cross-country flight to prepare for this media onslaught and to have appropriate security measures in place.

Upon landing, we deplaned first and were greeted at the gate by security and airport personnel who notified us that the media were gathered and anxiously awaiting our arrival. With security surrounding us, we walked through the airport to the podium to make a few comments. After several minutes of comments and questions, we were on our way to our waiting car with security, camera crews, and reporters on all sides. One cameraman who was walking backwards in front of us fell over a large planter in his quest to videotape our walk to the car. While he fortunately was not injured, it showed us just what lengths those in the media would go through to cover this story.

Being surrounded by media and security in the airport was a new and overwhelming experience for these parents in the midst of such difficult circumstances. They were both emotionally and physically exhausted, yet they knew it was critical to get the word out about their missing daughter.

During our stay in D.C., our hotel provided a press room in which to conduct interviews. While we were there, media camped out at our hotel and either preceded our arrival or followed us to every meeting and appointment we had scheduled. Instantly the story of Chandra Levy, the missing intern, was the top story in the nation. Nearly every show called requesting an interview—"we need just a couple minutes of the Levys' time," they'd say. My cell phone rang nonstop at all hours. When I would attempt to listen to my messages, both lines of my cell phone would ring nonstop, preventing me from clearing my messages to allow room for more.

Chandra Ann Levy, Congressman Gary Condit, and Jennifer Baker shown in a November 2000 personal photo taken on a visit to Condit's office before Jennifer Baker became an intern in his office. *Photo courtesy of The Modesto Bee.*

These moments proved a good reminder of why our foundation provides media liaison services. A family in this situation could never handle the media requests while they tried to get through each day. As it was, I was having a very difficult time and getting by on about three hours of sleep each night: Interviews began in early morning and continued late into the evening.

Having worked with media on several occasions in the past, I am fully aware of the competitiveness between the networks, particularly the morning shows. I understand how critical it is to be the "first" to air the story or to be the show that gets the "live" shot. Even before this experience, I'd been in the middle of two of the morning shows haggling over which one gets the live shot and who has to pre-tape and which gets the optimal location because of having to share space.

But this story was different. The networks and crews seemed to truly understand the pain this family was experiencing and worked together in ways I'd never experienced. They understood the family's desire to get their daughter's story out to the public in every way possible and were willing to do their part to help them accomplish that goal. They worked together to minimize the stress on the family even to the extent of sharing cameras for live shots so Mrs. Levy wouldn't have to move to a new location or miss getting her daughter's story on another show due to time constraints on the part of the networks. It was amazing to witness and a great example of how much can be accomplished when people work together toward a positive goal.

Not only did the crews and reporters work together and not argue over who got the first shot or the best location; they treated the Levys with great compassion both on and off camera. It helped to make an incredibly difficult and painful circumstance just a little easier for the family to endure. Many people, including some in the media, don't realize that as families in difficult circumstances, such as the Levys, tell their story over and over, it's like reopening a very painful wound. It's extremely difficult, but they do it because they recognize its importance and are therefore willing to endure the pain. Understanding this emotional trade-off that families go through can help journalists be more effective when working with people who are in such difficult and painful situations.

While the majority of the bookers, producers, crews and reporters have been a pleasure to work with and very understanding of the emotional strain Chandra's parents have been under, unfortunately there have been a few who went too far. There were the media "stalkers," reporters who followed the family or myself wherever we went and yet claimed to have arrived at the particular location by chance. There was also a crew that followed the Levys on a weekend getaway when it had been agreed upon that they would be left alone for the weekend. The pool camera stayed, yet some individual networks followed them on their own.

At times, the media cooperated with each other while they camped out in front of the Levy home. The networks had agreed to use a pool camera outside the home to help alleviate the additional stress and strain of having multiple cameras, crews and reporters there and minimize subjecting the parents to the same questions over and over again. That was a tremendous help. At other times, relations were less than friendly. Occasionally, one network would complain to me about the behavior of another network—never anything major, but just enough that I would hear about it.

With the barrage of media calls a case like this elicits, it's impossible to cooperate with each broadcast or print request. Rumors also abound as each network attempts to provide the very latest in the story. On several occasions, media outlets broadcast stories in which reporters cited another media organization as the source before looking into it themselves.

This kind of shoot-from-the-hip journalism occurred all too frequently. One producer with whom I had been working called and yelled at me, accusing me of lying to her because she saw a show announcing that they had an "exclusive" that I knew nothing about. She hadn't taken time to find out the authenticity of the report or assess my possible knowledge of the situation. Instead, she called to yell and swear at me. Though I am well aware that a large and very critical component of her job is to establish a positive working relationship with me so as to acquire interviews for her network, our relationship and the trust level I had with her were greatly compromised after this incident.

There have also been several occasions when reports have been made that human remains were located or that they had credible information as to where Chandra's body was buried. These reports turned out to be incorrect but, understandably, have been very painful for the family. It's so difficult in high-profile cases to take the time to adequately research these tips before reporting them due to the pressure to be first to report new information. But practicing this type of unsubstantiated reporting is not only very stressful for the family involved but can, over time, erode public confidence in the news journalists convey.

The cable news channels have covered the story nonstop from the beginning. They cover it on several of their shows and often break into their shows to bring something live whenever they feel it could be of value. Often when they break into coverage with important news, they do so prematurely and end up having to explain that the tip or information was a hoax or turned out not to be related to the case. This coverage has been painful for the Levys; friends or family members see it air and call the family to tell them to turn it on. Watching these breaking news details on television, then having them turn out to be nothing, further jolts their emotions.

Many of the cable talk show hosts have been discussing the case with panels of experts with varying degrees of expertise. While their ongoing discussions about the case have kept Chandra's story in front of the public, these often turn into battles and arguments in which no one's point is heard as they are all talking over each other and so emotional, with little control on the part of the host.

Both print and broadcast media have shown a photograph of Chandra and Congressman Gary Condit. I've even read and heard reports in which they've stated that a picture of the congressman and Chandra was found in her apartment. Actually, this picture was taken of Chandra, the congressman, and a friend of hers, but some news organizations cropped it to show only Chandra and the congressman. This type of reporting is very misleading to the public; it deceives the viewer by telling the part of the story the media want to emphasize. Displaying the real photograph with the three of them presents a very different scenario than showing Chandra and the congressman alone.

In looking back over the past three months, working with the media in covering this case has been both a pleasure as well as an exhausting adventure. Being in the midst of a case of this magnitude is quite an experience. I've learned a lot and believe that many in the press have learned as well. My hope is that the compassion and caring attitude shown to Dr. and Mrs. Levy during this very difficult time could carry over and be offered to anyone being interviewed at tough times in their lives.

This experience also demonstrates again the immense power of the media to inform the entire nation, not to mention much of the world, and to do so at a speed that can be breathtaking—with positive or negative impacts. Solving a missing person's case requires teamwork among law enforcement, families, the media, and the public. When media do their job responsibly and, as in this case, compassionately, the extraordinary strain on families such as the Levys will be eased. ■

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A Bullet, a Boy, a Story, and a Reporter's Observations

A journalist with an injured family member witnesses the press in action.

By Robert Salladay

A bullet went through my nephew's chest and out his side without much medical fuss. Two stitches on either end and he left the hospital with a bottle of Vicodin. His heart was just missed, and the family was thankful for the randomness of certain trajectories.

Triston Salladay, the 14-year-old son of my brother, was injured at Santana High School in San Diego County last March. In a country of 281 million people, our family was chosen to take a hit for the strange subculture of stressed-out teenagers, reporters, guns and the reassuring narcotic of TV sociobabble.

Within minutes of the shooting, the country moved into position. It had been practiced, done before. I took my place as well, as a reporter, family member, and media confessor for a day.

At about noon on March 5, my stepmother phoned the Sacramento bureau of The San Francisco Chronicle. She informed me that what I'd been watching on CNN all morning had meaning. Triston had been shot and might be dead. I went to San Diego and spent the next day with Triston. When I returned that night, my editor gingerly asked me to write about the experience.

Nothing I have ever written has produced as much response from readers, in part because the Chronicle took the unusual step of printing a critique of itself and other newspapers on the front page. The headline read, "A Reporter Sees Tragedy From the Other Side." Any given story will prompt five or six e-mails. My first-person article for the Chronicle, which was reprinted in several newspapers and online news sites, produced 250 responses. I've saved most of them on a computer disk for Triston.

Many of the messages offered prayers for Triston, or personal stories of being subject to media scrutiny. In nearly every instance, family members and victims said they felt betrayed and preyed upon, particularly by TV reporters, who promised them insightful, compassionate coverage and then produced cliché-ridden stories. Former reporters wrote to say they left the business because they felt guilty for embracing these victims for a single day, then moving on to another story.

I told a friend, an editor for the San Jose Mercury News, about the response. He replied in a half-joking way: "Congratulations. This shooting has been really good for you." He was right. I felt guilty for so publicly revealing the inner workings of our family at the same time I contemplated the intrusiveness of the media. Had I been using Triston's shooting to advance my career, to make a point at his expense? I wrote the story for several reasons. I wanted to make a point about the media and had the opportunity to get very close to a national story. I knew that I could get details nobody else could get. But the decision to write the story came after I returned from San Diego, after it was clear Triston would be okay.

Deadlines force trivialization and inexactitude. Perhaps people should look elsewhere for their meaning.

I found it easy to stop being a journalist during the week after the shooting. On the day after the shooting, the four or five smokers in Triston's thoroughly disjointed family gathered outside the hospital. There was some silence in our circle. We hadn't seen each other in years. I barely recognized many of them.

A local TV cameraman quickly walked by with his gear. He didn't stop, but blurted out: "You guys family?" Triston's 24-year-old half brother soundly said, "No," even before the man was finished speaking.

The cameraman whirled around and said, "Hey, we're not the enemy. We're not the enemy, man." He's upset at *us*.

It's a nice little package, effortless in its efficiency. Roles are taken. Defenses are offered.

Triston's other half brother, who is 19, received 41 phone calls from the media on his answering machine the day of the shooting. A producer from one national morning show said he must call them back or they will show up at his doorstep and stick a camera in his face.

Even the threats seemed clichéd. The New York Times called my brother in the hospital. He handed the phone to me, the media expert. Embarrassed that other family members might hear me, I nevertheless told some of the story as Triston had related it to me. A student had comforted Triston while he pressed a sweater down on his chest to hold the wound closed.

That's what she probably wanted, stories like that. But somehow only platitudes and story fragments came out of my mouth. I even knew that a teacher or some school employee had brusquely discounted Triston's claim that he had been shot after he ran up screaming amid the chaos. She retreated into a classroom, leaving Triston outside. I didn't say anything about it, nor my brother's seemingly natural wish that the shooter should be killed.

Newspapers rarely get it exactly right,

because people act like I did that day. The reporter asked three times for the name of this Good Samaritan who held down Triston's wound. She explained how Triston might want to get some recognition for this young man who might have saved his life.

All I could think was: "You're trying that ploy on me? I know that tactic. I've used it. Think of some benevolent reason for this person to give up the name. Then move on to another person's privacy, another anecdote."

The day reminded me of the final scene in "Six Degrees of Separation," the play about a wealthy New York art dealer and his wife who shelter a young man found bloody at their door. As every East Side matron hungrily demands details from their incredible tale, Ouisa Kittredge, the wife, stands up at a dinner party to say: "This was not an anecdote! It was an experience."

If we're looking for an explanation for the Santana shooting, let's start with a culture that strips away meaning. Everything must be talked about. Risk factors must be examined. Patterns must be found. The day after the shooting "TalkBack Live" did "When Kids Kill: Who's to Blame?" Governors and presidents are shocked and saddened. The shooter is labeled a coward. The Chronicle conducts an online poll asking people if the shooter should be executed.

It's all placed into position, devoid of real feeling and emotion. It takes on a shiny professionalism. I found that what I wrote for the Chronicle, much of which is reprinted here, took on sheen as well. It made me uncomfortable. I later wished it had been hidden somewhere inside the paper; I felt uncomfortable telling my brother that I had written about his son. Triston and I have never talked about the piece.

I don't know what could have been done differently by the newspapers and TV stations that covered the shooting. Deadlines force trivialization and inexactitude. Perhaps people should look elsewhere for their meaning.

Triston's mother found the description of her son in the San Diego newspaper to be a little cold. The reporter had found a single friend who described him as "funny." The story about Triston, the drama, centered on getting his father, Greg, back to California through an East Coast storm.

The little paragraph about the wounded should have, perhaps, read something like this: "Triston Salladay, 14, shot in the chest. Good condition UCSD hospital. Friends and family said Triston is bold with his affection despite erratic and occasionally distant relatives. His family tree looks something like a cross section of a lung. His father married a woman with six children, and he already had three half brothers. Triston has a remarkable, charismatic way of silently piercing you with his gaze after telling you something mundane.

"He has a writer's way of finding ironies, such as the teachers who banned Harry Potter books, calling them too childish, but read the books themselves. Or the high school associate who constantly teased and harassed him, but called almost in tears after the shooting to say how worried he was. Triston has four major scars from skateboarding and other outside activities. Now he has two scars from a bullet wound and his own story to tell." ■

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My Son Became a Voice the Media Relied on

For mother and son, 'the tug-and-pull of the media was unnerving.'

By Barbara Schardt

March 5 began like every other Monday morning, except I was on call. If I didn't receive a phone call by seven a.m., I'd have the day off. That hour came and went without a call, so my mind turned to thinking about all I could get done that day as I went to get my 17-year-old son, John-David, out of bed. "You have 20 minutes to get to school," I told him.

Our drive to school went as it usually did, with about eight minutes of conversation with topics ranging from what concert might be in town to whether John-David had lunch money or the books he needed. Invariably, he had forgotten either a book or, more recently, his camera, since he was now passionate about photography. We said our good-byes, and I watched him hurry off to class.

Later that morning, John-David called me at home. Before the phone was to my ear, I heard him say, "Mom…there's been a shooting at the school…." I heard yelling and screaming in the background, then deadly silence. He was no longer on the phone. My heart stopped beating. I had to catch my breath. I hung up the phone, told myself to remain calm and not to panic.

Turn the TV on, I told myself. A local station was doing a live news feed. There had been a shooting at Santana High: Two students were dead, others injured. Students were being evacuated to a staging area across the street. I heard the words without quite believing what I was hearing. I tried calling the school, knowing I wouldn't get through. I didn't, and decided to call the sheriff's department, where they confirmed the news. I made one more call to my former husband in San Francisco, who is a police lieutenant with the San Francisco Police Department. I certainly did not want him hearing about this second hand. He asked me to contact him as soon as I made contact with John-David.

Santana High is only a few minutes from our home. I drove there having no idea what happened to my son. He managed to call me within minutes of the shooting, but I knew nothing more. Was he hiding? Was he in danger? A million scenarios ran through my mind. All I could think about was Columbine and the students who hid out and made phone calls to their parents.

Tears were flowing as I approached the intersection at Mast and Magnolia where emergency vehicles were everywhere. Many parents were on foot, charging toward the school. All of this was becoming all too real to me, despite the surreal environment.

In this sea of people, all looking for someone, I searched for John-David. After about 20 minutes I found him. As I walked towards him, I almost laughed inside. This was, in part, a sign of my relief at finding him alive and unhurt, but also because members of the media were encircling him, leaving his face all but hidden by a sea of microphones. He was telling stories that he'd tell again and again, as the media remained fixated on telling the Santana story.

Little did John-David or I know that his life was about to change in ways we couldn't have imagined. But during the next week, it felt as though we were riding a roller coaster as John-David became a voice to which many in the media turned for storytelling and comment. As his parent, I wanted to let him handle this situation in ways that felt right to him, but I also felt protective.

At times, the tug-and-pull of the media was unnerving: It seemed every reporter wanted a piece of John-David, and they wouldn't leave him alone. Our phone rang at all hours of the day and night, and everyone expected him to respond to them immediately. There were times when all of this became frightening for me and for John-David. He handled it well and remained respectful to all, but at times I was worried that the media had taken control. Or so it seemed.

Upon returning home from school that day, we were confronted at our front door by a newspaper reporter. I found that extremely scary, and I began to understand how relentless members of the media were going to be in getting their story. I remember this woman from CBS's morning show. She followed us—literally stalked us—throughout the entire day while John-David did interviews. She wanted an "exclusive," she said, and was rude and pushy in her approach. Another woman with CNN's "Larry King Live" tried to entice us with an offer of another exclusive. She went as far as getting Larry King on the phone to talk with us.

Barbara Schardt's son, John-David, being interviewed by the media in March 2001. After many days of being interviewed, he told a reporter, "I'm sick of myself." *Photo by Monica Almeida/ NYT Pictures.*

It became apparent to me I had to regain as much control as I could. An exclusive was given to "Good Morning America," and John-David agreed to appear on "Nightline." We decided to do these particular interviews because of how we were approached; I did not feel threatened by the people who spoke with us from these programs and appreciated the ways in which they went about gaining our confidence and their willingness to tell the story correctly. In fact, after we had agreed to do the ABC morning show, they provided us with a person who "ran defense" for us; if someone from another network approached, our "defense person" told them we were doing their show and that was that. Having this person to help us was a big relief. With "Nightline," the producer kept his distance, provided us time to think about what we wanted to do, and didn't follow us around all day. Those personal qualities were what convinced John-David to go on that show.

John-David also did several local broadcasts on TV and radio and also on radio stations in San Francisco and Los Angeles. We received numerous calls from news media outside of California. Our voice mail stopped taking new messages on that first day once it reached 35 messages. They were all calls from members of the media. John-David received requests to be interviewed for several articles: The New York Times, USA Weekend magazine, and Upfront (a magazine geared for teens). He was invited to appear on "Politically Incorrect" with Bill Maher.

To be caught in this media frenzy could be overwhelming for anyone. I knew my son had reached a burnout point when he began declining interviews. At one point, in fact in an interview he did with The New York Times, John-David said, "I'm sick of myself." To me, he confided, "I just don't want to give another interview. I'm done for a while."

At that point, members of the media, for the most part, respected his wishes and left him alone. The respect shown by most in the media to this decision sent an important signal to us; having already discovered the sometimes heartless nature of the beast, John-David now had a chance to see another side, a more compassionate one. This is perhaps one reason that the experience, in the end, served to interest John-David in possibly working in the media one day.

Many students and parents successfully avoided the blitz of the media. Some parents chose to keep their children totally away from contact with the media, but this was not possible for us after John-David did the initial interviews at the school. It had been his decision in those early moments to speak with the press, and he was, in my view, doing a good job in trying to respond to their questions. Every student on campus that day had a story to tell, as did every parent. Each story offered a unique perspective, but I understand that some did not want to get involved in telling and retelling what had happened.

I remember thinking that morning when I arrived at the school that everyone standing there was fair game for the media. Every time I looked up, I saw reporters talking with students or parents or bystanders, then moving on as they "targeted" the next person to talk with. As they approached, that person had the right to talk or not talk, but not talking to the media got harder and harder to do as more reporters arrived, each seeking sources of information. My sense at the time was that if people remained at the scene, they were fair game for the media. If they didn't want to be hounded by the media, then my feeling was they should go home and stay away from the school.

For John-David, much that is positive emerged from the tragedy at his school. His experience in coping with what happened, and in working with the media, has made him grow in many ways. He is still taking pictures, freelancing for a newspaper, and will begin an internship with a local TV station in San Diego. He graduates from high school next year and begins another journey in his life. But I know he will carry with him forever that March morning and how it changed his life. I know I will. ■

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With Child-Care Stories, It Still Comes Down to Mothers

Negative findings grab the headlines.

By Barbara A. Willer

The number of mothers working outside the home has grown dramatically in recent decades. Today, nearly two-thirds of mothers of children under age six are in the labor force. With more than 13 million preschool-age children in some form of non-parental care, the need for child care is clear. But one wouldn't know this from observing recent news coverage of a child-care study in which some in the news media seemed willing to use selective findings to bolster unrealistic and outdated notions about work and family.

In April, the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development's (NICHD) "Study of Early Child Care" released preliminary findings from one phase of its long-term investigation. Among them was a finding that young children who spent more time in child care were slightly more likely to show signs of aggressive or assertive behavior than comparable children not in child care.

For a number of reasons, it is not a surprise that this negative news—unlike other more positive findings about enhanced language skills announced in the same study—quickly filled newspaper headlines. "Child Care Breeds Aggression," "Child Care Leads to Bullying," and "Day Care Linked to Aggression" were typical examples. It is certainly true that the media have a well established tendency to focus on the negative and to oversimplify the often complex details of scientific studies. Also, in this instance, reporters who filed the initial stories had no published report to help them put this study's array of preliminary findings into a broader context. Instead, the findings were presented by several of the researchers in a telephone conference call. Then, there were deadline pressures to conend with to get a story into the paper, on TV or the radio.

What is more surprising, and disappointing, was the underlying theme of much of the news coverage. It effectively blamed parents—and more specifically mothers—of young children for needing child care in the first place. Not long after the inflammatory headlines, many reports—especially on television—featured interviews with guilt-ridden working moms confessing how badly they felt for leaving their children in these horrible situations. Some described how the study's reported findings confirmed their worst fears or touched too closely their ambivalence about such parenting decisions.

The days and weeks after the release of the study brought more balanced coverage. (The Dallas Morning News was one of the few newspapers that brought commendable balance to its initial coverage with a headline that read, "'Smart and Nasty' Study; Child Care Breeds Aggression, Enhances Abilities.") Reporters talked with researchers who noted that the 17 percent of children in child care who showed signs of aggression is the same percent one would find in the overall child population. Others figured out that 83 percent of children in child care *didn't* show signs of aggression. And some follow-up stories included other findings, for example that children who spent more time in child-care centers were more likely to display better language skills and have better short-term memory, or that children in higher-quality programs were less likely to show signs of aggressive behavior.

While reporting of these smaller details improved, the larger theme—pointing to working mothers as the core of the "child-care dilemma"—remained in place. This is hard to excuse. Reporters might not be experts in the nuances of early childhood development, but they should be able to convey a basic understanding of the social and economic realities confronted by many families with young children.

Many of the millions of children in child care today are from two-parent families in which both parents are struggling to meet the family budget. Others have single parents facing even tougher situations. And many are headed by single parents who were recently told that welfare reform meant they had to find child-care arrangements and go to work. Yet a consistent theme of this media coverage was that if child care leads to behavior problems, parents should take their children out of child care. Often the stories seemed to ignore the fact that for millions of families that "solution" is not an option.

Part of this theme stems from the propensity of journalists to cover child-care issues anecdotally. There is logic to this approach, because it helps connect the audience with the topic, and child care is a crucial issue for parents and families. But the debate about child care is never *just* personal; it's also a critical public policy issue with important ramifications for children's education and well-being and for the ability of employers to find and retain qualified workers. In fact, the NICHD study is part of a growing body of research showing how high-quality child care and other early education programs help provide young children with a strong foundation for learning.

When a study reveals potential problems with child care, it seems strange—given our nation's social and economic circumstances—that the initial round of headlines and stories should point toward the unrealistic conclusion that mothers should stay home. Instead, reporters should try to assess the ample evidence that exists about child care and inform people about the challenges the field faces in offering high-quality care for more children as well as the benefits to children and families that this kind of care can provide.

The easy story for a reporter is one telling us that negative findings about child care have mothers concerned. The tougher, and more important story, is one that explains why that report should concern all of us and how constructive changes might occur. ■

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Journalists Ask Questions, Then Refuse to Answer Them

'How can we have the guts to run a controversial story and then put a muzzle on staffers to comment?'

By David Folkenflik

A spokeswoman for a small but influential local branch of a major American corporation was helpfully trying to explain why all my calls to employees are deflected to her. "If we get a call, it's routed through PR, and we assess who the best person to respond is," she told me. "If you called every company around the city, you'd find that, normally, those calls go through PR."

But hers is not just any company. She works for Baltimore's CBS television station, historically the city's leading news channel. And the folks from whom she is deflecting my questions are journalists who spend most of their day asking questions of others—and expecting to receive answers.

Turn on the news on that station or any of its competitors and you'll likely find one of the following: a victim's sob story, an apparent wrongdoer's indignant denial, a public official's crusade, a parent's whipped-up worries, a ballplayer's lament. Each of these stories share a single ingredient: They involve interviews. Once the tape is rolling, most reporters and producers display little compunction about asking questions that delve into the most private, painful reaches of people's lives. It makes for what's considered good television. Every now and then, it even makes news.

During the past year, I've covered

the television news business as a reporter and media critic. When I call reporters and producers, they routinely tell me they're not allowed to comment. For some, just the suggestion of a conversation over coffee stirs fear for their jobs. The culture of TV news is so firmly tethered to whim and pique, they say, that they could be fired if their names were to appear in print. The subject of the story almost doesn't matter. Sounds like the caprice found in a movie studio—or the CIA.

The CBS station's spokeswomen inadvertently led me to two extraordinary insights into the thinking of many people who are in charge at the nation's news outlets.

First, the news business, to them, is a business whose product happens to be news. If that means they're seen as providing a public service, so much the better. But it's not required. That's why many local stations have standing orders for all inquiries to be referred to public relations departments. National networks, too, try to exercise tight control over which employees comment about what topic and when they do so until they get too big to corral. (Those prominent journalists who are willing to criticize themselves, or their peers, often get tagged as troublemakers.) In doing so, these companies are following the pattern set by General Motors or General Electric in hyper-managing the company's image.

Second, there's a fundamental lack of trust. These networks and stations pay their staffs to sort through complex stories, often turning their subjects' lives upside down in the process. But they don't trust those same news professionals to act competently—to behave themselves, really—when they themselves are questioned. If there's more tangible evidence of the contempt with which some media companies regard those who report and present the nation's news, I haven't come across it.

These attitudes prompt some important questions. If the companies do not trust their own reporters and producers as professionals, why should their viewers? And if those staffers are not ultimately worthy of trust, doesn't that undermine the credibility of newscasts—the "product" these companies are hawking?

It would seem that over time bad ethical positions prove bad for business. Such aloofness (from the public) and distrust (of their own staffs) does not explain the erosion of ratings on broadcast television. Cable stations and VCRs probably have much more to do with it. But it doesn't seem as though the networks and local stations are doing themselves any favors by imposing this kind of silence at a time of industry-wide anxiety.

The networks were probably pretty controlling back in the day of Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite, too. CBS broadcaster William Shirer (author of "Reich: A History of Nazi Germany") left the network because of his tangle with disapproving bosses. But the recent absorption of so many media outlets by major corporations can't help this situation. The entertainment mega-companies Viacom and Disney, respectively, own CBS and ABC. The manufacturer and defense contractor General Electric owns NBC, which teamed with Microsoft to create MSNBC. Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation holds the Fox network and the Fox News Channel along with a movie studio, a satellite TV venture, and other interests. The online, entertainment and publishing behemoth AOL/Time Warner owns CNN.

None of these parent companies display particularly journalistic impulses of the kind that might recognize the value of allowing those whose job it is to ask questions to answer them as well.

A few months ago, prompted by the situation in Baltimore, where I live and work, I wrote about this phenomenon. Two of the four local stations with newscasts maintain not exactly a "no comment," but a "don't comment" policy. The rule is that if an outsider calls to ask about a story on the air, the new station jingle, the meatloaf at the company cafeteria, or the cube root of 27, that call should be bounced wordlessly to the general manager or spokesman. One of those two stations sometimes allows its reporters and staffers to talk about general journalism issues. The other almost invariably doesn't.

The story generated strong response. The readers were, understandably, outraged. The professional journalists, equally angered, were pleased to see this usually ignored topic receive public exposure. From a newspaper's TV critic: "It's bad here in Philly—and getting worse." From a magazine editor who is a former big-city newspaper reporter: "How can we have the guts to run a controversial story and then put a muzzle on staffers to comment?" From a network producer: "Even in the places where there is no set policy against speaking to the press, one is still very cautious. It's not merely hypocrisy, it's also a) cowardice and b) hyper-awareness of how reporting works."

In the column, I quoted an MSNBC spokesman who jokingly said the cable news channel put no locks on the phones. Keith Olbermann, once an anchor there, suggested otherwise. In 1998, Olbermann delivered the convocation address at Cornell, his alma mater. He gave a talk excoriating his industry, his station and himself for coverage of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal, intending to deliver a message of personal responsibility.

After his remarks received criticism from others in the media, the cable network forbade Olbermann from commenting publicly. By Olbermann's account, he wasn't allowed to return a call from a newspaper reporter whom he had known for years. He was even rebuffed after offering to allow a public relations staffer to listen in on a different extension. Olbermann was not long for MSNBC.

At The Sun, our public relations director likes to know who gets interviewed for what, although it appears to be more of an attempt to prove to our new owners, the Tribune Co., that we're part of the great multi-media bandwagon than any effort to silence reporters.

I am not suggesting that anyone should be *required* to speak. But for journalists, in particular, I think it can help restore trust with the public. When a writer for the Columbia Journalism

Review requested an interview with Jeff Gerth, the talented but controversial investigative reporter for The New York Times, Gerth initially insisted that he speak only off the record. When challenged, he relented. Yet Gerth's partner on stories about the Wen Ho Lee spy charges, James Risen, declined to comment for that piece, even though serious questions had been raised about the fairness of their coverage. The Times felt compelled to publish a story dissecting the implications of its own articles. In doing so, it sought to redeem its credibility by demonstrating to readers its fairness.

Policies intended to button reporters' lips, whether explicit or not, serve to keep the decision-making of news organizations mysterious and obscure. Such a policy further distances the media from the viewers and readers. Journalists should not be forced to respond to requests for interviews. But they might win some converts if they were to offer some insight into how they make decisions about their coverage. At worst, they might think things through a bit more thoroughly the next time.

All of this should go without saying. But it shouldn't pass without comment. ■

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Viewer Dissatisfaction Understates the Anger at Local TV News

A journalist reports on audience concerns, but is anyone else paying attention?

By Ike Seamans

In ancient Greece, and later in Rome, messengers carried news throughout the empire. If recipients didn't like it, they'd kill the messenger. We, in the media, are descendants of those messengers and now many viewers and readers want to kill *us*.

What they don't like is that we provide information they don't want and, worse, we fail to deliver news they do want. This might be the main reason why newspapers and TV news—network and local—have been for years losing audiences at an alarming pace with no end in sight.

Local television news is by far the favorite whipping boy. According to a 1999 study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, affiliated with the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, "Survey after survey reveals it [local TV news] to be the most trusted source of news in America.… Yet many critics deride it as the worst of the American news business." In a more recent, scathing report, Thomas Patterson of the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University argues that local TV news is "deliberately shortsighted, is rooted in novelty rather than precision, and focuses on fast breaking events rather than enduring issues."

At many stations, according to the Project for Excellence study, news has degenerated into simplistic, sensationalized coverage of "eye candy, stunts, and hype." A lot of newscasts present important stories by accomplished journalists, but they're often buried under an avalanche of irrelevant and insignificant minutia—usually crimes, accidents and fires—because consultants and managers are convinced this so-called "breaking news" is the best way to "grab" viewers despite ratings that continue to spiral downward, proving people aren't buying it.

As if to prove the critics correct, a Miami news director boasts of doing all this in abundance, cynically saying the audience is afflicted with ADD (Attention Deficient Disorder), their attention spans so short they can usually only handle easy to grasp stories.

"A lot of good journalism is going on," says Terry Jackson, Miami Herald TV critic. "The Firestone tire story was broken by a Houston TV station. However, they get sidetracked in this rush to be immediate, to beat or to match the competition. That's where local news falls down."

I've been hearing harsh criticism about how local TV does its job from viewers since I returned to Miami from NBC eight years ago. It's getting more intense. After writing an op-ed piece for The Miami Herald about what local TV is doing wrong, my station asked me to do a similar investigation for our newscast. This assignment was unprecedented in an industry not known for self-criticism. Usually what we do is fall back on well-worn rationalizations to explain why audiences are disappearing, even though several recent prestigious studies have identified the real culprit: It's us. Plain and simple, viewers don't like what local TV news is and does.

I talked with people of all ages in most socioeconomic groups. To a person, but from their particular vantage points, people described local TV news as being distorted and poorly reported.

A rabbi said there's not enough Jewish news. An African American charged that only bad events are covered in his neighborhood. A Colombian woman observed that newscasts lump Hispanics together. A man who is gay recounted how "stupid" TV reporters call his orientation a "lifestyle." And a teacher who believes TV news is irrelevant urged her students not to watch.

What I found were not people disconnecting from local TV news; for many, a connection to their lives and concerns had never been made. Not unrelated was the realization that despite a plethora of TV news outlets, it turned out that I was the first television journalist most of the people in my story had met.

I visited kids at a high-school newspaper. In love with journalism, they were confused by local TV news. Student editor Geraldine Rozenman learned one thing from textbooks about news coverage, then saw another on TV. "So much sensationalism," she said. "Helicopters swooping in, breathless reporters on the ground, and for what? An accident on I-95? Please. They could devote those resources to something important."

Pericles Jude, born in Haiti, raised in Miami's predominantly black Liberty City, was disillusioned. "They're always covering a drug bust, crime or a robbery, especially where I live. I've seen the TV guys. They can't wait to leave." Romina Garber was livid. Last year, she covered a huge gay rights rally before a crucial county commission vote on a human rights ordinance. Thrilled, she immediately started looking for local news reporters. "Nothing, nobody, and the organizers were hoping some local TV station would come," she remembered. "It was so relevant. An attack against one group is an attack against everybody. No TV. I guess they were covering something violent."

David Burkhard hoped violence wouldn't visit his neighborhood. But a couple of years ago, a violent murder did happen to a family across the street. TV trucks and reporters descended, badgering the victim's family. They pounded next on Burkhard's door. "Have they no decency? The questions weren't even good. 'Did you know the victim?' 'How does it feel to live nearby?' When they went 'live,' the reporters were superficial, relying on a police spokesman. I like breaking news, I want to know what's going on, but local news is extreme and tacky," this college professor said. "This wasn't something that affected the entire community, anyway."

Again and again, viewers recounted examples of isolated stories impacting few people that wound up leading the show for no other reason than to titillate the audience for a moment. Before some of the better reported stories appeared, these viewers had already surfed to a different station, concluding "Local news is no good."

"It's sensationalism that appeals to the lowest common denominator," contractor Michael Jordan told me. "How about some substantial issues that don't involve murder and mayhem, most of which should be put in a 30-second segment at the end of the show?"

"Is posing a reporter outside a hospital or government building hours after the news is over supposed to make us think something's still going on?" asked retiree David Thornburgh. He's exactly right. Producers have been taught that "live shots" project immediacy and excitement, providing a sense that a story could "break" again at any moment, even though their news judgment tells them it won't.

There's always been a fine line between TV news and entertainment. That line's been wiped out on some local newscasts. "Don't dumb down your audience," said Karelia Carbonell, a private school counselor. "Intellectually, we want more." When she occasionally watches TV news, "all stations look the same." After I let her know that some stations do it right, she's tuning in again, but cautiously. A small victory.

No one I spoke with wants "happy talk" or "family-friendly news." Few see anything offensive about a car chase or a murder scene, if the story is reported intelligently. Cover everything, they told me, but keep it in perspective and, above all, stop blowing routine news out of proportion just because there is "great picture."

All of this advice is easier said than acted upon, particularly when many in local stations are convinced that viewers such as these aren't telling the truth. "People say they don't like what we do, but secretly they love mayhem and fluff," is the mantra heard constantly in newsrooms.

In other businesses, a long-term failure to increase customers because executives ignore mounting evidence of what people say they don't like about the product would result in dismissals or demotions. But this doesn't happen in local news, where tired excuses for dwindling audiences seem to thrive on repetition. "There are too many demands on viewers' time," some conclude. "They get home too late for the early news and can't stay awake for the late news," others say. And, more recently, we've heard a lot about "the cable option."

If newscasts offered solid content, perhaps more viewers would tune in instead of turning off or seeking alternatives. But if the audience continues to shrink, concerns like the ones people expressed to me won't matter because, eventually, nobody will be watching. But I hope it doesn't have to go that far before local news responds to what viewers tell us they want, and we improve how our reporters treat people in gathering news and how the news we do report gets conveyed to our viewers. ■

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Silencing Voices for Racial Change During the 1950's

National magazine editors published those urging moderation and the status quo.

By Carol Polsgrove

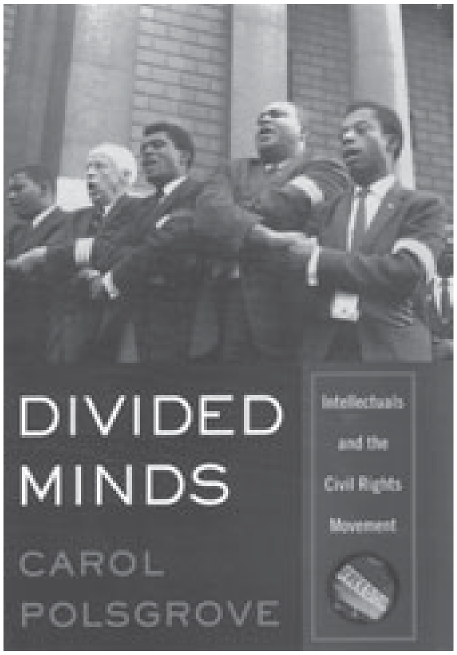
Not long after the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision opened the door to racial change in America, Georgia author Lillian Smith received what seemed to her a peculiar request. The Antioch Review, a little literary magazine, had sent along to her a piece the editor proposed to run and asked if she would respond to it. The article, by a New York-born, white Alabama professor, was little more than an exercise in contempt.

"[M]ost Alabama Negroes," Norman A. Brittin wrote, "live in crowded huts and shanties, they are ignorant, they are dirty, they are frequently drunken and immoral, their reading matter is trashy or nonexistent, their speech is an ungrammatical patois." The article then went downhill: "By and large, Alabama Negroes are still primitives."

Smith, one of several white southerners invited to respond to these views in the same issue, was appalled. This was the stuff of demagoguery. Publishing it only encouraged it. Refusing the invitation, she asked the editors, "What has happened to the intellectual life of Antioch?"

Whatever had happened at the Antioch Review had happened at other magazines. In a November 1956 Atlantic Monthly article (identified by an editorial note as "the fundamental case for the white South"), Herbert Ravenel Sass maintained that the United States was "overwhelmingly a pure white nation" and ought to stay that way. Desegregation of the schools would inevitably lead to "widespread racial amalgamation." To balance the article, the Atlantic published the words of white historian Oscar Handlin who, curiously, accepted Sass's premise—the undesirability of social mixing. But he argued that school desegregation would not necessarily lead to it.

In January 1956, Harper's, generally a liberal magazine, ran an article in which a South Carolina newspaper editor, Thomas R. Waring, attributed an array of faults to African Americans—venereal disease, illegitimacy, crime, intellectual backwardness. Harper's prefaced the article with a disclaimer: The editors did not agree with Waring, but published the essay in the interest of "dialogue."



In a book titled "The Cold Rebellion: The South's Oligarchy in Revolt," published just a few years later in 1962, African-American journalist Lewis W. Jones would offer Waring's words as an example of the many such articles that placed African Americans "in an unfavorable light" at this bend of the road. At least, he said, Harper's editors "had taken pains to point out the author's errors of fact and logic. Most editors do not undertake to comment on the half-truths and innuendo with which these articles are often crowded."

At a time when national magazines might well have been leading the way to change, they instead opened their pages to those who resisted it. When southern white novelist William Faulkner wanted to ask the North to "go slow" in pressing desegregation on the South, he turned to Life, and Life ran his plea in the spring of 1956. But when Lillian Smith cabled Life and asked for space to respond, the magazine turned her down.

It is not hard to see why Life put its pages at Faulkner's disposal. He was, after all, a Nobel Prize winner, highly respected by the literary establishment. At the same time, Lillian Smith, too, had a right to be heard. Not as gifted a novelist as Faulkner, she had nevertheless written two bestselling books about race in the South, "Strange Fruit" and "Killers of the Dream." Both books had reached a wide audience.

Yet Smith, clear about her own support for desegregation, watched while Faulkner and southern newspaper editors Ralph McGill and Hodding Carter, Jr., published their cautious views in magazines with circulations in the millions. Before the Brown decision, neither McGill, editor of the Atlanta Constitution, nor Carter, editor of a smaller paper in Greenville, Mississippi, had favored desegregation outright. Although they had spoken against segregation's worst abuses, they had not spoken against segregation itself. Now, since change must come, they spoke for change, but in good time. They, cautious and cautioning, and not Lillian Smith, were speaking for the white South in the big magazines.

Novelist Robert Penn Warren joined their moderate voices in a 1956 Life article that then appeared as a book, "Segregation." Reviewing it, Lawrence Reddick, an African-American history professor at Alabama State College, wrote in The New Republic that Warren offered up no more than a polite version of the southern picture painted "in cruder colors in the extremist press of the Deep South: The mistakes of the North are emphasized; the weaknesses of the Negro are underscored; and, above all, there is the determination of Southern white folk, they say, that 'nobody's a gonna *make* us.'"

That, he said, was the substance of Warren's closing remarks: that desegregation would only come when the white people themselves decided they couldn't go on living with their divided minds. "This is the way it goes," Reddick remarked with palpable bitterness. "Countless editors, scholars and men of letters, in and out of the South, who personally might shrink from killing an insect, give their sanction to the intransigence of the racists. Is it too much to say that there is a connection between the essays, editorials and novels of the literary neo-Confederates and the howling mob that blocks the path of little Negro children on the way to school integration?"

For two years after the Brown decision, as the white resistance gained strength, white southern men, ambivalent or worse, had led the commentary on race in the national magazines.

Reddick had put his finger on a shameful truth. For two years after the Brown decision, as the white resistance gained strength, white southern men, ambivalent or worse, had led the commentary on race in the national magazines. True, The New Republic let Reddick speak his piece and, before the Brown decision, Look magazine did try to get United Nations official Ralph Bunche, formerly a professor at Howard University, to write on segregation in the schools. The Nation did run commentary by African Americans involved in the NAACP and other political organizations. But the most powerful voices in the big circulation magazines were, as Lillian Smith observed, southern white gradualists.

When The New Republic finally let Smith have her say in 1957, she spoke of the "magnolia curtain" that had dropped down between the South and the North. She mocked the magazines' approach to racial change: "[D]on't let one intelligent white Southerner who opposes segregation speak. Keep them smothered…." As one who felt shunted aside, Smith fixed on the exclusion of desegregationists like herself, but the exclusion of African Americans constituted no less a political act. As "Invisible Man" author Ralph Ellison understood, rendering African Americans invisible was one way of disempowering them.

If whites did not notice the one-sided nature of the dialogue, African Americans certainly did. In "Cold Rebellion," published in England just a few years later, Lewis W. Jones observed that "Negroes are frequently unhappy in having their case presented by 'moderates' or 'liberals' whom they surely would not identify as being either moderate or liberal."

Kenneth B. Clark, the social psychologist who had helped the NAACP Legal Defense Fund make its case for Brown, protested a 1954 Reader's Digest article by Hodding Carter, questioning the editors' judgment in selecting Carter as an authority. "While Mr. Carter might feel competent to speak in the name of 'moderate' white southerners, it is presumptuous, patronizing, and not justified by recent events for him to attempt to speak for Negroes."

Why, at this important time, were the nation's magazines—still the primary vehicle for serious national political discussion—so much more interested in southern whites' discomfort than in the longstanding injustice suffered by African Americans? Why were they so little interested in what African Americans themselves had to say about what was happening?

Editors were, of course, journalists with their ears pricked for conflict, and whites were the ones providing conflict by resisting the Supreme Court. Nevertheless, there was something askew in the national media's fixation on the white South's response to Brown—and something more than askew in magazines' publication of articles portraying African Americans as degraded and unworthy. It is hard to escape the predictable, dreary fact that white editors, in this challenging hour, were unable to think outside the terms of their own race. Enclosed in their white worlds, instead of leading the way to change, they settled in behind the lines. ■

Carol Polsgrove is the author of "Divided Minds: Intellectuals and the Civil Rights Movement," published in May by W.W. Norton. A former Associated Press writer, she has been an editor at Mother Jones and The Progressive and has contributed to other national magazines. She is on the School of Journalism faculty at Indiana University, Bloomington.

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Journalism and Myth

Do They Create a Cautionary Tale?

Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism
Jack Lule
The Guilford Press. 244 Pages. $17.95.

By William F. Woo

Jack Lule has written a very good and engaging book about journalism and myth, and because of all the things to admire—the clarity, originality, scholarship and becomMing intellectual modesty of the author—I put it down with a sense of foreboding. Even now, journalists somewhere must be enduring a PowerPoint presentation: "Myth: How to Write It and Why."

In my imagination, I see a newsroom still aglow from the recent workshops to reconnect the paper with citizens (readers or the public, in a simpler time). A new sense of purpose suffuses the place. Received truth once more has asserted itself. Nonetheless, something is amiss. The editor frowns as he works over the Sunday take-out. The copy is clean enough to eat from. The facts are in order. But what is this? Try though he may, the editor cannot find the myth.

There is no Trickster, no Good Mother. He searches in vain for one of the great Master Myths—the Victim, the Hero, the Scapegoat, even the Flood, though this story happens to be about a fire in the projects. Finally, in exasperation, he summons the reporter in hopes of negotiating a rewrite.

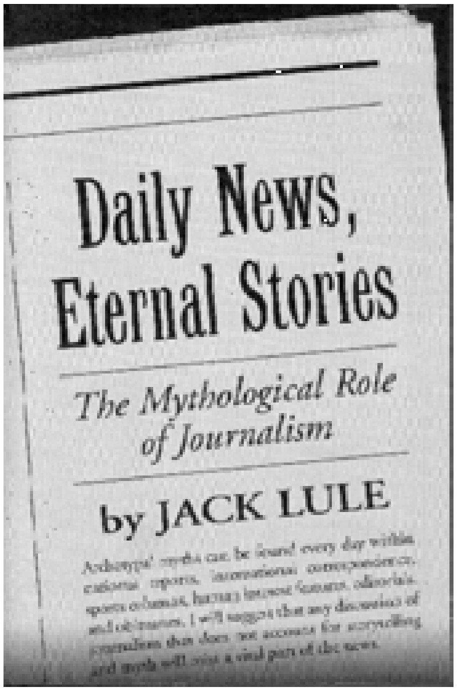
Had this burlesque occurred, Jack Lule would be appalled. His book, "Daily News, Eternal Stories," is not meant as a guide to newsroom practice. A former journalist and now chair of the Department of Journalism and Communication at Lehigh University, Lule offers an interesting way of looking at the news by demonstrating that the stories we put in the paper can be read as versions of our oldest myths.

Even so—and here my scalp begins to prickle—Lule asserts that "any attempt to address the crisis [in journalism] that does not recognize the mythological role of journalism is destined to fail." The information model of journalism is bankrupt, he suggests. "Newspeople think they are in the information business.… But newspeople primarily are in the story business. And news will remain a subject of crisis as long as it strays from story."

Myths, of courses, are the universal, eternal stories. But how are they also journalism? Like this, Lule suggests: "Myths," he writes, "draw upon archetypal figures to offer exemplary models that represent shared values, confirm core beliefs, deny other beliefs, and help people engage with, appreciate, and understand the complex joys and sorrows of human life." So, of course, do news stories, and in them, Lule says, we can hear "the siren song of myth."

Seven case studies are provided from The New York Times, which Lule calls our State Scribe, "society's privileged and preeminent storyteller." Lule's exhaustive work describes how the details and themes of hundreds of stories coalesce into myth. Here's an example. In the coverage of the murder of Leon Klinghoffer, the elderly American tourist killed in 1985 by Palestinian terrorists, Lule found the recreation of a compelling myth, the sacrifice of the Victim.

The story begins with Klinghoffer, who was confined to a wheelchair, among the hostages aboard the cruise ship Achille Lauro. Then he is killed and the tale focuses on the widow's agony. A more detailed portrait of the victim emerges, and he is transformed from a most ordinary man into a hero. (A headline: "Aged Victim, Portrayed as Helpless, is Recalled as a Strong, Happy Man.") The president calls to offer sympathy and strength. The body is brought home, and the governor, the mayor and two U.S. senators are there. Klinghoffer has become "a symbol of righteousness in a world filled with evil and cruelty."


Daily News,
Eternal Stories
The Mythological Role of Journalism
by JACK LULE

We can now find meaning in seemingly senseless and random violence: The Victim's life was sacrificed for others. "In the face of chaos," Lule writes, "order is established. In the face of death, life is affirmed. In the face of tragedy, news becomes myth."

By examining with similar meticulousness the degrading stories about the death of Huey Newton, a founder of the Black Panthers, Lule finds the myth of the Scapegoat and its warning to those who challenge social orthodoxy. Mark McGwire and his "quest" for the home run record recall the myth of the Hero from humble origins; Mother Teresa becomes the mythological Good Mother, "blessed among women;" the boxer and rapist Mike Tyson is seen as the Trickster, "the original savage/victim;" the coverage of Haiti evokes the myth of the strange and frightening Other World; a hurricane in Central America provides the myth of the Flood, the devastation set loose upon a people by elemental forces beyond their control and because of their iniquity (in this case the corrupt government and corporate policies that allowed houses to be built in unsafe areas).

Long before Lule wrote about myths and journalism, we had it drummed into us that there were not many stories, only the merest handful: the love story, the death story, the betrayal story, the redemption story, the triumph-over-adversity story. And which one, exactly, were you, the young reporter, trying to write just now?

Lule argues his cases skillfully and provocatively. But did the writers and editors of the Times set out to recreate these myths? It scarcely matters. News stories almost always develop in ways that are familiar, and what are myths, after all, but the most familiar, the most fundamental, of all stories? Yet, not all stories are myths, as Lule acknowledges by quoting an indelicate remark that Freud is supposed to have made—that sometimes a cigar is just a cigar. Sometimes the news is just the news.

This is a book that will intellectually engage any journalist. My concern comes from what reporters and editors might do with it. The premonition I described earlier arises from that concern. As an editor, and now as a teacher of aspiring reporters, my question always is, how will this theory be reflected in the news product? Civic journalism is an interesting theory. How will it play out? The theories of the nonfiction prose narrative and of mapping are interesting. How will they play out? A theory linking myth and journalism is interesting. But how will it play out in the day-to-day work of assigning, reporting, writing and editing stories?

As an editor, too, I came to acquire a wariness of theory in the hands of sudden true believers. Reporters and editors would go to this or that workshop on writing and return from the mountain top with the dogma du jour, which in turn inspired the heretically inclined to nonconformity and rebellion. Pronunciamentos would be uttered at the ever more frequent graveside services for the inverted triangle and other relics of tradition. And consultants would come through, and when they finally went their way again, we had more new theories to apply. To make the newsroom "work," we would search for the "Identified Patient." We had not known that the techniques of family therapy were to be used in journalism. We were only editors and reporters, but how earnestly we wished to learn enough to drive back the gathering night.

Long before Lule wrote about myths and journalism, we had it drummed into us that there were not many stories, only the merest handful: the love story, the death story, the betrayal story, the redemption story, the triumph-over-adversity story. And which one, exactly, were you, the young reporter, trying to write just now?

I think of myself as a fundamentalist who hears always the stern voice of his first editor saying, "Just write what happened," a fundamentalist who still believes in the power of truth to set us free and that the truth we journalists are after is what happened, not what might have happened or what we would like to have happened or what the well-made story or recreated myth require to have happened. The truth is the information in the story; it is not the story. It is the content, not the carton.

I also happen to believe, along with Jack Lule, that myths are infinitely enriching, arising as they have from thousands of years of a common human experience. Where we can easily go wrong as journalists is by trying too hard to retell the myth—or the Ur-story, as editors will soon be calling it—when we report on the city council or the homer in the ninth or the suicide of teenage lovers. Jack Lule surely would agree.

The simplest obituary, the plainest story about the violent thunderstorm that walked across the town last night, the most straightforward accounting of the longtime iron-fisted mayor who was unexpectedly tossed out by a nobody—all these can touch the universal subconscious if they are told without embellishment or pretense.

Read and enjoy this good book. But just write what happened. Scrupulously. The myths will take care of themselves without any help from us. They have for centuries. ■

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The Evolutionary Growth of Newspapers' Look and Feel

'Readers appreciate the design and feel of a publication *before* assessing its contents.'

The Form of News: A History
Kevin G. Barnhurst and John Nerone
The Guilford Press. 326 Pages. $35.

By Warren Watson

Oh, what a difference a century makes.

One hundred twenty-five years ago, crowds numbering in the tens of thousands were astonished by the speed, power and ingenuity of a working newspaper printing press on display at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

Visitors, standing in awe, witnessed this technological marvel, a manifestation of the might of a 100-year-old nation just moving into the world limelight. In less than a century, the newspaper had a respected and feared monopoly in the information business, an institution like no other.

Kevin Barnhurst and John Nerone recall this unique moment in "The Form of News," their well-referenced new book on the history of the American newspaper from colonial times till the present.

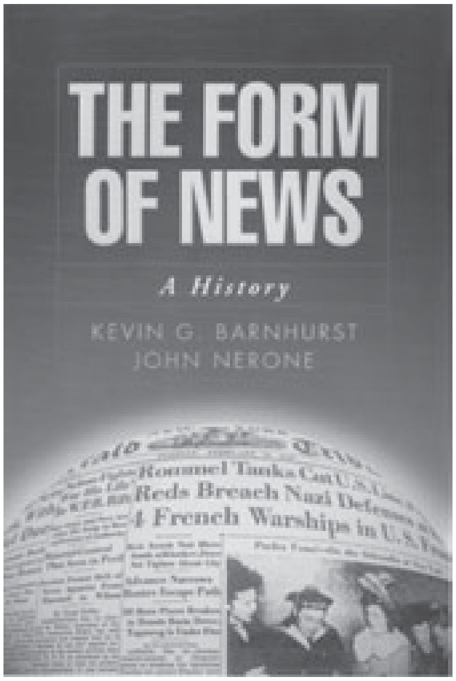
Of course, today, no one is in awe of the newspaper, not even an insider. Competition is everywhere, and the newspaper suffers further from a lack of interest from a non-reading public. The technology appears primitive by micro-chip standards, and publishers cannot seem to satisfy the profit expectations of Wall Street as they cut staff and content. As Barnhurst and Nerone remind us, it wasn't always that way. The press "was a source of peculiar energy of the newly imperial public," they write.

"The Form of News" is not your usual newspaper history, often heavy on personality, family squabbling, and politics. It is quite light on the colorful moments that make newspapers such a special institution. The book is an academic, sometimes clinical and dispassionate, examination about how social, economic and cultural forces led to the development of the modern, professional product we call today's newspaper.

The authors dispel popularly held notions that technological advances have driven change in the look and feel of the newspaper. They claim that inventions such as the telegraph (wire news) and the telephone (rewrite desks, different ways of writing) were factors but not shaping forces. Whether one agrees or not (the point may be best decided in bars frequented by journalists), the authors put in commendable research in the development of the book, which delves into the relationship between democratic civic culture and the look and feel of the newspaper.

By form, the authors mean "everything a newspaper does to present the look of the news. …We mean the persisting visible structure of the newspaper, the things that make The New York Times, for example, recognizable as the same newspaper day after day although the content changes," they write.

So in many ways the book is a history of the layout and design of news, including typography, habits of illustration, and use of photography. But it also tracks genres of reportage and how newspapers compartmentalized to meet the needs of a busy public.



At times, the text places too much importance on underlying cultural forces as the driver of change, and not enough on the pioneer writers and editors who shaped the newspaper and its history. Surely, Hearst and Pulitzer, and Greeley and Scripps, characters all but important figures to a one, deserve some mention in the transformation of the newspaper as a mass medium.

Nevertheless, Barnhurst and Nerone cover ground that has rarely been tread before. And they do it with a keen eye on historical context. I'm a former writer who calls himself a born-again newspaper designer. I came late to the visual form, appreciating later than most that readers appreciate the design and feel of a publication *before* assessing its contents.

So I was intrigued in learning how illustration and photography developed in newspaper pages, that it took many years for objective photography to supplant often-subjective drawings, long after the technology had been mastered. How bylines developed. How headline styles evolved to the point whereby they capture the essence of stories rather than provide an outline as they did in 1900. And I found it fascinating that most of the creative leaps forward in the look of newspapers found their way through advertising, not news.

The authors contend that a design revolution did not take place during the 1970's and 1980's, despite the fact that most newspapers made significant (and sometimes overnight) strides in creating a more organized, colorful and attractive look. They see those design forces gradually infiltrating culture through the late 19th and early part of the 20th century, only moving at a faster pace when the modern art movement arrived with the Armory Show of 1913, which showcased the art and design ideas of Europe. This would surprise some newcomers to the craft, who think the design movement began with the introduction of USA Today in 1982.

And I was impressed at how the authors have skillfully broken down the American newspaper development into a series of stages—printerly newspapers ("bookish and homemade"), Victorian newspapers ("crowded and busy"), and modern newspapers ("purposeful and organized"). Further, they trace the type and style of the newspaper from Industrial to Professional to Corporate, with improvements along the way.

The authors, in their forward, say they have attempted to mirror the rise and decline of American civic culture in this work. I'm not sure they have succeeded here, but they have kicked up loads of interesting facts along the way.

We do know one thing. Today's newspaper is a product of a developing market revolution that started long ago. The authors talk about how newspapers first wrote about market changes, then were cheerleaders for them—at least in terms of modern improvements in transportation and communication. Of course, those commercial forces took years to become the dominant determining factors in U.S. culture.

But that is the case today. Fewer family-owned enterprises remain, and more and more dailies are part of publicly owned chains that are driven largely by forces connected to the bottom line. We're trying but, on the whole, it's becoming more and more challenging for anyone to practice effective journalism. Look what we've unleashed.

Yes, the newspaper is not the guardian of civic culture as it once was. And it will be increasingly difficult to recapture that role if we continue to cut budgets and news staffs to maintain the kind of profit margins that other industries crave. ■

Warren Watson is director of extended learning at the American Press Institute. A newspaper reporter, editor and designer for 26 years, he is the second vice president of the Society for News Design and will be its president in 2003.

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Editorials: Pungent, Profound and Path Breaking

A book offers practical pointers about how the best in journalism transmit ideas and opinion.

Beyond Argument: A Handbook for Editorial Writers
Maura Casey and Michael Zuzel, Editors
National Conference of Editorial Writers. 120 Pages. $24.95.

By Nancy Day

The pithier the better: "The basic idea that all of us ought to have tattooed on some visible appendage is that the best editorials focus on a single idea. Just one. Not two," writes Richard Aregood, who won the 1995 Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Writing at The Philadelphia Daily News. After a 28-year career in Philadelphia, Aregood joined The (Newark) Star-Ledger, where he edits the editorial page. He is one of 11 editorial writers whose visions and practical advice are collected in this valuable handbook, part of the Scripps Howard Foundation's "Role Model Series."

The National Conference of Editorial Writers (NCEW) undertook this project in part because "a good many editorial writers enter the craft suddenly and without formal preparation," writes Francis L. Partsch, editorial page editor of the Omaha World-Herald. Writing with this audience in mind explains why some of the advice sounds basic. Other points, however, should spark discussion among veteran editors, writers and managers, especially the passages addressing new ways of doing business without sacrificing the core of this oldest form of American journalism, opinion writing.

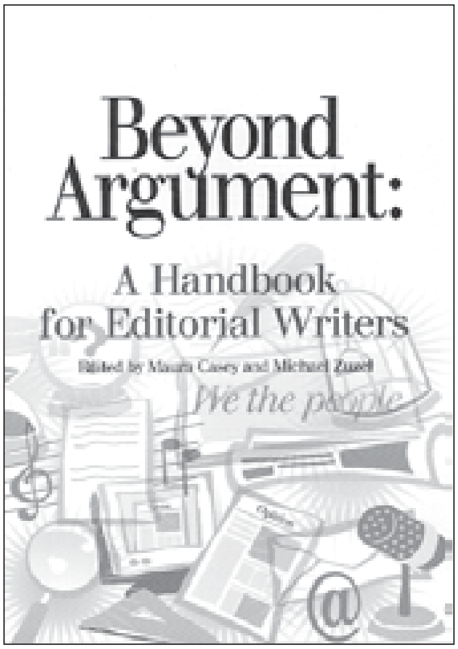
Aregood says one of his all-time favorite editorials bore the headline: "Adios, Dictator." Its full text read: "They say only the good die young. Generalissimo Francisco Franco was 82. Seems about right." In retrospect, Aregood writes, the last sentence is superfluous.

Brevity has its advantages, but in recent years editorial series, resulting from months of enterprise reporting, have made significant and enduring differences and gained the attention of the Pulitzer board. John Bersia calls his Orlando Sentinel series, "Fleeced in Florida," "the most intensive reporting project of my career." And Maria Henson—who is now deputy editorial page editor of the Austin American-Statesman—worked on an editorial series for 16 months, including the year in which "To Have and To Harm: Kentucky's Failure to Protect Women From the Men Who Beat Them" appeared in the Lexington Herald-Leader.

Pungent, profound or path breaking, the editorials cited in this book, along with ways to achieve similar excellence, are important for all journalists to read. However, the book will be most helpful to those who must pick up the slack when talented editorial writers are off doing projects. Practical advice ranges from filling the page to keeping up morale.

Though some attention is devoted to electronic media, the emphasis is on newspapers and their online counterparts. This is, perhaps, because it is rare that local or network television has its own editorial board or director. One exception is WISC-TV in Madison, Wisconsin, where Editorial Director Neil Heinen says he hopes the station's online site will help foster more interactivity with viewers.

Several writers address the Internet, both as a resource and as a way to get communities of all sizes more engaged. As a reference source, the Internet allows editorial writers to more quickly and comprehensively examine primary documents. Danny Glover (the managing editor of National Journal's Technology Daily, not the actor) suggests ways to connect opinion pages to the Internet. These include moderated forums, readers' logs (such as links in Jim Romenesko's daily media column at www.poynter.org), and interactive editorial boards.


Beyond Argument:
A Handbook for Editorial Writers
Edited by Maura Casey and Michael Zuzel
We the people

Michael Zuzel, co-editor and editorial writer and columnist for The Columbian in Vancouver, Washington, calls the editorial page "the original interactive mass medium." Letters to the Editor are still vital, he says, but he recommends readers use the Web to immediately access previous stories and background on current topics, and he suggests www.intellectualcapital.com, one of the book's many tips and useful references. Susan Albright, editor of the (Minneapolis) Star Tribune editorial pages, who is credited with conceiving this book, offers down-to-earth management advice—from bringing doughnuts occasionally to doing "those dratted performance reviews on time. Your staff wants your feedback, and they deserve the raise now."

To this day, too many editorial pages remain a stodgy and serious gray, all type and no action. This is a serious mistake. Even something as simple as running the editorial cartoon in color makes a difference. One clear editorial point, surrounded by photos, can have dramatic impact. The Spokesman-Review in Spokane, Washington ran biographies and photos of 35 people killed in 1999 on "The Highway of Heartache" to accompany an investigative series on the deadly Idaho portion of U.S. Route 95. More radical are stand-alone editorial graphics: The New York Times's "Op Art" is sometimes a single image, but on July 3, 2000, the editors published 35 close-up photos of people holding American flags with the headline, "What is America?"

Though Howell Raines, the New York Times editorial page editor recently named executive editor of the newspaper, is quoted in several essays, smaller and mid-sized newspapers are abundantly featured. In fact, several writers argue persuasively that editorial board meetings at some larger news organizations get in the way of doing a good job.

George B. Pyle, a columnist and editorial writer for The Salina (Kansas) Journal, was a finalist for the 1998 Pulitzer Prize. That year it was won by Bernard Stein, who writes for his family's weekly neighborhood newspaper, The Riverdale Press, in New York. The other finalist was Clint Talbott of the Colorado Daily in Boulder. Later that year, these three men appeared on a panel at the NCEW convention. Pyle writes of their common ground: "'We noted that each of us had the freedom to write what interested and moved us, without the need to first convince other members of an editorial board.' Panel moderator Phil Haslanger, managing editor of The Capital Times in Madison, Wisconsin, instantly labeled this circumstance, 'Room, but no board.'"

Paul Greenberg, editorial page editor of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, says columnists are better read than many of today's editorials and claims that it is the profession's own fault: "Today's editorial page oozes prudence, which is too often a euphemism for fear, especially the fear of ideas." He advocates scrapping editorial board meetings: "They're boring as hell and twice as long."

The book is illustrated with black and white cartoons by Jeff Danziger and Signe Wilkinson, and it is noted that this sparest of forms is represented by staff cartoonists at fewer than one-tenth of U.S. daily newspapers. While it won't help the employment situation of professional cartoonists in the current news economy, in this book the editors give ways to solicit cartoons from the public—and sound somewhat surprised that this has actually worked.

"In the end, the secrets are simple and the rules are few," Aregood concludes. "If you have something to say, spit it out. If you don't, shut up. The rest is mere technique." ■

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Essays by a Mexican Journalist Explore the Americas

Exposing the 'nervous system of countries struggling with great change.'

Looking for History: Dispatches From Latin America
Alma Guillermoprieto
Pantheon. 303 Pages. $25.

By Dianne Solís

America and the Americas are often two concepts that those of us living in the United States have trouble grasping. We think of America as limited to only the United States. Yet travel the whole of the Americas and its citizens will tell you that they, too, are Americans with their own histories, their own pursuits of liberty and justice.

And so Mexico-born writer Alma Guillermoprieto tells us simply and bluntly that she wrote her new book, "Looking for History," with the "conviction that Latin America has its own independent life."

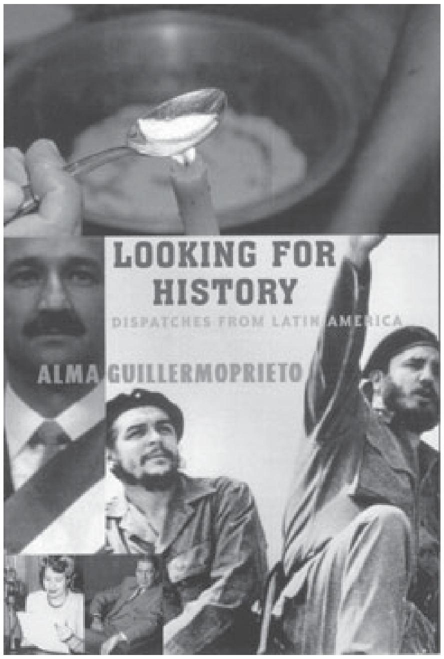
What emerges is a collection of 17 essays that take readers through the sad psychological and political battles of Colombians, Cubans and Mexicans—all from countries that shape U.S. policy like no others in the Western Hemisphere. Interspersed are profiles of the Argentineans Evita Perón and Che Guevara and Peruvian Mario Vargas Llosa.

Nearly half of the book is devoted to a series of scarcely believable tales from Mexico, where Guillermoprieto was born and returned to live in the mid-1990's. All of these essays appeared in The New Yorker and in The New York Review of Books between 1994 and 2000.

In this book, Guillermoprieto is at her best in her psychological portraits of Latin America's unconventional politicos. Among them are Vargas Llosa, the Peruvian writer who lost a presidential bid; Guevara, the icon by which the Latin American left defined itself, and Vicente Fox, the Mexican rancher who dethroned a corrupt political machine to take the presidency.

Guillermoprieto makes it clear why Vargas Llosa, an author of inspiring prose, failed miserably in his presidential bid. He wasn't much of a patriot, having written, "Although I was born in Peru, my vocation is that of a cosmopolitan and an expatriate who has always detested nationalism."

Her essay about Vargas Llosa also opens up a window into a cruel theme—what Guillermoprieto calls a fundamental trait of Peruvians, but is very much a continuing problem of Latin America and those in the diaspora to the United States. These nations and their peoples are constantly immersed in conflict over their mixed blood and class. It's "the deep-seated explanation for the conflicts and frustrations of Peruvian life," Guillermoprieto writes.



In her artfully handled essay on Che, it's easy to understand why Guillermoprieto, with her sympathies for the poor, was drawn to Che as a subject matter. Here she dissects three weighty tomes, published in 1997, on Che. And in doing so she quickly takes the reader into her generation's own psyche. "Guevara was born in Latin America's hour of the hero," she writes. "So many of our leaders have been so corrupt, and the range of allowed and possibly public activity has been so narrow, and injustice has cried out so piercingly to the heavens, that only a hero can answer the call, and only a heroic mode of life could seem worthy. Guevara stood out against the inflamed horizon of his time, alone and unique."

She sees Che's flaws, though. With horizon inflamed, a generation of followers were "incinerated" by their Che ideology. In a very personal passage, she details how those "children of Che" armed in radical revolution would die, including a great friend of Guillermoprieto's mother, a poet and feminist editor named Alaíde Foppa. And by synthesizing details from a book by Jon Anderson, she shows how Che, this man of the people, was a machista of an elitist background who would have his sexual way with the family maids. She writes that Guevara's slogans now sound foolish. And she highlights that with work from a book by Jorge Castaneda, a political scientist who is now Mexico's foreign minister.

This book illustrates Guillermoprieto's veteran ability to rush into what sometimes seems madness and expose the nervous system of countries struggling with great change.

Castaneda's Che is a man who cannot bear the natural ambivalence of the world, a world of gray where people have mixed allegiances. As the eventual head of the Central Bank, for example, Che was flummoxed by day-to-day realities of running a government. "Why corrupt workers by offering them more money to work harder?" Given the region's history of rickety economies, the reader wonders if a Latin American could be found today who shares that view.

The Mexican section is full of painful reading. It's devoted largely to the opera buffa that Mexico became during the years that Carlos Salinas reigned in the imperial presidency and the years that followed when the sober economist Ernesto Zedillo took over the script. These are librettos of sex, drugs, murder and guerrilla uprisings, unearthed skeletons, and paid informants who worked as sorcerers. The material is interwoven with a few topsy-turvy plot twists in which heroes frequently became villains.

The book's "Losing the Future" is a small essay about a large tragedy. It deals with the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio, the virtual president of Mexico, in a hilly slum named after bullfighting in Tijuana. On March 23, 1994, the candidate was shot in the head at close range. A lynching mob surrounded the man believed to be the assassin. The details of the hysteria and the hugely disorganized investigation that followed in Tijuana are left out of the book. Instead, the author focuses on Mexico City and the tremors in the seat of power. The discipline that had kept the Institutional Revolutionary Party together for an astonishing number of years after the Mexican Revolution no longer exists, she wrote in a 1994 dispatch. But it would take another six years to fully knock the corrupt ruling party from power in Los Piños, the pine-studded presidential complex in the polluted capital.

And when the reader fast-forwards to July 2000, there is at last a sense of optimism. It is in the portrait of Fox, the rancher who took the Mexican presidency from the ruling party, and in a smaller snapshot of a political activist named Sergio Aguayo, who built an organization called Alianza Cívica to insure clean, not just cleaner, elections in Mexico.

Guillermoprieto takes note of the "nutty extremes" to which Fox will take his rhetoric: He is the man who, after all, first came to the Mexican public's attention by looping a pair of paper voting ballots over his ears in an attempt to make fun of the protruding ears of then-president Carlos Salinas.

The hope comes in her elegant passages with Aguayo, who as a young member of the feared Los Vikingos battled an opposing gang linked to the ruling party in Guadalajara. Aguayo is now in his early 50's. The night after the elections, the author calls Aguayo to see how he fared in his bid for a seat in Congress. "Isn't it wonderful?" he asked. Assuming he'd won, Guillermoprieto answered that she was delighted to congratulate him on his victory. "What, me?" he said. "Oh, no, I lost. But the PRI lost, too, and that's just marvelous." Finally, a Mexican subject with the dignity of a patriot.

Guillermoprieto's reputation was honed in the wars of Central America. As a Washington Post reporter, she was one of only two journalists to travel to El Salvador and report on a horrific 1981 massacre at El Mozote conducted by a U.S.-trained Salvadoran army.

"Looking for History" illustrates Guillermoprieto's veteran ability to rush into what sometimes seems madness and expose the nervous system of countries struggling with great change. While her previous book, "The Heart That Bleeds: Latin America Now," dealt with common experiences of Latin Americans in a set of chronicles from an earlier period, "Looking for History" deals largely with politics. Those looking for heart-that-bleeds chronicles of windowpane fitters, garbage collectors and ranchera singers will find few essays that are similar. One exception: "The Children's War," a penetrating essay from Colombia on girl guerrillas, cocaine and U.S. military aid.

But this book should more than satisfy anyone looking for Guillermoprieto's ear and eye for detail and her poetic metaphors. And those wanting to learn more about the region's politics will be equally enriched. ■

Dianne Solís, a 1990 Nieman Fellow, is a writer for The Dallas Morning News. She was formerly based in Mexico City for The Wall Street Journal in 1991 through 1997.

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A Journalist Allows This Story to Speak for Itself

This House Has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria
Karl Maier
Public Affairs. 327 Pages. $26.

By Wilson Wanene

Eight years ago a presidential election was held in an African country that was remarkable, given the continent's gloomy record in holding trouble-free elections. The outcome surprised many. As the results were being tallied, international monitors declared it the most free election ever held in that country. As if this wasn't surprising enough, the candidate viewed to have the military government's blessing appeared headed for a major loss. And the voting pattern defied the usual trend in Africa. The leading candidate was drawing support outside his ethnic group.

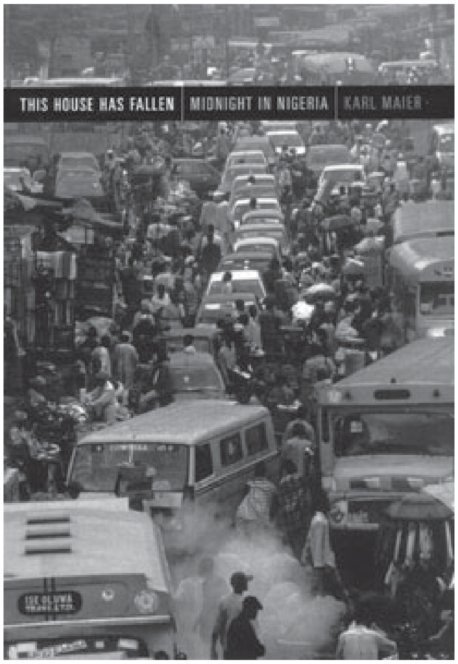
But before everyone could really savor the excitement, the junta leader, who was not in the running and had promised to step aside once a civilian was chosen, annulled the elections. The military effectively re-asserted its control. The country was suddenly plunged into a crisis from which it only recently began to emerge. The reason why the whole affair was particularly captivating, especially for Africans, was that it took place in Nigeria, the most populous nation on the continent.

Between the 1960's, when most African nations won independence, and the end of the Cold War, most of them were either run by autocrats or military men. Many scandals were reported by Western correspondents who were not subject to the same repression as their African counterparts. But even a Western journalist rarely could manage to get a one-on-one interview with a leader suspected of ordering an assassination, pocketing a huge cache of public funds, or any other gross misdeed. The idea of glimpsing a political event, from the point of view of an out-of-power leader, is still rare in Africa.

This is one example why Karl Maier's "This House Has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria" is remarkable. Through a well-placed contact, he manages to track down Ibrahim Babangida, the former Nigerian strongman who canceled the 1993 elections. Meeting him at his hometown mansion, Maier conducts an intriguing interview. For example, regarding the annulled elections, the author states: "Despite the fact that [Moshood] Abiola broke the mold of presidential politics in Nigeria by winning votes across regional and religious barriers, Babangida attempted to argue that his victory actually threatened Nigeria's unity.… But Babangida's version of events did not bear close scrutiny."

The book is a well-written, enlightening, though sad account of this complex West African nation, which has been hemorrhaging from years of misrule, repression and extreme corruption. The reporting is a skillful mixture of recent Nigerian history, carefully selected interviews, and vibrant local color ("As one columnist put it, Nigerian democracy had gone 'democrazy.'") The Africa correspondent for The Independent of London from 1986 to 1996, Maier—an American—has written two other books on Africa, "Angola: Promises and Lies," and "Into the House of the Ancestors: Inside the New Africa."

With 110 million people, one of every five black Africans is Nigerian. The nation is a seemingly unwieldy collection of over 250 ethnic groups. Two of the world's major religions—Christianity and Islam—are well represented in the country. For the United States, it's the fifth largest supplier of crude oil. Yet it's one of the 20 poorest countries in the world, according to the World Bank. And, according to the U.S. Energy Department, it suffers an external debt of between $30 to $34 billion and has to pay out $400-$500 million each year just to service it.



There's an understandable tendency among American foreign correspondents in Africa to subtly point out—in articles or books—why their topics are important. Implicit is the assumption that Africa is quite remote to the ordinary American. To help readers back home, pieces are peppered with comparative examples. One learns that Kenya is roughly the size of Texas; Democratic Republic of the Congo is equal to the United States east of the Mississippi; Burundi is comparable to Connecticut, and so on.

What's interesting about Maier is that save for the preface, he doesn't really waste time trying to justify Nigeria's significance. He just dives into his story. Perhaps this is due to his having worked for a British paper, or he simply feels that the book will mostly be read by those with a pre-existing interest in Africa. Whatever the case, the result is refreshing and proves that there really isn't a fixed way of reporting on Africa. A good journalist will get the story out, one way or another. And the story will speak for itself.

The Nigeria that emerges, as with much of sub-Saharan Africa, is cause for sobriety. Despite a bloody three-year civil war in the late 1960's, which left a million people dead, ethnic tensions still simmer and claim lives. Communities in the oil producing regions of the country, such as the Ogonis, feel none of the benefits have come to them, and their poverty is shocking. A breakup of the country cannot be ruled out. Abiola, the presumed winner of the 1993 presidential elections, died three years ago while imprisoned by the authorities for declaring himself Nigeria's legitimate leader. In 1999 Olusegun Obasanjo, a retired general who ruled Nigeria from 1976 to 1979, was sworn in as a civilian president following an election that was supposed to put an end to military rule. But it's too early to tell whether democracy will take root. The country has been run by soldiers for all but 13 years since it won independence from Britain in 1960.

Maier, at the beginning of his book, hints at Nigeria's attractive side. It has produced prized art works; acclaimed writers like Chinua Achebe and the Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka; talented sports figures such as Hakeem Olajuwon of the Houston Rockets, and internationally recognized singers like Sade, Seal and Fela Kuti, whose career and life were cut short by AIDS in 1997. However, the author chooses to focus on the dire challenges presently confronting what he terms "perhaps the largest failed state in the Third World." And it's to his credit that he maintains this focus, for one is forced to wonder how a country can squander so much potential. And the urgency to find remedies is keenly felt. He suggests that only if the present government is dead serious about reforming the country, and allows for a wide-ranging national dialogue, will disaster be averted. ■

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He Displeased His Bosses, Not to Mention Those He Covered

Daniel Schorr writes about his tempestuous career as a reporter.

Staying Tuned: A Life in Journalism
Daniel Schorr
Pocket Books. 345 Pages. $26.95.

By John Herbers

Among the ever critical editors and reporters who work for newspapers, Daniel Schorr may well be the most admired broadcast journalist of our time. In a reporting career stretching back to the 1940's, he has been a staunch defender of the First Amendment, a tireless searcher for the truth in both domestic and foreign affairs, and a brilliant analyst of the increasing complexities confronting a domestic society, the latter a role he continues through National Public Radio.

A reader of his memoir, "Staying Tuned: A Life in Journalism," might wonder how his career would have differed had he found his first major job on The New York Times rather than with CBS News. He writes that he wanted most of all to be a foreign correspondent for the Times, which repeatedly turned him down. At one point he was told that after lengthy consultations with the newspaper Turner Catledge, then the executive editor, had ordered a freeze on hiring additional Jews on the foreign staff for fear it might hamper the paper's coverage of any mid-East war. The ban was soon canceled, and Schorr was the only person affected by it.

On other occasions, any number of reasons for his rejection might have been at play on a paper, then and now, constantly besieged by job seekers. Certainly it was not lack of talent. Having later worked for the Times, I believe that had Schorr gone on the staff he would most certainly have been an outstanding correspondent and would eventually made a top editor or columnist. But he would not be recognized as a celebrity by leaders and others around the world and, of course, he would have had less material wealth. On the other hand, he would not have had to undergo the excruciating treatment he received from television executives and owners. After establishing a distinguished record at CBS News, he was fired for passing a secret CIA report to The Village Voice after the network refused to let him broadcast it.

The falling out, however, went much deeper than that. CBS executives were displeased that some of his reporting offended government officials who duly complained to the network's headquarters. Schorr took that in stride, acknowledging that because broadcasters are government regulated they do not have the freedom that newspapers enjoy. Some of his difficulties, however, stemmed from standard network practices. Reporters, given two minutes to explain a complicated development, were encouraged to end the segment with a statement of what it means. Too frequently the reporter would state the facts, briefly, then sign off with a one-sentence editorial.

In reporting Nixon's statement to a publisher's convention in 1974 that "your president is not a crook," Schorr concluded in his broadcast, "The evidence indicates otherwise." No print reporter could get away with that. He or she would be expected to write what the evidence was and let the reader decide. But not TV.

This and other broadcasts by the network caused CBS Chairman William Paley to order the abolition of "instant analysis" of Nixon appearances, but his order would have no effect on overall TV news practices. Schorr was too conscientious and prickly to thrive in that culture.

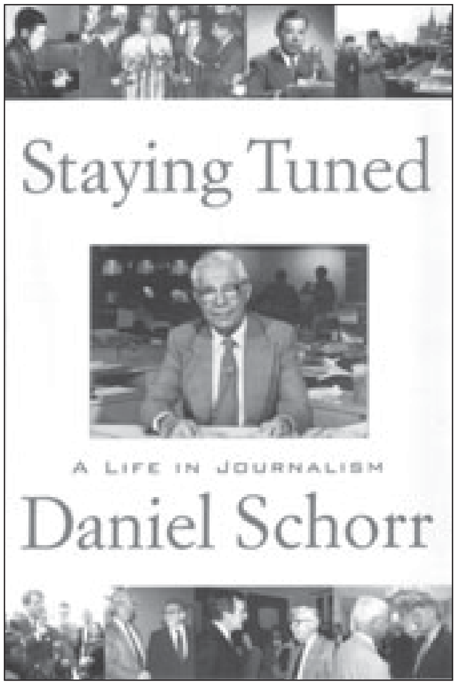
After leaving CBS at the age of 60, he coasted "on the momentum of fame" by lecturing, teaching at Berkeley, and writing a newspaper column. But none of these satisfied his appetite for reporting. So when Ted Turner, who was then in the process of creating an around-the-clock television news service, came to him with a job offer, he succumbed to the opportunity and was soon back on the television screen for Cable News Network (CNN).

If there was ever an odd couple it was Turner and Schorr. Yet Schorr prospered and renewed his fame for a few years. But when CNN tried to eliminate a clause from his contract that gave him the right to refuse an assignment, Schorr balked and CNN let him go. The network asked him to return the large satellite receiver dish that Turner had given him six years earlier, before cable service was available.

Schorr replied, "I would be glad to return the dish, but since it had been a personal gift from Turner, I would like a letter from him requesting it. Also I would expect CNN to pay for relandscaping after it was dug up. And, since the dish had attracted local newspaper attention when it was first installed, the removal probably would be noted by the media."

A CNN manager called to say, "Keep the f— dish." Schorr noted, "It still stands there, a memento."

It is obvious throughout the book that Schorr has a very large ego, which he acknowledges. The book would have been improved had it been shortened by a third. Time after time Schorr relates the details of assignments he carried out around the globe that add little to his story. He is a consummate name-dropper. The index reads like a listing of people of prominence in the latter half of the 20th century.



But, unlike most self-absorbed celebrities, there is another side to him. He has a deep concern about social justice. Perhaps that was due to the influence of his wife, Lisbeth Bamberger Schorr. He was 50 years old when they were married. He had worked mostly abroad and she, a social scientist, was employed in Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. He began to take on domestic assignments that had none of the glamour of the international arena he was accustomed to following. I observed him at the 1972 Republican National Convention covering the platform committee with a vengeance, an assignment most reporters shunned as irrelevant to the process of nominating a president.

Years later, President Clinton put his hand on Schorr's shoulder and said, "Dan, marrying Li was the smartest thing you ever did." Clinton had talked to her at length about a book she had written, "Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage."

Schorr dutifully reports this, but he stops short of saying—perhaps he does not know—that her book is considered a signal achievement among her peers that could have a more lasting legacy than anything her husband did. Toward the end of his book, Schorr observes that his view of his and his family's accomplishments is shifting. "In the twilight of a life and a career, I find new enjoyment in the way my wife, my son, my daughter have distinguished themselves by serving the public weal," he writes.

Schorr continues to make an impressive contribution with his reporting and analysis on NPR, which reaches an audience interested in advancing humane and lasting values. "In the old days," Schorr concludes, "people would recognize me and say, 'I've seen you on television.' In recent years it is more likely to be someone who swivels around in a restaurant and says, 'I would know that voice anywhere,' and then something like 'Thank you for explaining things.' I find that most satisfying." ■

John Herbers was for 24 years a reporter and editor at The New York Times and covered civil rights, urban affairs, congress, national politics, the White House, and demographic trends. He is a 1961 Nieman Fellow.

Nieman Notes

Compiled by Lois Fiore

Nieman Fellows Take to the Road in Korea

'For 10 days we changed from being reporters to being diplomats of our profession.'

By Stefanie Friedhoff

The Nieman Fellows meet South Korean journalists in a conference room on top of Seoul. Old linoleum floors, new microphones, and a view that strikes the eye: skyscrapers, flashing screens, roof decorations in glass and steel. A huge banner says, "Welcome Niemans!" in English, and in Korean, which to me, the German fellow, could be ancient Greek. After our flight halfway around the world, we've entered a world many of us have never been to before—Asia.

On our first day visiting Korea, our topic is online journalism. Soon we learn about Ohmy news, a journalistic Web site that recently scooped the leading national newspapers with stories like the one about some government officials using public money to pay for private amusements. One of the South Korean journalist explains: "The Ohmy news site is received as the only truly alternative source of news right now." In Seoul, half of the homes have Internet access.

My body clock tells me it's nighttime, time for bed, but my mind couldn't be more awake. I did not expect any discussion at this morning meeting—or at any other meeting in Korea—on one of the more delicate issues in the country, the media and the government.

South Korea, long headed by a military government and its propaganda machine, had its first presidential election in 1987. Freedom of the press was introduced—but disassembling a settled media bureaucracy is never easy. Three big conservative newspapers control 70 percent of the newspaper sales. A week before we left Cambridge, The New York Times reported on a controversy with an odd twist: Current president Kim Dae-Jung, a former dissident and devoted liberal elected in 1997, was accused of stopping the major papers from criticizing him. Kim, the story noted, believes there is need for "media reform" and regards the old players as too powerful.

In this muggy conference room on top of Seoul, it seems as if some agree with the president. One of the Korean reporters says that "It is public opinion that Korean news do not have a truthful objectivity." That is one reason why Ohmy news works well, with citizens acting as reporters. Ten thousand people contribute to this Web publication, while some 30 people edit the copy that comes in.

But this leaves me wondering how this Web site can publish articles without checking facts. Didn't we talk during our Nieman year about the ways to maintain quality in online journalism? By a few days into our trip, I find myself realizing how differently we think about these issues in countries like the United States and Germany. In a place like South Korea, where freedom of expression and of the press has yet to become a protected reality, Ohmy news provides a perfect platform to say what cannot yet be said in the regular media. It seems like a signpost along the road to democracy, and people here have more important things to do than to create false news.

Later in our trip, we board a train to head east. Here we are, 10 Niemans from nine countries—including Nigeria, Bosnia, Chile and India—Curator Bob Giles, his wife, Nancy, and U.S.-South African novelist and Nieman writing instructor, Rose Moss. This journey had been arranged and is headed by Lee Dong-Kwan, our Nieman colleague. His aim is to try to bridge the cultural gaps between our backgrounds and his.

If Lee seems slightly nervous, he has every right to feel that way. Our delegation is two-thirds female, and in a traditional country like South Korea, that might be considered almost improper. "Interesting!" the deputy major of the ancient city of Kyungju calls it. "Oh, how unexpected!" says the chief of the Korean Information System. Another issue: Instinctively, we don't like the popularity assigned to us. Wherever we go, we're introduced as "extraordinary and world famous journalists," in a tone that sounds a lot like: "May we proudly present: Madonna!" That we are expert in questioning authorities doesn't seem to matter. Suddenly, we are treated as the officials whom we use to grill. Banners, newspapers, even the TV news talk about us. We receive gifts from politicians, CEO's, even from President Kim. Can that be good?

To Lee's relief we don't revolt, but grab our nametags and do what we do best—observe. After all, we are here to experience the culture. If this treatment is part of it, let's touch, smell and analyze it. Food and gifts are a social language, not just in South Korea, and since our group provides a unique window to many different nations, we are, of course, being pampered. We are served the king's soup, the finest jellyfish, and little somethings in a bag—a wristwatch, a book. We smile, observe and begin to understand.

South Korea is a country of change. It is a traditional culture encountering globalization, an Asian Tiger still digesting the 1997 stock market crisis, and a product of the Cold War trying to open a dialogue with its communist brother in the North. It is a young democracy unraveling the strings of a totalitarian past. To me, it often feels like East Germany in the years after the wall came down, with its subtle chaos and strong contradictions. Along the roads, I see poor farmers, then some of the most sophisticated farming techniques in the global market. There are almost no women in powerful positions, but there are some courageous women performing "The Vagina Monologues" on stage in Seoul every night.

It could be said that we survived a trip of clapping, business attire, and five official appointments a day. But I'd much rather say that for 10 days we changed from being reporters to being diplomats of our profession. We changed from practicing journalism to participating in the globalization of journalism. And South Korean officials endured us as well, this multi-cultural, outspoken group of men and women, as they sat through some never-ending interviews and were baffled by President Kim extending his time with us, stimulated by the nature of our group.

In the end, it was a journey that repeatedly pushed all of us beyond our own cultural, intellectual and emotional borders. And that was the beauty of it.

We were Niemans on the road, and though nobody quite understands what that means, it gives new dimensions to an old idea—to promote and elevate the standards of journalism. Today, that means global journalism. ■

Stefanie Friedhoff is a 2001 Nieman Fellow who is a science writer and correspondent for German newspapers and magazines. She is based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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—1943—

Frank K. Kelly writes, "I must be one of the oldest living Fellows. I was in the class of 1942-43. I was called into the army in January 1943 and returned to finish my fellowship in the spring of 1946."

Kelly has been honored recently with the establishment of the Frank K. Kelly Endowed Lecture on Humanity's Future, an endowment for lectures to be given annually and published as excerpts or in their entirety to the public and to world leaders. Kelly writes from the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, "This project was launched at a luncheon here on my 87th birthday by the directors of this Foundation, which I helped to create in 1982."

A committee is forming to organize the inaugural lecture, to be given by Kelly himself, and to build an endowment for the project. For information, contact David Krieger or Chris Pizzinat at the foundation at 805-965-3443, or visit the Foundation's Web site at www.wagingpeace.org.

—1947—

Jack Foisie died after long illness on June 14 at home in Wilmette, Illinois at the age of 82. Foisie was a journalist for over four decades and was especially well known for his war reporting. He got his start at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, worked at The Seattle Times and San Francisco Chronicle, and served in the Army, first as a combat soldier and then as a combat correspondent during World War II. Working for the Chronicle upon his return, Foisie covered the war in Korea and traveled to Vietnam in 1962. In 1964, he was hired by the Los Angeles Times to be bureau chief in Saigon.

In his Los Angeles Times obituary, Robert W. Gibson, the Times foreign editor who hired him, said that Foisie "was fiercely independent in his thinking on Vietnam and everything else. It made him a marvelous reporter. …He never took hearsay. If someone said the village was being shelled, he would want to go and see it himself. He wouldn't report it until he saw it."

David Lamb (NF '81) said of Foisie, in the Times obituary, "He was soft-spoken and a gentleman but was best working off the beaten track, picking up information in the field, mixing with average people. He was the best of the old school journalists."

After his retirement from the Times in 1984, Foisie lectured and wrote commentary on foreign affairs and continued to go on occasional assignments.

He is survived by his wife, **Florence McTighe "Micki" Foisie**, three children, seven grandchildren, two great-grandchildren, and a brother.

—1952—

John Lawrence Steele died on June 13 of cardiovascular and pulmonary failure. He was 84. Steele began his journalism career in 1939 in Chicago at the City News Bureau. He worked for United Press in Chicago and Washington, D.C., served in the Navy reserve during World War II, and continued to work for UP after the war.

In 1953, he started work with Time-

Life News Service in Washington, covering the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations. He moved from the position of Washington bureau chief to vice president of Time Inc. and, after 1982, he was a public policy consultant to Time.

During his career, Steele wrote on journalism and public affairs and collaborated on the book "The Private Papers of Senator Vandenberg." He was a commentator on NBC, CBS, the BBC, the CBC, and a moderator and panelist for the Voice of America.

Steele is survived by his wife, **Louise**, a daughter and two sons.

—1966—

Ralph Hancox was awarded the Chancellor's Distinguished Service Award at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, on February 16, for his role in advancing the Canadian publishing industry's support for the Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing. Hancox, who has been a journalist, editor, a publisher and publishing consultant, retires this year after five years as a professional fellow and visiting professor at SFU's Master of Publishing program. The Reader's Digest Association of Canada, of which Hancox was once president and CEO, is to fund a professional fellow for the program in Hancox's name.

Nieman Foundation Announces International Fellows for 2001-02

Twelve international journalists were appointed to the 64th class of Nieman Fellows at Harvard University. Their names, countries of residence, and interests follow:

Waziri Adio, Lagos, Nigeria, editorial board member of This Day newspaper; the nexus between the press, politics and sustainable development.

Owais Aslam Ali, Karachi, Pakistan, chairman of Pakistan Press International; influences of international development in Pakistan and the region. Chiba-Nieman Fellow; funding provided by the Atsuko Chiba Foundation.

Dejan Anastasijevic, Belgrade, Yugoslavia, senior journalist for Vreme weekly; military structures in contemporary ethnic conflicts and the issues of democratic consolidation.

Kavi Chongkittavorn, Bangkok, Thailand, managing editor of The Nation; humanitarian laws and the development of East Asia since the end of the Cold War. Partial funding provided by The Asia Foundation.

Yuan Feng, Beijing, China, assistant to the chief editor of China Women's News; gender and women's issues as China makes the transition into a market-oriented society.

David B. Green, Jerusalem, Israel, senior editor/writer at The Jerusalem Report; Israel and the Crusades—how the medieval wars have had an impact on the Arab-Israeli conflict today.

Rami Khouri, Amman, Jordan, syndicated columnist and freelance TV and radio host; the links between religion, identity, national history, and governance systems.

Agnes Nindorera, Bujumbura, Burundi, producer at Studio Ijambo; the evolution, since the end of the Cold War, of social economy, international law, and human rights in Africa.

Paule Robitaille, Mexico City, Mexico, Latin America bureau chief for Canadian Broadcasting Corporation; the causes of civil wars and revolutions and the consequences of civil conflict, the effectiveness of conflict manage. Martin Wise Goodman Canadian Nieman Fellow; funding provided by the Goodman Trust in Canada and the Goodman Fund in the United States.

Geraldo Samor, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, correspondent for Thomson International/International Financing Review; the economics of international financial markets and impacts on local economies and development.

Giannina Segnini, San Jose, Costa Rica, investigative unit coordinator, La Nación; financial markets and information technology and their impact on economic and human rights. Knight Latin American Fellow; funding provided by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

Jabulani Sikhakhane, Rosebank, South Africa, editor at large, Financial Mail; the impact of South Africa's reentry into global markets since democratic elections in 1994. Funding provided by The United States-South Africa Leadership Development Program. ■

—1974—

Morton Kondracke has written a book to tell the story of his wife, **Milly**, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 1987. "Saving Milly: Love, Politics and Parkinson's Disease" is about their love, their efforts to manage the debilitating effects of that disease since her diagnosis, and of his eye-opening experiences as an advocate for Parkinson's research.

In an article in The Washington Post Magazine in June, Kondracke wrote, "Ever since Milly was diagnosed with Parkinson's, the nation's leading neurologists have been saying that this disease could be cured within 10 years. They still say that, but Milly's time is running out." A long-time Washington, D.C. journalist and commentator and currently co-host of Fox TV's "Beltway Boys," Kondracke has increasingly found himself on an unfamiliar side of politics—advocacy—as his wife's condition has worsened. Beginning in 1993 with a visit to the Clinton's, the Kondrackes have fought to increase federal funding for Parkinson's disease research, and in doing so have had to deal with a convoluted "disease politics" web of activist groups competing for federal allocations, hotly debated issues such as stem cell research, and the politicians whose votes may determine whether a cure is found years sooner, or years later.

In articles and interviews, Kondracke is as forthcoming about his political efforts as his enduring devotion to Milly. Though the first 20 years were quite different from the past 13, Kondracke

Chris Georges Reporting Scholarship Expanded

The Christopher J. Georges Journalism Scholarship Fund for in-depth reporting is expanding its eligibility to enable more young writers to apply.

The award, established in 1999 for interns at The Wall Street Journal, now is open to any journalist up to age 30. The scholarship winner will receive $10,000 to support an independent investigative reporting project.

This scholarship fund was established to enable young journalists to engage in the research and writing that reflects Chris Georges' commitment to in-depth journalism on issues of enduring social value in which the stories document the human impact of public policy.

Georges was an honors graduate of Harvard and a Wall Street Journal reporter who died in 1998 at the age of 33 from complications related to lupus. He worked in the Journal's Washington bureau, covering politics, economics and budget issues. His stories on the welfare system in 1997 were nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

The scholarship fund is administered by the Nieman Foundation.

Deadline for proposals is October 15, 2001. In addition to a written proposal for an independent journalism project, candidates for the fellowship are asked to submit a resume, a brief biographical essay, and a selection of published work (please note: selections of work cannot be returned). The journalist selected for the scholarship will receive a portion of the award at the beginning of the project and the remainder upon publication of the story or stories.

Proposals should be sent to: Chris Georges Scholarship; Nieman Foundation; One Francis Ave.; Cambridge, Mass. 02138. ■

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writes, "In fact, for 33 years we've lived a love story…."

—1977—

Tony Castro's book, "Mickey Mantle: America's Prodigal Son," has been published by Brasey's, Inc. Castro, formerly with Sports Illustrated, spent six years researching Mantle's life, interviewing more than 250 people. His previous book is "Chicano Power: The Emergence of Mexican America." His work has also appeared in the Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, and other publications. Castro lives in Beverly Hills, California.

—1978—

Ken Freed writes, "After my year in Lebanon, I returned to Omaha and tried the life of a Midwestern recluse; reading, tending to my flowers, and staring into the middle distance. All very nice, but as they say about Nebraska—the yards are wide and the horizons narrow. So, I looked for a way out and found it at Ohio University in Athens, Ohio, where I will spend the academic year as the E.W. Scripps Visiting Professional in the journalism school. I will teach one section of basic reporting and editing and an upper level course in international reporting. I also will help with a program that sends interns to work abroad."

—1979—

Michael McDowell became Senior Policy Advisor to the Fogarty International Center of the National Institutes of Health on July 10. His long-term goal will be establishing a large multi-year grant program for developing countries and U.S. reporters and editors on international health issues such as HIV/AIDS, infectious diseases across borders, peacekeeping problems in areas of high health risk, and building capacity for medical journals in developing and middle-income nations.

"I have become increasingly interested in the global health side of foreign policy, and it is a growing and salient issue for both the United States and other governments and international organizations like the U.N.

"This new communications initiative is innovative and key to tackling the growing crisis on AIDS/HIV. It will take some time to put together, but I hope to sponsor small and medium-term projects before the major program is up and running fully.

"I am very excited about this new position, and I am already using the Nieman network to help me with the initial planning. I would be very interested in suggestions from fellows from both developing and developed countries about what kind of training for reportage on global health would be most useful," he says. McDowell's new office e-mail address is: Michael_McDowell@nih.gov.

—1980—

Judith Stoia's "Between the Lions" won an "Outstanding Achievement in Children's Programming" award from the Television Critics Association this summer, an honor that it shares with "Sesame Street." This is the second year running that "Lions" has received the award. Stoia is the program's producer.

"Between the Lions" features a family of lions—Theo, Cleo, Lionel and Leona—who run a magical library. With the help of puppets and other helpers, episodes expose children to the written word in a wide range of forms, from poetry to recipes, based on a comprehensive literacy curriculum.

For Stoia's recent article on the show and its evolution, see the Fall 2000 issue of Nieman Reports. The show's award-winning Web site can be found at www.betweenthelions.com.

—1981—

Laurel Shackelford was promoted to executive editor of The Monterey (California) County Herald. She had been deputy editor/editorial page editor. Prior to joining the Herald's staff, Shackelford was an editorial writer with The Courier-Journal in Louisville, Kentucky.

—1983—

Callie Crossley left ABC News June 1, just a few months shy of her 13th anniversary at the newsmagazine "20/20." Crossley's ABC career began just after she completed work as a producer on the acclaimed documentary series "Eyes On the Prize."

Crossley took advantage of a buyout package offered by Disney corporate owners of ABC. Throughout her tenure at ABC, Crossley balanced a rigorous producing schedule with outside interests. She says the buyout offered her "the chance to make those outside interests my main focus. I was looking for a creative way to reinvent myself."

Callie reports that she is now hanging out her shingle as a media consultant (and no, she assures us, in this case it is not code for unemployed). She is wrapping up work as a consultant for a new documentary series, "This Far By Faith: African-American Spiritual Journeys," set to air on PBS February 2002, and she is pondering other opportunities to do more of the same.

She is also looking for more opportunities to do commentary for radio and TV and to build up her roster of speaking engagements. Crossley continues her weekly stint as a featured panelist on WGBH-TV's "Beat the Press," which examines media issues. The National Press Club recently awarded "Beat the Press" the Arthur Rowse Award for Press Criticism.

Crossley's e-mail address is ccmemphis@yahoo.com.

Gil Gaul writes: "After 18 years, many wonderful, I decided to leave The Philadelphia Inquirer in July and join the investigative staff of The Washington Post, where I will work on national and international projects. The move came as owner Knight Ridder was slashing costs at the Inquirer, again, and there was a sizable exodus of talented reporters and editors taking buyouts or searching for new papers. I was fortunate enough to land at the Post, where I work for two extraordinarily talented editors and am surrounded by smart, thoughtful reporters, including Nieman classmate **Guy Gugliotta**, who covers science.

For now, I am splitting my time between Washington and our home in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. A move will eventually follow.

My wife, **Cathy**, continues to teach art and produce in-house publications at Haddonfield Friends School. Our oldest son Greg is entering his junior

Donald Woods Remembered By Nieman Classmates

Donald Woods, a 1979 Nieman Fellow, died August 19 in England of cancer. He was 67. A fifth-generation South African, Woods had accepted apartheid as sensible policy until, as a law student at the University of Cape Town, he began to comprehend the systematic hypocrisy in South African law. He was reported to have later called apartheid "the great obscene lie."

Woods practiced as a lawyer, then worked for a short time for newspapers in England and Canada, and in 1960 returned to South Africa to work for The Daily Dispatch in East London. Within a few years, he became editor. In that position, he hired black journalists, worked to include material expressly for the paper's black readership, and vehemently criticized racist government policies.

Woods met Black Consciousness Movement leader Steve Biko in 1973. "It was a gradual, at first guarded, friendship that grew between Woods and the fiery Biko, but it was a friendship that was forged to last," writes Woods's classmate **Frank van Riper**. In 1977, after Biko was arrested and beaten to death in interrogation, Woods published the details of the killing. He was threatened, banned from writing, and placed under house arrest. Soon, he and his family fled to England, where he campaigned against apartheid in lectures, articles and books, including the biography, "Biko."

Van Riper continues, "[Woods] used his Nieman year to travel the country denouncing apartheid and raising the consciousness of a whole generation of Americans… To those who praised his courage…Donald would argue that it was not courage but indignation that drove him."

John Mojapelo writes, "Unlike many of his privileged white brethren, Donald never elevated himself to the level that he was a white man who was fighting for blacks. To him we were *all* South Africans. His ongoing fight against the pernicious system of apartheid was aimed at getting rid of an evil system for both black and whites.

"He was one of the few whites who could speak Xhosa like a native. South African whites, who normally could speak…one of the indigenous languages, usually assume because they speak the language they automatically understand the psyche of the natives. That was not Donald Woods. He spoke the language and used that as a tool of communication. Period. This can be seen in his relationship with Steve Biko. There is no truth that he used Steve Biko for his personal aggrandizement. Donald could have made it on his own without cashing on Biko's name.

Peggy Simpson recalls, "I'm not sure we had personal conversations with him then. He was under attack from many U.S. blacks for 'co-opting' the Biko story and while that wounded him it was confusing to many of us. I'm not sure we were as much solace to him as was the concert piano!"

And **Peggy Engel** writes, "How many Nieman fellows could have pulled off meeting with the president of Harvard on Tuesday and picketing his office on Wednesday? Donald was on campus as a guest of Harvard but that didn't stop him from joining student rallies and speaking out at every occasion.…."

Woods stayed in touch with Steve Biko's family and returned last May for the wedding of Biko's daughter. Woods is survived by his wife, **Wendy**, three sons, and two daughters. ■

year at Princeton. Cary, our youngest, is starting his sophomore year at Cherry Hill West. He took home major medals in swimming and track at the Junior National Wheelchair Championships this summer at Rutgers University.

—1985—

Mike Pride, editor of The Concord Monitor, writes: "I have had two books published this year. One is "My Brave Boys," which I wrote with Mark Travis, editor of the Monitor's editorial pages. It is a history of the Civil War regiment that suffered the most battle deaths of all 2,000 Union infantry regiments. We worked on "My Brave Boys" as a hobby for eight years. In addition, Felice Belman and I co-edited "The New Hampshire Century." Felice is a former Monitor city editor who is now an editor at The Washington Post, and the book grew out of a yearlong series of profiles in the Monitor. The University Press of New England published both books in April.

"My biggest family news is that **Monique** [his wife] and I became grandparents on June 3 when Grace was born to Melissa and Yuri, our middle son. Also our oldest son, Sven, a computer engineer who lives in the D.C. area, will be married in October and our youngest, Misha, will be at The University of New Hampshire in the fall. Monique still teaches foreign languages in a local school district.

—1987—

Susan Dentzer was elected chair of the Dartmouth College Board of Trustees effective June 2001. Dentzer graduated in 1977 and was elected to the board in 1993. An on-air correspondent with PBS's "The NewsHour With Jim Lehrer," she covers health-care policy, the economics of health care, and other economic and social policy issues. Before her move to PBS, Dentzer was an economics columnist and chief economics correspondent for U.S. News and World Report and a senior writer of business news at Newsweek.

—1990—

Dick Reavis, "a white Texas male, now of middle age," joined the civil rights cause in Alabama in the summer of 1965. Three and a half decades later, he tells his story in a memoir, "If White Kids Die: Memories of a Civil Rights Movement Volunteer."

Reavis writes in the book's preface: "What I saw in one small ghetto left me enraged for twenty years…. The story of the Civil Rights Movement as I knew it has not been told, perhaps because it does not end with the lofty victories that are officially commemorated today. The movement's incomplete struggle will probably not be resumed during my lifetime, though someday, I'm sure it will, because at bottom, it wasn't about color, anyway: it was about human equality, the oldest cause known to man. It is my hope that this work will help place the Southern civil rights struggle in a broader and more realistic context."

—1991—

Kabral Blay-Amihere writes, "July 1 marked my 25 years as a practicing journalist. There was no party or fanfare to celebrate. Instead I wrote and published a book, 'Fighting for Freedom: The Autobiography of an African Journalist,' to mark my silver jubilee.

"The book was launched on August 17 by Ghana's new head of state, John Agyekum Kufuor, whose policy towards the media is progressive. His government has repealed the obnoxious criminal libel law which previous governments used to suppress the press.

"The other development in my life is that I have been appointed Ambassador to Sierra Leone. This appointment means that I am moving on to new frontiers in my service to Ghana. It has been a hard decision, accepting to become a diplomat, but I believe that this new platform will still afford me every chance to serve my country and mankind. I will always remain a journalist and a writer and will use this new post to write more books."

—1992—

George de Lama was named deputy managing editor/news for the Chicago Tribune in July. De Lama has worked for the Tribune since 1978, most recently as associate managing editor for foreign and national news.

—1997—

Mathatha Tsedu now works for South Africa Broadcasting Corporation [SABC] as deputy chief executive of news. There, he joins Nieman alumnus **Barney Mthombothi** (NF '94), who is SABC's head of news. Tsedu writes: "I moved from The Star where I was deputy editor on June 30 and started here on July 1. For me it is a significant move in that I have spent my last 23 years as a journalist in print and moving to broadcast has been very challenging. But that is what work as a journalist should be."

—2000—

Dennis Cruywagen writes: "While taking some classes at the Kennedy School of Government during my Nieman year, it hit me that although South Africa has become a democracy, the majority of us have never experienced living in a democracy. For example, even the press—which generally speaking has to undergo some more changes before it's fully representative of the population—often talks about acting in the public interest. Yet, somehow, it has taken it years to realize that it alone could not define or speak on behalf of the public interest. I wanted to learn more about democracy, democratic norms, values, traditions and culture.

"So, while in Cambridge, I applied for a Mason Fellowship to do a Masters Degree in Public Policy and Management at the Kennedy School. And that's where I am right now. If all goes well, I shall graduate on June 6, 2002.

"Being back in Cambridge is great. But summer school was grueling. Made me think: Oh to be a Nieman again." ■

End Note

In Korea, Nieman means prestige. Most Nieman alumni became publishers or editors in chief of major newspapers. Out of 19 fellows, about half have served as cabinet members.

This is why the 2001 Niemans visiting Korea were pampered everywhere we went. In a society where Confucian tradition of heirarchy is still strong, it really matters what group one belongs to. Regardless of whether it is good or bad, it is reality. ■*—Lee Dong-Kwan*

Nieman Fellows in a train's dining car on the way from Seoul to the ancient cities of Andong and Kyungju.

Volunteer guide Dong Ho Kim (right) gives a tour of Seoul's new soccer stadium to Nieman Fellows Consuelo Saavedra (left) and Sayuri Daimon.