NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VOL. 55 NO.1 SPRING 2001

Five Dollars

Colombia
The War Against Journalists

Journalist's Trade:

Reporting on the Underbelly of the Once High-Flying Economy

Words & Reflections:

Why Race Matters In the Newsroom

Vol. 55 No. 1
Spring 2001

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Cover photo by Steve Salisbury.

Universities Teach Journalists Valuable Lessons

Specialized knowledge is gained, and questions beget more questions.

By Bob Giles

The Nieman idea of mid-career education for journalists in a university setting is now widely acknowledged as essential. Indeed, the need has never been greater. Journalists are struggling to understand the complexities of our times and explain them to readers, listeners and viewers.

Critics among us are not reluctant to note when coverage doesn't measure up to the needs of the public. In his annual meeting with the Nieman Fellows, Harvard President Neil Rudenstine described the quality of reporting on higher education as "uninformed." Trudy Lieberman, one of the Shorenstein Fellows at Harvard this spring, explains her project as a study of how the press has misreported the development of new technology in medicine.

There is nothing new about the reality of the uninformed reporter or the misreporting of complicated topics in the news. As early as 1919, Walter Lippmann saw that as stories become more complex and specialized, there is a greater need for reporters and editors to develop special areas of expertise in which they can do their work in a highly informed and authoritative way.

The solution Lippmann recognized was for journalists to acquire more of the "scientific spirit" and aspire to a "common intellectual method and common area of valid fact. The field should make as its cornerstone the study of evidence and verification."

The idea that journalists would have a solid grounding in traditional academic disciplines, such as economics or science, became the basis of the original journalistic convention of objectivity. Bill Kovach, the former Nieman Curator, and Tom Rosenstiel, in their forthcoming book "The Elements of Journalism," remind us that the concept of objectivity has become "one of the great confusions of journalism," an idea whose true meaning has been lost.

Objectivity, as it is commonly understood today, is difficult to achieve because of the perception that the bias of the observer influences the way an event is seen or facts are interpreted. Thus, no journalist can be objective.

But in its original meaning, Kovach and Rosenstiel argue, objectivity was seen as a journalistic process that "called for journalists to develop a consistent method of testing information—a transparent approach to evidence—precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work."

In his widely acclaimed book, "News Values," Jack Fuller, the president of the Chicago Tribune Co., acknowledges that journalists must be more generalists than technical experts, "and yet they also must be capable of dealing with experts from a position of strength." He says this requires journalists to become more comfortable with technology, to have a rigorous education in a specialized discipline, and to understand that they are expected to produce work in complex fields that holds up against sophisticated examination. "We cannot accept the kind of ignorance of basic statistical methods that so often lead to preposterous reporting of scientific claims," Fuller writes.

Undergraduate journalism education is not likely to become more intellectually challenging in its own right. So it is the continuing education programs, like the Nieman Fellowships and those at Stanford, Michigan, Columbia, Maryland, MIT and other universities, that provide the best opportunities for the development of journalistic specialties.

These elite programs, however, offer to a relatively few journalists the chance to take a year off to deepen one's knowledge of a field of coverage. For continuing education to have a broader reach, news organizations themselves must take the lead. Yet few are making this investment. The reputation remains that the news industry spends less on continuing education than most other businesses. In a speech to the Committee of Concerned Journalists, developmental psychologist William Damon of Stanford University observed that reporters he'd interviewed learned strategies to verify their reporting through trial and error, on their own, or from friends. They rarely learned them in journalism school or from their editors.

What is it about the university environment that is essential in the building of knowledge for journalists? For many Nieman Fellows, it is the Harvard faculty, with the authoritative knowledge and fresh perspectives it brings to the classroom and to discussions with journalists. At Harvard, professors are always asking questions. For every question, others follow, typically without clear or precise answers.

In the academic world, the question is always open. This is an important discovery for many Nieman Fellows. New information tomorrow or a fresh idea next week or next year may suggest a different question or, even, a different answer. As a way of thinking about things, it is a critical counterpoint to the structure of daily journalism, where today's events want to be summed up with a neat conclusion for tonight's viewers and listeners and tomorrow morning's readers.

Of the many lessons of Harvard that make the Nieman year such a formative experience, few are more lasting or more important than this one. ■

International Journalism

Colombia: The War Against Journalists

Reporting on Colombia's war is extremely dangerous for journalists. For what they publish and broadcast, reporters are threatened and harassed, kidnapped and beaten, driven into exile and murdered. Only in Algeria have more journalists been murdered during recent years in retaliation for the work they do.

Linda Robinson, a 2001 Nieman Fellow and Latin America correspondent for U.S. News & World Report, begins our series of reports about journalism in Colombia with an overview of why war is being waged, who is fighting whom, and why Americans should care about what is happening. **Marylene Smeets,** Americas program coordinator at the Committee to Protect Journalists, describes the dangers posed to journalists and the country's justice system's lack of response. A five-year time line of crimes against journalists is presented.

Jineth Bedoya Lima, a reporter with El Espectador who was brutally assaulted and tortured by members of the paramilitary forces, writes about that day when "my truth was caught in the middle of the crossfire and was dealt a mortal wound." Likewise, she says, her nation also suffers a "mortal wound in its truth." **Ignacio Gómez,** a 2001 Nieman Fellow and investigative reporter for El Espectador, fled Colombia last year following many death threats and an attempt on his life. Gómez writes about how reporters like him risk their lives to uncover evidence of illegalities and military abuses yet governments—his own and others—balk at pursuing these leads. **Francisco Santos,** a 1992 Nieman Fellow and editor at El Tiempo, writes from exile about the ways in which violence against journalists leads to self-censorship. Kidnapped and held for eight months by drug cartel leaders in the early 1990's, Santos continued to face retribution from both guerrillas and paramilitaries for his writings and peace-promoting activities until death threats forced him and his family to flee Colombia in 2000.

Tod Robberson, Latin America bureau chief of The Dallas Morning News, moved his family from Bogotá, Colombia to Panama City, Panama when threats of kidnapping and violence against them intensified. Robberson worries that as U.S. dollars and advisors become more involved in this war, some of the forces might "look for Americans whose abductions might draw some attention to the Colombian plight…they just might settle for the most accessible Americans they can find: journalists." And **Linda Robinson** concludes our section of stories with a description of her reporting trip into rebel-held territory. Explaining her reason for taking such a personal risk, she writes, "…the dearth of firsthand reporting from the half of the country where the government was entirely absent seemed to me like an egregious lapse posing a different sort of danger. There was no other way to learn about the FARC except to put myself in their hands. That's just what reporting on guerrillas requires."

Steve Salisbury, who has lived and worked as a journalist and photographer in Latin America since 1981, shares with us images from the frontlines of the Colombian conflict. ■

Can What Ails Colombia Be Fixed?

As the war intensifies and U.S. money is sent, the story hits Page One.

By Linda Robinson

Colombia has begun to appear on the front pages of U.S. newspapers, but it is still such terra incognita that Americans often misspell its name (using a "u" instead of an "o"). Those who can conjure up this South American country see drug cartels and flashy kingpins, images fed to them by press and policymakers since the 1980's. The reality, as always, is too complex for sound bites, like the nation's geography that goes from the tropical Amazon to the mountainous Andes to the Caribbean seascape. And like other far-off places that receive attention only once they're in shambles, this worsening tableau of internal war, crime and drugs comes complete with a handwringing chorus wondering whether outsiders can help fix what ails this troubled land.

When the word "Colombia" is used, get ready to read and hear new buzzwords attached to it: failed state, quagmire, slippery slope. Are these exaggerations? Statistics suggest a society coming apart at the seams. Colombia has been the world's kidnapping and murder capital for some time, but it set records last year. More than 3,000 people were kidnapped, 205 massacres were committed, and more than 38,000 were killed in all. Long the principal refiner of cocaine, the country has become the world's biggest coca grower. A 36-year-old guerrilla insurgency and right-wing vigilantes are growing stronger, profiting from the drug trade and weak government. More than a million people have been displaced by the violence, hundreds of thousands more have left the country, and one-fifth of those who remain are unemployed. Peace talks with the rebels, initiated by President Andres Pastrana, have faltered, and the public has lost hope.

Who can help? Who is to blame? President Pastrana and the U.S. government crafted a $7.5 billion rescue effort called Plan Colombia, to be funded by international donors and the Colombian government. But it, too, has bogged down in suspicions and recriminations. Europe, envisioned as a major source of development aid to replace the drug economy, has provided only a fraction. At the Clinton administration's behest the U.S. Congress did progressively increase aid, making Colombia the largest recipient of U.S. aid after Israel and Egypt. U.S. aid to Colombia and its neighbors grew to $289 million in 1999 and then to $1.5 billion last year. The U.S. aid is primarily aimed at eradicating drugs, with the collateral goals of reducing guerrillas' income and shoring up the government. Most of it is going to create three Colombian army anti-drug battalions, which are being trained by U.S. Special Forces, and to buy 58 helicopters. The United States is also upgrading a host of intelligence assets, an operations base deep in the Colombian jungle, and a base in Ecuador for U.S. anti-drug surveillance flights (to replace closed U.S. bases in Panama).

Drugs and the war are getting worse, together. Colombia's drug production skyrocketed in the late 1990's, in part because next-door Peru and Bolivia radically reduced theirs. Colombians have figured out how to get much higher yields of cocaine per hectare. Much of it is bound for Europe, where prices are twice that in the United States, and Russians are swapping arms for drugs. Colombia also created a heroin industry from scratch and now produces eight metric tons each year.

Set foot in the countryside and what is found is a tangled brew of drugs, guerrillas and vigilantes. Essentially it is no man's land. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC (its Spanish acronym), fields 15,000 to 18,000 fighters and a clandestine political arm called the Bolivarian Movement. The second insurgency, the National Liberation Army (ELN), has perhaps 5,000 members. It carries out mass kidnappings and 50 to 100 times each year it blows up the country's oil pipelines. But the FARC has a far more formidable structure of 66 fronts scattered all over the country.

The FARC readily admits levying protection fees on the drug trade as well as legitimate economic businesses in areas it controls and kidnapping those who don't pay the requested "tax." It claims the right to collect taxes and profit from the drug trade as others in Colombia do. The government estimates that the guerrillas earn some $550 million annually, much of it from drugs. (They charge $2,500-$5,000 for drug planes to land on airstrips they control and $50 a month per hectare for guarding coca plantations.)

The right-wing vigilantes do this, too. The top vigilante leader, Carlos Castaño, acknowledged on national television that 70 percent of his funding comes from drugs. His group is strongest in the north but is moving into southern Colombia to kill what it claims are civilian supporters of the rebels and to capture some of the lucrative drug trade. Castaño forces number about 10,000. These paramilitaries are responsible for the vast majority of massacres and other abuses.

Colombia's military is poorly equipped and funded and is comprised of mostly conscript combat troops, numbering about 55,000. The military's human rights record has improved greatly since the early 1990's, but paramilitary groups also use military bases, locate their camps nearby, and maintain frequent contact with the troops. Colombia's military commander told me in an interview that many soldiers join the paramilitary groups after they perform their obligatory military ser-

vice, since the groups pay relatively high salaries of $300 to $400 a month. U.S. aid requires the Colombian government to rein in abuses and sever the military's links with the paramilitaries, but these requirements were temporarily waived. The military chief has new powers to dismiss officers. It is hoped that he will remove those linked with the paramilitaries, as was done when Colombia's police went through a similar process in which thousands were fired.

The debate about how to cope with the situation in Colombia has just begun. In addition to human rights, skeptics in this country and in Colombia doubt the utility of attacking drug supply since producers simply relocate. Others want a different mix of carrot and stick, more emphasis on coca substitution than forced eradication. Some believe the top priority should be peace talks. Others fear the United States will inevitably be dragged deeper into the war, despite officials' vows that U.S. trainers will not go out on operations and Americans will never be used as combat troops in Colombia.

Will the Bush administration wade in deeper, or wash its hands? In his one speech addressing Latin American issues, candidate George W. Bush did advocate supporting Colombia's democracy from the threats of both drug trafficking and guerrilla insurgency. Yet his general stance on foreign policy has been to limit U.S. involvement, to subcontract peacekeeping duties to others, and to eschew nation-building missions altogether. On January 17, Colin Powell said to the Senate: "One country that will be uppermost in our mind is Colombia. Colombia is a country in difficulty. Their democracy is in difficulty."

Stay tuned. ■

Linda Robinson, a 2001 Nieman Fellow, reported on Latin America for U.S. News & World Report for 11 years. She recently published an article on Colombia in the World Policy Journal (Winter 1999/2000) entitled "Where Angels Fear to Tread."

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Violence Against Journalists in Colombia

Impunity surrounds these crimes.

By Marylene Smeets

Nothing more clearly illustrates the daunting dangers Colombian journalists face than the number of their colleagues who were killed over the past decade as a result of their work: 34, according to research by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). This figure is unequalled by any country in Latin America; worldwide it is exceeded only by Algeria, where 58 journalists were killed in reprisal for their work over the same span of time.

With the continuing escalation of the nearly four-decade conflict that pits two major leftist guerrilla groups against the army and right-wing paramilitary forces, and with the peace process largely moribund, all warring factions are targeting journalists in efforts to control information. Over the last year, CPJ documented three cases of journalists killed in reprisal for their work. Numerous others were assaulted, threatened and kidnapped. Many fled into exile.

The shocking attack on Jineth Bedoya Lima [See Bedoya's essay about reporting in Colombia on page 8] illustrates the frightening challenges Colombian journalists must deal with. On May 25, 2000, Bedoya, a reporter at the Bogotá daily El Espectador, was kidnapped, beaten and raped. The attack apparently occurred in retaliation for the paper's coverage of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), the leading right-wing paramilitary group. During her ordeal, Bedoya's assailants told her they planned to kill three other journalists, including Ignacio Gómez, the head of El

Univision TV reporter Raul Benoit interviews a Colombian National Police anti-narcotics trooper at a small, rustic coca leaf processing laboratory in the Catatumbo region of northeastern Colombia. *Photo by Steve Salisbury.* ©

Espectador's investigative unit. [See Gómez's story on page 9.] The day before Bedoya was attacked, a man whom Gómez recognized as a member of the paramilitary forces tried to follow him into a taxi. Gómez fled the country less than a week later, after police told him that they could not provide protection.

All sides in the conflict are acutely sensitive to how they are portrayed in the media, and all have resorted to violence to try to receive favorable coverage. The right-wing paramilitaries are the worst offenders, but journalists have plenty to fear from leftist guerrilla organizations as well. In 2000, CPJ documented numerous kidnappings by Colombia's largest rebel groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN); these acts of intimidation were carried out in efforts to influence the journalists' work.

During the inauguration of peace negotiations in a guerrilla-controlled hamlet at the end of January 2000, FARC leader Manuel Marulanda told reporters that their bosses had been unfair to the FARC and would be made to pay. A prominent television personality, Fernando González-Pacheco, fled the country in March after receiving kidnap threats from the FARC. A week later, Francisco "Pacho" Santos Calderón, the editor of Colombia's largest daily newspaper, El Tiempo, also went into exile after receiving credible reports of death threats and experiencing a suspected attempt on his life. [See Santos's article on page 12.] According to one of Santos's colleagues, the would-be assassins were hired by the FARC. Santos had founded a nongovernmental anti-kidnapping organization after Medellín drug cartel leader Pablo Escobar kidnapped Santos in 1990 and held him for eight months.

Violent attacks against the Colombian press in recent years were perpetrated largely by warring political factions rather than by the drug cartels that were responsible for so many deadly attacks against journalists during the late 1980's and early 1990's. But it is important to note that all sides in the conflict are partially financed through the drug trade. Some Colom-

Journalists Murdered, Attacked, Kidnapped and Threatened in Colombia

Between 1986 and 1995, 43 journalists were murdered in Colombia, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), which suspects this number is an underestimate since many reported murders of provincial print and radio reporters could not be confirmed. Most of those that could be confirmed were apparent drug-cartel contract murders. As years go by, more violence involves political factions.

Here are the names of journalists murdered, attacked, kidnapped and threatened beginning in 1995. The list continues through page 19.

April 5, 1995: Lolita Acosta Maestre, publisher, El Diario Vallenato, escaped unharmed from gunfire but, as a result of the attack, Acosta decided a few months later to stop publication of her newspaper and move to Spain.

April 6, 1995: Six reporters were threatened by alleged members of the Cali drug cartel after reporting appeared on recent anti-drug sweeps in that city. Miguel Angel Arango, editor of the daily El Caleño in Cali, resigned from his job after receiving the threat.

May 8, 1995: Three journalists were attacked and kidnapped by a rebel group and brought to a mountain camp to discuss release of some hostages being held by these leftist rebels and to carry a message to local sugar cane growers. Journalists were prohibited by law from interviewing leftist guerrillas.

August 17, 1995: Ivan Darío Pelayo, manager of radio station Lloanorámica, killed by members of the National Liberation Army (ELN). He was killed when guerillas broke into the studio as Pelayo was broadcasting a program.

November 11, 1995: Gabriel Cruz Díaz, a correspondent for El Heraldo, was stabbed to death by unknown assailants. He was working on a book about the military's role in Córdoba, an area of Colombia where the government has been battling leftist insurgents.

December 12, 1995: Ernesto Acera Cadena, a veteran reporter, was killed on the street by an unknown assailant who shot him three times and then fled.

January 26, 1996: Three journalists from the Miami-based television channel Univision were threatened with death after an interview aired in which a former minister accused then-President Ernesto Samper of accepting drug money for his presidential election campaign.

March 16, 1996: Raul Benoit, a correspondent for Univision, was shot at by two unidentified gunmen while driving in Bogotá with his wife and children. Benoit had received death threats after filing a series of stories on the Cali drug cartel and the political crisis in Colombia.

May 10, 1996: Ana Lucia Betancur, a reporter for a television news program, was kidnapped by leftist rebels in Cali. She was released unharmed five days later with a message from her kidnappers to the government. The government forbids journalists from carrying any statements made by leftist guerillas.

August 15, 1996: Hector Mujica, a correspondent for El Espectador, was ordered by an armed man to give a verbal explanation of articles he had written about an ambulance set on fire during protests by producers of coca.

August 20, 1996: Two journalists with El Tiempo were threatened by a group of civilians, who forced them to attend a demonstration against a government campaign to prohibit coca cultivation by small-scale local producers.

August 22, 1996: Two television reporters with QAP Noticias were detained by police after covering the occupation of Hacienda Bellacruz by farm workers and later stopped by members of an armed paramilitary group which issued death threats against them.

August 29, 1996: Five journalists were fired upon by soldiers in the Caqueta area of Colombia. The reporters were covering a demonstration by coca cultivators against government prohibitions of small-scale local producers.

bian journalists worry that the U.S. government's $1.5 billion military aid package, aimed at fighting narcotics, could lead to an intensification of the war and increase their vulnerability. "The question my colleagues and I ask ourselves is, who will be left to report on how the money is spent?" noted Gómez in a June 23, 2000 opinion piece published in The New York Times, just weeks after he had been forced into exile.

The attack on Gómez and his colleague Bedoya are illustrative not only because of the exile caused and the grisly violence involved, but also because of the impunity that surrounds these cases. Recently, Bedoya told CPJ that no one had been detained in relation to the attack and that the prosecutor in charge of the investigation had not even contacted her.

On August 18, 2000 the Colombian government established the Program for the Protection of Journalists and Social Communicators. A number of journalists, including Bedoya, have been supplied with bodyguards. But while this is a laudable gesture on the government's part, having to drive around in the company of bodyguards clearly debilitates the ability of journalists to do their job. What is needed is that the perpetrators of crimes against journalists be brought to justice. But in a country with near total impunity for human rights abuses, those crimes go largely unpunished.

Colombian journalists continue to carry out their work in the face of enormous perils. As Gómez wrote in his New York Times op-ed, "We have always accepted the consequences for what we write, and we will continue to do so." ■

Marylene Smeets is Americas program coordinator at the Committee to Protect Journalists in New York (www.cpj.org). CPJ's annual report, "Attacks on the Press in 2000," detailing the violence in Colombia and other countries during 2000, was recently published.

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Truth in the Crossfire

In a brutal attack, 'my truth . . . was dealt a mortal wound.'

By Jineth Bedoya Lima

For many, working as a journalist in Colombia is exciting. It's like experiencing the magical and unreal of what the world has to offer in the 21st century. But for those of us who, in addition to working in Colombia, live in Colombia and for Colombia, it is an exhausting workday in which day by day one gives up slices of life, and one experiences the spirit of death in each task. This is the reality left by the Colombian armed conflict: an undeclared civil war that, in the course of decades, has left thousands of persons killed, displaced, disappeared and exiled.

The confrontation, which in addition to the political interests of the guerrillas, the far right-wing groups, and the drug traffickers includes the hand of the state veiled in impunity, places the press, and therefore the truth of what is happening in Colombia, in the crossfire. We are caught in a thick web that subjects its victim to awaiting the slow approach of any of its victimizers. As a result, we, journalists who have sought to scrutinize these dark webs of interests, have ourselves become their targets.

On May 25 of last year, when I still thought truth prevailed over bad intentions and that it was the best protective shield for a reporter in Colombia, three armed men, who identified themselves as members of the paramilitary forces under the command of Carlos Castaño, kidnapped, tortured and assaulted me in the worst possible way. That day, my truth was caught in the middle of the crossfire and was dealt a mortal wound.

Today, ten months after that terrible episode, I can't stop thinking so much of my own personal drama, but of the drama of Colombia, which also has a mortal wound in its truth. It is the sum of hundreds of atrocities: There have been towns razed by the lack of conscience of the guerrillas; peasants affronted by the barbaric acts of the paramilitary groups; children wounded by mines sown by terrorists; ideologues, professors and trade unionists subjugated by the black glove of power. And there is a latent foreign threat silently closing in with its winds of war.

It's Colombia. It's a country that has seen in recent years how freedom of the press has been at these difficult crossroads. But journalists here have a great responsibility not to grow weak in the face of the cynicism of its rulers and the muteness of its authorities. And in the face of the rulers and authorities, journalists have also waged bloody battles that put us at a disadvantage since we are weaker, and that weakness places us in the sights of the guns. Yet we still have the indissoluble power of the truth, the same truth that is mortally wounded as it lies surrounded by politicians, police, soldiers and criminals. It is the same truth that ten months after I became disabused of many illusions, also enables me to continue living and writing a few lines. This same truth has spurred on the journalist in me, but nonetheless has not been able to encourage the woman in me. It is merely the reflection of a country and the drama of many who, perhaps, don't have the good fortune to be able to tell their feelings to someone else, as I can now. ■

Jineth Bedoya Lima is a reporter with El Espectador in Bogotá.

Colombia's War Takes Place on a Global Stage

In exposing the roots and connections of violence, journalists risk their lives.

By Ignacio G. Gómez

What Fernando Cano liked most about his new situation was the driving class offered to people like him who were being "protected." Among the full array of suggestions, which included exile that the government advised, he opted for "soft security," which meant using a strategy of keeping a low profile. Along with his brother Juan Guillermo, he had taken the helm at El Espectador weeks after his father, Guillermo Cano Izasa, had been assassinated just outside of the newspaper's offices on the evening of December 16, 1986. Driving at high speed, he was accompanied by an expert riding on a motorcycle and well trained in the use of his MP-7 machine gun. These were the most intense moments in the action film that had become his daily life.

Three months later, the 100-year anniversary of Colombia's oldest newspaper was observed with a special edition of El Espectador that their father had organized. At this time, the actions of drug trafficker Pablo Escobar and his Medellín cartel were destroying a peace process. One by one, more than 3,000 activists of the Unión Patriótica, whose objective was to convince the guerrillas that they could pursue their demands without weapons, were assassinated. In the midst of this dirty war, which displayed the worst practices of the cold war, President Ronald Reagan declared drug trafficking to be an American security threat. In response to

Colombia National Police "Jungle Command" anti-narcotics police troops are among the best-armed government special units in Colombia. *Photo by Steve Salisbury.*©

August 29, 1996: Luis Gonzalo Velez ("Richard"), a cameraman with a Colombian news program, was beaten repeatedly by three soldiers because of recording soldiers firing on unarmed peasants during a demonstration by coca cultivators. He was forced to flee into exile in the United States after he narrowly escaped being abducted.

October 18, 1996: Norvey Diaz, a director at Radio Colina, was murdered in what CPJ described as a killing "carefully planned by professionals."

December 16, 1996: A van packed with dynamite exploded outside the home of Juan Gomez Martinez, an owner of the daily El Colombiano. This incident followed a telephoned threat by an anonymous caller who told the newspaper to "keep quiet."

December 22, 1996: A bomb loaded with 20 kilos of dynamite exploded in Bogotá outside the offices of the weekly Voz, the official publication of the Colombian Communist Party.

December 28, 1996: A bomb containing five kilos of dynamite exploded outside the offices in Medellín of the Bogotá-based daily newspaper El Tiempo. Police speculated that the bomb was planted by members of the guerilla group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

March 18, 1997: Freddy Elles Ahumada, a freelance photojournalist (who drove a taxi to supplement his income), was abducted by three unidentified individuals in Cartagena and found assassinated a day later in his cab. His death might have been in reprisal for his photographs of police violence published in El Espectador.

March 20, 1997: Gerardo Bedoya Borrero, opinion editor of the Cali daily newspaper El País and a harsh critic of drug trafficking, was assassinated as he was getting into his car by gunmen who shot him repeatedly. Three weeks earlier, Bedoya wrote a column defending the controversial U.S. decision to decertify Colombia as a recipient of U.S. economic aid because of its government's alleged ties to cocaine cartels.

November 8, 1997: Francisco Castro Menco, president of the Fundación Cultural, a community foundation that broadcast daily by radio, was shot and killed at home by unidentified

Washington, the drug trafficking networks in Colombia plunged the nation into a period of "narcoterrorism." Bombs went off at a shopping center on the eve of Mother's Day. Airplanes blew up in mid-air. Entire city blocks were demolished.

These were the news stories that were reported every day. And El Espectador also became part of this story. Violence was directed at members of the press, in general, but also the history of our newspaper crossed paths with the history of the news. Two days before Guillermo Cano's death, Amparo Hurtado, the Miami correspondent, had died mysteriously while reporting on the assassination of Adler "Barry" Seal, a person whose name was later mentioned in the Iran/contra scandal. Issues of the newspaper were intercepted, and the lives of national correspondents were threatened: Three El Espectador correspondents were assassinated from 1986 to 1988.

Thousands of messages conveying solidarity with our newspaper were received. These were well-intentioned and expressed the sentiment of a country that saw its mainstay, freedom of the press, growing weak. The news pages remained full, but not the newspaper's advertising space. Advertisers received death threats, and death was foretold for those who hawked the paper on the streets. The sales manager and administrative director of the newspaper's office in Medellín, the country's second-largest city, and some readers and vendors were shot. The sculpture dedicated to Guillermo Cano was bombed three times. Shortly after discovering that Cano's assassination had been paid for through secret accounts held by Pablo Escobar at the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) (before that famous international scandal broke out), the general counsel for El Espectador, who was also a columnist, was assassinated.

By September 1989, three years later, many columnists had gone into exile, and many fellow journalists considered working at El Espectador "like having your gravestone tied around your neck." Fernando and Juan Guillermo Cano had succeeded in slowing the pace of the losses and were preparing to expand the number of pages by purchasing additional printing apparatus. But a bomb partially destroyed the physical plant, and only one machine was serviceable, so the newspaper came out in four-page editions.

A paramilitary fighter holds a rocket-propelled grenade launcher. *Photo by Steve Salisbury.* ©

One of the stories I reported, which was published shortly before this bomb went off, spoke of activities in Colombia of Yair Gal Klein. Klein was purported to have been the mastermind behind the elimination of the perpetrators of Black September during the Munich olympics in 1972. And Peter Stuart McAleese was one of the founders of the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Just days after the Cold War ended, these "dogs of war" were finding new homes.

Every day at the newspaper there were reports of threatening phone calls describing imminent and future attacks. Three or four times a year we had to evacuate the building due to a bomb scare. A large part of daily conversation revolved around protection. For several months, the newest trend in clothing was the bulletproof vest designed for women. Security measures made the newspaper staff act like a team. Protective resources were shared. We would take turns sharing bulletproof vests and calls would be made from house to house to be sure friends made it home safely.

The death of Pablo Escobar in 1992 meant a reduction in the physical threats to reporters, but not of the economic risk for the newspaper. El Espectador was among the first news organizations to denounce the dirty money that President Ernesto Samper (1994-1998) received, as well as many corrupt acts by his predecessor, César Gaviria. In 1996, the newspaper's finances burst. When the salvage plan failed, the Grupo Santodomingo, one of Colombia's most powerful financial groups, assumed total control of the newspaper in 1998. Juan Guillermo and Fernando pulled out of the business at the same time their cousins and uncles sold their shares.

Many sensationalist stories were published about Colombia at this time. But there were also very good international journalists working in Colombia who called into question the role their own countries were playing in Colombia and in the "drug problem." The death, kidnapping, or exile of many of my journalistic colleagues became front-page news, perhaps only because these events illuminated the disaster of a Latin American democracy engaged in an escalating war over drugs during the initial post-cold war period.

The Colombian government was incapable of guaranteeing its citizens—including its journalists—safety. This was, in part, because the threat came from a large global force—the illegal drug market—but also because other global and illegal businesses, whose principal shareholders have always been outside Colombia, also have a hand in it. These include arms traffickers as well as the illegal trafficking of persons, contraband in household appliances, chemical products and cigarettes, and the "dogs of war." In Colombia, this is what was meant by globalization.

Among many cynical remarks I've heard about violence in Colombia, one stands out for me. McAleese, a soldier of fortune in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Angola and Nicaragua, and former British Special Air Services non-commis-

sioned officer, said the following: "We were not training drug cartels' hit squads, as various frenetic journalists later accused us of doing. With 15,000 murders every year, these Colombians did not need our help…it is the most ludicrous arrogance…to think they need outsiders to tell them how to kill each other." This quote comes out of his 1993 book of adventures ("No Mean Soldier: The story of the ultimate professional soldier in the SAS and other forces.") In 1989, the year McAleese referred to, the World Health Organization defined Colombia as the country with the leading incidence of violent deaths in the world, excluding motor vehicle accidents and suicide. (Since then, the figure has grown exponentially; in 1999, there were 36,650 violent deaths.) Even though McAleese's facts were correct, it was hardly a sufficient answer to the questions the Colombian government asked when it sought his extradition, a request that the British government has never officially answered.

Israel brought charges against McAleese's colleague Klein for selling equipment (Galil assault rifles and Uzi submachine guns) and military knowledge without government permission, but he was given a sentence without imprisonment. Klein's students, McAleese and his 12 colleagues, had told the Colombian justice authorities that they learned attack techniques, the use of explosives, and military planning from them. It was easy for the Israeli courts to ignore the Colombian evidence; it had been prepared by a justice system in which 95 percent of cases remain in impunity. Yet in 1999, when Yair Klein was discovered smuggling machetes and helicopters in Sierra Leone, it was clear that if the Israeli courts had not made that mistake, perhaps tens of thousands of Africans would still have their hands.

During the past two decades, hundreds of journalists have been threatened, kidnapped, attacked and murdered for the work they've done in exposing corruption and injustice. For global opinion about Colombia to change, the nation's courts need to clear up many cases that involve such violence. Journalists will have a large role to play in not allowing cases that have remained in impunity to be forgotten. And when the war ends, it is likely that an international court will have to be established in Colombia, similar to those dealing with Rwanda and Bosnia. But one problem is that channels do not exist for other countries to address their responsibility for what their citizens and/or businessmen do outside of their borders. For example, in October 1998, because of a joint investigation of El Espectador and The Guardian, the British House of Commons promised it would investigate for whom the British Petroleum (today BP-Amoco) adviser, in charge of security in a Colombia oil pipeline construction project, was getting military equipment and training. That investigation—just like the investigation by the German Bundestag into the activities of German spy Werner Mauss—seems to have ended up archived as a state secret. Not even those who initiated the debate have brought it up again.

…fellow journalists considered working at El Espectador 'like having your gravestone tied around your neck.'

There are also unsatisfactory investigations taking place in the United States. One involves coincidences in time, place and purpose between a team of 12 Pentagon trainers and the Colombian Army officers who are accused of planning and organizing—for a paramilitary group—the decapitation of 37 people (including three children) in Mapiripán, Colombia, in July 1997. These students of Klein and McAleese, known as the paramilitary forces, wanted to assume control of the coca paste market, which the guerrillas controlled. To this end, they used army

killers. His program offered an independent voice for community news in an area of the country where both guerrillas and paramilitary forces are active, and either side might be responsible for his murder.

November 20, 1997: Jairo Elías Márquez Gallego, director of the magazine El Marqués, known for its critical reporting on corruption, was killed in a drive-by shooting while entering his car. He had received numerous death threats during the previous two years because of his crusade against corruption.

February 22, 1998: Oscar García Calderón, a reporter for El Espectador, was shot to death by unidentified individuals. CPJ sources said that García was conducting investigations into the links between bullfighting and organized crime.

March 14, 1998: José Abel Salazar Serna, host of a radio show, was found dead in his apartment. He'd been stabbed 15 times. Salazar had broadcast appeals for peace and coexistence.

April 16, 1998: Nelson Carvajal Carvajal, a highly regarded journalist with Radio Sur, was shot 10 times outside the elementary school where he taught. Local journalists suspect that local government officials (in Pitalito) might have ordered his murder in retaliation for his critical reporting about the former mayor of that town.

May 19, 1998: Bernabé Cortés Valderrama, a reporter with the nightly news program Noticias CVN who reported frequently on topics such as drug trafficking, corruption and negotiations between FARC and authorities about soldiers held by Colombian guerillas, was killed as he was riding in a taxi and pulled up in front of a relative's home. A CPJ report in 1999 published a report linking drug traffickers to his murder.

August 11, 1998: Ampara Leonor Jiménez Pallares, a former television journalist who had received death threats while working on a documentary about peasants who had been displaced when a government official appropriated land, was shot three times in the head outside her home.

October 14, 1998: Saúl Alcaraz, spokesperson for Instituto Mi Río, an environmental group in Medellín, was shot six times and killed after resisting being forced into a car.

equipment and installations donated by the United States. When the issue was discussed in Washington, one of the most heated debates regarding the approval of Plan Colombia ensued. Yet eventually the plan was approved, increasing 20-fold the number of U.S. military trainers in Colombia.

"Obviously our people do not teach torture. They do not teach massacres. They teach human rights in every single class…. As to the massacre, or alleged massacre and its proximity to or juxtaposition to the training activity, that is something that we will have to look at very carefully," Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations Brian Sheridan told the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations, in response to questions put to him by Rep. Jesse Jackson, Jr., regarding my investigation that was published in El Espectador.

Perhaps it was a mere coincidence, like other cases in which the trainers and equipment from U.S. military aid end up juxtaposed with the groups of paramilitary fighters, who are responsible for a vast majority of the human rights violations in Colombia. But global (not just United States) public opinion has the right to know just how hard a look at this matter the Pentagon takes, what conclusion is reached, and what guarantees are put in place to ensure that this or other circumstances do not give rise to more violence.

Perhaps there will be more Pulitzer Prizes and other journalism awards won by those who strike up the best friendships (and therefore are able to get the best interviews) with the guerrillas, paramilitaries, or other types of drug traffickers. Yet these journalists can make a difference not by publishing what the leaders of the various armed groups want to say, but rather what they, and their supposed enemies, want to hide. ■

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In Colombia, Journalists Have Many Enemies

'The first and most damning effect is self-censorship.'

By Francisco Santos

A few years ago I tried to get life insurance from a European company. I was surprised when they denied the policy due to my job: I am a journalist.

Maybe I shouldn't be so surprised. After all, Colombia is the place in the world where many journalists have been killed in the last 15 years and insurance companies play the odds. Obviously, the odds of being killed in Colombia are high for everyone—my country also has one of the highest rates of murders in the world—but if you are a journalist, then the odds are somewhat higher.

Yet journalists keep doing their job. And they keep dying for doing it.

Why? What is different in Colombia than in other places in the world? What is it like to be a journalist in Colombia? Who is killing journalists in Colombia?

To understand the situation one has to understand the environment in which journalists work. And it sure isn't a healthy one. Colombia has an insurgent and counterinsurgent war financed by drug trafficking and a booming drug business. The three main illegal actors in this war are drug traffickers, guerrillas (leftist rebels), and paramilitaries (extreme rightist and illegal armies). Obviously, they are no friends of the truth, of exposés, and are certainly trigger-happy. With a weak judicial system and a 90 percent rate of impunity, it is journalists who pay an immense price for revealing who is doing what or who is killing whom.

So how is this unhealthy environment affecting day-to-day reporting or decision-making by editors in Colombia? Certainly the primary and most damning effect is self-censorship. Before writing a story an editor and reporter must ponder how dangerous it is, for example, to publish information about the paramilitaries and their ties with the military. Or about Plan Colombia (the U.S.-funded strategy) and how it might change the military situation and improve hopes for peace. Or about drugs and drug traffickers who finance the war. Or about kidnapping and other crimes committed by the guerrillas.

Retribution for stories has happened to me. I wrote a column in El Tiempo about the growth of paramilitaries and how the abuses of the guerrillas against civilians fostered that growth. As a result, the guerrillas labeled me a sympathizer of the paramilitaries. But then when a story I wrote carried accusations of extreme elements within the military being close to the paramilitaries and being responsible for the murder of a journalist and comedian last year, I was labeled a guerrilla sympathizer.

Colombian Army anti-narcotics special forces arrest coca leaf processing workers. ***Photo by Steve Salisbury.*** **©**

The only thing I really sympathize with is the truth. But, in a conflict, the truth is one of the first casualties, and when a story or an editorial column gets close to it, the labels come first, the threats second, and exile or death will follow soon enough.

Therefore, journalists have had to be very careful about what they write or be ready to assume the consequences of what they've written.

That's the main reason why more than 50 Colombian journalists are now in exile. Threats have become a common tool to silence the media, and though they've had an impact, especially in morale among journalists, their attempts haven't been fully successful. Yes, members of the media have had to become more careful about how they treat sensitive information. Bylines have mostly disappeared on those types of stories, and at our newspaper we have tried to rotate reporters on dangerous beats. But if one is honest about the current situation, one must admit that stories that might have a significant impact haven't been done due to the danger they carry.

But journalists also must accept some blame for what's happening to them. Many stories, due to bad reporting, are so lopsided that any of the warmongers might interpret their content as a personal bias that has to be "rectified." And these readers don't send letters to the editor or to the ombudsman! This element of the danger hasn't been studied as much as it should. But it should be, since in a society in conflict journalists and media play a huge role. And journalists, especially those in the electronic media, haven't been as careful as they should be, and their sloppiness has had an impact in the terms of the political and military circumstances the country now faces. Those types of poorly reported stories underscore the power of the media, but they also put the lives of journalists in danger.

The war for ratings in television has had a terrible impact on journalism. A declaration by one of the warring factions attracts viewers, but often the event turns out to be more newsworthy than what is said. There's no distance from the source and, obviously, the journalists are being used and manipulated. When television started interviewing the leader of the paramilitaries, Carlos Castaño, they gave him a political status that he had not had before. One of the journalists who did the initial interview is now in exile. In that interview, many of the tough questions were avoided and, therefore, the popularity of the interviewee shot up.

There's too much interviewing of the violent leaders and eliminating of context around them and of running to get it out first. This race puts journalists in danger since the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, and the drug traffickers don't spend a lot of time trying to understand the subtleties of who's who. The media are their enemies.

The Colombian government hasn't helped much. It's impossible to protect journalists when the soldiers are unable to protect the common citizen. The government has created a task force to analyze cases and help those who are in most danger. It's a big step, but it's only a palliative that doesn't solve the main problem: the real and present danger to journalists.

What can help things change? Without a doubt a successful peace process would help a lot. It would take out the two main "enemies" members of the press now have: the paramilitaries and the guerrillas. In Colombia, we will have to live with drug trafficking until the world realizes that it's a health problem, not a police problem.

Yet if we were able to reduce our enemies from three to one, I'd take that improvement any time. ■

Francisco Santos, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, is an editor at El Tiempo. He has lived in exile since learning that a FARC guerrilla unit had scheduled his murder. In 1990 and 1991, Santos was kidnapped and held for eight months by a drug trafficking cartel. Later, Santos created Fundación País Libre (The Free Country Foundation) to help people cope with a kidnapping in their family through psychological counseling and tips about negotiating.

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January 7, 1999: Two suspicious-looking men were spotted outside the home of Alfredo Molano Bravo, journalist and columnist for El Espectador. He had received a series of death threats from paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño since publishing an article in July 1998 that linked Colombia's right-wing paramilitary groups to the violent anti-kidnapping group Death to Kidnappers, which has close links to drug traffickers. Fearing for his life, Molano fled to Spain.

March 24, 1999: Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, a journalist and columnist with El Tiempo, was sent a book-size mail bomb that exploded in a private mail company's delivery truck. Mendoza believed he was attacked because of a column in which he accused the attorney general's office of being infiltrated by members of the ELN (leftist guerrillas). Later in the year, Apuleyo left Colombia for Italy, fearing for his life.

April 11, 1999: Hernando Ragel Moreno, a freelance newspaper and radio journalist, was shot four times in the head. He had regularly denounced the corruption of a local mayor and, just prior to his death, had organized a protest against this mayor.

May 22, 1999: Jorge Rivera Sena, a correspondent for the daily El Universal and a radio network, was kidnapped by individuals believed to be members of a paramilitary unit. He was held hostage for 19 days and released unharmed. Fearing for his life, he moved from where he had been reporting. He continued to receive threats and left for Spain in September.

May 25, 1999: María Cristina Caballero (a 1997 Nieman Fellow), an investigative editor for the weekly SEMANA, received a death threat on her home answering machine. She had interviewed drug traffickers, guerrilla leaders, and the head of Colombia's paramilitary forces. After hiding for several days, she left the country to live in the United States, where she is writing a book about the conflict in Colombia.

May 27, 1999: Two motorcyclists attempted to run over Jineth Bedoya Lima, a journalist working for El Espectador and several radio stations. She had written about criminal gangs that kidnap people for ransom and had received threats by telephone prior to the attack.

The Risks American Journalists Confront in Colombia

Staying safe sometimes collides with aggressively reporting on the war.

By Tod Robberson

It's still the stuff of cocktail party snickering among the correspondents in Bogotá: Tod Robberson, his wife and daughter once spent part of an evening cowering on their kitchen floor because someone outside their apartment kept "painting" their heads with a laser.

At the time—two and a half years ago—we thought a sniper was training his gun sight on us. It turned out to be two teenagers playing with a toy laser pointer. Everyone laughs about it now, but the situation was dead serious at the time. In fact, so serious that my wife later told me: "I want out." My editors agreed that it was time to reconsider our presence there, in spite of how it might impact our coverage.

A Colombian "Jungle Command" police trooper is surrounded by children in Meta province. Thousands of children work in the coca business, mostly as "raspachin," coca leaf harvesters. *Photo by Steve Salisbury.* ©

Colombia is unquestionably the hottest story in South America right now, and newspaper editors are pushing their correspondents to milk the story for everything it's got. The United States is pumping $1.5 billion in mostly military aid into Colombia and surrounding nations, while Colombia's military, guerrillas and paramilitaries are gearing up for a period of potentially unprecedented bloodshed in the months to come.

The Dallas Morning News, Houston Chronicle, and Miami Herald all are maintaining some form of permanent presence in Colombia. The news hole and appetite their editors have for Colombian stories seems unlimited. The Washington Post, The New York Times and Los Angeles Times decided late last year to open bureaus or satellite bureaus in Bogotá. Two of those newspapers consulted me before deciding exactly how they wanted to handle the dangers posed by Colombia, apparently because word about my experiences had made the rounds.

The issue that concerns all of us, primarily, is one of safety and how it affects a correspondent's ability to cover the Colombian story. We constantly find ourselves balancing our drive to cover an exciting news story against our overriding desire to stay alive and kidnap-free in a country infamous as the kidnapping capital of the world. My solution was to move my family to the safer climes of Panama, but to keep an assistant and small apartment in Bogotá. I can "commute" to my job.

Let's backtrack a bit to see why such a drastic move became necessary after the laser pointer incident. Around the time we found ourselves crawling across the kitchen floor, the nation's largest rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), was staging its biggest-yet offensive. On the advice of the U.S. Embassy, American businessmen in my Bogotá neighborhood were barring their apartment doors and staying away from work because of intelligence about a large-scale kidnapping being planned by the guerrillas. The rest of the foreign press corps had not been told of the embassy alert, and the only reason I knew was because some friends at the embassy had passed the warning along privately. We already were nervous.

Also around that time we were picked up one morning by a taxi driver who offered—without being asked—to recite all the details he and his colleagues had been collecting about our daughter. The driver knew her name, her address, where and when she went to school, and the hour she normally returned home. Was someone profiling her so that the information could be sold to kidnappers?

That incident was followed by a series of crank phone calls over several weeks. There was always a silent pause, after which the caller would hang up without saying a word. Then the phone quickly would ring again and again.

But one day, after the long succession of hang-ups, the caller decided to stay on the line. I could hear him take the receiver away from his ear, as if aiming it elsewhere in the room. There was the distinct sound of a little girl crying in the background. In a panic, I called my daughter's school to make sure she was safe. She was, but the terror I felt didn't subside for weeks.

Against that backdrop, it's easy to see why my wife wanted out, and why other correspondents in Colombia are now talking about leaving as well. We

are all under a tremendous amount of pressure from our families, friends and editors to modify our coverage of Colombia for the sake of our personal safety, even while we are pressuring ourselves to get more deeply involved in coverage of the Colombian war. It's in our blood, or we wouldn't be here in the first place.

So we tend to follow the time-honored rules. We never travel alone, we always inform colleagues about our travel plans. If it's a particularly risky trip, we fix phone call deadlines. If I haven't called my wife or my desk by a certain time, they have a "panic button" procedure they can follow to locate me and make sure I'm all right. If that doesn't work, other procedures are supposed to kick into action.

When I arrived in Colombia four years ago, it was unlike any other war zone I had worked in. I've covered at least five major conflicts, including Lebanon, the Iran-Iraq war, and El Salvador. But Colombia was the first place where I could not pass among the different warring parties with a relative assurance that they would not do me harm. In fact, until recently, the FARC and the paramilitary militias gave every indication that they would not hesitate to kidnap or kill anyone who approached them without going through proper channels. And they never quite spelled out what those proper channels were. The risks seemed too high, and many of us tended to avoid venturing into certain parts of the countryside, even as a group. Our coverage and balance suffered as a result.

Much has changed in today's Colombia, largely due to the increased U.S. presence there and the competition among the Colombian government, the guerrillas, and the paramilitaries to influence our coverage. All these players have set up their own, well-oiled press operations. Thanks to a Switzerland-sized safe haven created for the FARC in southern Colombia, we journalists now can fly straight into the rebel heartland. Within minutes of landing, we can be sipping beer or shopping for kung fu videos with a top FARC commander. Not to be outdone, the paramilitaries have opened channels so that their leaders can be interviewed more easily in the field. In December, I actually received an e-mailed New Year's greeting from the FARC. With only one or two phone calls or e-mail messages, we can arrange interviews with just about any player in the Colombian conflict.

More importantly, the foreign press corps seems to have been granted the same kind of diplomatic immunity that

Robert Young Pelton, a TV producer and host, videotapes a Colombian Army special forces sergeant who was wounded by the explosion of a stun grenade during a training exercise. ***Photo by Steve Salisbury.©***

June 8, 1999: Two journalists with RCN Television received death threats after the station aired their footage of policemen ignoring a mob killing. Later that month, one of the journalists was attacked on the street. Within a few months, both journalists had left Colombia.

June 29, 1999: Carlos Pulgarín, correspondent for El Tiempo, received death threats that accused him of being a spokesman for FARC, Colombia's largest guerrilla movement. He had published articles about the assassination of indigenous activists by right-wing paramilitary forces. Later in the year, he received more death threats and was kidnapped at gunpoint. By year's end, he had moved to Peru, where he continued to receive death threats—the first known case of a Colombian journalist continuing to face threats while in exile.

July 13, 1999: Two radio reporters received death threats after they exposed corruption within the Cartegena municipal administration.

August 12, 1999: A pamphlet circulated and signed by an ultra-right group called the Colombian Rebel Army included the names of three journalists on a list of 21 people it described as enemies of the peace process.

August 13, 1999: Two motorcycle-riding gunmen murdered political satirist and radio and TV host Jaime Garzón as he was driving to his office. He had regularly traded on his stature as a well respected broadcaster to negotiate for the release of victims of guerrilla kidnappings. He also served on an independent commission that was mediating between the government and the leftist guerrilla group ELN. He had frequently been threatened by Carlos Castaño, the leader of AUC, a right-wing paramilitary group linked to numerous attacks on journalists.

August 15, 1999: Luis López Criollo, a veteran radio journalist, began receiving death threats. The threats grew so persistent that he canceled his radio show on October 30, and he and his family fled the country on Christmas Eve.

September 16, 1999: Two assassins shot and killed Guzmán Quintero Torres, editor of the daily El Pilón. He had recently published an article about an AUC attack on the home of a presumed guerrilla sympathizer, and his prime source was kidnapped and murdered after the story was published.

allowed us to move relatively freely in other war zones such as Lebanon or El Salvador. It means we can cover Colombia much more thoroughly than before. We can ask tough questions of paramilitary and guerrilla leaders without being worried that they will retaliate against us.

Still, we cannot forget that we are dealing with a nation held hostage by thuggish gunmen whose rules of engagement seem to be changing on a daily basis. There are cowboys among the foreign correspondents in Colombia who love to make fun of me for being overcautious about security. All I can do is remind them of a conversation I had with Terry Anderson back in 1985. Terry spent the better part of a dinner in Amman, Jordan, chiding me about my fears of returning to Lebanon after I had been involved in a hair-raising kidnapping incident. He insisted that journalists had nothing to worry about, provided we maintained good contacts with the major militias and were balanced in our coverage. Two days after that conversation, Terry was kidnapped in Beirut and spent the following 2,454 days as a hostage.

The rules changed in Lebanon without anyone telling us. They might be changing in Colombia, too. As in Lebanon, when the U.S. aid starts flooding in and the bullets start flying thicker and faster, Colombians are going to get angry. They're going to look for ways to vent their frustrations over U.S. policy. They're probably going to look for Americans whose abductions might draw some attention to the Colombian plight, and when they can't find the prominent executives and businessmen they're looking for, they just might settle for the most accessible Americans they can find: journalists. ■

For the past four years, Tod Robberson has been the Latin America bureau chief of The Dallas Morning News, based in Panama City and Bogotá. He also was Mexico bureau chief of The Washington Post, El Salvador bureau chief and Middle East correspondent for Reuters.

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Spending Time on the Frontlines of Colombia's War

Taking personal risks is part of the job of a foreign correspondent.

By Linda Robinson

It was dusk on my first night with Colombia's guerrillas. The rebel leaders stood on the dirt road, ringed by their guards, discussing what to do with me. They seemed bemused by my request to stay on to learn more. After weeks preparing to meet them, reading their voluminous communiqués and several scholarly books on the country's 36-year-old war, I wasn't satisfied with the afternoon's brief interview. I had many more questions. Raul Reyes, one of the comandantes, came over. "What are we going to do with you?" he asked.

This was a rhetorical question if there ever was one. At least 20 rebels toting the latest automatic weaponry awaited his orders, so we both knew who was calling the shots. This short, bearded man in crisp fatigues, a pistol and machete on either hip, might have been testing me to see if I was serious. My hiking boots and pack suggested I'd come ready to stay. Their puzzlement was understandable since most people try to avoid becoming guests of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

They not only take prisoners of war but also kidnap civilians for ransom or political reasons. Americans are not exempt. Several U.S. tourists had been seized when they went bird watching in the territory of a particularly fearsome FARC comandante, and three American activists had been killed.

Accusations of spying were lodged in both cases, although Reyes told me the murders had been a mistake. It is difficult to comprehend Colombia's climate of mayhem from the outside; hundreds of people are killed and kidnapped daily. As the last light faded behind the trees, Reyes turned to my

A grave digger has just buried a coca farmer, whose family members said they did not know who had killed him. One person said he was murdered by FARC guerrillas as punishment for breaking its armed blockade. ***Photo by Steve Salisbury.*** **©**

rebel-assigned driver and said: "Take her to El Loco."

Naturally I had second thoughts. Here I was paying some laconic mustachioed man, trusted by the FARC but unknown to me, to take me down a pitch-dark road in the middle of the jungle. I especially did not like the idea of being delivered to someone called "the crazy one." I wondered if he was in charge of stupid, nosy journalists, but I did not want to betray my nervousness. After bouncing wildly over the ruts for another half-hour, I summoned up my most casual tone and asked, "So why is he called El Loco?" Looking right through me, the driver just laughed.

From the afternoon's talk I could tell that the NATO bombing in Kosovo had made the rebels jumpy. Their suspicions of Americans were being fed by rumors that the United States planned to intervene in Colombia. I had done what I could to minimize their grounds for mistrust by sending word ahead through several channels about who I was, what I wanted, and when I would arrive. Nonetheless, the first person I encountered at the FARC's liaison office, a mop-haired young man, immediately said: "You're from the CIA, right?" We spent the rest of the afternoon playing 20 questions, while word of my arrival was radioed to the main rebel camp. The novelty of my clove cigarettes may have helped to break the ice. I was told to go out to the countryside with a driver the FARC designated. There I would meet Reyes. But I later learned that one of my intermediaries' letters had reached Reyes that day, a lucky stroke that probably did the trick, and confirmed my belief in advance planning. The next day I was told to go out to the countryside with a driver the FARC designated.

Before I went down to FARC territory in southern Colombia, the U.S. ambassador warned me that I'd be on my own. That was hardly news to me. I had chosen to make the visit alone precisely because I couldn't predict how the FARC would react. My editors knew my plans, although I wasn't sure where I would stay or how long I'd be gone. On another trip I had hired a plucky British stringer, Vicky Burnett, to accompany me to a town where right-wing vigilantes were holed up after massacring a couple dozen people, but I remained reluctant to ask others to shoulder the risks of rural Colombia. The only foreign reporter I knew of who did go to the frontlines of Colombia's war was Karl Penhaul, then of Reuters, who generously offered his advice. But as a magazine reporter looking for an exclusive story I couldn't very well team up with a wire service colleague.

To my great relief, El Loco turned out to be a peasant known for his clownish sense of humor. He and his wife, whom he introduced as La Loca, gave me a welcome meal and the best bed in their humble home deep in the wilderness. The next day I was taken to the rebels' camp where Reyes talked at length about their views and goals, answering dozens of questions with remarkable frankness. Some answers were chilling, such as his defense of ransom and extortion as taxation. Profiting from drugs? Everyone does it. Conscript army? The other side does it. But I came away understanding much more about the rebels, their war, and Colombia's warped moral universe. And I got to observe how they treated each other and the civilians around them.

Since I survived these first encounters without becoming a permanent guest of the FARC, I decided to take a further risk. The FARC was in the middle of a nationwide offensive, so I made my way to one of their elite mobile units fighting some distance away. I explained to the taxi driver I hired just what I intended to do, and he accepted the job, apparently curious at my own willingness to venture out. It may also be that the rebel commander I met on the mountaintop as the government planes strafed its flanks was too surprised to see me to refuse to talk. The experience of being with rebels in combat was scary, but it could not have been more educational. I got to see for myself that this unit was as accomplished a military force as reputed, deftly capturing a town, holding it for days, and withdrawing at night without experiencing any casualties.

Why have I made it my priority for

[continued on page 20]

October 21, 1999: Rodolfo Julio Torres, a radio correspondent, was found brutally murdered. Colleagues are convinced he was assassinated in reprisal for his outspoken reporting and, a year earlier, anonymous pamphlets had accused him of being affiliated with the leftist guerrillas.

October 26, 1999: Henry Romero, a freelance photographer, was kidnapped by members of the National Liberation Army (ELN) and held for nine days. He was kidnapped in retaliation for taking and publishing a photograph of ELN leader Comandante Nicholás without his signature black and red mask.

October 29, 1999: Members of FARC abducted seven television journalists and held them for five days. They were compelled to march long distances to villages where they heard farmers denounce alleged paramilitary atrocities.

November 2, 1999: Alvaro Montoya Gómez, a cartoonist and reporter with El Nuevo Siglo, resigned his position as weekly columnist after receiving anonymous calls that threatened his life and the lives of his children. Even after resigning, Montoya continued to receive threats.

November 10, 1999: Members of FARC kidnapped seven television journalists while they were traveling to cover the aftermath of a right-wing paramilitary attack. They were released in two to four days.

November 14, 1999: A bomb exploded in front of the Cali offices of the Bogotá-based daily El Tiempo, injuring three employees and causing considerable damage. The attack was attributed to either drug traders (angered by Colombia's policy of extraditing suspected drug traffickers to the United States) or left-wing guerrillas.

December 3, 1999: Pablo Emilio Medina Motta, a TV cameraman, was killed by multiple shots to the head and back when more than 100 leftist guerrillas stormed a town. FARC apologized for the murder, explaining that they had mistaken Medina for a police informer.

December 31, 1999: During 1999, at least 13 Colombian journalists fled the country. A Bogata-based weekly, Semana, described Colombian journalists as "the new displaced."

Frontline Images

Colombian Marines patrol the Magdalena River in north central Colombia, one of the country's most dangerous areas.

A FARC soldier watches as members of the Communist Youth Movement shout slogans against the United States and Colombian governments. FARC sometimes organizes such demonstrations.

Adolescent girls make up a significant part of the FARC guerrilla movement's strength. They are injected with contraceptives each month to prohibit them from getting pregnant.

A Colombian soldier stands in front of a casket containing the corpse of a murder victim. As with many murders in Colombia, townspeople couldn't or wouldn't say who the killers were.

Steve Salisbury has lived and worked as a journalist and photographer in Latin America since 1981, specializing in guerrilla conflicts and drug wars. His photos have appeared in The New York Times, The Washington Post, GEORGE, Men's Journal, Colombia's largest newsmagazine, SEMANA, and other publications. His articles have been published in SEMANA, Jane's Intelligence Review, The Washington Times, The Nation, and elsewhere.

All photos by Steve Salisbury. ©

A Colombian Army soldier, armed with a South African-made 40mm grenade launcher, stands as a cocaine laboratory that soldiers torched blazes behind him.

A peasant coca farmer chews a coca leaf as he stands by his two-hectare plot of coca bushes. He harvests six times each year, grossing about $900 each harvest, more than he can earn growing legal crops such as rice, yucca and plantains.

Colombian President Andrés Pastrana (center) with military officials.

May 24, 2000: Ignacio Gómez walked out of his home in Bogotá, got in a taxi, and noticed a man approaching him from behind. Gómez recognized the face as that of a composite sketch of a killer, provided by survivors of a 1997 Mapiripán massacre. In February he had reported that the massacre had been carried out by paramilitaries under the command of Carlos Castaño in concert with Colombian Army forces. Since publication of that story, he'd received 56 threatening letters. A week later, Gómez fled to the United States, where he is currently a Nieman Fellow.

May 25, 2000: Jineth Bedoya Lima, an investigative reporter with El Espectador, was kidnapped outside La Modelo Prison in Bogotá. After being drugged and abducted at gunpoint, she was driven to another city where she was brutally assaulted. She was found 10 hours later in a state of nervous collapse, crawling out of a roadside dump. The likely motive for her kidnapping was the paper's coverage of an April 27 battle at the prison between common criminals and inmates who belonged to paramilitary factions. She had reported extensively on the prison riots, apparently offending paramilitary leaders at the prison.

October 31, 2000: Juan Camilo Restrepo Guerra, a community radio station director, was shot dead by a suspected right-wing paramilitary gunman. He was apparently murdered in retaliation for his sharp criticism of the local administration.

November 2, 2000: ELN guerrilla fighters kidnapped two television journalists. In exchange for releasing one of the journalists, the guerrilla group called on the government to pledge money for road improvements.

November 15, 2000: Gustavo Rafael Ruiz Cantillo, a radio correspondent, was shot and killed by two gunmen as he crossed a town square. Colleagues said that the gunmen were members of a right-wing paramilitary gang. According to one source, gang members had told Ruiz, who covered politics, crime and general news, to "give up that big mouth's job."

December 13, 2000: Alfredo Abad Lopez, director of a radio station, was shot and killed at his home by two suspected paramilitary gunmen. ■

[continued from page 17]
the past three years to report from the frontlines of Colombia's war? It is a situation about which Americans are vastly ignorant and one in which the United States has become increasingly involved. That seems like a pretty good rationale to me. I can't imagine a much worse situation than the United States wading into a place it knows virtually nothing about. I don't minimize the dangers inherent in reporting anywhere in Colombia and certainly not in the war zone, which is coming to be most of the countryside. But the dearth of firsthand reporting from the half of the country where the government was entirely absent seemed to me like an egregious lapse posing a different sort of danger. There was no other way to learn about the FARC except to put myself in their hands. That's just what reporting on guerrillas requires.

A question like "Why do you do it?" has many layers, including personal ones. I became a foreign correspondent because I like to get my shoes dirty and my shirt sweaty, and this story is as challenging and fascinating as it gets. In 15 years of reporting in Latin America, I've seen wars and anarchy, but this is an extreme case of pathological violence and social decomposition. Southern Colombia's jungle is becoming one giant coca plantation. Going to the country is like jumping down the rabbit hole or stepping through the looking glass. But I also have the luxury of being able to leave, and this gives me a distinct advantage over reporters based inside the country, our Colombian colleagues above all, who are the most vulnerable to intimidation, threats and retaliation.

I've gotten out into the hinterlands, and I've tried to develop a comprehensive picture of the principal actors and issues—the guerrillas, the military, the paramilitaries, and the U.S. role in Colombia. Covering the first three are difficult mostly because of the very real possibility of personal danger. The fourth has been tough because the U.S. embassy has erected obstacles to reporting. Foreseeing that the media would cast the story as "another Vietnam," the U.S. Embassy blocked access to the main topic of interest, the U.S. special forces training anti-drug battalions in the Colombian army. I did get access to the ambassador and military advisory group commander and finally to the anti-drug battalion, but the embassy warned me that if I even tried to talk to any special forces trainers I'd get no more access to any U.S. officials in Colombia.

U.S. trained and equipped Colombian "Jungle Command" anti-narcotics police leave a small coca leaf processing laboratory on fire behind them. *Photo by Steve Salisbury.* ©

I knew this wasn't a bluff because the embassy had already cut off access to many reporters. Interestingly, Southern Command, the U.S. military command overseeing Latin American operations, disagreed with this approach. While it can't override embassy press policy inside Colombia, it has offered information to explain what the United States is doing and why. Colombia's military has allowed reporters into the field with its troops, but many believe the story is not big enough to justify the risks. Although major media have begun devoting more coverage to Colombia, frontline reporting is still limited. I've been warned many times not to go out with a force seen as inept and unreliable. A veteran former reporter warned me, "They'll leave you out there and not come back."

The Colombian military has certainly suffered major debacles. Entire units have been ambushed or taken hostage en masse. And I did indeed have some unnerving experiences when I accompanied some of these forces. Soldiers slept rather than standing guard over the commander's helicopter. And I flew into an operation with young conscripts who were so scared that they terrified me. But I've also been with experienced soldiers who let neophyte reporters come along for a hazardous day of dashing through guerrilla territory, blowing up cocaine labs, running through endless fields of coca. The situation was surreal. But there was nothing wrong with the way the troops or their leaders performed; they were just totally outgunned and outnumbered.

Still, for a reporter, nothing compares with being a witness to events like these. If journalists aren't gaining this kind of firsthand information (and passing it along to readers), then decisions that involve U.S. troops and dollars will risk being made without the wisdom of understanding that Americans ought to demand. And for reporters, those who have spent even one day in a war zone know that lessons learned there are indelibly vivid, the payoff for being a foreign correspondent. ■

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Journalist's Trade

Reporting on the Economic Underbelly

Lynda McDonnell, political editor for the St. Paul Pioneer-Press and former poverty reporter, finds much "ingenious, committed reporting" on the lives of the poor but also sees "missed opportunities." Why? As McDonnell writes, "poverty and poor people don't have to be covered, as city hall and schools do. A newspaper can do without. Neither advertiser nor reader is likely to demand more coverage." **Jonathan Kaufman,** a reporter and editor at The Wall Street Journal, observes that "stories about race and class, social justice and inequality…provoke rolling-of-the-eyes, distracted nods, impatient dismissals—not just from readers but from editors, too. 'There you go again,' their expressions seem to say."

Nick Kotz, who reported on poverty during the 1960's for The Washington Post, offers a valuable historic perspective. "Too often, in my opinion, reporting about questions of social and economic justice has been trendy, superficial and sporadic—if not simply missing from the news agenda…. America's problems of race and poverty…rarely are assigned a news priority that calls for sustained, penetrating coverage." **Peter Edelman,** professor of law at Georgetown University Law Center, writes from the perspective of a former policymaker who worked on welfare reform. "Some of the most important questions in the coverage of poverty today are ones that begin with the word 'why.'" He raises questions that journalists might want to ask.

Diana Nelson Jones, a writer, and **Steve Mellon,** a photographer, recently went to Appalachia to report for the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette about what's happened to poverty since the war on it began there. They share insights on how they reported the story and what they found. Jones, who grew up in West Virginia, writes, "Its negative portrayals are all too negative, and what is positive about the region remains all but unknown outside its borders." Mellon recalls a man who, when he learned they were journalists, shouted at him, "You going to make us look like a bunch of idiots, like those last reporters did?"

Roland De Wolk, creator and producer of KTVU Channel 2 News in the San Francisco Bay Area, writes about "The Price of Prosperity." This collaborative journalism project involving print, broadcast and the Internet, is examining the "costs" that accompany an economic boom which often go unreported. One story highlighted the otherwise barely noticed rise in child suicides. **Raj Jayadev,** editor of Silicon Valley DE-BUG, tells about the experience of young, low-wage workers publishing their stories of life in high-tech America. It has become "a vehicle for youth who feel that they live on the margins in Silicon Valley," Jayadev writes.

Photographer **Harvey Wang** shares his eyes' view of life on the Bowery. "The main point," he says, "was to document the humanity behind these forgotten façades…."

Tapping New Sources

Richard C. Harwood teaches journalists strategies for finding valuable new sources. He describes how perspectives of people from various layers of civic life often go untapped by reporters and how, by tapping them, coverage of a community can be strengthened. As Harwood writes, journalists "can 'visit' civic life to do a story from time to time, or they can decide to *live* there—to come to know communities deeply and to have that knowledge inform their daily work." **Karen Lin Clark**, an editor at The San Diego Union-Tribune, describes how reporters at her paper have gotten to know communities deeply by using Harwood's techniques. **John X. Miller,** public editor at the Detroit Free Press, emphasizes the value of reporters seeking out and listening in new ways, as his paper's reporters did in their city's Arab-American community. And **Kathy Spurlock,** executive editor of The (Monroe, La.) News-Star, shows how a change in news coverage spurred community dialogues across racial lines.

Youth Journalism

Mark Goodman, director of the Student Press Law Center, laments the lessons about journalism and the First Amendment that young people are learning as adults censor what they write. "Professionals who fail to defend student press freedom will have only themselves to blame when young journalists they hire are one day as indifferent to the First Amendment as many working journalists are now to the problems confronted by the high-school press," Goodman warns. **Laurie Becklund,** president of Associated Student Press, provides essential tools to high-school journalists with the belief that "high-school news programs are in a better position to save mainstream media than 'we' are to save them." **Diana Mitsu Klos,** senior project director of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, describes that organization's new high-school journalism project involving collaborative efforts with universities and established media.

Barbara Walsh, a writer at the Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram, immersed herself in teenagers' lives and created a five-part series to tell their stories. "We might have made some of our adult readers uncomfortable, but we promised teens we'd listen to them and tell *their* stories. It felt good to keep that promise," she writes. **Katherine Cowy Kim,** editor of Youth Outlook, explains how young people transform their experiences into published stories. And **Celina De León**, senior editor at Teen Voices, describes the editorial and personal challenges faced by young women whose editing, writing and artwork comprise this national, quarterly magazine.

Political Journalism

Steve Nordlinger, a former reporter and editor at The (Baltimore) Sun, uses a Maryland example to illustrate how the media all but ignore coverage of Congressional races when incumbents run. ■

Neither Publishers nor Readers Clamor for Stories About the Poor

Even so, the hard work of reporting about poverty has lasting value.

By Lynda McDonnell

A young colleague, fired with the ideal that good journalism afflicts the comfortable, read the posting for the newsroom's latest job: a reporter to write about homes and home decorating.

"Just what we need," she said in disgust. "Someone to tell people how to decorate their great rooms."

Those of us who have hung around newsrooms longer are more tolerant of sections and features aimed at middle- and upper-class readers in an affluent age. Advertising revenue pays our salaries. And we've fussed over window treatments and table settings ourselves on occasion.

But implicit in my young colleague's remark is an important question: Do we slight the stories of poor citizens in our communities because we've become preoccupied with the high-demo reader whom advertisers crave? Does our marketing emphasis shape news values, driving us to devote any new resources to coverage of business, sports, entertainment and suburbs and to neglect coverage of hunger, homelessness, sickness and struggle? Have we become enthralled with the go-go spirit of the times and complacent in our own middle-class lives?

I know of no careful analysis of how much the media cover poverty. Even counting the terms "poor" and "poverty" would be a faulty measure. Many subjects that touch the lives of low-income Americans—foster care and welfare reform, immigration and public transit, high rents and lack of health insurance—wouldn't necessarily show up in the tally. I can't claim statistical proof of what our profession is documenting or neglecting.

As a journalist who covered poverty and welfare for four years and has taught college students about poverty, I can point out a lot of ingenious, committed reporting—from news features to huge projects—that brings the lives and concerns of poor people to the broader community. I can also point out missed opportunities. Despite nearly a decade of steady economic growth, 12 percent of the population lives in poverty as the federal government defines it—less than $17,000 a year for a family of four—and one-fifth of the nation lives on less than $17,500. You'd never know this if you picked up the average newspaper.

With the exception of Christmas features about needy families, few newspapers or television stations attend regularly to the lives of people living on disability checks or raising children on a hotel maid's or nursing assistant's wage. As journalists, we are drawn to people who are doing something—building dot-coms, merging companies. That's where the news and the hot beats are. People living in poverty often struggle just to pay bills.

John Soloski, director of the school of journalism and mass communications at the University of Iowa, suggests a simple way to test the thesis that newspapers aren't interested in poor citizens. Find out what parts of the market they don't circulate in. Perhaps readers in those neighborhoods lack the income or interest in subscribing to newspapers, I suggest. Soloski counters by citing a finding by his colleague Gilbert Cranberg. The St. Petersburg Times, which is owned by the Poynter Institute and is satisfied with smaller profit margins than those that the big chains and their investors expect, has far higher penetration in that city's poor, largely black neighborhoods than did the chain newspapers he studied—The Milwaukee Journal, Detroit News, Detroit Free Press, and The (Baltimore) Sun.

Few newspapers offer the sorts of appeals, discounts and premiums in poor neighborhoods that they offer readers elsewhere, Soloski believes. "There's no effort made. It's a little bit like redlining." He then quotes Max King, formerly of The Philadelphia Inquirer, who has reported that large losses of circulation in city neighborhoods elicited no reaction from advertisers. They didn't care. Soloski also points out that among the big newspaper chains, McClatchy is one of the few that explicitly uses circulation growth as one of the key measures used to determine executive pay. The reluctance to push for circulation in poor neighborhoods might have been present before, but Soloski believes that today's economic pressures on newspapers drive it further.

But blaming limits of our coverage entirely on selective demographics and greedy investors is too simple. Jason DeParle of The New York Times, as high-demo a newspaper as they come, did smart, determined reporting from Washington as the Clinton administration and Congress passed welfare block grants and time limits, then reported from Wisconsin for a year after that state implemented the changes. I doubt that many Times readers clamored to know how poor families were faring in Milwaukee. DeParle and his editors decided they needed to know.

DeParle's absence to write a book about welfare has reduced the newspaper's level of coverage. That's hardly surprising. Whenever an experienced and talented reporter is replaced on a beat, there's a gap as the newcomer builds sources, knowledge and

confidence. But covering poverty and welfare demands particular ingenuity and commitment from reporter and editor.

To begin with, poverty and poor people don't have to be covered, as city hall and schools do. A newspaper can do without. Neither advertiser nor reader is likely to demand more coverage. Neighborhood activists complain about too much negative coverage of their communities, too much attention to fires, murders and drug busts. They want stories about neighborhood volunteers, high-school sports stars, bad landlords, new businesses. They're not as likely to ask for more coverage of poverty.

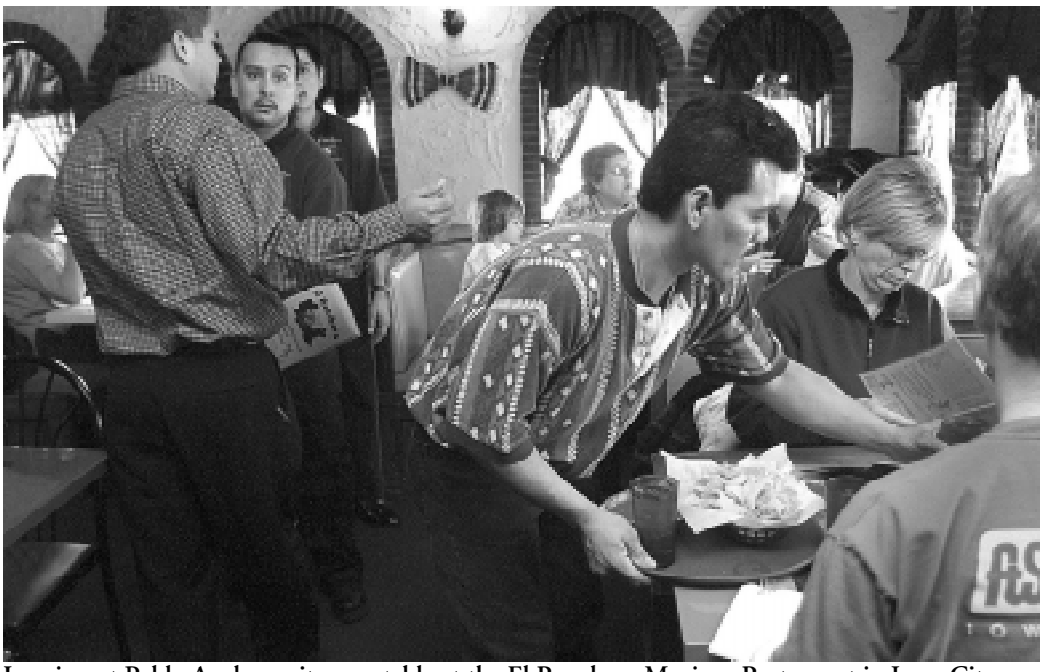
Second, a poverty or social issues beat consists almost entirely of enterprise work. Few press releases will arrive on the reporter's desk. Few press conferences will be called. The numbers that are released—food stamp use declines, welfare rolls fall—will be mere figures that must be fleshed out with patient street reporting to learn why this is happening and how people's lives are affected. Finding affected people requires patience and ingenuity. Privacy requirements limit access to clients' names and case files. Charities and nonprofits often must be coaxed to identify broader trends and to link reporters with affected individuals. Poor people often move around, have their phone service cut off, are reluctant to give a reporter free access to their lives. It takes time and commitment to negotiate through all that. Searching for a single mother who was trying to improve her skills and get a better job, Isabelle Wilkerson of The New York Times made her pitch in several night classes before she found a subject willing to provide the necessary access and time.

For the reporter, covering poverty often presents ethical quandaries. If the family you're writing about needs food or transportation to the doctor, do you bring groceries and give a lift, reasoning that it's like buying lunch for a middle-class source? Or do you restrain yourself in order to give a truer portrait of how a poor family manages? If the person being featured has her daughter's family living illegally in her public housing apartment or lied about her job benefits in order to qualify for government-subsidized health insurance, do you include that information, knowing she could lose the apartment or the insurance? The conferences and publications sponsored by the University of Maryland's Casey Journalism Center for Children and Families are filled with such debates.

When I was covering poverty, the political debate over welfare reform gave the story a clear focus and unquestionable importance. What would Congress and President Clinton do? How would our state respond? What would be done about such obvious barriers to work as child care, transportation and low wages?

It's a harder story now because action is not centered in legislatures and welfare offices but dispersed within communities, workplaces and child-care centers. Welfare rolls have dropped precipitously. Many people have disappeared entirely from the public support system. What has happened to them, their children, and their neighborhoods? No report from the welfare department is going to answer that. But teachers, visiting nurses, ministers, mail carriers, cops, grandmothers, shopkeepers and families themselves might be able to.

By nature or necessity, good journalists are opportunists. Each community will present its own opportunities to delve into the lives of its have-nots. After a public health report was released about the prevalence of diabetes among Native Americans, the Minneapolis Star Tribune looked at the reasons for the growth of the disease, the terrible effects on individuals and families, and efforts to change diet and improve medical care. When Iowa's governor declared that he wanted his state to be a magnet for immigrants to restock the labor supply, the Iowa City Press-Citizen used the chance to look at immigrants in eastern Iowa, the jobs they hold, the cultures they brought, and how they meshed with Lutherans and cornfields.



Immigrant Pablo Auelos waits on a table at the El Ranchero Mexican Restaurant in Iowa City. ***Photo by Scott Norris/Iowa City Press-Citizen.*** **©**

But if we believe the issues of poverty can only be treated effectively in series, we greatly constrain what's possible. Former Nieman Curator Bill Kovach once suggested that I read Henry Mayhew, who wrote hundreds of brief newspaper portraits of the poor of London in the mid-19th century. Mayhew's sketches of costermongers and organ grind-

ers and flower girls are vivid and scrupulous, with copious quotes from the people themselves.

Mayhew saw his work as "the first attempt to publish the history of a people from the life of the people themselves." He was sympathetic to his subjects and impatient with both charity and economic exploitation. But most of all, he was interested in them—curious and angry that the wealthy knew and cared so little about starvation, ignorance and depravity.

In our age of irony, exhaustion and complacency, it can be hard to get the reader's attention to stories of the down-and-out. But there are opportunities to remind the comfortable of the struggling. When heating bills in Minnesota spiked because of a cold winter and jump in natural gas prices, Chuck Haga of the Star Tribune spent a morning at a community center where dozens of panicked people applied for heating assistance. During the Christmas season, the newspaper published brief, first-person vignettes from readers who had needed help years earlier. Their memories of the neighbor who brought a tree and presents, or a church that brought food, reminded readers living in unprecedented prosperity that fortune in America is like a Ferris wheel—it moves up and down.

Maja Beckstrom, who writes about poverty for my newspaper, went to a dental clinic for homeless men and described a roomful of men with no thought but eliminating the pain of abscess or exposed root. She also probed a related policy problem: Many of the men are covered by Medicaid, which includes dental benefits, but couldn't find dentists to treat them because the government reimbursement rates equaled about half of the dentists' normal fees. Moreover, if a doctor accepted the appointment and the patient didn't show, the dentist had an empty chair and a wasted hour.

Last year, when I taught a seminar about poverty to college freshmen, I was surprised at how little they knew about the poverty of today and the past—the Great Depression, the War on Poverty. After all, their parents and grandparents lived through those times. And many Americans still live with little. Yet before my students spent time for class at soup kitchens and residential hotels, few had known anyone who is poor.

We can blame their ignorance on a dearth of history classes in high school and a lack of political attention to poverty, on economic segregation and a sense of shame that keeps even poor kids from wanting to be seen that way. But surely we can blame some of it on the way the media reflect the world back to themselves. As journalists, we need to keep reporting on lives that are alternately feared, pitied and ignored. A middle-class woman who worried about low-income apartments in her neighborhood once told me: "Poverty is like mercury. A little can ruin a neighborhood. And middle-class people know it."

If we don't report across that toxic divide, who will? ■

Lynda McDonnell, a 1980 Nieman Fellow, is political editor for the St. Paul Pioneer Press, where she reported on poverty for four years. In the November 2000 issue of The Washington Monthly, McDonnell wrote an article entitled "The Ghost of Tom Joad: What happens when an entire generation forgets what it means to be poor?"

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Covering Race, Poverty and Class in the New Gilded Age

To connect with readers, stories must be told with fresh perspective.

By Jonathan Kaufman

"So, what are you working on?" a friend asked me recently as we waited in line to see a movie.

I told him about a story I was writing about racial tensions in an upper-middle-class suburb outside Washington, D.C..

"Oh, you're still writing about that stuff," he said dismissively as we bought popcorn. "When are you going to give it up?"

Such is the plight of reporters trying to write about race and class during this new—though now perhaps slightly tarnished—gilded age. Back when I started reporting in the late 1970's, veteran reporters around the newsroom used to groan about "mego" stories—the ones that made "my eyes glaze over." They were the assignments everyone dreaded: cover the Federal Reserve; write a story about changing interest rates; report on the stock market. With the memories of the 1960's still fresh, many of us wanted to do the stories that would make a difference: expose racial injustice and class division, write about poverty and people with no voice or access to power.

These days, of course, what was once considered "mego" is now a front-page staple with reporters lined up to cover it. Television stations interrupt their regular programming to report on Federal Reserve meetings. The stock market, still, is just about all people want to talk about. It's the stories about race and class, social justice and inequality, that provoke rolling of the eyes, dis-

tracted nods, impatient dismissals—not just from readers but from editors, too. "There you go again," their expressions seem to say.

I don't think this skepticism about such coverage is necessarily a bad thing. In many ways, coverage of race and class has become too predictable during the past 15 years. Readers picking up a story about a neighborhood devastated by drugs, or an African American complaining of discrimination often feel, I think, that they've read this story before.

Coverage of race or poverty has begun to mirror the intractability of these problems. I sometimes worry we have succeeded too well in communicating the bleak prospects of the inner-city underclass. Stories and then books such as Alex Kotlowitz's "There Are No Children Here" have portrayed in harrowing and memorable detail the life of poor blacks. Have they also had the unintended consequence of making these problems seem beyond solution or hope? Faced with bleak statistics of poverty, single-parent families, dropout rates, and incarceration, most readers throw up their hands. They read these stories the way many of us read about tragedies in distant lands, like the oft-parodied bus plunge in Bangladesh that kills 50. It's a shame, but it doesn't really affect us and, therefore, it is not news to which we find connections.

This distancing from the problem of the poor and disadvantaged is especially true at a time when, despite the economic boom, middle- and upper-middle income readers seem increasingly focused on their own lives and concerns. Even the "haves" today envy the "have-mores." This dynamic leaves little room to feel empathy for the poor. And as the economy slows down, this lack of interest and compassion will only increase.

So how do journalists connect our largely middle- and upper-class readers to these stories? One approach I've tried is to find those stories that show places where poverty and wealth and the races intersect—and then cast an honest light on how these forces play out. Last year I reported a story about Menlo-Atherton High School in Silicon Valley. It's a fascinating school: One third of the school's students come from well-to-do white families drawn from the high-tech boom; two-thirds come from poor black and Hispanic families who live in East Palo Alto.

As I brainstormed the story with some editors, a black editor said to me, "You know, I already know the story about the minority kids—the obstacles they face. I want to know what the white parents are thinking." A light went on in my head. The story ended up being largely about the influence of the well-to-do white parents in this school and the way their power and anxiety about their own children's success contributed to tracking and other policies that hurt many of the poor and minority kids. The story received a huge response in part, I think, because it touched a nerve among white readers unsettled to see aspects of themselves exposed in the paper—such as white students in advanced placement courses referring to regular, minority-filled classes as "ghetto" classes or teachers describing how powerful well-to-do parents had blocked a science program designed to help poor students by mixing students of different races and incomes.

To avoid the glazed eye syndrome in writing about poverty, journalists need to push themselves to find both new stories to tell and new ways of telling them. A few years ago we decided to write about the high rate of imprisonment of black men in inner cities. The story would be told not from inside the prison but outside, in the neighborhoods in which they no longer lived and among the people whom they'd left behind. What's it like to live in a neighborhood where 40 percent of men in their 20's are either in prison, on their way to prison, or have just been released from prison on probation?

I spent several months in Baltimore speaking with families, prisoners, ex-cons, social workers, and ministers. I eventually focused on Vernon Branch, a small-time drug dealer just released from jail, and his extended family. The story as I initially wrote it followed Branch as he left jail and the impact his repeated imprisonments had on his mother, his siblings, his mother-in-law, and his 10-year-old daughter, Sabrina. After my editor read the story he called with bad news. The story didn't work. It was well reported and well written. But it was essentially a story about a drug dealer who gets out of jail and, by the end of the story, ends up in jail again. Branch wasn't someone about whom readers would feel much sympathy. "But," my editor continued. "I could read 100 inches about Sabrina." I ended up refocusing the story, telling it through the eyes of a 10-year-old girl who lives in a world in which not only her father but her mother, uncle and most of the men in her life are in jail. It worked in a way my previous structure never could have.

Writing front-page stories for The Wall Street Journal, of course, gives me the luxury of time and space to develop these ideas. But on a day-to-day basis, The Washington Post does a terrific job tracking the evolving race and class issues in Prince George's county, which is home to one of the country's largest concentrations of middle-class blacks. At a recent conference I attended at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University on race and ethnicity, West Coast reporters berated those of us based on the East Coast for failing to understand the changing diversity of the country, missing stories about Asian Americans and Hispanics—and pointing to ways in which their coverage is breaking new ground.

They are onto something, and so is my friend at the movie. For those of us committed to writing about race, class and poverty, the bar is higher now. We need to work harder to leap over it and pull our readers along. ■

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Reporting About Poverty and Race Needs to Change

Yet journalists too often convey only a one-dimensional sense of déjà vu.

By Nick Kotz

In 1960, Edward R. Murrow won widespread acclaim for "Harvest of Shame," a searing CBS television documentary reporting on the hard lives of migrant farm workers. The setting was Immokalee, Florida, where Murrow filmed and interviewed migrants who were working long hours at backbreaking labor picking vegetables for less than poverty wages and living in unsanitary shacks. There were men, women and children deprived of the basic rights most American workers take for granted.

Ten years later, NBC's Martin Carr revisited Murrow's Immokalee location to produce "Migrant," another widely admired TV documentary. Carr concluded that virtually nothing had changed for workers since Murrow's exposé.

And in January 2001, Florida newspapers reported how farm workers from Immokalee and other farm communities had marched to the state capitol in Tallahassee to demand that Governor Jeb Bush and state lawmakers enact legislation giving them the right to earn "a living wage" and to organize. The governor had visited the fields to report that migrants lived in inadequate housing and earned less, after adjusting for inflation, than they had 50 years ago.

Over the years, the migrant story developed an eerie sense of recurrent déjà vu. Though the stories, as told by journalists, changed little from decade to decade, migrant farmers only received penetrating news coverage on those rare occasions when Walter Lippmann's proverbial moving searchlight paused briefly to illuminate their difficult lives.

The migrant story raises questions about how journalists report about issues of poverty and race in American society. These two issues that have been intertwined since the civil rights movement of the 1960's not only secured for blacks the right to vote and sit at integrated lunch counters but demanded remedies to economic inequality, the legacy of 300 years of discrimination. Too often, in my opinion, reporting about questions of social and economic justice has been trendy, superficial and sporadic—if not simply missing from the news agenda. When articles about race and poverty win journalism awards, it's almost as if the revival of these stories for a new generation, along with their inherent shock value, is what brings them recognition.

America's problems of race and poverty—from inner cities to Appalachia to rural farm fields—rarely are assigned a news priority that calls for sustained, penetrating coverage. At most news organizations, these problems only have received attention when advocates for minorities and the poor demonstrated forcefully enough to create crises that government and the public could not avoid. Throughout most of our nation's history, these marginal groups have remained as invisible to journalists as to other Americans.

As a journalist reflecting on this history, I ask two questions: How can we do a better job covering these issues

Farmworkers from El Paso, Texas, picking chilies in the fields of Hatch, New Mexico. ***Photo by Carlos Marentes/Border Agricultural Workers Project.***

and exploring the impact poverty and race have on people's lives? As a corollary, journalists might also wonder: Has the absence of sustained coverage in some way contributed to why so little has seemingly changed in the life of migrants and others in poor communities?

It would seem that many in journalism share a large conceit about the impact of our work. For example, when Murrow's great documentary appeared, many journalists and citizens assumed naively that this powerful exposé surely would lead quickly to reform. Great journalism does sometimes lead to change, but seldom does real change come easily, and it almost never results from the episodic and fleeting attention journalists give to ingrained problems that are deeply rooted in the structures of American institutions.

Our feeling of self-satisfaction once we've done a story contributes to another all too common phenomena—the reflexive editorial rationale that "we've already covered that." The operative news judgment too often is that once we've reported a story, we have no continuing obligation, on our own initiative, to follow up.

Trendiness also too often drives news judgments, especially on topics that usually begin with a low priority on the news agenda. As a reporter at The Washington Post and Des Moines Register and later as a magazine writer and author, I observed how prevailing political winds influence our judgments in reporting on civil rights and poverty. Cesar Chavez's long effort to organize California's grape pickers was a national news story in the 1960's, a time of civil rights activism and President Johnson's War on Poverty. By the 1970's, however, as a political backlash against efforts to help the poor emerged, Chavez's struggle lost its news appeal.

I recall the reasoning an editor at the Post used in rejecting my suggestion to cover Chavez at that time. He readily told me that he now thought about the migrant story less in terms of California's grape pickers than as the favorite cause of knee-jerk "limousine liberals," those hapless creatures so brilliantly and wickedly portrayed by Tom Wolfe as they munched on canapés at a lavish Long Island fundraiser for Chavez's grape pickers.

When I left the Post to write a book with my wife about civil rights and welfare rights, it was "conservative chic" to be a tough-minded critic of the 1960's and social causes. But it was not chic to cover the continuing story. The news media too uncritically accepted the popular assertion that the War on Poverty was a total failure. If, as many editors came to believe, stories about poor people's lives were biased by sentimentality and too predictable in their telling, then the remedy should have been more thoughtful reporting and editing, not an abandonment of coverage. Instead, coverage was curtailed, and the migrant story, for example, never regained a place on the national news agenda.

How then, in this new century, should journalists strive for more effective reporting of what Gunnar Myrdal defined, midway through the 20th century, as "the American dilemma?" What Myrdal saw was the persistence of racism and poverty in stark contradiction to the professed values of the nation.

Better coverage might begin with a news vision that includes a commitment to ongoing reporting of the great issues in American life. Contrary to the contention of some news people, it does not involve either bias or advocacy journalism for editors to make critical judgments about what are continuing core issues in our national life and in our local communities. What our ethic requires is that we strive to give our news audiences a reliable view of the world.

In developing a long-term news agenda, race and poverty belong on a list that reflects the major problems that affect our communities and nation. A promising start would be for news organizations to identify a list of such core issues that would be covered over time, whether or not episodes or events—or political winds—drive them onto the front page. Of course, to make this work, editors and reporters would have to make time available regularly to discuss and decide on the manifestations of these issues as they are reflected in the complex reality of their communities. And to truly grasp this evolving reality, news organizations must recognize—and represent—the diversity of interests and viewpoints in the society.

In his book "News From Nowhere," Edward Jay Epstein quotes broadcast executive Richard Salant, in defending CBS from charges of bias, as protesting that "Our reporters don't cover stories from their point of view. They are presenting them from nobody's point of view." It is a convenient fiction, relieving us of responsibility, to suggest that news stories emerge immaculately and autonomously from some kind of machine, uncontaminated by any journalist's own biases or beliefs or critical judgments about what is important. Our news judgments—on these issues and others—might be wiser and more responsible if we acknowledged and actually examined how our own value systems and interests influence decisions we make about what is news and about what our responsibilities are as professional journalists.

Fresh eyes are desperately needed to look anew at perennial stories such as race and poverty. Too much reporting on these issues still comes off as sentimental and stereotypical, reflecting perhaps our limited knowledge. In too many presentations, journalists end up portraying minorities and the poor as helpless victims rather than as autonomous human beings. Too often we simply assume the accuracy of prevailing stereotypes, rather than expending the necessary energy to probe more often and deeply into the story.

We need also to get beyond stories that only rediscover the problem. Our current reporting needs to be grounded in a historic context that informs the audience about what has changed and what hasn't. The issues of race and poverty have not remained static. Many individual lives and communities are better off as a result of historic civil rights laws passed during the 1960's, of Medicare and Medicaid, of scholarship aid for higher education, and of the much maligned War on Poverty. When journalists fail to comprehend and describe an issue's historic context, we often present a static and uninteresting snapshot that neither re-

flects reality nor offers the reader a reason to become engaged in the story.

To provide such context requires journalists who report from the nation's capital to acquire knowledge that overcomes the "Potomac River gap." Washington journalists have a habit of reporting on changes in national laws and regulations without examining how laws or programs actually work in communities. And local reporters just as rarely incorporate into their stories a detailed knowledge of the intent of federal actions and programs. In recognition of this problem, several media efforts are now underway to help reporters at the state and local level know what is going on in other states and communities. Former TV news executive Ed Fouhy, in the Pew Center on the States research project, provides policy news from state capitols to journalists and others through Stateline.org, an online news service.

Important, too, is the need to fit national and local issues of race, poverty and work into larger institutional contexts. This requires that journalists become much more ambitious in understanding and explaining the basic functioning of important American institutions. The migrant farm worker system exists and resists change because it serves a vital role in America's agricultural economy. Yet too few migrant stories examine how agribusiness works, explore the source of strength of the agribusiness political network, or examine what the cost of changing the system would be for American consumers and growers. Would a better deal for migrant workers make American growers noncompetitive with imports or price fruit and vegetables out of the reach of too many consumers? Would consumers and the nation be better off with lower trade barriers to foreign produce?

Now that changes in federal welfare law have curtailed the legal right to welfare, producing a significant decline in welfare rolls, the subject requires ongoing and deeper journalistic examination. The old system was deeply flawed, but only sustained probing will reveal what has happened to the women and their dependent children who have been forced off of welfare. Are the adults now employed more independent and better able to care for their families? Or have their problems simply been swept out of sight, only to reemerge later with even harsher consequences for the poor and the nation? Answering these questions requires a broad context, one that involves reporting about the availability and adequacy of jobs, training and education, as well as questions about family structure and race. During the last two years, The New York Times has demonstrated the reward to readers that comes from sustained efforts to examine the impact of this new welfare approach, as well as to explore beyond shallow stereotypes the state of race relations in the nation today.

Just as it's naive to assume that exposure of human suffering alone will lead to change, it could be that if journalists work to broaden our understanding of why institutions function the way they do, constructive change will still not come. But at least journalists will better serve citizens by giving them a more reliable picture of the world they live in. ■

Nick Kotz, a winner of the Pulitzer Prize and National Magazine Award, is working on his fifth book, a study of change in the 1960's.

Forgotten Stories About Forgotten People

'Journalists could do a much better job reminding us of who we are supposed to be.'

By Peter Edelman

The media have gone to sleep on America's poor. The silence is not total, to be sure, and I can hardly claim to be aware of everything that is published or aired. Stories appear all the time about individual successes or heartbreaking situations and whether homeless shelters and soup kitchens are serving more people this winter than they did last year. But I've observed relatively few journalists who try to portray patterns when it comes to coverage of poverty or who skillfully weave questions about policy into their reporting on people's lives.

The most obvious dereliction is in the coverage of the 1996 welfare law, although stories about poverty ought to be about much more than just welfare. Most Americans believe the law has been a huge success. Undoubtedly many base their views on information they've been presented; perhaps the most oft-repeated statistic is the one reporting that welfare rolls have been cut by more than 50 percent since their high point in 1994.

Yet that piece of information actually tells only a small part of the story. There are dozens of stories about, or connected with, the developments in welfare policy during the past five years. For example, of those who left welfare, how many still have a job? It turns out to be a lower percentage than one might think. There has been a major increase in the number of single mothers who are working, but research shows that only about three out of five who have left welfare actually have a job. These figures suggest a deeply troubling story, but it goes almost totally unreported.

Among those who are working, not many are managing to escape poverty.

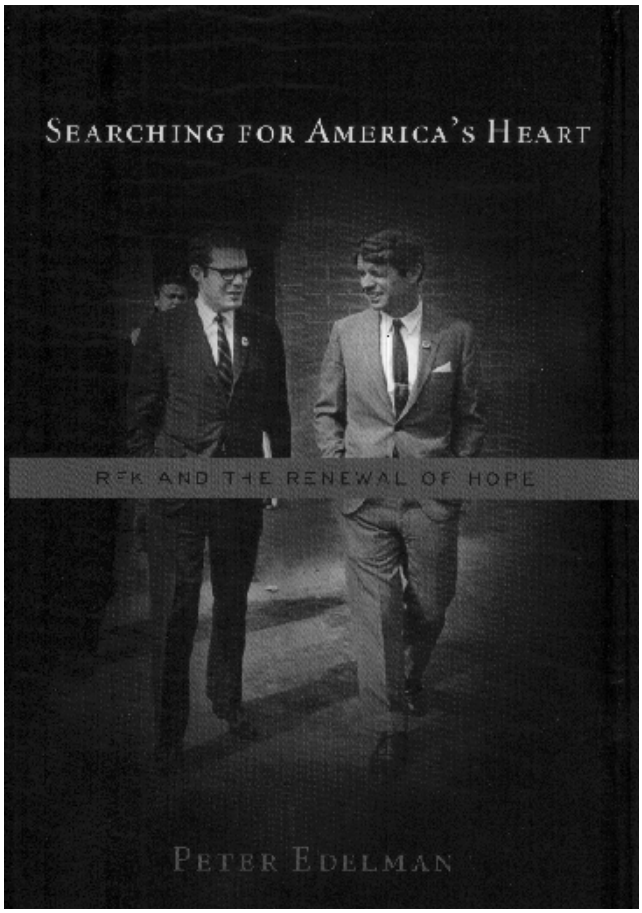
The average wage paid to former welfare recipients is seven dollars an hour, and they work an average of 30 hours per week. Using the Earned Income Tax Credit, a single mother who earns $10,000 in salary and has one or two children will get out of poverty (although this assumes that the poverty line is a meaningful measure of a decent standard of living). But for about half of these women, there are either too few hours of work or too low a wage paid, or both, to help them get out of poverty. Additionally, many of these women lost their food stamps or their Medicaid (health insurance) or both, even though the law explicitly states that this shouldn't happen when they leave welfare.

Some of the most important questions in the coverage of poverty today are ones that begin with the word "why." Why is there so much low-wage work in an economy that has been so strong? Why is there so much part-time work when people want and need full-time jobs? Why have so many former welfare recipients lost their food stamps and Medicaid? Why is the poverty line defined as $14,000 for a family of three? There are other important issues that journalists could also do a better job of tracking. What does it actually cost for a family to survive? And what does "survival" look like in terms of daily life? What approaches could be tried to respond to challenges raised by such questions?

When was the last time you read, viewed or heard a well reported story addressing these issues? Or read an article informing you that the poorest 10 percent of single mothers have lost income during the past four years because they have lost more in benefits than they have gained in earnings? Or seen a story in which a reporter explored ways in which states' various policies have produced different outcomes? If a state uses private and/or faith-based contractors to deliver services, are they performing well? Are they adhering to constitutional obligations? And can journalists even get the kind of access to vital records that the public ought to expect from these private companies?

These are stories waiting to be told, along with those that will help us understand more about what is about to happen as time limits take assistance away from large numbers of families. The list of possible stories goes on. How does poverty affect children? What does a single mother do about care for her children when her work hours are from four until midnight, a time when little child care is available? Or what does she do when her child is sick? Or if she has an infant and is required to go to work, what happens when she can not locate an affordable infant care slot?

The 1996 welfare law expires in 2002. During the next year, debate will begin in Congress about its reauthorization. Energetic reporting about the experience so far, from perspectives rooted in personal experience and policy approaches, would be extremely useful in informing the public in preparation for this debate.



In his new book, Peter Edelman writes that in a time of unprecedented prosperity, Americans have in many respects forsaken their fellow citizens.

But issues revolving around poor and low-wage workers aren't only about welfare. Even though there are crises in affordable rental housing in nearly every big city in America, very few stories about this situation seem to be emerging. Then there are issues that are covered well by some journalists and news organizations but still lack consistent and comprehensive reporting that reaches the general public. Among these are critical topics such as racial discrimination, the increasing lack of health insurance, the safety of some child-care arrangements, foster care and child protection, and schools that serve predominantly poor children.

The totality of this pattern is, in fact, greater than the sum of its parts. What such reporting would reveal is a structural problem, one that currently doesn't receive the media attention it deserves. This wealthy country of which we are so proud is, in reality, two nations. Out of embarrassment, shame or indifference, we, who live in one part of this nation, have tended to shove the residents of the second out of sight. Journalists could do a much better job reminding us of who we are supposed to be. ■

Peter Edelman is a professor of law at Georgetown University Law Center. He was assistant secretary of health and human services in the Clinton Administration and is the author of "Searching for America's Heart: RFK and the Renewal of Hope" (Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

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Going Home to Rediscover Appalachia

A reporter tells the story of poverty by looking through a different lens.

By Diana Nelson Jones

As a general assignment feature writer, I have the good fortune of being tapped for a variety of assignments. Last year, at my editor's urging, I began seeking out potential story ideas with our newspaper's national editor, Greg Victor, whose only staff writers are based in Washington, D.C.. During one of our impromptu meetings, Greg showed me a wire service article about a new litter-control program in Kentucky. The dumping of old chairs, rusty ovens, broken push mowers, washing machines and other household appliances over hillsides into hollows remains a serious cultural obstacle to progress throughout Appalachia. This news item prompted Greg to think this might be a good time for an in-depth look at what is happening in Appalachia nearly 40 years after the nation's War on Poverty riveted the public eye to this region.

Greg asked if I would be interested in trying to explore this question, and of course I was.

As the daughter of a West Virginia family from Shinnston, in the north-central part of the state, I saw the assignment as a way to learn more about the region that shaped me without claiming me. I have always had a back-and-forth attitude toward "home," believing it is too easily stereotyped and widely scorned while what I know about it is really different. Its negative portrayals are all too negative, and what is positive about the region remains all but unknown outside its borders.

Appalachia is a huge region that can nevertheless be plucked almost at random for microcosms of its sameness—rural living that is almost quaint, oddly genteel, modest, unwittingly plain and innocent, in fact, the very opposite of the image of the United States in general. I asked photographer Steve Mellon to team up with me. (See Mellon's story on page 33.) He has roots in eastern Kentucky and is known in the newsroom for his depth of thought and sensitivity. My first and overriding goal was to avoid the predictable images of poverty and attitudes of glib superiority that prevailed in nearly every article I'd read about the region.

For the first three weeks I researched old articles, government reports, and documents. I read books about coal miners, grassroots activists, and first-person accounts of community projects during the War on Poverty's early years. I called old colleagues in Huntington, West Virginia, where I worked on my first newspaper, for ideas. I did preliminary phone interviews with people who are now active in developing efforts and initiatives to reinvent the economies of entire towns in anticipation of coal's decline. Some people remembered President Lyndon Johnson's visit to Inez, Kentucky and the sudden spotlight on poverty in 1964. Throughout the project, I got invaluable help with statistics and historical perspective from Mike Kiernan of the Appalachian Regional Commission.

By the time I set out to report the story, I had decided to focus on central Appalachia, the area that I think of as the region's "gut"—specifically, southwestern West Virginia and eastern Ken-

Tommy Fletcher still lives in the ramshackle frame house that President Lyndon Johnson visited on April 24, 1964, to launch his War on Poverty. At the time, Fletcher was a former coal miner in his early 30's. Now in his 70's, Fletcher keeps to himself. He never did find steady work. ***Photo by Steve Mellon/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.***

tucky. Appalachia extends to western Pennsylvania, home of two of the most distressed counties in the region, and I knew my focus might seem like a slight to local readers. But it is in this gut of Appalachia where poverty is thickest. In this area, one can drive an hour or two in many directions and reach more counties where poverty is the way of life than anywhere else in the region. I figured that if we could examine how the region has changed here, we'd be describing substantial, and perhaps the most indicative, changes in the region.

When my friends found out I was going to Inez and Hazard, Kentucky, some of them twang-sang the first few bars of the theme from the movie "Deliverance." I have stopped taking people's potshots at Appalachia and the poor people who live there personally, but I have realized that my people are the last ones in this country who can be made fun of without incident.

Steve and I trolled through the mountains for one week in June and another week in August. The national editor only reluctantly approved the second week of reporting; I know he felt pressure to show that taking a general assignment feature reporter out of circulation for national reporting didn't have to mean it would grow into a huge and time-consuming project. I got our second valuable week back in Appalachia by convincing him that this effort was worthy of my time, and it did turn into a project. Once reported and written, the stories took up three days of Page One and significant jump space in November.

My first and overriding goal was to avoid the predictable images of poverty and attitudes of glib superiority….

Our first visit, in Huntington, West Virginia, was to a traveling rural health clinic. The clinic personnel came from the Marshall University School of Medicine and went into adjacent counties where for generations residents have had insufficient medical care. The pediatrician in charge, a Cuban-born woman who considers West Virginia home, spoke tenderly and in awe of her patients. Having lived most recently on the outskirts of New York City, she displayed an almost protective attitude toward people in whom I found solid Appalachian qualities, as they responded "yes ma'am" and made their kids say it, and were rarely assertive or expectant.

Largely because Steve and I had no interest in hunting down stereotypic characters, we didn't find but one—the man in whose front yard President Johnson was photographed that April day in 1964 when he declared the War on Poverty. Tommy Fletcher still lives in what looks like a shed, albeit with a new porch and railing. We felt compelled to go back to this spot and talk with him, but I considered his life to represent little more than a clichéd image. His life, according to others, has been a series of haplessness and hard-luck stories. He was uncommunicative, with a caved-in mouth and sad distant stares. I was almost glad he did not reveal much of his life since 1964.

Instead of seeking out those with hard-luck stories to tell, the people we sought to tell Appalachia's story today were those whose lives have changed. They are people overseeing economic incentive projects, people who have been inspired to take an active role in reinventing their towns and economies now that coal is in decline. We found lots of families who work hard, often barely making ends meet, but who have children enrolled in college who are preparing for better prospects ahead. There was a financial planner who challenged us to reflect people as they really are, and he used the word "ain't" with dramatic flair, as if to mock any idea we might have that this dialect denotes lack of intelligence.

From regular trips I took out to my hometown, I knew that Appalachia had become less isolated (and, as a consequence, more up-to-date) during the ensuing decades. This does not mean that everything that has happened represents progress. Strip malls sit in what used to be meadows, and one is never far from a Ponderosa Steakhouse. More people wear the look of middle-class America and sound savvier, a consequence of having media at their fingertips like the rest of America.

What I worried about as I researched and reported this story was that few people would want to read about a place that for so long has been known for its poverty. A lot of people resent those who are poor and don't even want to know that they exist, not to mention wanting to read about their lives. Especially since our story was set to appear during a time when the nation's economic boom was still going strong, it seemed all the more ironic to suggest that such a thing as nascent economic recovery would make compelling reading in a three-day series. Even though we would be focusing on people who were not really poor in many aspects of their lives—they have homes, food, families, jobs and the camaraderie of community—still they were not doing anything extraordinary in the way most people who make the news do. What kept me going was a sense of faith that many of our readers would still relate to what struggle means and see, in those whose lives we featured, a bit of themselves.

Ultimately, what we wanted to portray about Appalachia was the story of people who weren't defined (and stereotyped) by their poverty but rather by their efforts to confront and overcome the barriers of economic circumstance. By telling that story, we hoped our readers would recognize in our subjects the universal "we." ■

Diana Nelson Jones, a native of Shinnston, West Virginia, is a weekly columnist and feature writer at the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, where she has worked since 1990. She has also worked at The Tulsa Tribune, which folded in 1992, and the Huntington (W.Va.) Herald-Dispatch.

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Carefully Choosing the Images of Poverty

A photographer considers what message images will convey.

By Steve Mellon

Ask Americans over the age of 40 to close their eyes and visualize Appalachia, and they'll most likely conjure one of the black and white news pictures to come out of the region in the 1960's. The image they see will be perhaps a shoeless child standing on the porch of a squalid shack or a toothless man wearing tattered clothes. Those pictures had far-reaching and lasting power, a fact not lost on those who were photographed.

One morning in Inez, in the hills of eastern Kentucky, reporter Diana Nelson Jones and I walked into a diner, where a few locals were lingering over their morning coffee. When we introduced ourselves as journalists, one man shot out at us, "You going to make us look like a bunch of idiots, like those last reporters did?"

We were prepared for the question. In fact, Diana and I had discussed at length how to deal with the hostility of those weary of being portrayed as helpless, dumb and poor. We explained to the man our purpose: to explore the effects, if any, of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty which he declared in Inez in 1964. Then we told the man we'd do our best to avoid the stereotypes that had come to define his home.

Covering poverty is important, especially since our sometimes giddy coverage of the economy leaves the impression that everyone is getting rich. And coverage of this topic can also be a bit touchy. Some subjects see their poverty as an indication of failure; they want no part of reporters and photographers who want to make it news.

Tommy Fletcher may fall into that category. During his famous visit to eastern Kentucky, President Johnson visited Fletcher's home, a shack-like structure pressed into a steep slope just outside Inez. Fletcher then was a

Gary Ball, a former coal miner (left), is now editor of the Mountain Citizen newspaper in Inez, Kentucky. Ball had recently written a story about this couple's house.

After leaving an abusive relationship and working her way off welfare and into a job, Emma Fletcher (left) was proud to be helping her daughter Melanie pack for college.

Photos by Steve Mellon/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

poor man. He still is. His home looks much the same as it did in those old news pictures. Diana and I paid Fletcher a visit. It seemed fitting to go to the place where Johnson's "War" began, but our visit was an awkward encounter. He mumbled answers to a handful of questions, then only reluctantly agreed to be photographed.

Back in Pittsburgh, after Diana and I had completed our work in Appalachia, I discussed with picture editor Pam Panchak the idea of leading with one of those pictures, juxtaposed with a historic photograph of Johnson's visit to Fletcher's home. The idea was quickly scrapped: it seemed to suggest only failure and continued poverty in Appalachia, and that certainly wasn't what we'd found.

Instead, we narrowed our choice to a handful of pictures focusing on the incremental progress being made by individuals in the region. One was a photograph of Emma Fletcher (no relation to Tommy), a former welfare recipient who was helping her daughter pack for college. This picture suggested a universal theme—a parent's desire to give her child a better life. We also considered a picture of Gary Ball, a former coal miner who'd become the local newspaper editor (in the process, his income dropped from $50,000 to $18,000). In the image, Ball leaned against his old car in downtown Inez and talked to his college-age son. It did not exude optimism, as did the Emma Fletcher image. Ball's body language seemed tentative. Perhaps, we thought, this was a more appropriate picture to lead a story about a region making agonizingly slow progress.

Finally, we settled on a picture of Ball talking with a couple on the porch of an eastern Kentucky home. We felt this was the most complex image because it hinted at the poverty that still exists in Appalachia as well as at the wariness of outside influence and of change. The photograph also gave readers a sense of the region's geography. There was some concern expressed that a shirtless man in the photograph simply reinforced stereotypes. But the man's presence, off to one side and in fading, shadowy light, was, we decided, balanced by Ball, whose story represented Appalachia's hopeful struggle into an uncertain future. ■

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Gary Ball (right) talks with his 19-year-old son, Josh, near the Martin County courthouse. Like thousands of others, Ball has had to change careers after being laid off from his work in a coal mine. With few opportunities in the eastern Kentucky county, Josh will probably have to leave to find work. ***Photo by Steve Mellon/Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.***

'The Price of Prosperity'

Journalists unearth stories beneath the veneer of wealth.

By Roland De Wolk

Always thirsty for a story about California's blessings gone awry, the East Coast-dominated news media have drunk deeply in the San Francisco Bay Area's Silicon Valley. Initially, stories of new great wealth often depicted a nouveau riche that might have been young, vital, educated and sophisticated but was still suspect, if only because of a subtext suggesting the ongoing shift of power from east to west had moved another massive and irrevocable step. This last year's slowdown of the nation's unsustainable economic growth has been most visible in the industries now commonly referred to as "dot-bombs", and the attitude by the Old Coast (vs. Gold Coast) news media has been a barely restrained bacchanal.

Throughout this often silly cycle of coverage, insightful journalists covering the historically significant growth of the high-tech/Internet industries have reported the evident and not-so-evident contrasts in the heart of the Silicon Valley. Because of the highly complex nature of American civilization, these paradoxes and sometimes contradictions have long been common fare in news coverage of almost any of our politically vulnerable subcultures, and there is no reason to exempt California, the Bay Area, or the Silicon Valley. Reporters, editors and producers who have deep understanding of the Valley and its impact on our economies and cultures can take advantage of this respite in the economic boom to consider the more profound and compelling stories underneath these evident changes.

KTVU Channel 2 News in the Bay Area is launching a long-term approach to examining some of the broad and fundamental causes and consequences of what has happened, what is happening, and what we might expect to happen in the San Francisco Bay Area because of the driving force of Silicon Valley within our metropolitan region. We are calling this storytelling project "The Price of Prosperity." And we are defining this series of stories in what we hope will be a useful, understandable and disciplined way. The approach we are using could be extremely useful for any news organization that wants to tell in-depth stories about the people who live and work in its circulation area (or ADI—Area of Dominant Influence). We think this approach can work whether the subject is Silicon Valley or the closings of rust belt industries or significant economic changes with deeper societal implications.

With assistance from the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, KTVU is joining with the San Francisco Chronicle and the Web sites of both news organizations. KTVU is the most viewed news station in the Bay Area (the fifth biggest market in the nation). The Chronicle, recently purchased by the Hearst Corporation, has the highest circulation in the region. KTVU, which designed and proposed the series, is by almost any broadcast standard one of the most serious and straightforward TV news operations in the country. It has succeeded principally because of its long-earned reputation for attention to accuracy and depth, its newsbreaking stories, and absence of show biz gimmicks that afflict so many other not-so-successful news operations. The Chronicle, after a turbulent merger with the staff of the old San Francisco Examiner, is recommitting itself to becoming *the* excellent newspaper, a direction it's been heading during the past few years.

"The Price of Prosperity" has been called by Jan Schaffer at the Pew Center "a master narrative," as it seeks to make clear the strong connections among what can all too easily be seen—and reported—only as random daily events. Examining and understanding these crosscurrents occurring underneath the visible layer of stories requires some persistence of reporting. That itself costs time and money, two elements that shortsighted media owners are sometimes unwilling to invest. But when reported thoroughly and told in compelling ways, our long experience shows these stories are exactly the kind of investments that draw viewers to television news, newspapers and online news sites.

Although much of the Bay Area is wildly prosperous—and prosperous in large measure because of what has happened in Silicon Valley—almost anyone aware of the changes that have taken place in the region knows they come at a cost. Our stories will try to tell this tale.

This storytelling will take readers and viewers far beyond the now familiar high cost of housing and cost-of-living stories. For example, in a preview last November, KTVU ran a three-part series about the overwhelming pressures on individuals and families to be part of the almost mythically "successful" Bay Area population. Perhaps the most compelling of the stories documented the heretofore barely noticed rise in child suicides. Some of these children were so young that they were unable to write a suicide note. In fact, epidemiologists say children as young as five are taking their own lives in the Bay Area and other stress-driven parts of the United States.

Parents working extraordinary long hours to afford a nice home and other material signs of success are a national phenomenon. But in the most prosperous parts of the Bay Area—especially in the Silicon Valley—there are reports of parents offering nannies (or "au pairs," in the argot of the Baby Boomers) up to $70,000 a year to take care of their kids while they routinely work 60 hours each week.

Trying to form a family is also immensely difficult, perhaps especially

so for many of the highly educated and trained software and hardware engineers of the Valley allowed in this country on special H1-B visas. Clashes between "Old World" and "New World" cultures can be evident when looking at how some of these immigrants find spouses. Some resort to essentially purchasing brides from ancestral homelands and bringing them to the Bay Area. Resulting shocks of this adjustment can ripple across the community.

One ripple can be seen in the need, in the first place, to import trained workers. This occurs, in large part, because Bay Area schools cannot pay teachers enough to be able to live in the region. With enormous numbers of unqualified people taking the teaching jobs, especially in schools that serve poorer children, the future workforce receives an inferior education and cannot compete with the immigrants on special visas. Resulting resentments can run deep and have ugly consequences.

If you are one of the young workers who can make great sums of money by working almost nonstop in the Silicon Valley, you are in serious danger of effectively losing your 20's, as they zip by in the haze of work-related ambition. This is a critical time in anyone's life, a developmental time that cannot be recaptured. Realization of that loss and the affect it has can be profound.

There are many other stories already finished or about to become part of the "Price of Prosperity" series. These include the environmental and personal health costs related to this new economy, the different types of crime associated with it, and the burgeoning new political power centers that have little accountability to the citizenry.

The challenges to exploring these sorts of stories are always great. Doing them in local television is perhaps greatest because of the inherent time restrictions that commercial broadcast stations work under. Making these same stories interesting, even compelling, for print is also sometimes a little acknowledged challenge. The reason: Given today's shorter attention span and time crunch, readers aren't attracted to long series of stories spread over many pages, even if newspaper reporters love doing them. Conventional online news sites are struggling to figure out ways to use the wonderful tools they have to tell these stories in interactive ways. Trying to join these media forces together adds to the challenge.

It's a challenge we gladly take on, for it is finding and telling the stories that lie beneath the surface layer of prosperity—the ones some news organizations seem to have missed—that motivate us in this endeavor. It is digging through these top layers to unearth the stories that tell what is happening in the foundations of prosperity that makes this an exciting project not only for journalists to report but for viewers and readers to receive. ■

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Filling a Void Left By Mainstream Media

Young temporary workers in Silicon Valley write out of their own experience.

By Raj Jayadev

In computer manufacturing, "debug" is a term referring to the process of searching for the root cause of a malfunction and exposing it. In journalism, Silicon Valley DE-BUG is the name of a group of young writers who work there. Many people are confused by the title, but our main audience—other young blue-collar temporary workers—relates to it immediately. They recognize it from their work experiences on the shop floors of high-tech factories.

Without any formal training or prior media experience, young assemblers, janitors and machinists have emerged from high-tech warehouses as prolific reporters, essayists and commentators on the otherwise unreported side of Silicon Valley. Pacific News Service (PNS) and Youth Outlook have allowed us to create our own media to communicate our experience to others like us, as well as the rest of the world. Our writers' average age is 20, and their stories have been picked up from the PNS wire and published in daily papers across the country. Silicon Valley DE-BUG is evidence that journalism can be a vehicle of expression for everyday working people regardless of age, class or educational background.

It began with us simply telling our stories that are familiar and confirming to others in our situation and are illuminating to those who don't know of our struggles. We write about unlivable wages, toxic health hazards, and demoralizing job insecurity faced by thousands of young temps like us in the Valley. The authority of our experience gives the writing a realness that no polished journalist looking in from the outside can offer.

Silicon Valley DE-BUG was first published in September 2000 as a way to communicate about issues with our peers. But it has also become a way to document an important side of Silicon Valley's history. Our writings give voice to the many blue-collar workers in Sili-

con Valley who are physically creating technology with their hard labor. These workers include those who do everything from clean computer chips to package printers before they are shipped to stores. Through our writing, we are changing public perception of how high technology is produced. We are describing how the "new economy" is being created by "old economy" labor practices.

In Silicon Valley, even those on the assembly line know we are living in the high-tech epicenter of the world. The industries' innovations and economic prowess are in the media every day. But the reality many young temporary workers in Silicon Valley knew from their experiences differed from the one reported on by the mainstream media. We were not creating dot-coms, owning stocks, or buying the million dollar homes we see on television or in the newspaper. Our Silicon Valley is about conveyer belts, sore backs, and bounced rent checks.

So what happens when the Silicon Valley that the mainstream media portray differs from the one you see through your lived experience? How do you relate to the world if you are not part of the one that is on television or in the papers? Are you still part of this world?

Through our writing, we are changing public perception of how high technology is produced. We are describing how the 'new economy' is being created by 'old economy' labor practices.

Without being able to locate their experiences in the "reported world," the Silicon Valley DE-BUG editors found that many young people on the low-wage end of Silicon Valley had disengaged from the media. This, in turn, limited their knowledge of the world and their ability to critique and respond to it. Young workers in Silicon Valley were invisible and silent.

So our editors posed questions that emerged out of their ability to reflect on their experiences and out of their capacity to imagine. "How are you important to Silicon Valley?" "What would you say to the CEO of the company you clean circuit boards for?" "How has your perception of Silicon Valley changed since high school?"

They also proved that young people could create newsworthy ideas, thus transcending expectations placed on them as being merely low-wage laborers.

The questions were first met with trepidation. These young workers were not used to having their opinions valued. Nor was critical thinking asked of them during their school or work experience. But after finding that their responses were respected, and seeing them in print, they became more comfortable with the process. And in time they, too, became writers.

After writing from personal experience, the topics of reporting expanded outward.

"How do you feel about the presidential elections?" "What do you think about public school?" "How will the dot-com fallout affect young temporary workers?" The way in which these stories were constructed required these writers to investigate the world around them and show how they related to it. As they did this, they reconnected with the news. And by considering the interplay of their lives and the news, our writers produced fresh insightful articles. They also proved that young people could create newsworthy ideas, thus transcending expectations placed on them as being merely low-wage laborers.

Our discussions were so engaging, we now have open weekly meetings for youth to come and talk about the issues of the day. The youth are examining their lives and relating them to stories they read in the newspaper. Out of these discussions, ideas for our stories emerge.

In order to communicate our stories to a broader audience, we are putting up a Web page. The irony is that even though the writers' day jobs are to work in technology, none of us has very much knowledge about how to use it. Learning the skills of information technology is just another part of our tasks.

Silicon Valley DE-BUG is an important first step to improving the conditions of young temporary workers on the low-wage end of high tech. Youth working on the assembly line, who feel isolated in their experience, now have an outlet for their voices. Publishing our stories allows us to connect with each other and with those who should know of our stories. Most importantly, this process serves as a vehicle for youth who feel that they live on the margins in Silicon Valley. It gives them a way to engage with the world and events around them. For both young writers and readers, Silicon Valley DE-BUG has confirmed that the experiences, perspectives and voices of young temporary workers have significance. This is something the mainstream media have failed to do. ■

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These Pictures Are Not About the Photographer

The camera documents humanity behind forgotten façades.

By Harvey Wang

The Bowery, the world's most infamous skid row, has long fascinated me. Barber shops, employment agencies, liquor stores, tattoo parlors, and cheap restaurants once lined this New York City street. During its heyday, between 25,000 and 75,000 men slept on the Bowery each night. Today, gentrification has transformed the 16 blocks that make up the Bowery, just like it's remade much of New York City. All that remains of the old Bowery are a mission, a single liquor store, and seven "lodging houses," which are home to less than 1,000 men.

Inside these lodging houses, or flophouses, men can still get a cubicle with a bed and a bare bulb for as little as $4.50 a night. In the midst of Manhattan's real-estate boom, as rents for studio apartments climb to $2,000 a month, the flophouses' inhabitants struggle to scrape by on disability checks or the proceeds from redeemed cans. Many inhabitants are drug or alcohol addicted and have lost or been rejected by their families.

By documenting the flophouses and the men who inhabit them, my coauthors and I hoped to shine a light on this hidden corner of America. "Flophouse: Life on the Bowery" is my second book collaboration with the radio documentarian David Isay. This time, he had a coauthor, Stacy Abramson. The book was born after David and Stacy produced a radio documentary on the Sunshine Hotel, which aired on National Public Radio in 1998.

"Flophouse" documents life inside the Sunshine Hotel, as well as three other flophouses. The book is comprised of 50 black-and-white portraits of the flophouses' residents. Each portrait is accompanied by a short oral history, which was transcribed from interviews done by David and Stacy. With most of the residents, David or Stacy conducted an interview first, and I would listen in order to get a sense of the subject's story.

A man sits in one of the cubicles of the Providence Hotel, a lodging house in New York City's Bowery. Two hundred men sleep on four floors of the residence. *Photo by Harvey Wang.*©

Afterward, I would make a portrait of the flophouse resident, usually in a place of his own choosing. Sometimes I was drawn to a particular place within the hotel, like the shower room or a fire escape, and would suggest to the subject that we shoot there. Dispersed throughout the book are color photographs of the flophouses themselves—of their walls, windows, corridors—which are included in order to give viewers a better sense of place. Though I almost always shoot in black and white, I felt that these bleak interiors would be better portrayed in color.

I strive in my work to be as honest as possible, and I tried to be objective when making the pictures in the book. Though the residents are responding to me and are active participants in the picture-making process, I hoped that I would remain "invisible." The pictures are not about the photographer, like so much of the celebrity photography that appears in magazines. And the work is not about whether flophouses or their inhabitants are good or bad. I wanted readers to realize that they are not so different from residents of these hotels who, for the most part, have lived hard or unlucky lives. The main point was to document the humanity behind these forgotten façades, showing how some New York City residents are living, even as much of America revels in its current prosperity. ■

Harvey Wang is a director and widely published photographer. His other books are "Harvey Wang's New York" (W.W. Norton & Co., 1990) and "Holding On: Dreamers, Visionaries, Eccentrics and other American Heroes" (with David Isay, W.W. Norton & Co., 1995). He received an Emmy Award for his work on WNET's "City Arts" in 1996 and 1998.

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Robert Rushin/Evicted from Room 14L
Sunshine Hotel, 241 Bowery

> "I feel like a lot of people look down their nose at you because you live in the Bowery and you're a 'bum.' It disturbs me. I'm an artist. If you don't have a thrill about what you're doing, it's just marking time. It's not music. It's not music when you hit every note and just have technical facility. It's music when you have the spirit, when you say something that you feel. So that's the basic message I've learned: The only real success in life is inner success."

Tony Bell/Room 23A
Sunshine Hotel, 241 Bowery

> "This is where I hang my hat. I put up the pictures to cover the dirt on the wall. Never had a paint job in twenty years. I'm sorry to put it that way, but I asked them and they never give it to me. But I appreciate that the landlord lets me keep my junk in here. It's better than nothing."

Photos by Harvey Wang, text from "Flophouse: Life on the Bowery," published by Random House, 2000.

Understanding the Community's Civic Life

Journalists' tools include new questions and different sources.

By Richard C. Harwood

Tapping civic life is another name for practicing good journalism. It should be the very essence of how journalists see and relate to the world around them. It is an approach to covering a community in which a journalist seeks to understand and engage with the entirety of civic life, a life that is dynamic and complex and contains many voices, layers, institutions, perspectives and experiences. No lecture, article, or financial incentive can replace the windows that open when journalists tap into civic life. For when they do this, they examine and rethink what they think they know and how they do their work.

Yet the sad truth is that in too many newsrooms reporting on civic life becomes buried beneath the pressure of deadlines, the rush to fill news holes, and the widening separation between journalists and their communities. Journalists also bring with them preconceived notions and biases that are often not recognized. Seldom do I meet a journalist who does not care about the life of the community that he or she covers. But I do meet many journalists who resist the fullness of tapping civic life because it sounds like just another task in a long list dreamed up at an annual editors' conference. [In journalists' training, the words "tapping" and "mapping" are used interchangeably in presenting this approach to reporting on a community's civic life.]

Another sad truth is that many Americans are enormously frustrated with the news media. Their laments remind me of the refrain in an old country song, "I can't see me in your eyes anymore." Many people feel they do not get the *whole* story from the news, but have to settle for partial truths and fragments instead. They complain that journalists value the *most* scintillating or interesting, rather than illuminating the most important, the complicated, or even the mundane. A sense of reality is missing in the news, only to be filled in by an aberration, an odd fact or event.

Pushing journalists to recognize the public's frustrations with their work often makes them quite defensive, even arrogant, in dismissing people's concerns. But try asking journalists two questions—"Why did you go into journalism?" and "What do you do every day?"—and the conversation shifts dramatically. In 15 years of working with journalists, I have heard their words often echo public sentiment as they yearn to find ways to report on communities with more perspective and context and depth.

A sense of reality is missing in the news, only to be filled in by an aberration, an odd fact or event.

The gap journalists see in their work is often about better fulfilling a personal calling or the noble purpose of their craft. For the public, it is about credibility and trust. What to do? Too often, journalists take the path of adding special one-time features or gimmicks, but fail to change the essence of what they do daily. Gallant efforts are made to get more citizens' voices into the news, do a special project or section on an issue, hold a community forum, and run excerpts.

But the real avenues for progress lie elsewhere. These avenues lead to discovering a broader and deeper picture of communities and developing sensibilities for experiencing the breadth and depth of a community in reporting on it. Journalists are not alone in needing to seize such an opportunity. I have found similar challenges face folks from public agencies, foundations, schools and other public organizations. For a journalist to truly tap civic life, several basic questions need to be asked in new ways:

Who is an authority about civic life? And how do journalists write with more authority? Our research suggests that journalists tend to spend much of their time in two layers of civic life. First, they cover the official layer of institutions, leaders and process. Second, they turn to the private layer to get individual reaction to a news story, write profiles or cover individual tragedies or triumphs. But there are at least five layers of civic life, each providing fundamentally *different* insights and knowledge (authority) about communities. These layers include the official, quasi-official, third places, incidental and private. Experience in these layers broadens a journalist's view of who speaks with authority in a community, about what and where knowledge exists. This approach changes journalism.

Routinely I hear journalists say, "Average people don't know what they're talking about." This assumption is based on whether people can name a piece of legislation or some other vital fact about a story. Yet, in tapping civic life, journalists can come to see that these same people can hold different *and* important knowledge. Some are able to define with great complexity their concerns and why they hold them; the competing values they are struggling with; the ambivalence they might feel over different courses of action; the

emotions they hold. These are critical pieces of knowledge that give journalists the opportunity to write with far greater authority; ask far better questions of citizens and leaders alike, and think far more deeply and creatively about ways in which to frame their stories.

How can journalists' work become more authentic? And why does that matter? A clarion call in America is for leaders and institutions to act with greater authenticity. But what might this mean for journalism? Some suggest journalists and their news organizations must show they care about their communities by offering up more feel-good news, creating new marketing slogans ("We're on you're side!"), or by having journalists volunteer in the community.

But authenticity is not generated, first and foremost, by whether journalists undertake extracurricular activities or try to make their institutions feel kinder and gentler, but by the care journalists bring to everyday journalism. That care is defined, in part, by whether journalists are able to uncover and reflect the many *dimensions* of peoples' lives, which takes root when journalists tap into civic life. It is then that they come to see that their questions must give people room to bring their whole lives to a response, not simply the fragment of their lives that a journalist might demand. That is how people engage. Journalists then see with greater clarity that several different views of an issue exist, and this prevents them from reflexively pursuing a master narrative of two-sided conflict or acrimony. They come to hear the language people use in their lives, and its various meanings, and to understand the implications for their reporting.

What makes journalists accountable? And why is that important? "Accountability" is often focused on what one can count. Is the news hole consistently being filled? (This is no small feat for some newspapers I've worked with.) Are morning newspapers hitting customers' doorsteps on time? Have line editors and reporters met their weekly story quotas? Tapping civic life helps to emphasize additional questions of accountability, such as focusing on how journalists account for *themselves* in their daily work. For instance, by gaining a deeper understanding of civic life, I've found that journalists have a much greater willingness and openness to engage in sharper discussions about their stories, deciding whether to redo or even pull a story because it is incomplete, *potentially* misleading or simply misses what people need to know.

Perhaps the most powerful force of accountability is when journalists come face to face with their *hidden* preconceived notions and biases about the world in which they are reporting. Common biases include whether ordinary folks care about issues and are worth interviewing beyond man-on-the street quickies; whether businesspeople are concerned only about money in their interactions, or whether low-income folks ever see themselves as political actors or just powerless victims. I have found that when these biases are uncovered and talked about, it changes the very questions a journalist views as being relevant, how one listens during an interview, and the stories a journalist might pursue or even consider.

Perhaps the most powerful force of accountability is when journalists come face to face with their *hidden* preconceived notions and biases about the world in which they are reporting.

To make tapping civic life part of the culture of a newsroom is not an easy task. Many journalists resist such efforts from the get-go, saying that tapping civic life is too soft, they already do it (and some do!) or that it is simply Journalism 101. Others embrace the approach only to co-opt the language but never change their behavior. And there are those editors and journalists who say that it takes too much time.

The challenge of making this approach work in the newsroom is not to impose it as yet another project on journalists who already feel strapped for time, but to connect it to the very calling and sense of craftsmanship they yearn to pursue. Demonstrate how tapping civic life actually helps journalists fulfill this yearning. The best way to get started is to work with a small group or team of editors and reporters (which also can include photojournalists, librarians and others), and from there, step by step, spread the ideas and practices throughout a newsroom. There is little that can substitute for people gaining from their own experiences and having to produce stories; they discover for themselves the usefulness of tapping civic life.

Still, too many newsrooms will approach this idea merely as another project. Then it becomes ghettoized to a handful of weeks or stories or a special section of a newspaper. Then, like so many other efforts that come and go, tapping becomes discredited and dies—seen as just another flavor of the month.

At its core, tapping civic life poses a fundamental choice to journalists. They can "visit" civic life to do a story from time to time, or they can decide to *live* there—to come to know communities deeply and to have that knowledge inform their daily work. ■

Richard Harwood, president of The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, created Tapping Civic Life and has now trained scores of journalists in its approach and methods.

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Civic Mapping Can Ignite a Reporter's Curiosity

At The San Diego Union-Tribune, community experiences become stories.

By Karen Lin Clark

Curiosity should be the first trait that newspaper editors screen for when they consider reporter applicants.

A curious reporter stops for coffee and notices a small sign in the window of the barbershop next door. She learns that the barber transforms his shop into a dance studio at night and teaches ballroom dancing. She writes a cover story that runs with great photos.

A curious reporter doesn't wait for the city to deliver its agenda each week. She makes contacts within city hall and among active residents, allowing her to know weeks ahead of time what community issues will come before the council. When she writes about an upcoming meeting, it's more than just inside filler, it's a cover story with great photos.

Curious reporters are not satisfied with what government officials and civic leaders place before them. Curious reporters always look beyond the official record for the rest of the story—the best story.

Curious reporters who also possess good writing skills don't need any other tools or gimmicks or direction. Turn them loose in a given geographic area and, without prompting, they tell that community's story—not just from government's perspective but from the perspective of the people who live and work there.

And curious reporters are the future of our franchise.

Our readers have many other options when they want news. Radio and television remain formidable foes for breaking news. News and entertainment Web sites offer an immediacy and specialization that newspapers struggle to match.

Our future rests in our ability to cover communities. We need to learn how to do it better before some upstart dot-com takes the franchise away.

If our newsrooms were filled with curious reporters, we wouldn't have to agonize over how to better cover communities, how to reach into diverse neighborhoods, how to best document all the demographics of our regions. But the reality is that our newsrooms, at best, are only half full of curious reporters.

For everyone else, there's civic mapping (or tapping).

It's impossible to teach curiosity, but you can teach a reporter how to end what I call "agenda addiction" and find community stories that go beyond government.

Civic mapping is simply a tool that encourages good journalism. It offers steps that prompt reporters to ask the questions that come naturally to their curious colleagues. It suggests a pathway to real people that begins with civic leaders—with whom most reporters are comfortable—but leads to the more ambiguous world of active residents and neighborhood leaders, the place where most good community stories originate. I view civic mapping as an efficient way to quickly learn more about a community, an issue, or people with shared interests.

One premise of civic mapping is that there are many layers to community, but journalists tend to spend time only in the top and bottom layers. We attend civic meetings, and we go into people's living rooms—usually when tragedy occurs. But we don't tell many of the stories that percolate in the layers between. By learning to report in those in-between layers, reporters can find stories before they reach an agenda. They can discover the people in any given community whom others turn to for information.

At The San Diego Union-Tribune,

Phil Fedalizo's door is open night and day. By night, the sinks of the barbershop vanish behind room dividers, and the little shop on Imperial Beach Boulevard becomes a ballroom, offering patrons not shaves and haircuts but dance lessons, exercise and fun. ***Photo by Earnie Grafton/The San Diego Union-Tribune.***

we first used civic mapping to get to know the community of Eastlake, a large, new housing development within the city of Chula Vista. One of the most surprising things we learned was that many of the residents viewed the Vons supermarket—a large chain store—as a place to go to find out what was going on in their community. It was the only grocery store in the area, so residents almost always ran into someone they knew there. It was, in effect, their town square. And the astute store manager capitalized on this.

He made a point to post notices of all the upcoming community and neighborhood events. Residents knew they could go there and find out what was going on. Another surprising finding about Eastlake was that city hall is the last place residents turn for help. They turn first to their homeowner's association, next to a woman named Natasha who works for the developer and also lives in the development, and finally to the developer. The story of that leadership structure became a centerpiece package for us.

Two important stories in our area had been covered exclusively at the official level. One was a proposal to develop a cargo airport at Brown Field, a municipal airport. The other was a proposal to build a toll road that would ease traffic in this rapidly growing suburban area. But this would not happen without making some neighborhoods much less inviting. By covering these issues only at that layer, we were really only covering the approval process, not the community. In the instance of Brown Field, there were many issues we missed by our limited focus, and once we began talking to residents, they let us know clearly that we had missed a story they considered very important. We attempted to remedy that. The result was a rich Sunday package that has continued to pay dividends. We still hear from the people whose lives and businesses will be affected by this airport. In the case of the toll road, we had missed a strong community story about the people whose neighborhoods would change in order for more recent residents to have better freeway access. We had told the story at the public hearing level, but never at the community level until we spent time in the neighborhoods—away from the meetings.

Another premise of civic mapping is that journalists do not listen well. We ask our questions and then listen for the best quote. Once we have that sound bite (and print journalists are as guilty of this as broadcast), we move on to our next question without necessarily hearing or considering what else our subject has to say. In National City, one of the gathering places is the Senior Nutrition Center. We know this is a good place to find seniors, and the crowd is diverse. We have dropped in to gather quotes on senior issues and the presidential recount, but it had been more than 10 years since we told the story of the center. When a reporter decided to check out a news release that the center was adding breakfast, she saw this dining room as a community unto itself and told its story. What might have been a brief became a centerpiece package.

Yet another premise of civic mapping is that journalists go into stories with preconceived notions that we are sometimes reluctant to abandon. During a recent Chula Vista City Council race, some candidates made a point of mentioning an area of town they viewed as neglected. They pledged their support to improving services to the downtrodden neighborhood. After the election, both the reporter who covered the primary and another who covered the runoff proposed doing a more in-depth story looking at this neighborhood. Both offered the premise, which they drew from the campaign, that the area, annexed 15 years ago, did not have sidewalks or other basic city services and residents were tired of being ingored. When the story appeared in the newspaper, it had a very different tone. And residents were pleased with the attention they had gotten from the city. They still have work they want the city to do, but they view a new recreation center and a new library nearby as tangible commitments by the city to the area. Our story reflected residents' opinions, not the candidates' views.

By reporting in many community layers, by listening to what residents say is important to them, by abandoning preconceived notions, reporters can turn routine events into rich stories of community life. Two reporters did just that with "A Centro for San Ysidro," a story that could have been just another ribbon-cutting brief. Instead, here was the opening of the main story:

> SAN YSIDRO—Merchants along San Ysidro Boulevard have traditionally promoted their businesses with events in downtown San Diego or Coronado. Miss San Ysidro is typically selected at a pageant in Chula Vista. The thriving music, theater and dance program at San Ysidro Middle School holds its annual spring show at Eastlake High School. In a school district where many parents don't have a car, it's been an inconvenience to have eighth-grade promotion ceremonies at Southwest High School in Nestor, "where our children are so far from where they should be," said San Ysidro parent Alicia Jimenez.
>
> In a community where there is no civic center, no country club, no hotel ballroom, there's been no place to celebrate San Ysidro. Five years ago, the people made a school bond wish list, and they asked firmly and repeatedly for a community auditorium. Today they get it.

At The San Diego Union-Tribune, we have used civic mapping in limited ways during the past year to learn more about southern San Diego County. During a lengthy press expansion, South County did not have a zoned edition, but we were still able to apply this reporting philosophy. The results, despite our limitations, have substantially improved our community coverage. This year, with the return of a South County edition, we will apply civic mapping more deliberately and hope for even greater results.

So, what about the "map?"

Richard Harwood, who teaches this method, isn't going to like this answer. Ideally, the information gathered through civic mapping will be shared with other journalists. This can be as

simple as an extensive source list that provides detailed context for each name on the list. It can be as elaborate as an Intranet Web site that reporters in the newsroom can access whenever they have a need to report in a given community.

The reality is that the maps are difficult to maintain. Unless you have someone who can devote time each week to maintain a Web site, it will be difficult to create maps that benefit the entire newsroom. Even with source lists, reporters tend to keep their source information to themselves. They are often happy to share when other reporters seek their expertise, but information is power, and this information helps them do their jobs better than anyone else. Why would journalists want to give it away?

In many ways, the map becomes the community stories you write using civic mapping. These stories help journalists and their readers gain a better understanding of the communities where they live and work. ■

Karen Lin Clark is South County editor at The San Diego Union-Tribune, where she has worked for 11 years. For five of those years, she created and directed the newspaper's "Solutions" project, finding and telling stories of community struggles and successes. She previously worked as night city editor of the Dallas Times Herald and as an education writer at the Hayward (Calif.) Daily Review.

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Looking for Stories in All the 'Third Places'

In Detroit, reporters use civic mapping to find new stories and sources.

By John X. Miller

Looking again for ways to extend journalism past just traditional reporting, the Detroit Free Press is using public journalism's technique of civic mapping to help define journalist regimens of building sources, gaining knowledge about communities, and listening more carefully to those people who don't customarily appear in our stories.

Civic mapping offers reporters definitive ways to find untapped sources for stories and also teaches journalists to listen in different ways when they find those sources. Not surprisingly, by applying these lessons we find we listen to familiar sources in a different way, too. Our stories reflect these new connections because they are told with more context and authority.

"Journalists have to come up with a new way to do what we do and report in different ways," says executive editor Robert McGruder. "And we need to listen more and more and more."

Since four of our newspaper's journalists were trained in civic mapping skills last spring, the focus in the newsroom has been to build small successes in how these ideas improve journalism and, over time and by example, convince veteran journalists of its merit. Such an approach is critical at the start of any initiative. We have just started and have not broadly introduced mapping to the staff yet, but we see these new tools strengthen our reporting already.

Medical reporter Patricia Anstett, an 18-year Free Press veteran, used mapping techniques successfully in a story she reported on health issues within the city's Arabic community. This was a topic she knew nothing about when work on the story began. Nor was she trained in civic mapping. But Anstett intuitively picked up on the multilayered approach to community coverage after we had conversations about how this reporting approach works.

"I proceeded slowly and carefully. I listened. I did the research. I called dozens of people. But most importantly, I went back, again and again," said Anstett. "Each time I went to Dearborn, I came back with a rich insight, sometimes small, sometimes big. I discussed a largely invisible community that, as our religion writer told me after reading the stories, had not been on anyone's radar."

Anstett's series, "Life of Struggle in Promised Land," which was published in July and August 2000, dealt with Iraqi Shiite refugees caught in America's welfare and medical bureaucracy. It described how their refugee status and inability to speak English complicates their ability to get assistance from these programs. The issue is important to metropolitan Detroit because the region is home to one of the largest Arab populations outside of the Middle East. More than 25,000 Iraqi refugees have settled in this region since the Persian Gulf War.

The series generated emotional phone calls and e-mails from members of the Arab-American community and others. In turn, the Free Press made an effort to translate and reprint the series in Arabic and is discussing joint forums with the Arab-American community. The series also demonstrated the Free Press's commitment to uncover and explore important issues for minority communities.

Civic mapping's most direct impact on coverage is occurring in our Oakland County bureau, where our reporting focus is on community beats. Results there are encouraging, too. One reporter has discovered and written stories on the need for more funding for senior centers in places where resources are more focused on facilities for school-aged children. The scenario is usually the other way around, and he says he discovered this angle from

spending time at a senior center. In civic mapping terms, this center represented "a third place," one that without the broadening emphasis of this approach he probably would not have visited.

In civic mapping training sessions that several of us attended last spring (organized by the Pew Center for Civic Journalism and The Harwood Institute), we were introduced to words that describe sources as "catalysts" or "connectors," and "third places." Catalysts are leaders whom people look to in their communities, and connectors are people who interact in lots of places and participate in lots of conversations. Third places turn out to be those places in a community where real people gather and talk about what's important to them. We also examined why past practices do not always work *and* are less likely to work in the future, and brainstormed new reporting routines.

Now in our newsroom we talk about finding stories and building sources and are constantly trying to think of new places and people to go to in our search. As an editor who has observed the benefits of this kind of reporting, I have some advice to offer other editors and reporters.

- Look for "third places," then give reporters time to spend there, as an observer, not a driver of conversations.
- In return, expect reporters to bring back story ideas we wouldn't have gotten if we'd stuck to our old way of covering the city.
- Along the way, build the source list of catalysts and others in those areas and make that list visible and user-friendly for all reporters. An overall goal for mapping at the Free Press is to literally map these "third places" so they become more than a single reporter's sources for listening and can be used by all as a newspaper's listening post.

Our executive editor wants the Free Press to explore mapping because the credibility of a newspaper stands on how well it tells stories. If stories we tell do not ring true for readers and they recognize gaps in knowledge, perspective or context, our credibility suffers.

Public journalism is not new to the Free Press. Children First, an effort to report about the violence and abuse of children in a way that enables people to do something about it, began in 1993 and continues today. Former publisher Neal Shine's mantra was that a newspaper ought to go beyond keeping score and get in the game.

Ultimately, public journalism strengthens reporting and adds community knowledge, not just information. It connects the dots of context, the cause and effect of the choices people make, and exposes government's inability to solve complex issues. If done well, it gets citizens off the sidelines and into the game. ■

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Finding a Path to Cross a Racial Divide

Reporters began to listen rather than assume they knew what the story was.

By Kathy Spurlock

Name any street in Monroe, Louisiana, and most News-Star staffers will not only tell you where it is, but also give you some landmarks.

We know what's where. And we thought we knew what was what.

But what we really knew was that our community faced an ever-growing crevasse of race, fueled by a geography that separated the white north from the black south as definitively as the Mason-Dixon line. We knew the black-white division wasn't a black-and-white issue, yet our reporting hadn't penetrated the civic layers beyond the political arena to open a community dialogue about basic economic and trust issues that affected people's daily lives and interactions.

In covering the news of our community, we seemed to only position the newspaper even further from the African-American community. Legendary Grambling State University football coach Eddie Robinson was sanctioned by the NCAA, and our newspaper sued for access to public records. Monroe's first African-American mayor filled city hall with cronies, including a department head who was indicted for bid-rigging. Both minority weekly newspapers accused the News-Star of conspiring with other media to destroy strong black men. We knew the conspiracy theorists were wrong, but some of our traditional sources dried up because of the distrust that this perception engendered. We had to find new ways to reconnect with our community.

The concept of civic mapping appeared to provide opportunities to reconnect. We applied to the Pew Center for Civic Journalism to receive training. By learning, and now using, civic mapping techniques taught by The Harwood Institute and the Pew Center, we've embarked on a path that is leading us to more balanced coverage. By applying these methods of reporting, our newspaper is able to portray

all members of our community in a fairer and more accurate light.

Even before we learned about civic mapping, our reporters had tapped ordinary citizens, known in our newsroom as "real people," to comment for publication on all topics. We were careful to include minorities into our coverage. Yet, by the time we sought their input, the agenda for the article had been set and their quotes were simply inserted. Often, this approach ended up putting them on the spot, asking their thoughts on the particular issue we were covering in our story.

Should alcohol be sold on Sundays in Monroe? The politicians were saying yes, but backed off after The News-Star published residents' opinions. Here, Joyce Powell discusses Sunday alcohol sales as Forrest Harvey listens. *Photo by Margaret Croft.*

When we turned the tables and began to encourage "real" people to tell us their concerns, their responses became more genuine. As a result, we moved closer to writing about actual issues in the life of our community. Civic mapping's core concept—going beyond the usual interviewees and building relationships with people described as community connectors—has forced The News-Star's reporters away from their newsroom desks and into barber shops, community centers, and coffee shops to enhance their ability to find reliable and informative sources.

An assistant principal talks about economic disparity faced by African Americans as The News-Star's managing editor listens. *Photo by Margaret Croft.*

We've also re-learned the art of conversational interviewing, which relaxes an interviewee who might not be accustomed to a news reporter's style of questioning. We've discovered that asking someone "What do you make of that?" can be a magical query, one that is far less threatening than "What do you think?"

Recently the newspaper convened a civic mapping conversation about race relationships in our city that brought minority concerns into the public arena. A sampling of those concerns follows:

- Few retail stores remain open at night in minority residential areas. "If I take sick tonight and an aspirin will save my life, you know where I have to get the aspirin? I have to cross Louisville (a street known as the geographic black-white dividing line) to save my life to get an aspirin," a high school assistant principal said.
- Longstanding economic discrimination involves government and quasi-government agencies. "Why can't we have a post office on the south side of Monroe?" a reader asked, as the conversation turned to a new post office under construction less than three miles from three existing ones. "You have to go all the way to the north of Monroe for a cotton-picking stamp to mail a letter."

In another story driven by the civic mapping approach, a reporter experienced firsthand with a neighborhood just how miserable it can be to live downwind from a sewer treatment plant. This perspective was chosen for the story instead of corralling the usual city hall sources for an article about the need to replace the aging facility.

These are places, people and issues we pass every day. It's our community. We thought we knew it. But this familiarity also had instilled in us natural biases, blinding us and hindering our ability to uncover meaningful stories. Civic mapping has restored our vigorous curiosity. It's teaching us how much we have to learn about the place all of us call home. ■

Kathy Spurlock, executive editor of The (Monroe, La.) News-Star since 1995, has served in various writing and editing capacities at The News-Star, The (Baton Rouge, La.) Advocate, and The (Jackson, Miss.) Clarion-Ledger since 1975. Her newspaper is the current recipient of a Pew Center grant to use civic mapping and other techniques to enhance public involvement with the Monroe school system and to teach these techniques to civic journalism students at Louisiana Tech and Grambling State Universities.

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Freedom of the Press Stops at the Schoolhouse Gate

The consequences of student press censorship could be devastating.

By Mark Goodman

For most high school journalism teachers and publication advisers, teaching students to be responsible journalists means instilling in them an unwavering commitment to the public's right to know the truth. In this time of moral ambiguity, that is a surprisingly easy sell to young people, who desperately want to believe their lives can make a difference.

But teaching this lesson, which is at the very heart of the profession of journalism, has never been more difficult. The censorship faced by teen journalists and those who work with them today is constant and debilitating. The consequences, for the future of high school journalism and the entire profession, could be devastating.

Many who have not read a high-school newspaper in several decades may be surprised to learn how the medium has grown up. In 1969, the Supreme Court ruled that students had the right to wear black armbands to school to protest the Vietnam War. Students, the Court ruled, do not shed their First Amendment rights at the schoolhouse gate. As a result, public school officials were forced to recognize that some free press protections applied to the high-school media. By the early 1980's, courts across the country had ruled that unless public school officials could demonstrate some evidence that substantial disruption of school activities was imminent, they could not censor school-sponsored student publications simply because they were controversial or expressed unpopular views. As a result of these protections, the quality of high-school journalism soared as students began to discuss real issues such as teen pregnancy and school board policies instead of limiting their coverage to movie reviews and sports scores.

In January 1988, the Supreme Court pulled the rug out from under the burgeoning success of the high-school press. In a case that arose from a school in suburban St. Louis, Missouri, the Court said that school officials had the authority to censor stories about teen pregnancy and divorce from a high-school newspaper. In its ruling in Hazelwood School District vs. Kuhlmeier, the Court said school officials have the authority to censor most avenues of school-sponsored student expression when they can show that their censorship is "reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns." That phrase (Supreme Court legalese for having an educational excuse) dramatically lowered the First Amendment hurdle that lower courts had said school officials had to overcome before they could legally censor student media.

To no one's surprise, requests for legal assistance received by the Student Press Law Center (SPLC) in the years since the ruling have increased dramatically. In 1988, the SPLC received 548 calls for help from students and their advisers around the country. By 1999, that number had increased to more than 1,600.

The sad fact is that for many school officials, their primary commitment is not to teaching students the values of a democratic society or the principles of good journalism but to ensure that their school is portrayed in a positive light, no matter how unrealistic that portrayal may be. Censorship of the student media is one way they achieve that, as dozens of students and advisers tell the Student Press Law Center each month. Some recent examples:

- In Indiana, a principal censored a story that painstakingly described how freshman football players were threatened and beaten by upperclassmen as part of an annual hazing ritual. After the newspaper staff threatened to go to the local media, the principal allowed an edited version of the story to be published.
- In California, high school administrators censored a story about the growing popularity of "backyard wrestling," an organized effort by students to mimic television's professional wrestling matches, which sometimes results in physical injuries. Several months later, national newsmagazines were publishing stories about the phenomena.
- After a Florida student wrote a column criticizing the rap music industry for the role models it creates, her school principal prohibited her from writing any more articles for the newspaper because of her racial insensitivity despite the fact that she never mentioned race in her column.
- At a California high school, the principal censored a story about the school's teen parenting program because it would send the wrong message to the community. A neighboring high-school newspaper agreed to publish the censored story.
- After a Washington state student newspaper published a commentary criticizing the food in the school cafeteria, the principal prohibited the publication of anything "that is critical or might be perceived as critical" of any school staff member or program.

Students are not the only ones who are confronting this censorship. Increasingly school officials are threatening media advisers who refuse to censor their students as the administration demands. Thus advisers dedicated to strong and independent journalism may well find themselves confronted with the choice of protecting their stu-

dents or saving their job. It's no surprise that the turnover rate among publication advisers is alarmingly high. Those who stay to fight for their students are true heroes.

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges to face the student media in recent years has revolved around changing technology. Teen reporters and editors, like their professional counterparts, have found the Internet an invaluable tool in researching stories and contacting resources. But the growing prevalence of filters on school computers has significantly limited its usefulness. Students and advisers report being blocked from sites dealing with topics like breast cancer and Bosnian war crimes because the school's imprecise filtering software excluded them. After one publication staff found that its school's filters blocked access to the Student Press Law Center's Web site, they persuaded school officials to provide them an unfiltered computer in their newsroom. Most students are not so lucky.

…journalism educators are left to ask themselves whether we are really preparing students for their role as citizen defenders of press freedom.

Moving into online publishing has also caused conflicts. Even schools that have allowed student editors to make their own content decisions for the print version of a student newspaper have censored an online edition or prohibited the publication from creating one altogether. The potential audience available on the World Wide Web makes some school administrators even more concerned about stories that could tarnish the school's image.

Facing all of these threats and constraints, journalism educators are left to ask themselves whether we are really preparing students for their role as citizen defenders of press freedom. Or is the constant barrage of censorship teaching young people that there is nothing wrong with allowing government officials to dictate what is and is not news and that free expression is to be tolerated only as long as those in authority agree with it?

Despite increasing efforts to silence the student press, many students and teachers make their best effort to fight back. Many go public with their censorship battles, contacting the local media, in order to force school officials to publicly defend their efforts to silence student expression. Some students turn to their own independent means of publishing, through "underground" newspapers produced on a home computer and duplicated at the local copy shop or through an independent Web site. The courts have made it clear that school officials' ability to censor student publications distributed on school grounds that are not school sponsored is much more limited. And for publications created and distributed outside of school (independent Web sites, for example), school officials' ability to punish or censor student expression is virtually nonexistent. Parents, not schools, have the right to oversee student expression when it occurs outside the boundaries of the school day.

These off campus forms of expression are an important alternative for censored student journalists. But when press freedom is available only to those students who have the financial means to support it, the voices of poorer rural and urban students are lost. And the benefits of a trained faculty adviser who can teach journalistic skills, ethics and responsibility are missed when students are forced to turn away from school-sponsored media. Youth pages of community newspapers or citywide teen publications supervised by professional editors are a great training ground. But they can seldom reach the same number of students that would be involved in school-sponsored publications at each school.

…when press freedom is available only to those students who have the financial means to support it, the voices of poorer rural and urban students are lost.

Although the Supreme Court appears to have forsaken high school journalists, some legal protection against censorship remains. The most surprising response to the Hazelwood decision and the censorship it has inspired has been the effort to enact state laws giving students free press protections. The Supreme Court's ruling only dictated the limits of First Amendment protections; it left open the possibility that states could create their own laws or regulations that provide student journalists with greater rights than this high court recognized under the federal Constitution. A total of 29 state legislatures have debated such laws, and six now have them on the books. California, Massachusetts, Iowa, Kansas, Colorado and Arkansas have returned high-school journalism to the place it was before 1988, saying students will be allowed to express themselves freely in school unless school officials can demonstrate their expression is libelous, obscene or will create a substantial disruption of school activities.

One of the most frustrating aspects of this ongoing battle for many students and teachers has been how little support they sometimes receive from the local "professional" media. Most community newspapers and television stations have no idea if the high-school media in their community are being censored simply because they have never asked the students who produce them or advisers who work with them.

A high-school teacher's job was threatened several years ago because of a controversial feature published in

the student yearbook on which she was advisor. "Why are they [the local media] so anxious to see us fail, highlighting what they perceive are our students' mistakes and never willing to defend our right to be less than perfect?" she asked. "Would they really like to be held to the same standard?"

She expressed a sentiment that discussions with student editors and advisers around the country suggest is sharply increasing. A growing number believe that the commercial media is only interested in the First Amendment and press freedom when its rights are being threatened and have little concern about those same rights as they apply to others, especially young people. After 15 years at the Student Press Law Center, I know that perception is not an accurate reflection of the attitudes of thousands of working reporters and editors at large and small news organizations throughout the nation. But I also know that most of these students will not make journalism their profession and thus will never set foot in a professional newsroom. Their attitudes about and the importance we place on press freedom will be fundamentally shaped by experiences that end the day they graduate from high school.

If we care about the future of journalism, we have to show student journalists that we care about them, too. Professionals who fail to defend student press freedom will have only themselves to blame when young journalists they hire are one day as indifferent to the First Amendment as many working journalists are now to the problems confronted by the high-school press. ■

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Creating a Network of Young Reporters

We're still thinking about saving high-school newspapers. But, if we start now, they might be able to save us.

By Laurie Becklund

I remember when the thought first came to me of how many people would never see the stories I wrote about them. I was sitting at my desk at the Los Angeles Times on the first day that a series I'd written about slumlords was appearing in the paper. I realized that our best editorial efforts, our finest writing, our biggest marketing campaigns, would never be enough to help the newspaper find a home in most of the city's diverse communities. Some residents would simply get their news elsewhere. But for too many people, news would always be something that tumbled onto them, something other people made and other people did something about. For the first time, I began to think about building circulation as a social imperative.

What does this lament have to do with high-school journalism? Not much, I would have said a few years ago. Almost everything, I believe now. That's why, despite the puzzled looks I get from former colleagues (and the university executive who told me point blank he "wasn't going to waste my chits on high-school kids"), I've spent the past few years conducting projects that use the Internet to network high-school news staffs. I am now convinced that high-school news programs are in a better position to save mainstream media than "we" are to save them.

Consider this: High-school newspapers are by far the largest network of community-based newspapers in the country. If combined, the circulation of these roughly 20,000 publications probably reaches 12-15 million readers, most of whom are young and out of reach of mainstream news organizations. Add several thousand television and radio newscasts and high-school news sites, and you begin to see the potential for multilingual, multimedia, community newscasts.

Just who, if anyone, will organize this network and its links to the multibillion-dollar "youth market" is up for grabs right now. The Nasdaq crash has given mainstream media a second chance to create appropriate strategic alliances with high-school news organizations. I say "second" chance because victory in the first round went to dot-coms that are now suffering temporary setbacks.

About three to four years ago, when major news organizations still regarded the Internet as a threat, a handful of these venture capital-backed dot-coms headed out to high-school newsrooms. Starting with high-school newspapers, they began gathering "low-hanging fruit"—journalism teachers who were under pressure to go online but were ill-equipped to construct Web sites. The dot-com "content aggregators" offered teachers free Web-hosting on their servers and provided templates to create instant cookie-cutter student newspapers online. In return, they gained free, dynamic content around which to wrap ads for their profit. Undoubtedly to satisfy attorneys, they blithely put their copyrights on stu-

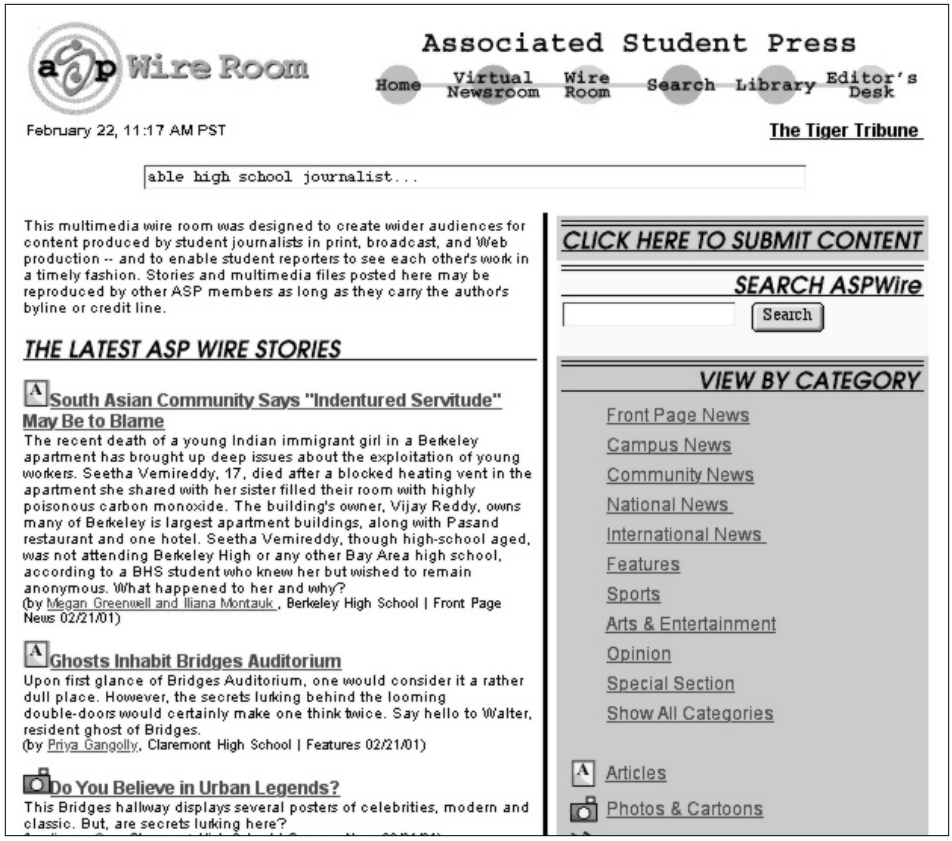
dent news sites even as they disclaimed any responsibility for the content.

Relationships with high-school news programs must be developed with extreme care since there are complex needs on both sides. Potential benefits are clear if journalists approach these programs as future partners rather than as noble, but possibly lost, causes. A few news companies—CNN, for example—are attempting to develop youth news networks. And the American Society of Newspaper Editors (having experienced failure in reaching its goals for minority participation in newsrooms) is developing its own high-school news site with Knight Foundation funding. [See article on page 52.]

But, so far, mainstream news organizations have largely failed to focus on concrete ways in which the high-school news infrastructure can help them solve their greatest challenge: coping with aging demographics. Instead of *investing* in high-school newspapers, they *give* to them and graciously offer young writers a spot on their youth pages or on their Web site. Meanwhile, their more substantial investments can be found in annual reports that describe the large amounts of money spent on marketing research, circulation campaigns, "out of the box" redesigns, mergers and acquisitions, and speculative new media ventures.

I've viewed this evolutionary process from a unique perspective—as the founder of a dot-org, a nonprofit experiment called Associated Student Press (ASP). With seed grants from media foundations such as Times Mirror, The New York Times, and the SDX Foundation, ASP has carried out a series of pilot projects to support teachers who are often untrained and encourage students to develop community-based stories that metropolitan dailies cannot hope to cover. ASP is a project of Community Partners of Los Angeles, a nonprofit incubator.

Macroeconomic changes have also impacted technology-based nonprofits like ASP. During the past year, dot-coms have legally converted a handful of established nonprofits with revenue-producing potential. A lucrative, unsolicited offer from an education-based dot-com prompted us to investigate whether we, too, should head in that direction. In the end, we decided the fit wasn't right. However, during this hard-reckoning process, it's becoming clear that neither foundations nor most dot-coms are ideally suited to helping us unleash the potential of high-school news staffs to become "indispensable sources of news and information in their own communities." While some educational functions are best left to teachers and established nonprofits like ASNE, our future as a developer of creative, community-based multimedia news lies in partnerships with news organizations.



The wire room of the Associated Student Press Web site.

ASP grows out of needs identified in a study of high-school journalism that I did as a consultant in 1998 for the University of Southern California's (USC) Annenberg School for Communication and the Open Society Institute. Apart from national surveys, we dispatched researchers into a dozen overcrowded, year-round high schools in poor, mostly Latino and black neighborhoods. These visits reaffirmed our fears that school newsrooms had few of the resources professional journalists take for granted. They lacked telephones and telephone source books, transportation, clip files, experienced editors, and news services. And they were operating in virtual isolation from each other and from outside news sources. But to our surprise, virtually all these schools had computers and Internet access.

Taking advantage of this finding, we began shaping Internet tools to help fill these gaps. Instead of bringing students out of their newsrooms for training at a central location, which many programs do, ASP built specific online resources that can be delivered inexpensively into high-school newsrooms where students frame and publish their stories. Modeled in part on The Associated Press, ASP also has a multimedia online wire service to allow students to distribute their work to each other in real time.

Because students lacked access to primary sources, we developed a "Beats" library of carefully annotated links to point students to reliable national data or to quotations from original sources on subjects they frequently cover. Volunteers hand-searched the Web to develop the database that un-

derlies our search engine, the only Web-wide search engine devoted to high-school news. We developed a multimedia wire room for stories, photos, cartoons, as well as video and audio snippets so students could start thinking of themselves as journalists rather than as "print" or "broadcast." We designed two sites for each member staff, including an editor's desk with a suite of intuitive editing, publishing and communication tools. With the Student Press Law Center [see article on page 40], we developed a means of helping students safeguard First Amendment rights on their news sites by checking a box invoking specific Supreme Court language from the prevailing Hazelwood decision.

During this time, we conducted a series of projects that, despite limited funding, helped test both the capacity of high-school news programs and our tools and theories about them. In the wake of the Columbine shootings in Colorado, we launched a joint listserv with the Society of Professional Journalists to enable high-school reporters and professional news reporters to learn from each other about how to cover violence in schools. In Connecticut, we joined Quinnipiac College's master's in journalism program in helping train journalism teachers to think about news as well as writing and ethics. At Siggraph, the world's premier computer graphics convention, we brought eight high-school newspaper, television, radio and Web-based news staffs together using videoconferencing cameras. The project delivered live daily programming over the Internet into an "immersion technology" setting that allowed both viewers and participants to see and hear each other.

Last summer, with support from the SDX Foundation, Annenberg's Online Journalism Program, and the USC Provost, ASP brought 16 top student editors to Los Angeles for a week to cover the Democratic National Convention and events surrounding it. They received professional credentials and operated one of the largest Internet-based news operations at the convention. Working almost around the clock, they focused on gathering issue-oriented news and making it work for their own audiences back home. They balanced DNC events with protests and Republican briefings.

We are now midway into our ASP Irvine Project, a California pilot program sponsored by The James Irvine Foundation. We are visiting school newsrooms, conducting Web trainings, building out content, solidifying relationships with advisers, and preparing to launch online discussions. By spring, we expect to have 24 newsrooms from across the state actively networking online. Some publish in Spanish.

The capacity of high-school news staffs, I've learned, varies dramatically. But I've never once visited a high-school newsroom without finding a story that could run in any metropolitan daily. Far from the bland reports I initially expected, students routinely write about drugs, suicide, bulimia and serious hazing on sports teams. Many also report on school boards, city councils, vouchers and teacher strikes. One young editor in chief, whose staff members happened to witness a gang murder of a student, created a plaintive Web site (complete with machine gun sound effects) called "How are we supposed to cover murder, anyway?"

All that we're observing in high schools today connects back to the central problem that newspapers confront today. Since the day I arrived at the Los Angeles Times in 1978, I have watched that newspaper struggle to find its way into diverse local communities. Suburban sections were opened to fight circulation battles, then closed to cut costs. An inner-city edition was launched to community praise, then closed to community censure. New city editions were opened amid wild talk of attracting a half million new readers. Then they were closed in red ink. Through it all, circulation hovered stubbornly at just over one million.

This newspaper's experience is emblematic of that of so many others. Yet, even with a stagnant or shrinking readership, newspapers keep trying to wrest readers away from each other. The same strategy exists for TV networks. But what resources do news organizations devote to trying to grow new readers and viewers? How much do they spend to grow new writers from within communities of color whose subscribers they seek with bus stop ads? What would happen if they devoted that money to helping develop high-school news programs with an eye to their future interests? What if, for starters, newspapers set a simple goal: to eventually make a subscriber out of every reporter working on a high-school newspaper? Do the math. Calculate turnover and graduation.

Today, most journalism teachers are "volunteered" into the job. Generally, they are young English teachers with no formal journalism training. Anxious to teach journalism "right," they focus, reasonably enough, on writing. However, this starting point can stifle diversity of style and substance even as journalism seeks to bring more people of color—and their perspectives—into mainstream newsrooms. And this approach leaves little room for us to learn from these students' experiences the stories and creative formats that appeal to younger audiences. I am eager to create a lab that uses student journalists and artists to help develop new "news delivery vehicles." These vehicles would inevitably vary from community to community, but among them we might find some that improve our chances of reaching elusive readers, like the ones who never saw my slumlord stories. But such an experiment awaits necessary financial resources.

We're looking down the road to the day when global positioning systems and wireless networks will enable us to pinpoint the very corner on which news is happening—and to broadcast instantaneously from that corner. The technology exists. But, to use an outdated but familiar term, where are we going to find the "legmen?" ■

Laurie Becklund, president of Associated Student Press, worked at the Los Angeles Times from 1978 to 1993, covering news, features and investigative stories in the United States, Mexico and El Salvador. She covered the O.J. Simpson trial for CBS News and is the author of two books.

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Sparking a Passion for Journalism in High School

A journalism association works to strengthen a tenuous but invaluable resource.

By Diana Mitsu Klos

Not long ago in The New York Times, foreign affairs columnist Thomas L. Friedman paid homage to Hattie M. Steinberg, his high-school journalism teacher. "I took her intro to journalism course in 10th grade, back in 1969, and have never needed, or taken, another course in journalism since," the two-time Pulitzer Prize-winner wrote. "She was that good."

Friedman is among the legions of newspaper folk who say their passion for journalism was sparked in high school. Yet the leaders of most scholastic journalism organizations say that despite some bright spots, high-school newspapers today are not in the best of health. It is estimated that 20 percent of high schools lack a student newspaper, most notably in urban areas and rural communities. At those schools where newspapers exist, the situation is often tenuous. Concerns abound about censorship, dwindling resources, veteran teachers who retire and are replaced by untrained newspaper advisers, scheduling of classes that makes it virtually impossible for students to take electives (such as courses in journalism), and the perception among some aspiring journalists and their advisers that the professional press is not interested in nurturing them.

With such circumstances at the high-school level, it's no wonder that newspaper editors lament the difficulty of finding and retaining staff and accredited university journalism programs scramble to get students into the print journalism track. "Teens who don't get exposed to hands-on journalism are being denied not only a potential career path, but also miss out on gaining a better understanding of the role media play in our society," said Richard A. Oppel, president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) and editor of the Austin (Texas) American-Statesman. "A lack of scholastic journalism programs is also a key factor in why newsrooms struggle with increasing the diversity of the staff."

Last year The Freedom Forum conducted a survey about newsroom diversity issues and learned that 22 percent of white journalists cited working on a high-school newspaper as a "very influential" factor in their career choice. The percentages are higher for journalists of color: 26 percent for Hispanic Latinos, 28 percent for Asian Americans, and 31 percent for African Americans.

In the spring of 2000, with the financial support of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, ASNE developed and launched an ambitious national high-school journalism project that seeks to jump-start and revitalize scholastic journalism. With a $500,000 planning grant, ASNE has developed and launched three multi-year programs to train teachers, nurture aspiring journalists, and share information on the Web.

This summer, for the first time, about 200 teachers committed to advising student newspapers will take part in a two-week, for-credit newspaper program at six accredited colleges of journalism across the country. They will emerge from the ASNE High School Journalism Institute better informed about newspaper operations, practices, news values, and ethics. Tuition and graduate credit hours will be covered by the program, which will also provide teachers with a subscription to their hometown newspaper for classroom use, books and periodicals for a school journalism library, and memberships in regional and national scholastic journalism groups. Six universities have been selected to administer the program from among 31 accredited schools of journalism that applied: Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, Kent State University in Ohio, Hampton University in Virginia, the University of Maryland, the University of South Florida in Tampa, and the University of Texas at Austin.

At the start of this year, 27 daily newspapers and their 31 high-school partners received technology grants of up to $5,000 to launch a student newspaper or improve an existing one. In some instances, a local college journalism program signed up as a partner as well.

- The Arizona Daily Star, Tucson, Wakefield School and the University of Arizona are working together to produce a monthly student newspaper that will be distributed to 600 school families. To bring attention to the project, The Arizona Daily Star will print and distribute a special bilingual edition of the student newspaper to 7,000 local families. The partners will also work with students to create a fine arts publication that highlights photojournalism.
- At Kakankee High School in Illinois, a 13-year-old laser printer and 12-year-old scanner are giving way to iMacs and digital cameras. Teacher Cheryl Benoit says the upgrade is "a dream come true." Students will work under the tutelage of their adviser and staffers from The Daily Journal. The newspaper will also offer summer internships to promising teens.
- The Philadelphia Daily News has designed a journalism curriculum to be taught by newsroom staffers to supplement work being done in a communications class at William Penn High School. The Daily News is working with a teacher at the school to set up e-mail mentoring and job shadowing. The ASNE grant will be used to purchase desktop

publishing software and computers so the students can regularly publish a school newspaper.

A second round of 20 ASNE Partnerships will be funded later this year for the 2002 calendar year. Also, a new Web site created by ASNE, (www.highschooljournalism.org) received 200,000 hits in November. Content is geared toward students interested in journalism, their teachers and advisers, guidance counselors, and newspaper editors. The site features skill-building exercises, sample lesson plans, a spotlight on high-school newspapers throughout the country, interaction with professional journalists, and updates on scholastic press freedom issues.

"The response to this project from newspaper editors across the country has been tremendous," said Susan Bischoff, chair of ASNE's Education for Journalism committee and deputy managing editor of the Houston Chronicle. "So many of us fondly remember our first forays into journalism, the support that others gave us, and the hard lessons we had to learn. It's our responsibility to grow the next generation of journalists. We're in this for the long haul." ■

Diana Mitsu Klos is senior project director of the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Reston, Virginia. Along with the high-school journalism project, she also supervises programs focused on journalism credibility, strengthening the ties between college journalism professors and daily newspapers, and training editors from abroad. Prior to joining ASNE in 1996, she was managing editor of the Poughkeepsie (N.Y.) Journal. She has also worked for the Norwich (Conn.) Bulletin, Asbury Park (N.J.) Press, and The Daily Journal in Vineland, New Jersey.

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Reporting Compelling Stories About Ordinary Teens

'Pretend you're an archeologist or an alien recording their world.'

By Barbara Walsh

The assignment unnerved me. My editors wanted me to write about teenagers.

Teens in Portland, Maine had been driven from the city's parks and downtown streets. Merchants called them "waste products" and blared classical music to scare them off. Police set curfews and arrested those who broke them. Their crime: They were teenagers with no place to go.

"No one listens to us," they told us. "The media only write about us when we do something bad or get in trouble."

My editors agreed and decided we needed to rethink the way we covered teens. They asked me to immerse myself in the world of teenagers, to dig deep into their lives and thoughts, to give voice to kids who'd been shunned, feared and often misunderstood. They wanted stories rich in detail and voice that would help the reader understand how being a teenager today is different than 10, 20, 30 years ago.

We decided to tell these stories in an occasional series that would span more than four pages in our Sunday paper. We called the series "On the Verge," and focused on five themes with which teens said they were most concerned: popularity and cliques; dating and sex; family life; racial and cultural struggles, and the pressure they feel to succeed at an early age.

Asher Boisvert, 16, walks to class at Deering High School in Portland, Maine. Because of his different looks and shy character, Asher often gets harassed at school. "I try to think of what I did." ***Photo by Gregory Rec/Maine Sunday Telegram.***

The Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram committed me full time to the assignment and gave me a couple of months to report on each topic. When I started, I worried about how I'd find compelling stories about ordinary kids. Most of my career, I'd reported on kids who had done bad things—teens who raped, killed, vandalized. Now I was looking for those kids who weren't traditionally newsworthy, the kind of kids who went unnoticed.

"Pretend you're an archeologist or an alien recording their world," my editor told me. "Look beyond the clichés and stereotypes."

Feeling like an alien wasn't a problem. I was 42, old enough to be the mother of a teenager. How would I get these kids to trust me, to share their lives with me? By talking to teens, to hundreds and hundreds of them. I hung out at rock concerts, schools, music stores, comic shops, school dances, pep rallies. I cruised with high-school girls in their cars, inhaling a lot of cigarette smoke and listening to the teens hoot and holler at "hot boys" walking the streets.

When I found teens who had compelling stories to tell, I gained their trust by spending time with them. I visited them at school, in their homes, shopped with them at the mall, hung out at burger joints with them. They took me to their special places—parks, playgrounds, high school music rooms. I met their friends, listened to their music, went to their dances, learned about their hobbies, what movies, clothes and foods they liked. Easy questions led to the tough ones, questions about what made them angry, sad, elated, scared, excited.

I often asked the teens if I could talk with them in their rooms. I wanted to see what they hung on the walls, whether they had stuffed animal collections, what books they read, what lip gloss or glitter makeup adorned their bureaus. When I talked with Asher Boisvert, a teen with orange spiked hair and a fondness for Kurt Cobain, I sat in his room, surrounded by mounds of clothes, a naked female mannequin, the walls covered with posters of Cobain, a rock singer who killed himself, and grunge rock lyrics. An intercom rested by his bed—it was how the 16-year-old and his parents communicated.

Dressed in gown and wig, 17-year-old Brad Chapman gets a hug from one of his "mummies," Jess Maurer, after his performance with the Maine Gay Men's Chorus. *Photo by Gregory Rec/Maine Sunday Telegram.*

As Asher foraged around on his floor, fidgeting with ties and mechanical tools, he talked about his passion for William S. Burroughs and Shakespeare and his anger about the school kids who ridiculed him for his shy, withdrawn nature. For over a year and a half they jeered at him daily, poking at his hair, taunting him: "Nervous turtle. Nervous turtle."

On another afternoon, I sat in the peach-painted bedroom of 13-year-old Mary Metevier. Mary's fuzzy blue slippers dangled from her bunk bed as she giggled and described how her first French kiss was all slimy and gross. She talked about how her first love had dumped her, even though just 24 hours earlier he'd kissed her and told her how beautiful she was. She cried and said it was one of the saddest days of her life.

I met other kids at school dances, kids like seventh graders Robin Dionne and Erin Bell. Rap and disco music blared and bubble gum and peach perfume scented the gym as the girls pointed to a group of kids near the DJ's stage and explained: "They're the populars. They rule. They're hot. We're not." Later, when I talked with the girls in their bedrooms, they told me the "populars" could be really mean. They spread nasty rumors about the girls and put them on a list of kids considered too ugly or uncool, too fat or too short.

I talked with teens like Robin and Erin seven days a week for 15 months. They e-mailed me and called me at home. Often, the teens were amazed that I wanted to spend so much time with them and that I actually cared about what they had to say. While gathering their stories, I also had to use different reporting techniques. Girls were usually easy to talk with. They chatted for hours about everything—their divorced parents, abortion, sex, school pressures. Boys often answered my questions with a shy yes or no.

The first boy I tried interviewing was a seventh grader, who had been harassed at school because he was one of the few black students in his class. We talked in the basement of his home while he played with his Hot Wheels. Only 10 minutes had passed when he said: "OK, are we done now?" I groaned. I'd planned to spend about six more hours with him over the next few weeks. The next time we spoke, I asked him to invite his best friend over. The two of them giggled and teased one another

and talked about girls and cliques and how they didn't have many friends. All I had to do was ask an occasional question and they'd rattle on, prodding each other with memories and stories.

I stuck with that routine while talking with many teen boys. When I hung out with them and their friends, I learned plenty by just listening to their banter, their teasing, their memories. I also used a tape recorder during interviews. I dreaded transcribing hundreds of tapes but I wanted to capture how teens talked, how often they stretched their vowels like aaaaawesome when they were excited, mad or happy. While I was writing, their recorded voices often made me laugh or cry or just remember how intensely they felt about their struggles, their decisions or memories that made them really sad.

With every story, every interview, I agonized over what to use and what to keep out of the paper. Often, these kids told me things they'd never told anyone. I found myself editing my notes much more than I would with adult interviews. I routinely told the kids what would be in their stories and deleted details that I felt were too private, too explosive to print. One eighth-grade boy told me that he'd never met his father. When I asked why, he said: "My mom was raped." I told him I wouldn't use that information until I'd talked to his mom. Ultimately, I never printed that information because he wasn't one of the kids I profiled.

Sometimes, parents asked me what their kids and I talked about. Usually, I gave them a general idea of the conversation I'd shared with their son or daughter. But I let their kids fill in the details. After talking with three 16-year-old boys about how agonizing it was to resist having sex, one of their fathers asked me on my way out of his home: "We're not going to read in the paper that our son is having sex, are we?"

I told him no, I wouldn't be writing that his son had sex. I wanted to add: "But he's really close."

I encouraged teens to let their parents know what we'd been talking about. But sometimes, they weren't totally honest with their parents about our conversations. For the story about cliques, I profiled a teen girl who was gay and had been sworn at and pushed into lockers at school. Her mom knew she'd been talking to me about peer pressure and her struggles as a gay student. But the mother didn't know that her daughter had been picked on and pushed around for months at school. She learned about the harassment when my story was published.

Jolene Sinclair (left) and Nichole Ryder hang out in Nickie's bedroom. "They live in a community where it's survival of the fittest," says Michael Hutton, who works at a Christian teen center where the girls occasionally visit. "There are a lot of things missing in their lives." *Photo by Gregory Rec/Maine Sunday Telegram.*

The mother cried as she told me: "I can't believe she didn't tell me." I felt badly but I also knew I couldn't fix family problems or make kids talk to their parents.

Though I always got parental permission to talk with the kids, adults', parents' and expert opinions were kept to a minimum. In each of the stories, teen voices dominated. I didn't want to clutter the stories with mature voices, politically correct quotes that often bog newspapers down and make them boring. These kids had trusted me with their secrets, their fears, their dreams, and I didn't want to diminish or sugarcoat their stories to make readers more comfortable. I wanted readers to feel like they were in the same room with me as I listened to an 18-year-old girl cry as she talked about aborting a baby when she was just 14. I wanted people to feel the sadness of teens who were torn apart by their parents' divorce. I wanted readers to care about these kids and what they had to say. I usually interviewed teens three and four times, spending at least six to eight hours with them, and sometimes up to a dozen or more hours. My editors never blinked about the time commitment—especially after the first article about cliques and peer pressure appeared.

We received more than 100 letters and e-mails from readers, who thanked us for reporting on teens in such a dramatic, novel way. Many of our readers said they had no idea being a teen today was so stressful. Yet our series helped them to see that even though teenagers are dealing with the same old pressures—sex, drinking, drugs and grades—today they are moving at warp speed. The teens we portrayed helped adults understand that their worlds are bigger and broader and spin 24 hours a day, seven days a week. They're wired to computers, beepers and cell phones. On TV, teens see and hear sex, sex, sex an average of 14,000 times a year. And they're maturing faster and experimenting with sex sooner. They are expected to excel, succeed and have their futures mapped out by eighth grade. And they're growing up in homes where broken and blended families are commonplace.

Throughout the five-part series, teachers in middle schools, high schools and colleges used our articles in their classrooms to open up discussions about sex, cliques, name-calling, divorce and race. Parents also said the stories gave them an opportunity to talk to their kids about topics they'd been afraid to bring up around the dinner table. Hits on our teen Web site, where the stories are archived, tripled from 20,000 page views to 60,000 each

month.

Teens eagerly read the stories. They said they related to the emotions and experiences of the kids I profiled. It comforted them to know they weren't alone in their anguish over fitting in, struggling with sexual urges or finding peace in a family that was fractured and "messed up." And the teens were thrilled that someone cared enough to listen to them.

"Thank you for finally writing about teens and their lives," one teenage girl wrote. "It means a lot to know adults notice that we exist in a manner that isn't negative."

The stories also changed the way the community looked at teens. The Portland City Council invited high-school students to sit on an advisory board to offer ideas and solutions on teen issues. Readers also reached out to teens who needed help. They offered support, money and encouragement to kids who lived in troubled or poor families. One of those teens, Tom Pelletier, received more than 50 calls and more than $2,000 in donations after I reported that he'd been accepted into MIT. He'd gotten into the prestigious school despite growing up in a home with an abundance of abuse, alcohol and poverty.

Not all the feedback on the series was positive. "The stories made me uncomfortable," one woman told the newspaper. "You should talk to more parents, adults," one father advised. "These kids are just teenagers. You shouldn't rely just on their words and emotions."

We decided otherwise. The stories were compelling *because* we relied on teens' voices and experiences. They weren't clichéd, trite tales that had been reported dozens of times before. These stories were raw, real, unvarnished portraits of kids who'd been largely ignored. We might have made some of our adult readers uncomfortable, but we promised teens we'd listen to them and tell *their* stories.

It felt good to keep that promise. ■

Barbara Walsh, who works for the Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram as a projects and general assignment writer, shared a staff Pulitizer Prize for General News Reporting in 1988 when she worked for The Lawrence (Mass.) Eagle-Tribune. The "On the Verge" series is archived at: http://20below.mainetoday.com.

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Extraordinary Stories Emerge out of Daily Lives

At Youth Outlook, diverse voices portray youthful experiences.

By Katherine Cowy Kim

It is young writers who say they can't write that drives Youth Outlook. Young people come into our office and tell us some extraordinary tale from their daily lives. They then walk away when we ask them to write their story down, shooing us away with a wave of their hand. But when, as editors, we sit down with these potential writers, talk them through their stories, and even type them out while they narrate, if we have to, they begin to realize that they *can* write.

Youth Outlook (YO!) is an award-winning monthly publication, Web site, and weekly column in the San Francisco Examiner, written by and for young people in the San Francisco Bay Area. We feature in-depth reporting pieces, first-person essays, comic strips, and poetry written by youth from the ages of 13 to 25.

In past issues, we've featured stories such as "The Death of the Inner City," a chronicle of the gentrification of one of San Francisco's last ghettoes, Hunters Point, as told through the eyes of a native son. Another young writer did an exposé about horrific work environments many young temporary workers find on the assembly lines in Silicon Valley. A young homeless woman, living on the streets of San Francisco, put together a how-to-train-hop guide. And a young Salvadoran man, who likes to frequent quinceañeras—a 15th birthday/debutante ball for young Latinas—wrote a primer on salsas, bandas and merengues.

Included in a recent issue we published on identity were pieces by a Colombian American, a Salvadoran American, an Afghan American, a Nicaraguan American, an African American/Brit, a Korean Jew, and a fifth-generation Mexican American from Silicon Valley. Some of our work within local communities grew so extensively that we dedicated separate publications to their voices. One of these publications, Quietly Torn, focused on young women of Iu Miena, a southeast Asia hill tribe. Another, Izote Vos, featured writing and art from young Salvadoran Californians. Road Dawgz is the name of the group of young homeless writers and also the name of their Web site. Road Dawgz produced a guide for young homeless youth in San Francisco called The Freedom Manual.

Our writers and artists come from all over the San Francisco Bay Area. We recruit some of them through outreach efforts at high schools and some walk into our office looking for an assignment or a job. Some are from the inner city and some live in the suburbs. Some are college-track kids and some are high-school dropouts. Some live at

home. Others are squatters, and some sleep on the streets. There are kids who have never smoked pot, kids who have kicked a crack habit, and kids who are still fighting heroin. There are those who "spit flows" [slang for rhyming or rapping or performing the spoken word], and then there are those who pen their prose. Some are fresh out of high school, while others are just leaving juvenile hall.

We dedicate a page each month to The Beat Within, a weekly newsletter from youngsters who are incarcerated at juvenile hall. We share an office with The Beat, a hook-up to some of our most talented writers and artists, under the umbrella of our parent organization, Pacific News Service.

YO! has a national distribution of 40,000. It is available in every high school in the Bay Area and in many libraries and community-based organizations. This year, with the launching of our revamped Web site, www.youthoutlook.org, we hope to reach more youth and facilitate communication between them. Our goal is to encourage—and be a bridge for—youth expression. ■

Katherine Cowy Kim is editor of Youth Outlook (yo@pacificnews.org). Before joining Pacific News Service, she was a reporter at Yonhap News Agency and The Far Eastern Economic Review in Seoul, Korea and an editor at The Cambodia Daily in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

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Letting the Voices of Young Women Be Heard

At Teen Voices, real-life experiences are the stuff of which stories are made.

By Celina De León

Our editors come to work three afternoons each week after six hours of school. They arrive at our downtown office from all over Boston, especially from economically disadvantaged parts, places where there isn't a lot of political capital. They read writing sent in from across the United States and around the world by young women whose lives are like and unlike theirs. They come to learn and be supported by writing mentors. They also come to move words and images onto the pages of our magazine to portray the experiences, feelings and opinions of female teenage writers.

Each earns a small monthly stipend for her role in creating the national, quarterly young women's magazine, Teen Voices, and the bimonthly Teen Voices Online. Empowering teenagers to write for an audience of other young women, Teen Voices has, for 11 years, worked hard to bring the concept of people's journalism—media in which people speak for themselves—to the people.

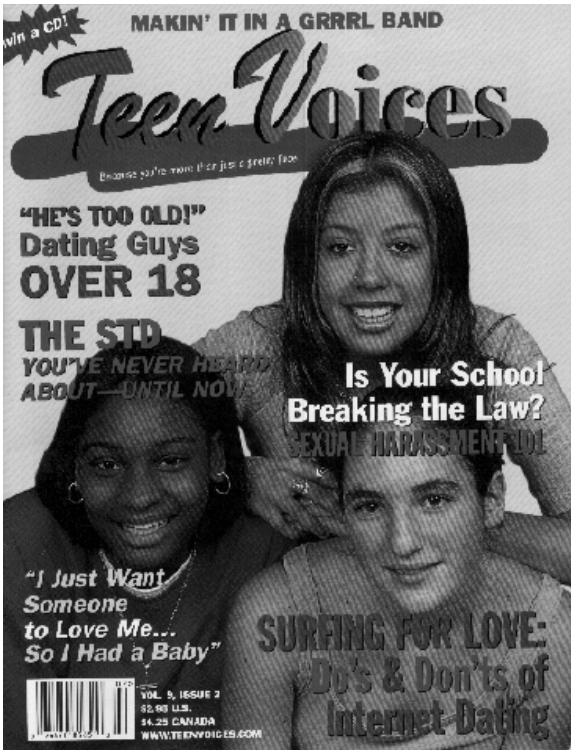
As senior editor of this process, it is my job to train and guide both mentors and teen editors. I work with them on not only the journalism techniques they'll need to use, but also on the politics behind the language and images, so that various perspectives are spoken to and included within the pages of Teen Voices. This involves, for example, trying to make sure the Love Poems section does not solely include poems on heterosexual love. (Not many teens feel safe exploring or expressing their sexuality.) And I make sure our volunteer artists from across the country do not illustrate solely based on a stereotypical idea of beauty.

Teen Voices is a magazine that strives to truly include and represent all of its readers' experiences as well as to critically examine America's oppressive myths. But this goal is not easily attained through attending a couple of workshops or mentoring sessions. Constant questioning and challenging of ideas and assumptions goes on among teen editors and their mentors (mostly volunteer journalists or students like myself). Not all of the teens who join our magazine believe totally in or understand fully our mission of addressing social and economic justice. Many think their voices are enough, even when they are not challenging society's myths. Often, as a result, many are left feeling disillusioned with their positions at Teen Voices.

"But what about my voice?" is a question that often comes up during meetings I have with teen editors and their mentors after they have received their drafts with lots of edits from me and the magazine's editor in chief. Many of them are not exposed to critical thinking in school or at home, so when we pose editorial questions they are often received negatively. The editing

Artwork by Abby Zemrock, accompanying the article "'What Up Nigga!' Would You Say It?" from Teen Voices.

process is hard for adults; imagine the impact it has on a 14-year-old girl who exposed her personal angst in what she considered to be her best writing. To deal with this, we have begun a workshop called "The Editorial Process," in which I act out my role and one of our writing mentors leads the discussion on the relationship between writers and editor while I edit an article in front of the group. This has helped, but sometimes our discussions go deeper than any workshop exercise can help.



Just as white faces are not allowed to adorn every page of Teen Voices, academic jargon and local slang do not get into the editorials of Teen Voices without being properly vetted for their alienating tendencies. And editors' personal experiences are not to outshine the experiences of others. In striving to be as inclusive as possible, an editor for Teen Voices must constantly think about how to help each reader feel as though she matters and that she is not alone in her experiences.

"You are more than just a pretty face," is our magazine's slogan, and it goes to the heart of what we firmly believe and know resonates with many young women: They are more than make-up, clothes, boyfriend seekers, and gossip tellers. Certainly, their lives and circumstances are more varied than the usual images of upper-middle-class, suburban whiteness that appear in most teen movies and advertisements. What happens in the lives of many young women involves issues that are often at the heart of our nation's political debates. To these teens, the personal is political, even if politicians often forget to refer to them in their examples of American life.

The challenge for us—as editors of this unique teen magazine—is that we work at a distance from those whose lives we might influence through what we publish. Our mission is to empower young women to achieve social and economic justice, so it is not surprising that the young women we do work with directly are teens who have grown up in underprivileged neighborhoods and have had few or no resources for upward mobility. Most of them come from urban, low-income, often single-mother families. They are mostly teens of color and often first-generation American citizens. Their experiences range from their fathers being deported to their countries of origin to losing their mothers to cancer, to being shipped from foster home to foster home, to becoming pregnant and being physically abused by their boyfriends. Many are also constantly pressured by family members to work at McDonald's rather than work alongside the extraordinary women at Teen Voices.

Artwork by Angela Cast, 18, accompanying the article "Sisters That Stick Together," from Teen Voices.

These are young women whose efforts are often overlooked at school because they don't measure up to middle-class standards. Unable to excel in school or even meet teachers' expectations, many of them fall farther and farther behind. At Teen Voices, they are encouraged and supported in their efforts to communicate their feelings and experiences. Here, they are empowered with the resources (mentoring sessions and Friday journalism workshops) to inform their peers across the divides of class, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and educational exposure.

Depending on what happens during recruiting sessions, we are also not always able to work with a diverse group of volunteer mentors. Some of our writing mentors don't come from urban backgrounds, nor have they experienced domestic violence. But they do come from all parts of the United States, from different ethnic, racial and cultural backgrounds, and are often excellent teachers. They are usually young women college students who are eager to be involved with teens in a way that can bring about meaningful change.

To keep our editorial content meaningful for the young women who cannot physically be part of our editorial process, we ask each other questions. "Will a teenager in Oklahoma feel awkward reading b-cuz?" Or, "Should we include an editor's note to readers

explaining that some agreed to work on this feature even though they don't believe in homosexuality?" (B-cuz was approved for its phonetic readability, and after a lengthy and personally revealing discussion it was determined that such an editor's note would take away the power of these women's words and make it harder for other readers to see their experiences for what they are.)

Hard feelings are often part of our editorial process. Editors sometimes feel that they are not being heard because either I or the editor in chief urged them to move in a different direction. Even though I've been doing this for three years, I sometimes feel that I am shattering worldly truths rather than acting as a tough, progressive editor. But then, when I least expect it, an editor will seek me out and tell me she is happy about the decision we made together and proud of the feature. This is my favorite part of the process.

How do we keep doing what we do when Teen Voices doesn't have any money? We all put in more sweat labor than paid labor to start with. Because of our strict advertising policy of not publishing any ads in Teen Voices that portray young women as desperately seeking make-up and as fashion fanatics, it makes it really hard to compete with other youth media. But our difficulty with advertising doesn't stop there: Companies that we'd like to advertise in Teen Voices—such as health food stores, big-name computer companies and educational resources—do not regard young women as worthwhile constituents. As a result, we can't afford to purchase the most up-to-date computers or fast Internet connections. Our office furniture is hand-me-down stuff, and in the winter we don't have much heat or, in the summer, cool air. We can't even pay the teen editors minimum wage, though we know their families rely on their monthly stipends.

Somehow we keep doing this day in and day out, loving what we do. And somehow our four-color, glossy magazine, filled with the true writings and illustrations of young women from around the globe, makes its way to the newsstands and into the hands of our dedicated readers. ■

Celina De León, 22, is senior editor of Teen Voices magazine. She began her stay at Teen Voices three years ago as a volunteer writing mentor, and became senior editor nine months later. She is also a senior at Northeastern University majoring in print journalism with a special concentration in women's studies. De León is a Presidential Scholar Award recipient. She worked at The Boston Globe for two years as a promotional copywriter.

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Artwork by Angela Cash, 18, accompanying the article "Sisters that Stick Together," fromTeen Voices.

When Incumbents Run in House Races, The Press Stays Home

In Maryland, major news organizations ignored a close congressional race.

By Steve Nordlinger

Every two years, a lot of political reporters and editors make a critical decision early in the campaign that members of the U.S. House of Representatives running for reelection cannot be defeated. Name recognition is too high. And their jobs come with franking privileges and other perks of office, including the ability to raise money from those whose interests they serve. Conversely, their challengers are often not widely known or well funded. Once such assumptions are made, it follows that covering these campaigns appears pointless and of little news value.

The problem is that judgment becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Almost all House incumbents are reelected. Of the 405 incumbents who ran last year for reelection, only eight were defeated, a mere two percent. A small number of journalists, therefore, come to play a role, maybe a decisive role, in determining the election outcomes, especially since many of the newspapers they work for hold monopoly or near-monopoly power in their communities. And it is no wonder that it has become difficult to recruit people to run against a House member, nor a surprise that House members can become complacent about their performance in office when they know the newspapers back home consider them shoo-ins at election time.

Actually, to suggest that the newspapers make an important decision on coverage may, in fact, be an overstatement. In many cases, these House races go by the board without the editors or reporters giving them any real thought. Contenders in these races might get a single feature story and/or mention in the voters' guide in a pre-election roundup. But that is it. Only races for open seats get attention.

The "coverage" of a House race last fall in Montgomery County, Maryland, close by the nation's capital, illustrates this problem. The Washington Post and The (Baltimore) Sun, the two major dailies read in the state, and The Associated Press, gave almost no attention to the campaign in which Representative Constance A. Morella, a moderate 69-year-old Republican running for her eighth term, was challenged by Democrat Terry Lierman, a successful 52-year-old businessman, lobbyist and community leader up for his first elective office. I volunteered for Lierman's campaign, though I did not know the candidate when the campaign began.

In many cases, these House races go by the board without the editors or reporters giving them any real thought.

Known for her community service, Morella had won 60 percent of the vote in her other reelections. So the newspapers assumed there could be no story this time. It was just another race, with Lierman about to be one more sacrificial lamb. And since no one was covering the campaign, reporters and editors failed to recognize that Lierman's message was resonating in the largely Democratic district.

Essentially, Lierman pressed the point that it would take a gain of only six seats for Democrats to retake control of the House and oust the current leadership. He also emphasized that Morella had lost her once considerable influence in the House now that it was controlled by conservative Republicans who kept her off any of the top committees despite her seniority. The media also ignored signs that Lierman would run a well-financed campaign, putting a large amount of his own money into the race and raising a substantial amount in contributions.

The Sun did a feature story on the Morella-Lierman contest in early September. It also published a long "editorial" across the top of the page in late September that carried the headline, "Morella holds the center, delivers the goods." It was a glowing report on her background and House career. Lierman was not mentioned. The AP ran a feature story on the campaign as well. These three articles were so laudatory of Morella that she posted them on her Web site.

Many voters in this congressional district depend on the coverage of The Washington Post. But this time the newspaper, despite its long devotion to political coverage and its substantial resources, largely stayed aloof from this campaign except for a routine voters' guide piece and a late string of unfavorable stories about Lierman. The Post interviewed Lierman before the campaign began, presumably for a profile, but none was published. Three weeks before the election, the Congressional Quarterly reclassified the race from "safe" Republican to "leaning" Republican, the only change made among the 435 races. But even that reassessment did not persuade the Post to pay attention. Nor did the fact that Lierman attracted as many as 1,500

volunteers and campaigned relentlessly. The Post didn't send a reporter to cover Lierman as he campaigned until two days before the election.

Despite this vacuum of campaign coverage by Post reporters, exactly a week before the election the paper ran a story concerning a $25,000 loan Lierman made in mid-1999 to Rep. James P. Moran, Jr., an old friend. Lierman was then lobbying for a bill that might have extended the patent on the popular allergy drug Claritin. Later, Moran added his name to a chain of co-sponsors of the legislation.

Reflecting its indifferent attitude toward coverage of this House race, the Post assigned only one reporter to research and write this late-breaking article, despite its complexity and potential damage to Lierman. The result was that the published story omitted key details, such as the fact that when he became a candidate, Lierman disclosed the loan in his financial report to the House. This occurred nine months before the Post ran its story, yet went unmentioned. The story also did not state that Moran was one of 77 bipartisan co-sponsors, including some top House members, and that the bill was assigned to the House Judiciary Committee, where Moran is not a member. Instead, the story led readers to conclude that Moran was the sole or crucial co-sponsor.

When the election was over, Morella won, with Lierman getting 46 percent of the vote. One Post columnist declared this "an amazing achievement."

In House campaigns, as in all news coverage, fairness and objectivity should be hallmarks. And that means going out and covering the candidates the old-fashioned way, with complete, balanced reports that keep readers informed about the incumbents *and* the challengers. It is essential that journalists not determine their political coverage by making assumptions about winners and losers. ■

Steve Nordlinger worked for 32 years at The (Baltimore) Sun, reporting on local and national politics, the State Department, Congress and the Soviet Union (as Moscow bureau chief), and served as an investigative reporter, feature writer, and national editor. He is now retired.

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THE SUN

AN EDITORIAL

Morella holds center, delivers the goods

Election 2000

In late September The (Baltimore) Sun published a long editorial which was "a glowing report on [Morella's] background and House career. Lierman was not mentioned."

Words & Reflections

Race & Content of News

In a series of interviews with staff members of network news, former broadcast executive **Av Westin** uncovered ways in which racial bias impacts decision-making about the content of news. He published his findings in "Practices for Television Journalists" (Freedom Forum, 2000), and he shares with us subtle and not-so-subtle experiences that illuminate how this happens. **Gregory M. Branch** and **Claudia L. Pryor,** both African-American news producers, echo Westin's observations by chronicling the workplace situations that persuaded each to leave a network job and form an independent documentary production company called Network Refugees, Inc.

Erna Smith, interim programs director at the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education, explores how newsroom diversity is connected with decisions about news content and, in turn, with the newspaper's credibility. **Arlene Notoro Morgan,** who directs the Let's Do It Better program at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, writes about the program's recognition of well reported stories about race and ethnicity and the learning opportunities these efforts present. **Angelo B. Henderson,** a Wall Street Journal senior special writer, describes how his editors value "my difference and my lens" by urging him to use his African-American perspective to bring fresh stories to Page One. **Steve Corrigan,** editor of Closeups section of the Savannah Morning News, writes about Neighborhood Newsroom, his paper's approach to publishing more stories written by African Americans. A Neighborhood Newsroom graduate, **Margaret Bailey,** a former pipefitter, lets us know about her journey. And **DeWayne Wickham,** a columnist for USA Today and the Gannett News Service, spotlights the failure—exhibited by most members of the press—to investigate charges of voting problems in black communities in the presidential election in Florida.

"The Elements of Journalism"

In a seminar with reporters new to Washington beats, **Bill Kovach** and **Tom Rosenstiel,** co-authors of "The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect" (Crown Publishers, March 2001), spoke about the ways in which sources and journalists operate in the nation's capitol. As Tom Rosenstiel says in excerpts from this discussion, "We have come to recognize that sources—those who want to manipulate members of the press—are gaining the upper hand in their relationships with journalists today, particularly in Washington."

Book Reviews

Robert Jensen, a journalism professor at the University of Texas at Austin, reviews "Drive-By Journalism: The Assault on Your Need to Know," by Arthur Rowse. **Anil Padmanabhan,** a 2001 Nieman Fellow and economic affairs editor for Business Standard in New Delhi, peers inside of Nancy Maynard's book, "Mega Media: How Market Forces Are Transforming News," and reveals how digital media and market forces are transforming how news is gathered, delivered and consumed. ■

You've Got to 'Be Carefully Taught'

Decision-making in TV newsrooms too often involves racial criteria.

By Av Westin

There's a song in the Rogers and Hammerstein musical "South Pacific" that laments prejudice against minorities. The message of the lyrics is that prejudice is learned—something that is "carefully taught" by parents to their children who otherwise might remain unaffected by bias. In a sense, that is what has happened in TV newsrooms throughout the country as a variety of forces—many of them related to business concerns—combined to bring racial bias into decision-making about news.

It is safe to say that blatant bigotry and intolerance do not exist in these newsrooms. Without exception, executive producers and senior producers of network news fervently deny that race places a part in their decision-making. But in more than 120 interviews with their staffs, conducted while preparing a handbook, "Best Practices for Television Journalists," we discovered that people who work for those executives have a sharply different impression. (None of the interviewees are named in the handbook because of an interest in promoting honest dialogue about a very difficult subject. We promised anonymity in exchange for candor, and we got lots of candor. The Freedom Forum published this handbook in 2000, as part of its Free Press/Fair Press Project.)

In these interviews, men and women responsible for the hands-on development and production of news insisted again and again that race and ethnicity *do* have an effect on all components of a story. The interviews reveal a clear sense among the rank-and-file that news management's attitudes about race play a role in story selection and content, editorial point of view, and the skin color of the person who will provide the "expert" sound bite. At the network level, producers are "carefully taught" by the conventional wisdom of executive producers and their senior staffs that white viewers (whom advertisers regard as having greater purchasing power) will tune out if blacks or Latinos are the principal characters in segments on their shows.

Here are a few of the typical observations we heard.

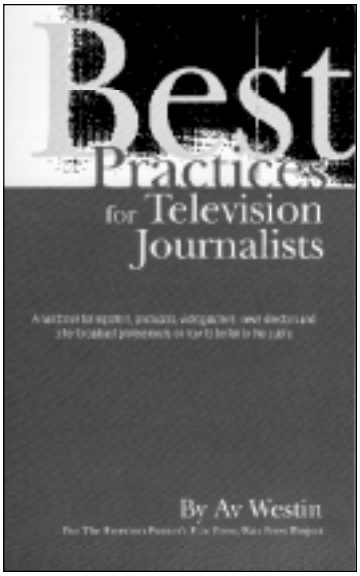
- "My bosses have essentially made it clear. 'We do not feature black people.' Period. I mean, it's said. Actually, they whisper it, like cancer. [Whispering] 'Is she white?'"
- "I love the people I work with, they're nice people, and I don't know where they're getting their information from, but I have been told that when people live in a trailer, people watching at home do not give a crap. And if they're black, no one cares."

A producer who worked at NBC and ABC provided some perspective:

- "It's a subtle thing. A story involving blacks takes longer to get approved. And if it is approved, chances are that it will sit on the shelf a long time before it gets on the air. No one ever says anything. The message gets through."

Race as a factor extends to the local station level where news directors and assignment editors consistently fail to cover stories in the black or Hispanic parts of town while swarming over similar stories in white or affluent sections. The former president of a network news division spoke about this pattern of coverage:

- "I went to Chicago as a news director at one point and there was some horrendous crime committed that seemed worthy of a story. I remember sitting in our morning news meeting thinking 'Wow, this is terrific!' And the producer of the show said, 'Oh, it's a domestic.' I had never heard the term before. I asked, what does that mean? He said, 'Well, it's a domestic; it's a husband and wife in the ghetto who had a fight and they killed each other and their kids.' So he deemed it unworthy of coverage."



One television station group executive confirmed this news bias.

- "There tends to be a belief that crime in the ghetto is less worthy of coverage than a better demo[graphic]. The same is true for stories about welfare, because most viewers who aren't involved in the welfare system don't care about it."

"A better demo…." Why should it matter? As background, consider this: In the past decade, business considerations—the bottom line—have trumped journalism. First, reducing budgets for newsgathering has resulted in smaller staffs, closing bureaus, and hiring less experienced personnel at

lower salaries. That means that ethical standards, enterprise reporting, and double-checking sources and facts are no longer standard procedures in many newsrooms. Second, paying attention to the bottom line has meant going "down-market" for ratings resulting in higher advertising revenue. And third, as a corollary of that drive for ratings at any price, demographics and minute-by-minute analysis of the Nielsens have influenced story selection.

Every business has its code words whose function is to disguise true meaning. TV news is no exception. It is conventional wisdom that, as one former executive told us, "Blacks don't give good demos!" Television ratings measure viewers' demographics (what insiders call "demos") indicating the age range and ethnic and racial composition of the audience. With advanced electronic capability, Nielsen can now provide minute-by-minute results, enabling a producer to actually see what viewers are responding to during each minute of the program. When viewers turn off a program, producers conclude that whatever was being shown at that moment was not appealing. Decisions about what to include in future programs are strongly influenced by the minute-by-minute surveys. "They are bad demos" or "It's not good television" are euphemisms for "Avoid stories about African Americans."

There is another pattern, particularly at local stations, that has racial overtones, reinforcing the view that unwed teenage mothers, welfare recipients, and criminals are predominately black. Whenever coverage of surveys involving social problems is broadcast, file footage from news libraries is trotted out to provide background video for the latest statistics. A few years ago most of the blacks at CNN gathered in a group to lodge a protest about the material being used as "wallpaper" behind the numbers. They complained that every time CNN did a story on poverty, the "b-roll" illustrative footage showed poor blacks, and every time CNN did a story on crime, the "b-roll" focused on black criminals. As a result of the complaints, management went back to look at the file tape and, in fact, it *was* all black. What CNN's management subsequently did serves to provide an answer to the question: "Can anything be done?"

At CNN, Bob Furnad, formerly president of Headline News, cleaned out all the racially offensive video in the library and shot new pictures incorporating a more balanced approach to the real world. Furnad also had minority members of his staff produce a remarkable video entitled "Through the Lens." It addresses stereotypical attitudes of whites by illustrating just how pervasive and insidious racially based criteria can be. All employees at CNN were required to view the tape as part of an effective sensitivity training program.

Often, all it takes is one individual who is proactive and determined to make sure that the staff knows that there are to be no racial criteria when stories are assigned or people are "cast" to appear in them as experts. An African-American associate producer summed it up this way: "Management has to deliberately set some standards as a best practice or break away from some of the ones that are in place because we don't see other faces. Black faces, Asian faces."

In those newsrooms where racial confusion is at a minimum, managers as a general practice seem to hold regular staff meetings sometimes as often as twice a day. One manager described an important dynamic of these meetings. "One of our [senior staff] is a black woman who constantly asks, 'Why was the interview with the black guy conducted standing outside his house while the interview with the white guy was in his living room with a picture of his family and his dog behind him?' It's a small thing but small things can make a difference in shaping a newsroom's attitude. Viewers get the message, too."

This direct communication makes a difference by reinforcing the message of sensitivity. Someone who heads up a TV newsroom said that "you generally have to create an atmosphere where people are not afraid to come forward and say I didn't think that was the right thing to do. It's a non-threatening kind of atmosphere where people know they're not going to be punished for disagreeing on something."

But being constantly proactive is not easy. Doing so takes its toll on anyone who takes on this role. As one TV news director explained, "We don't like discussing race in our newsrooms because it can make us uncomfortable, and if we're uncomfortable, how can we have a team? We want everyone to be working together. Newsrooms themselves first have to be prepared to deal with issues of race before covering issues of race. We discuss race. We discuss culture. We explore issues and then know how to transfer them over to the coverage of our news stories."

Without singling out any organization for *not* being aggressive, the best practices in place at NBC News for consciousness raising are worthy of special mention. NBC News has a unique panel—the Diversity Council—consisting of nearly one dozen news employees of all ranks. It is assembled when stories or story elements are particularly touchy. One NBC news senior staff member described what happened with one particular story that the council examined. "We had a story on the whole subject of the hate crimes. Someone used some language in a sound bite that was clearly offensive. Interestingly, the council said that in order for people to understand the kind of hatred that's out there, you really need to use this bite; you shouldn't fail to use it. So that's what we did."

Once again, the challenge is met by one individual in a key position who adopts a proactive approach. In this case, it was David Doss, then the executive producer of the "NBC Nightly News." As Doss said, "The question that we ask all the time is about bias. Case in point. If we are doing a story about welfare. Should every welfare mother be black? Well the answer, of course, is no. If we are doing a story about unwed mothers. Should every unwed mother be black? No. The fact, of course, is that more unwed mothers are white than are black. If we're doing a story about Wall Street, does it necessarily have to be a white male that we interview as an expert? It shouldn't be. That takes a very proactive effort, and we do it every day."

David Doss is now executive producer of the ABC News newsmagazine,

"PrimeTime Live." As one of his first acts in his new job he held a staff meeting to make it clear that he wanted stories and their "casts" to reflect the diversity that exists in America. Clearly, the need to be proactive is high on Doss's agenda.

WNBC-TV News in New York maintains what some call a "rainbow Rolodex" designed to achieve a variety of opinions from experts who represent the same level of diversity that exists in society. It was the brainchild of the then-news director, an African-American woman, Paula Madison. She believes managers have to "go the extra mile." She instructed her staff to collect business cards—in particular, those from minority populations—at any professional or social function they attended as part of their assignments. The result, she said, was "separate lists of Asian-American contacts, African-American contacts, and Muslim contacts. We just put them in our general contacts sheet."

ABC News has a similar resource in the form of a notebook. But, as a cautionary note, even though these materials exist there is no guarantee that they are being used. At ABC News, the notebook has not been updated in several years and, as one staff member admitted, it has become "a coffee cup coaster." Paul Friedman, executive vice president of ABC News, acknowledges the book might have "fallen into…disrepair" but insists that producers are using their own contact lists which management has "every reason to believe are influenced by the news division's concerns about minority representation." Friedman believes ABC News broadcasts today include many more minority experts than in previous eras "partly because the world has changed and partly because [ABC News] has made a conscious effort."

In my view, the future of broadcast journalism is, at best, cloudy. There is a generational change of command underway in TV newsrooms across the country. New managers have grown up with different standards than their predecessors. They have been "carefully taught" under regimes that were concerned with ratings rather than journalism. And if, as we've discovered and documented, there is a belief that viewers won't watch stories involving African Americans and other minorities, the lessons learned will continue to perpetuate closet racism as the "dirty little secret" of television news. ■

Av Westin is a former Freedom Forum Fellow. During five decades of work in broadcast news, Westin held high- ranking positions at ABC, CBS, Time Warner, and King World, winning six Emmys, four Peabodies, three Alfred I. Dupont-Columbia University Awards, and two George Polk Awards.

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Race Plays a Decisive Role in News Content

As a result, two black producers became 'Network Refugees.'

By Gregory M. Branch and Claudia L. Pryor

"'Network Refugees.' Isn't that a bit confrontational and risky?"

"Not really. It isn't meant to be. It's meant to be a declaration of truth; where we come from, why we left, and where we're going. Essentially, who we are."

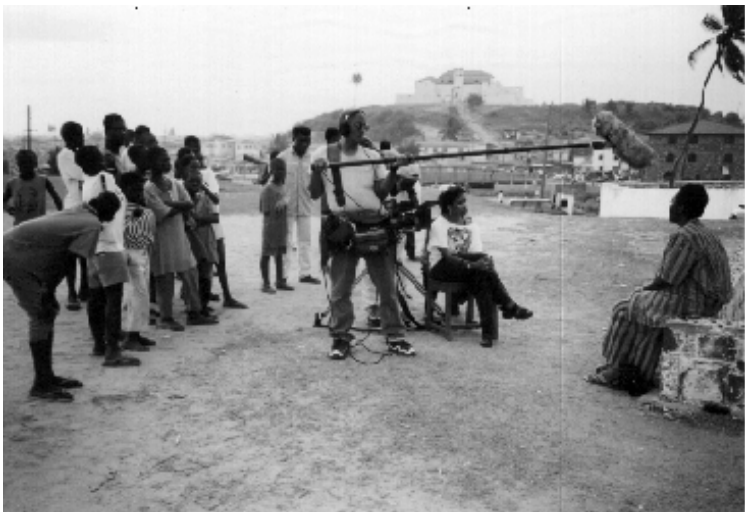
This is how conversations often start when we are asked about Network Refugees, Inc., our nonprofit film and documentary production company that we recently formed. Network Refugees is dedicated to the telling of stories about people of color and the issues that affect us. In addition, we offer those who may not have had our backgrounds and experiences the opportunity to learn under our tutelage. Currently, we are shooting two documentaries, financed from our personal savings and by a small seed grant from the Soros Foundation. We are also acting as executive producers on three additional projects, working with independent producers who've come to us for help.

Network Refugees was formed, essentially, as a way to put our "money where our mouths are." As journalists of color, we consistently find opportunities to complain about the lack of diversity on and in network television news. After a combined 30-plus years' experience in television news, we looked around our privileged settings and saw that things hadn't really changed since we entered this business. In fact, although our individual careers had been very successful, there still weren't many others like us.

Gregory's Story

At 33 years old, I am the younger member of this team. During my 10 years in network TV, I found very few mentors, despite the long presence of black journalists in television news. Those mentors whom I did find were either black women or whites. There were black males in front of the camera, but only a few who worked in production. And those who did developed what I like to call the "only-one syndrome"—the only black producer on staff—a person who became terri-

bly put upon to represent the race, cover black stories with insight, but without connection, and to mentor any and all black underlings on the show. Additionally, this "only-one" producer is fighting to cover good stories that are *not* about race and worrying about the same political and production concerns as every other producer. Often, mentoring younger blacks becomes either too time consuming or too threatening. There is a very real belief that there's only room for one or two successful blacks on a staff, who are regarded as exceptions to the common refrain, "We just can't find any qualified blacks." Therefore, for that "only-one," the up-and-coming black hire is more likely a replacement than a comrade.



Claudia Pryor and Gregory Branch interviewing "Nana," Ghana's first female chief, at the Elmina slave castle on that country's Cape Coast.

Being black can make other aspects of the producer's job difficult as well. When I covered news stories about racial bias, I was told to be aggressive in my pursuit of the perpetrators. However, as I investigated further, inevitably I found racist circumstances that mirrored what I knew to be happening in my own backyard. Yet I would continue to pursue these stories, hoping that my colleagues would begin to understand the similarities between the racism that we covered and that we experienced at work.

I was a production assistant with a newsmagazine show during a winter blizzard in New York. The executive producer had given the staff permission to leave while the roads were still passable. Two colleagues and I were sitting in the show's library and began to watch TV; we had a long commute home and wanted to know if the storm would let up. Our supervisor walked in and remarked, "Is that all *you* people do is watch TV? Why don't you go home and do that!" One colleague spoke up and asked, "To which people are you referring?" Her response—"Oh, you know." She was right, we did know, because we were all people of color—two blacks and a Latino. Her comments made us feel that the behind-the-scenes situations in the newsroom sometimes echoed the more racially infamous stories of the day, à la Denny's and Texaco.

After witnessing this kind of hypocrisy, I would move on to the next show and the next network hoping that perhaps the next situation would be better. Moving was possible because I was considered a "safe diversity hire." "Safe" means that I graduated from an Ivy League college, was smart, professional enough, and able to work in an environment that was largely white. I was young enough to hire cheaply and ambitious enough to do what I was told.

Claudia's Story

I was 44 years old when I met Gregory three years ago. I was among the highest paid producers in this business, black or white, and increasingly dissatisfied with the success my brains and ambition had brought me. In network television news, success is measured by the details of one's personal contract—the salary amount, the job title, and the specific job description one is able to negotiate. My job title was senior producer of special projects, and my job description was to make documentaries and mentor young talent. I had received numerous awards. Best of all, I got paid to do something I absolutely love—producing stories for television.

Someone once told me that we blacks who were privileged to have good jobs must "not only do our work, but do race work" as well. That meant we are to set a good example by succeeding more than our white counterparts whenever possible and always by succeeding beyond the expectations of our white bosses. It also meant that we should challenge the "system," but work within it.

My definition of "race work" was to do as many stories as I could with positive—i.e., visibly working, articulate and law-abiding— black characters, and to mentor young talent, black and white. One summer day, while I was in the throes of writing and editing a documentary, a network executive asked me to produce another documentary on Amy Biehl, a young white Fulbright Scholar who was murdered in the black township of Guguletu, near Cape Town, South Africa.

While her murder was horrific, I objected to doing a story immortalizing Amy when neither my show nor any other network newsmagazine had bothered to notice the thousands of black people who had been killed in South Africa's struggle against apartheid. After hearing my objection, the executive firmly stated that the documentary should include "a parallel character"—a black South African whose story would unfold along with Amy's. That sold me.

We filmed Amy's family for several months as they came to terms with her life and her death. We also filmed the story of Maria, a black woman who was working as a maid for a white family. The family had never learned her last name even though she'd been there for 16 years.

In the first screening, the executive and seniors complimented our efforts and asked us to put in more about Amy

and take out some of Maria's story. We grumbled, but beefed up the Amy section of the first act and moved Maria to the second and third acts. After the next screening, one senior took me aside and gently explained that Amy really was the only part of my story that "America could relate to" and that, after all, Maria was "passé" and needed to be dropped altogether. I called that decision racist and reminded the senior that I hadn't gone to South Africa to "just do a story about a white girl." The white correspondent and the white associate producer supported me. We also pointed out that our commitment to doing a parallel story was one of the reasons the Biehl family had agreed to work with us in the first place.

Maria stayed in the story. The night the documentary aired we received 100 telephone calls. Ninety-eight were about Maria—offering so much money that a trust fund had to be set up; two calls were about Amy. America had spoken.

Claudia Pryor and Gregory Branch talking with "Nana" during a shoot in the Botanical Gardens near her home town.

Claudia's Exit

I felt good. I told myself I was making a difference, story by story. But I had won the battle and not the war, because what was considered worthy of being a story was rapidly changing. By the mid-1990's, network news divisions had fully adjusted to corporate ownership and a profit-driven culture. It became increasingly difficult to get stories with minority or poor characters on the air. Our target audience narrowed to white, middle class, and suburban, an audience that supposedly suffers from race and social issue fatigue. The difference I was making was disappearing.

The end came for me in a careless, almost offhand way, during an informal staff meeting one day. Brainstorming about story ideas, the senior producer leading the meeting mused that we really needed to do more stories with cute kids because "audiences just love that." She went on to describe these child ratings-magnets as "blond, blue eyed…." I felt a chill deep inside me. Before my eyes, my craft was being redefined to exclude me and others who look like me. I looked at the faintly bored faces of my colleagues—all white. They were all still in the game. I wasn't.

I was powerless. Well paid, well thought of, yet powerless. Now, of course, this revelation was far too disturbing for me to immediately embrace. Denial was more pleasant and much easier. It took three more years and the threat of losing my exclusive documentary status to make me leave and go independent. Strangely enough, I got a lot of support from a young man I had recently met and begun to mentor. His name was Gregory Branch.

Gregory's Exit

The end came for me in the guise of a great and rare story assignment. I was sent, along with four others, to Somalia to do a story about what had happened in this chaotic nation with no central government since the Americans pulled out after Operation Restore Hope. What we found was incredible.

The country had splintered. The south was governed by fear in the form of local warlords. Disease and famine were conspicuously present, and the area was in economic shambles. Many of the folk we talked to didn't speak much English, so we relied on Western aid workers to be our translators and guides. However, when we traveled north we encountered a totally different and unexpected set of circumstances.

A northern area of Somalia, called Somaliland, had broken off from the south and formed its own nation, without any real help from Western governments. It was the African version of the American Horatio Alger tale. Residents of the north had pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, relying largely on livestock trade with Saudi Arabia and money sent by Somali expatriates in the West. Somaliland now has an infrastructure and services that might rival many aspiring developing nations. Unlike their southern brothers, they were able to stabilize the population, stop the fighting, and repatriate Somalis from abroad to rebuild. We encountered many government officials and dignitaries who had either lived in America or had been educated there. Most people spoke English. The mayor of a major port city who is a former Seattle resident engaged me in a conversation about Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls! I knew we'd found an original, compelling news story. Furthermore, it had an American angle—absolutely vital when doing a foreign story for American network television news. We decided to present it as Somalia north and south; a tale of two countries.

We returned home and edited the story. We had two screenings by executives who promptly, in my opinion, gutted it. They threw out the original and positive story of the north, saying it simply wasn't interesting. In the end, we were allowed to devote a tiny amount of time to Somaliland. The remaining 12 or so minutes were devoted to the south and the all too familiar pictures of sick, emaciated,

starving people and kids with automatic machine guns. Our reporting had been largely discarded, and our work had been used to perpetuate the prevailing negative stereotypes of Africa and Africans.

The final blow was that the story was slated to air in mid-August, when most viewers are either away on vacation or not watching TV. We had found a compelling tale with an obvious American connection and risked our personal safety for a story that would hardly be seen.

However, I did not leave network television right away. I continued to find other stories about people of color. One came from my uncle. We were sitting next to each other on a plane to West Africa. I was stopping in Senegal, he was continuing on to Ghana. He began to tell me about a friend he was going to visit who is the first woman to become chief of her people, a rarity in Africa.

I was extremely intrigued. I learned more about her people, her village and her culture, but getting her to talk about herself would be difficult. When I went to visit her, at first she wouldn't tell me everything, but what I learned was enough to convince me that her life needed to be documented.

Eventually I told her story to Claudia, who was by now an independent producer. She loved the story, so I asked her if she would produce it. Still working in network news and having learned what executives considered marketable, I knew that a story about an African woman chief was not. Claudia agreed to work on the story, but only if I joined her. A few months later I resigned, and Network Refugees was born.

Network Refugees' Story

We are now independent, freelance producers of stories about people of color. The independent arena has not been the "land of milk and honey," though. In our attempt to raise money from grant-making foundations, we've learned that they can be as Byzantine and impenetrable as any large corporation or television network—a big reality check. So we take freelance jobs to fund our own projects.

We are, however, happy in a way we've never before been. Work has become so fulfilling that it has ceased to be "work"—separate and distinguishable from "play," or "home," or "love." We have empowered ourselves to make a living doing what we believe in, not trying to adjust our beliefs in order to make a living. And we now know that this is the best we can do. ■

Gregory M. Branch, president of Network Refugees, worked at ABC, CBS and NBC News. His work won an Edward R. Murrow Award, an award from the National Association of Black Journalists, and received an Emmy nomination.

Claudia L. Pryor, vice president of Network Refugees, worked as a producer and senior producer for ABC and NBC news. Among her awards are a George Foster Peabody, an Alfred I. DuPont (gold baton), an award from the National Association of Black Journalists, and more than 10 Emmy nominations.

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Linking Content and Credibility to Newsroom Diversity

The Maynard Institute's 'Reality Checks' seminar explores enduring Fault Lines.

By Erna Smith

Some San Antonio Express-News staffers approached their paper's newsroom diversity training last year with "great dread." They complained of being "volunteered" to go because response to invitations was poor. Phrases like "a lot of PC crap" and "a bunch of eggheads" showed just how low their expectations were of the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education's workshop.

But sometime during the second day, the tide began to turn. "As we got into day two I really started to see the value in [the training]," one skeptic told a Ford Foundation consultant one month later. "And the value in it, from one simple standpoint, was for me when you are incorporating diversity in your newspaper, you are dealing in the realm of accuracy. Accuracy in representing your community. And accuracy in newspapers is credibility and everything else. And that really was the turning point."

After 11 years of research and work with journalists on strategies to make news coverage more inclusive, I'm accustomed to newsroom skeptics. The knee-jerk reaction to any attempt to address bias in news coverage is to dismiss it as "PC crap," like the Express-News staffer did. Such attitudes blind journalists to the impact of news coverage on credibility and the relationship between credibility and the bottom line, especially among people of color, who comprise the plurality or majority of populations in most major U.S. media markets. That said, some editors and publishers do "get it," including the top management at the Express-News.

The workshop the Maynard Institute led in San Antonio last March is

called "Reality Checks." It is part of the Institute's Total Community Coverage (TCC) program. Based on the Fault Lines framework created by the late Robert C. Maynard and developed by his daughter, Dori, Reality Checks weds readership and community demographics with content analysis to empower journalists to audit their coverage and to develop strategies to make it more inclusive. Led by current and former journalists, Reality Checks workshops have been conducted at three newspapers over the past 18 months, including the Express-News. The Institute also analyzed coverage in a fourth newspaper using the Reality Checks model.

Robert C. Maynard, former Oakland Tribune publisher, identified five enduring Fault Lines of race, class, gender, generation and geography as the prisms through which many of us see the world. He wrote: "The society is split along five faults, and we try in vain to paper them over, fill them in or pretend they aren't there. These underlying forces, like those in the center of the earth, will thwart us until we come to see our differences as deep but completely natural things, as natural as geologic fault lines."

Fault Lines are not only social but personal. Maynard Institute President Dori Maynard believes Fault Lines not only make us who we are but create "blind spots" that render us unable to "see or make sense of some of the complexities in our communities and/or in others, including our newsroom colleagues."

The three-day Reality Checks workshop opens with a Fault Lines orientation. In successive sessions, participants use the Fault Lines framework to 1. compare and contrast readership demographics with the general population demographics of their circulation area, 2. analyze news story sources and photo subjects, 3. brainstorm story ideas, and 4. analyze news coverage over time. They also learn about the impact of their Fault Lines on the subconscious practice of news framing. News frames refer to the main theme—some call it the "master narrative"—conveyed by a story. It is the central idea around which facts are organized.

The third day largely focuses on training and preparing participants to collect and enter data for a content audit of their newspaper using coding sheets and software that Maynard provides. Afterward, participants spend a fourth day auditing local news coverage on their own. Maynard analyzes the data and writes a report for presentation to participants and whomever else the paper wants to invite. San Antonio, a Maynard TCC partner since 1995, sponsored five sessions last July, including three for newsroom employees, one for its community advisory board, and one for its operations committee. So far most Reality Checks workshops have focused on the news side, but one workshop also included business side staff.

The diversity of voices increases in proportion to sources.

It's too soon to evaluate the impact of Reality Checks, but from the content audits similarities emerge in coverage patterns and in the relationship between the findings and the quality of reporting and decision-making. Not surprisingly, the most frequent source of news is an upper-middle-class, white, male Baby Boomer who lives on the affluent side of town. The diversity of voices increases in proportion to sources. The more sources, the less likely they are to be the "usual suspects." The same is true of enterprise vs. spot news reporting. Coverage depicting people of color tends to be played more on Page One, metro, sports and feature section fronts than on inside pages.

The Fault Line portrait of the "typical" news source and the pattern of placement of stories depicting people of color reflect multiple factors: social reality, conventional news values and practices, and the Fault Line "blind spots" of the journalists who produced the coverage. Most news emanates from the corridors of power, which once again are filled with upper-middle-class, white, male Baby Boomers. The inroads blacks and, to a lesser extent, Latinos have made in local government could account for the prominent placement of stories depicting people of color. The sports section consistently ranks among the top three areas of news which depict people of color in most newspapers, and the Reality Checks newspapers were no different. The sheer volume coupled with the dominance of black athletes and the fact that sports news quite often spills onto news pages provides another explanation of the placement finding.

There is little surprising in these findings, especially for workshop participants who collect the data. "You know we recognize that the newspaper reflects too much the white male. And even if we don't want to admit it, there's not a journalist in the room who doesn't know that that's true," said another Express-News workshop participant. What has been different, in my experience, is the reaction of others in the newsroom who did not attend the workshop. It's harder to dismiss the work of colleagues than of an outside consultant, especially if backed by management commitment and resolve to instill a sense of diversity as an integral part of accuracy and credibility in journalism.

"I don't see TCC as more black or brown faces," said Carolina Garcia, Express-News managing editor. "This is about journalism and raising the bar on reporting and being out in the community." ■

Erna Smith is interim programs director for the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education. A former newspaper reporter and editor, she is a professor and former chair of the San Francisco State University journalism department and a 1992 fellow at the Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy in Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

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Let Us Now Praise Good Reporting on Race

A journalism program spotlights and studies the exemplary ingredients of coverage.

By Arlene Notoro Morgan

"When journalists fail to handle sensitive issues of race and ethnicity effectively, or fail to integrate sources that reflect gender and ethnic diversity into their stories, the community pays a serious price, both in the short and long run."

This premise, championed by former Milwaukee Journal Editor Sig Gissler, led to the creation of the first Let's Do It Better workshop on race and ethnicity for professional journalists in 1999 at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism.

Gissler, who joined the Columbia faculty in 1994, was weary of the criticism—often justifiable—that the news industry encountered on the coverage of race. He reasoned that a workshop built around discussion of well reported stories would create a comfort zone to help journalists teach others how to improve their coverage of racial and ethnic issues. To Gissler's knowledge, no other journalism school was tackling this professional shortcoming. And what editor, he mused, would turn down a free trip to New York City, a city that illustrates the importance of covering a multicultural society?

Supported by a sizable grant from the Ford Foundation, Gissler began a competitive process to find "the best" stories documenting how race is lived in America. In its third year, the project is on its way to becoming a national showcase for the print and broadcast pieces that pass the test for insight, authority and courage. Most important, the honored journalists share their work—as evocative case studies—with a carefully chosen group of media "gatekeepers," influential editors and broadcasters who set newsroom agendas and can implement change. "By showcasing excellent examples of racial and ethnic coverage in America, we aim to spur better performance," Gissler explained.

In launching Let's Do It Better, Gissler had to overcome a sizable share of challenges. There was the entrenched perception, voiced on a variety of fronts by communities of color and frustrated journalists, that the news industry is almost as conflicted today about including people of color as part of the total community as it was in 1968, when the Kerner Commission rebuked the media for their lack of inclusiveness. And there were questions, the answers to which were not easy to come by. Would journalists bother to respond to the school's annual call for "the best"? Should a newsroom that ignored race, except for the random prize-generating project, be honored on the same level as a Newsday, the Long Island newspaper that has made diversity in hiring and content part of its everyday mission? Do the TV weekend shows, regarded by many journalists as "the ghetto" for segments dealing with issues such as Hispanic business, qualify for the same honors as the nightly news or prime-time magazines? Would the smaller newsrooms, where resources are limited, produce competitive work?

'We are seeking work that illuminates diversity, eliminates stereotypes, and provokes discussion.'

What we discovered, once the entries began to come in, was that race and ethnicity are topics of great interest and intensive reporting at many media outlets. Dozens of entries from publications like The State in Columbia, South Carolina and the Lincoln Journal Star in Nebraska soon indicated that the search for new readers and viewers in emergent immigrant communities finally might be changing the picture.

The selection process posed additional problems. Picking a cross section of judges to represent a variety of colors, genders, experiences and backgrounds to screen entries meant looking for people who could suspend their own emotions on race and judge the entries based on objective standards. Also, what role, if any, would the community play in the selection of honorees? An idea that initially sounded so simple grew to become a project filled with enormous challenges.

"African Americans often charge that journalists cover only the negative news within the black community," Gissler explained. "White Americans often feel the media blame them for all race-related problems. Similarly, Americans of Asian or Hispanic ancestry complain about flawed coverage, saying it reflects journalistic ignorance of their cultures and traditions. New immigrants, from an array of nations, often feel especially misunderstood."

Concerns also emerged about something I will label "diversity fatigue." While most journalists agree on the need to accurately and adequately portray the multiculturalism of their communities, experience shows that, regardless of color, most journalists head for the door when it comes to attending the usual prepackaged lectures on diversity behavior that are the staple of most training programs. Would any news executive sign up for yet another

training session on diversity?

Gissler worked to keep the focus of the Let's Do It Better program on the journalism. And therein lies the secret of the project's success. "I have yet to meet a journalist who did not want to improve his or her performance," said Gissler, who teaches a course on race and ethnic reporting. "This program lays it all out: tips from the honorees, obstacles to be overcome, management issues that need to be resolved."

Thus far, Let's Do it Better has attracted about 400 entries, representing newspapers and broadcast stations of every size and location, from Tacoma, Washington to New York. Some 80 journalists, including a few recognizable faces like Tom Brokaw and Dan Rather, and Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Angelo Henderson [see his story on page 73], have participated in two workshops at Columbia. A third forum, held in partnership with the 25th anniversary of the National Association of Black Journalists, attracted a mix of some 125 journalists, public health workers, and community members to Philadelphia last December to discuss the coverage of racial disparities in health care.

Transforming the winning entries into case studies for the workshop can be a daunting task. While the Let's Do It Better entries go through the same screening process that is in place for the Pulitzer and DuPont awards, the search for unique teaching vehicles also drives the selection. "We have to ask ourselves if this work achieved any impact on moving the discussion or understanding of race in the community," Gissler says. "We are seeking work that illuminates diversity, eliminates stereotypes, and provokes discussion. Honorees must be willing to come to the workshop to facilitate the discussion of their work. Even though they're being honored, we have learned that they have to be prepared for a lot of tough questions."

That certainly was evident last June. CBS Anchor Dan Rather and CBS News President Andrew Heyward were peppered with questions about why they assigned only white men to Jasper, Texas on the day John William King was sentenced to die for the brutal dragging death of a black man, James Byrd. The CBS Jasper coverage—honored for its quality and depth—sparked a spirited discussion about perspectives that reporters of color bring to stories, a conversation that occurred several times during the workshop. Rather conceded that CBS should consider this issue more aggressively on future stories.

What these discussions do is provide participants with new levels of awareness about the consequence of decisions that often get made in the

Let's Do It Better: 2000 Honorees

Newspapers:

Newspaper of the Year—Newsday
For overall excellence in covering race and ethnicity and for developing a strategy to deal with the paper's demographic challenge.

Gabriel Escobar, city editor, The Washington Post
For his stories on Latinos: "Dominicans in Black and White" and "The Other Pro Soccer."

Angelo Henderson, reporter, The Wall Street Journal
For his Pulitzer Prize-winning stories on race: "Crime Scene" and "Color Code."

Stephen Magagnini, reporter, The Sacramento Bee
For his series: "Getting Along," and other stories on race and ethnicity.

Lonnae O'Neal Parker, reporter, The Washington Post
For her Style section story: "White Girl?"

The San Jose Mercury News
For special projects, "Majority of None" and "Diaspora," and for the development of a race and demographics team.

Aaron McGruder, cartoonist
Creator of the multiracial comic strip "Boondocks," distributed by Universal Press Syndicate.

Television:

Station of the Year—CBS News
For general excellence in coverage of race across a range of news programs.

Alden Bourne, producer, "60 Minutes," CBS News
For "Vice Versa," an unusual twist on affirmative action.

Paul Gallagher, producer, "60 Minutes," CBS News
For "KIPP," a report on education progress in minority neighborhoods in the Bronx and Houston.

Barbara Ciara, reporter-anchor, WVEC-TV, Norfolk, Virginia
For her report, "The N-Word."

Emiko Omori, documentary filmmaker
For "Rabbit in the Moon," a film about lingering tension over internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

Lynn Redmond, producer, "ABC News 20/20"
For "Acting White," an exploration of race and education.

WTVJ-TV, Miami, represented by Don Browne, president and general manager
For "Does Anyone Here Speak English?" and a portfolio of race and immigration stories.

Names and positions are given as they were in 2000 when selections were made.

rush of workday pressures. While most of the participants do not consider themselves insensitive to racial issues, what they learn through these exchanges is how blind they might be to things that are seen so clearly by someone who is of a different race or ethnic background.

Mixing the television and newspaper gatekeepers also led to interesting "aha" moments of understanding about how much more complex storytelling is for TV news compared to newspapers. "Whenever race comes up in a newsroom, fear comes after," Barbara Ciara, the WVEC Norfolk (Va.) TV anchor, told workshop colleagues as she presented her award-winning segment on "The N Word."

Newsday Managing Editor Charlotte Hall, who accepted the 2000 "Newspaper of the Year" honors, emphasized the importance of holding every newsroom manager accountable for diversity in content and hiring. Hall advised newsroom managers to remember the benefits of integrating diversity into the entire content, especially in the photographs selected to appear. "The tone of the paper is set by the visuals," she said.

Picking the participants who comprise the workshop class is as critical to the event's success as the presentations are. Class members are drawn from newspaper and broadcast applicants. Those selected to attend must be high-ranking newsroom managers who have the clout to improve hiring practices and the coverage of race, and the ability to remove the obstacles that often prevent the publication or airing of a controversial or sensitive story. The selection process targets editors who demonstrate a commitment to using the workshop materials and discussions to stretch the perspectives of their newsrooms.

Participants describe the impact of the program as "uplifting." Most stay in touch with each other to exchange ideas through a Let's Do It Better listserv that Gissler maintains. Now, thanks to a second grant from Ford, this year's program will give gatekeepers a full day to discuss management issues, such as tips on effective hiring practices, staff development, and making race a comfortable part of the daily news meeting discussion. The grant also will support expanding the workshop's reach through a series of regional workshops and lectures, designed in collaboration with other journalism schools and professional organizations.

"Journalists have a social responsibility to engage the nation in a fuller, more meaningful conversation about race," Gissler said. "If the newsroom is fearful or timid about this subject, what can be expected of the audience?" ■

Arlene Notoro Morgan has directed the Let's Do It Better program since August 2000, when Sig Gissler returned to full-time teaching. Morgan spent 31 years at The Philadelphia Inquirer where she was an assistant managing editor for readership, a staff development trainer, and recruiter. She has consulted on the Let's Do It Better program since its inception.

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Gatekeepers can apply to attend the June 6-9 workshop by e-mailing Morgan at race@jrn.columbia.edu or calling 212-854-5377. The Let's Do It Better Web site, where honored work and a workshop application are posted, is at www.jrn.columbia.edu/workshops.

Why 'Mama's Santos' was honored by Let's Do It Better

"Mama is preparing to die. This is nothing new. She started to make these preparations when I was in fourth grade, 34 years ago."

With that opening, Arizona Daily Star reporter Carmen Duarte started her 36-part series on "Mama's Santos: An Arizona Life," a poignant portrait of her mother that also tells the story of immigration in Arizona.

From a field of more than 150 entries, "Mama's Santos" was one of 16 newspaper and television stories to make the 2001 Let's Do It Better list of honorees. Each story had to pass a vigorous discussion, based on issues of context, complexity, authority and voice, during the final phase of judging, held at The Poynter Institute in January.

No one describes how "Mama's Santos" wrote its way onto this list better than the nominating letter from Jane Amari, editor of the Star and a graduate "gatekeeper" who attended the first Let's Do It Better workshop.

"It is a story of one woman's courage, strength and faith," wrote Amari, "but many of our readers told us it was the story of their families as well."

Told in first person in chapter-by-chapter episodes—a device Amari admits was "a risk"—Duarte told the tale of the Arizona cotton industry through the experiences of her mother and other family members.

Duarte's mother, "Nala," became "a metaphor for the thousands of Hispanics whose experiences in this harsh and beautiful corner of our country were similar," Amari added. "It is a tale of obstacles met and overcome, whether they had to deal with the unforgiving climate or discrimination and economic inequality. Although it is 'Nala's' story, it is also Carmen's, who through telling the tale found in her mother a source of strength and a renewal of faith in the future."

Amari said the series, which ended in March 2000, continues to draw viewers to the paper's Web site at www.adstarnet.com. "So many people in the community told their friends and relatives about it that we've translated it into Spanish for the Web site."

Duarte receives a plaque and a $500 check from Columbia in recognition of her work. But it's the gatekeepers—editors who attend Let's Do It Better workshops—who will receive the real gift when they hear and discuss the emotional journey Carmen Duarte took to tell her family's story and the impact it achieved by "doing it better."—ANM

Opening Windows Gives Readers Unexpected Images

An African-American writer reflects glimpses inside his world.

By Angelo B. Henderson

Some people call it perspective, others dub it context, but I call it "my lens." It's how I see the world.

In my view, windows are more exciting than mirrors. Yet in 16 years of working in various newsrooms across the United States, I've noticed far too many "mirrors"—reflections of the same, compared to "windows"—glimpses into new and different worlds, among those who walk, talk and shape thought inside these institutions. Mirror-like images tend to be more comfortable, less challenging, easier to understand, and less risky. Mirrors are familiar. How often is someone shocked when looking in the mirror? It's an expected image, just another view of the same person at a different time. *"He reminds me of me when I started in this business."* Ever thought that? It was almost like talking to a mirror.

It's ironic that I'm listening to jazz vocalist Rachelle Ferrell's album "Individuality—Can I Be Me?" as I write this.

Last year, Columbia University's Let's Do It Better program recognized several of my articles as among the best on race and ethnicity in America. Part of the recognition included participation in workshops with decision-makers in television and newspaper newsrooms on strategies and techniques to use when covering race. During these discussions, I said that much of my success at The Wall Street Journal is because I've had editors—Ken Wells (my direct editor and leading advocate), John Brecher (former Page One editor), Robert Simison (former Detroit bureau chief, who hired me and even promoted me from reporter to deputy bureau chief), Paul Steiger (managing editor), Dan Hertzberg (deputy managing editor), and now Mike Miller (current Page One editor)—who value my difference and my lens.

My editors believe in me, respect me, and appreciate what I do and how I do it. As a senior special writer for Page One, I am given freedom to explore my own ideas. This alone demonstrates the paper's faith in my lens. I feel valued when I pitch stories to Ken Wells. He always listens and gets excited about my ideas. I learned early in this business that a reporter is encouraged when an editor works as a partner. Ken understands me, and I feel as if he is truly my brother in journalism. When I feel valued, it's only natural that I value my job and really strive to make as much impact as possible. Newsroom managers and editors across the country will realize one day what you give is what you get.

The bar is set extremely high for stories that appear on the front page, so I don't just toss up any idea. I spend quality time and thought doing research. I talk to many people, bouncing around not so obvious angles. I specialize in untold stories.

Let me be clear. I am a 38-year-old, African-American male. While none of my editors are African American, this doesn't stop them from listening, supporting and respecting the ideas I bring to the table. In many newsrooms, unless there is a person of color around, ideas of color get whitewashed. My experience at The Wall Street Journal is quite different. Since coming here in 1995, all of the articles that I have written on the front page have been my ideas that reflect glimpses inside my world—what I see, where I go, what I do. They often demonstrate my wonder. And, in some respects, what I am doing is holding a mirror up to my own world as a way of opening windows for others.

Consider these examples:

- Rolling Revolution: "The Wheelchair Turns Hip as New Generation of User Demands Style—Many Are Youthful Victims of Urban Violence Who Want More Than a Ride—*Trading up to a Rolls-Royce*."

This story starts with the perspective of 25-year-old Willie Brown, who was ripped by four slugs from a .357-caliber Magnum when gang members opened fire on a drug dealer near his home. He was paralyzed from the waist down. While Brown was a basketball star in high school, these days he moves to the hoops in a glistening, black, $2,500 lightweight wheelchair known as the Quickie GPV. This was his fourth chair in the past few years, and he was hoping to be able to move up to a high-tech, $4,000 "standing chair" that would allow him to move from a sitting to a standing position. "That's my dream chair—the Lexus of wheelchairs," he said.

An epidemic of urban violence has created a whole new class of wheelchair user, which in turn is driving the fastest growing niche in the nation's $475 million-a-year wheelchair industry. Many of the buyers are young African-American men who are not content with the heavy, chrome prototypical wheelchair of old. Once they accept their fate, many want from their wheelchairs what young men everywhere want from cars, running shoes, and bicycles: They want style, performance and pizzazz. The idea for this story originated from seeing an increasing number of young black males in wheelchairs at a suburban Detroit mall and movie theater. Both of these places have largely African-American customers.

- Hair Business Goes Wild: "In Detroit, Stylists Put Heads Together to Stage Glitzy, Bizarre Shows."

The city that gave the world tail fins and the Supremes suddenly found itself giving something else—a new definition of Big Hair. This story started with a glimpse at Detroit hair-styling competitions. Stylist Willie Robinson paraded his five-foot-two-inch model on stage and her hair was perhaps two-foot-five-inches tall and bound by a zipper. It swooped upward in a towering wave known as a French Roll. Then Robinson unzipped the 'do and retrieved a live, four-foot python. Last time it was two white doves, and before that a bottle of champagne with two glasses.

Next was Michael Turner, who introduced the world to the "Hairy Copter." His model sported a style that, with the aid of tiny battery-powered motors, included flashing lights and miniature rotating helicopter blades of hair, and helped him earn the nickname "Mr. Motor Hair." These hair fashion shows target African Americans and have run in Los Angeles, Columbus, Ohio, Miami, Dallas, New York, Atlanta, Washington and Chicago. I learned about them from my barber in Detroit and decided to attend.

- Pitching Used Cars on Church Fans Isn't Holy Inappropriate: "Once the Advertising Realm of Mortuaries, Devices Get a Much Livelier Look."

First the pearly gates. Now, the golden arches. This article explored how African-American funeral home operators had an exclusive, yet arcane, advertising window to the faithful: the church fan. Those printed cardboard-on-a-stick devices typically had a photo of a staid African-American family or Martin Luther King, Jr. on the front and an ad for a local black funeral home on the back. But nowadays, car dealers, loan companies, colleges, hair-care concerns, and even McDonald's have invaded this turf.

I noticed this in church one Sunday. It seemed as if every week at my predominantly African-American Baptist church, we had hundreds of new fans.

And the headlines continue:

- Color Code: "Black Entrepreneurs Face a Perplexing Issue: How to Pitch to Whites—Some Prefer a Low Profile, Often Using Stand-Ins For Suburban Campaigns—*Choosing a Caucasian Clone*."

This article profiled successful African-American entrepreneurs who find it easier to use white fronts when selling to largely white markets so race isn't such a hurdle in doing business.

- Death Watch?: "Black Funeral Homes Fear a Gloomy Future as Big Chains Move In—White Companies Target Inner Cities, Churches In Push for New Markets—*Rumors Fly in Los Angeles."*

One of the last remaining black-owned neighborhood businesses—the local funeral home—is attractive now to the big boys.

- An Easter Bonnet With Frills Upon It Is Decidedly Old Hat: "At St. Stephen Baptist Church in Louisville, They Won't Dress Up This Year."

Everyone seems to dress up for Easter, especially in the black church, but even that is changing in some places.

- In Detroit, Blacks Turn the Staid Obit Into a Glossy Art: "Minimagazines Sprout Up, Dishing Virtue and Candor; *A Poem Raps a Gangster*."

In Detroit, African Americans who were frustrated with getting small obituaries in the newspapers have started designing full-color glossy magazines with photos of their loved ones. It demonstrates the power in telling your own story in a form that can be passed down for generations.

In 1999, I won the Pulitzer Prize for Distinguished Feature Writing for "Crime Scene: Beyond the Statistics, A Druggist Confronts The Reality of Robbery—Ripped Off Once, Mr. Grehl Got a Gun, Vowing Not To Be a Victim Again—*Eye to Eye with 'Yo Roller.'*" This article provided a harrowing, yet empathetic, look at an attempted drugstore stickup that ended in death. The question I attempted to answer was, "What is it like to kill someone?" This was born out of my experience in urban America, recognizing the number of shootings that are commonplace, and thinking about possible untold stories.

While God has blessed me with editors who appreciate, respect and applaud my lens, they don't consider it a limitation. That is often a problem in newsrooms where some African Americans are fearful about exploring or even proposing "black stories" for fear they'll be pigeonholed to those beats or arenas for the rest of their career. There are a few blacks who have no insight into African-American issues and trends and could care less. Well, I enjoy writing about my world, which is largely one of color.

At the same time, at The Wall Street Journal, I have never been limited to just stories about African Americans. My first year here, I covered all the non-U.S.-based automakers. The next three years, my beat was the Chrysler Corporation (now DaimlerChrysler)—the third largest U.S. automaker—from the showroom to the boardroom. Indeed, I was able to provide staple and standard fare for our news pages, but at the same time I could chip away and churn out world-class chocolate desserts.

When I lecture at various universities and news outlets across the country, one of my key suggestions to the audience is: "Describe your lens." I believe that survival in our business often depends on finding ways to separate reporters and editors from the pack. "Describe your lens," I suggest. "What makes you different? What gives you value added? What is your niche? What can't others do quite like you? Where do you go that others don't? Get friends outside of the newsroom. Use all this to your advantage. You shouldn't be waiting around on someone to give you stories vs. your own. You'll never get the best ones that way."

I also invite reporters to examine their passions. "What excites you or moves you? When is the last time you wrote a story that resulted in an emotion—a story that made you sad, happy, pissed off, or left you encouraged? If it doesn't move you, what makes you think it will move the reader?"

It's important to remember that re-

porters have fears and failures, tears and trials, voyages and voices. Diversity is more than just a color issue. Oftentimes, it reflects a difference in thought, responses and experiences as well as expectations, adventures and dreams.

It's easy for newsroom managers to surround themselves and promote people who look and think alike—mirrors. There is normally some connection—possibly the same college, the same former news outlet or department. It could be that both individuals enjoy the same restaurants, music or hobbies. Nevertheless, I invite those who can hire, promote or assign stories to change their view a bit for the broadening and bettering of the news operation. Just step away from the mirrors occasionally and try taking a panoramic glimpse outside the window—there are plenty of them around, and it's amazing what's out there. ■

Angelo B. Henderson is a senior special writer for Page One of The Wall Street Journal and is based in Detroit, Michigan. He won the 1999 Pulitzer Prize for Distinguished Feature Writing. During his 16-year journalism career, he has covered beats that range from drugs, crime and neighborhoods to real estate and small and minority business at The St. Petersburg Times, The Courier-Journal (in Louisville, Kentucky) and The Detroit News.

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Wanted: Diversity of Voice and Experience

The Savannah Morning News creates the Neighborhood Newsroom.

By Steve Corrigan

At the Savannah Morning News, we are taking a not-so-revolutionary approach to diversifying our newsroom. In fact, in keeping with Savannah's fascination with the past, we've tapped history to better prepare us for the future.

Forty and 50 years ago, reporters at the Morning News followed an apprenticeship program. They started as copy boys, advanced to obits, honed their craft on the rewrite desk, then moved to the cops beat. Today, most journalists come from universities. They polish their talents at internships and at small papers. They work their way up by bouncing around the country, a year covering police here, followed by a couple of years covering the school board there. This modern system produces topnotch journalists with solid reporting skills. They are often fine writers and good storytellers, but their short stays don't give them much opportunity to know the communities and people they cover.

Here in Savannah, we now take people from various walks of life and place them in a month-long program designed to transform novice writers into aspiring newspaper reporters. In creating this new type of apprenticeship program, we built on an idea from the past by tailoring it to meet future needs.

We call it the Neighborhood Newsroom.

The idea is to train correspondents for our five weekly neighborhood publications, called Closeups. From there, the writers can contribute to sports, business and entertainment sections of the daily paper, as well. Eventually, they are considered for staff jobs. And some find work at other newspapers. A former apprentice and freelancer is now a staff writer at The Gazette in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

We look for people who live and work in neighborhoods that are underrepresented in our newsroom and in our newspaper's usual circulation. We find candidates through church groups, civic groups, and area colleges. About two dozen people applied for the initial program. They had to complete a lengthy application, which included an essay and two short-answer questions. Ten people were invited to participate and nine accepted, including businesswomen, teachers, students and even a former pipefitter [see Margaret Bailey's article on page 76]. All of the participants were women, and six were black. (The racial breakdown of the community potentially served by the newspaper is just about evenly divided, black and white, while the newsroom, with 68 employees, has only five minorities on staff.)

For two hours a night, four nights a week, they were given a mixture of hands-on activities and lectures led by editors from the Morning News. Four of the graduates of the Neighborhood Newsroom now are regular contributors to Morning News publications, meaning they write at least one story a week. Three are occasional contributors, and two have left the area.

Participants are exposed to many facets of journalism. In the first session, Civic Editor Tuck Thompson led a lively session on libel laws and other legal issues that engaged participants but, more important, made them realize the ramifications of their reporting and stories. Classes were augmented by visits from Morning News reporters. Their real-life stories added emphasis to the classroom lectures and activities.

Participants had to put into practice what they learned. The program opened with them interviewing local elected officials and writing about their goals for the coming year. Other sto-

ries included a preview of a Savannah Sand Gnats baseball game, a feature on a neighborhood trend, and a news article on a Port Wentworth City Council meeting. Each story forced participants out of their comfort zones. As the sessions progressed, the writers became more confident and self-assured. And that showed in their writing. They also were subjected to stringent editing and frank evaluation that was tempered with helpful suggestions for improvement. There was plenty of support, too. Each participant was paired with a Morning News editor who served as a mentor.

No doubt graduation from the program won't earn participants a spot in the Savannah Morning News newsroom. There are still many writing hurdles to overcome, including wordiness, clarity and focus. The most common one is the challenge of finding the story. Often it is buried under layers of preparation and set-up. Once cleared away, the stories can then unfold smoothly. However, these problems can be found among even the more experienced writers.

Besides the mechanics of writing, the biggest obstacle Neighborhood Newsroom graduates confront is retaining dedication to the craft. Writing is difficult, and writing well can be painful, particularly when editors offer biting criticism. Learning to take suggestions and use them to improve stories isn't easy.

Some graduates slip away, never to be seen again. Others offer a few stories, then gradually fade away. A few continue to submit stories and build relationships with editors and other reporters. They offer story ideas, rewrite articles, and accept assignments. These are the ones we hope will mature into Morning News staffers.

The second class of Neighborhood Newsroom begins in May. Some improvements are in the works, many of which were suggested by our first graduates. Among the changes we intend to implement are finding ways to incorporate reporters into the mix and providing more hands-on activities and fewer class lectures. We also like to encourage and find men who want to participate.

We'll know we've been successful when we have a Neighborhood Newsroom graduate covering city hall and another editing those stories. ■

Steve Corrigan is editor of Closeups section of the Savannah Morning News.

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Changing a Newsroom's Complexion

In Savannah, a newspaper trains community members to be journalists.

By Margaret Bailey

Steve Corrigan, editor of the Closeups section of the Savannah Morning News, stood beside me, giving slight nods as he made some introductions while showing me the busy newsroom.

"What do you see?" he asked. His question caught me off guard. He paused, but in a moment continued speaking. "All white faces," he said, "and that's what we hope to change with the Neighborhood Newsroom Program."

A quick survey of the newsroom confirmed what his eyes and mine saw. There were no faces that looked like mine. To be sure, racial diversity has made inroads in many public arenas but it still has a way to go in many parts of the private sector, including this part. The absence of faces like mine—and the voices and experiences connected to those faces—is one reason why minorities feel disconnected from this newspaper and other media. It's also why feelings of one-sidedness arise at times when stories about murder or robbery of someone of another race appear in the news. And it's why magazines such as Ebony and Jet remain so popular.

When a face like mine is part of an enterprise, it sends out a signal that chances for fair treatment have increased. Perhaps when a minority event is mentioned in the newspaper that story will carry the same significance as others. Maybe when newsroom staffs are composed of many different faces, expressions used in conversations such as "he was giving me funny looks"—which in some instances has led to murder—would be better explained to readers.

I thought about this as I watched a courtroom scene on television. It was a case involving two young boys and a woman who have different racial identities. The boys wanted to play in the area and asked the woman when she intended to move her vehicle. The woman didn't answer the boys, and when she wasn't looking, she thought the boys damaged her car. The judge asked her why she didn't answer the boys. "I don't play with children," she replied. The judge ruled in her favor but commented that the boys deserved an answer. It seemed that the judge misunderstood what the woman meant by her response. To my ear, she was saying that the boys were so rude and disrespectful in the way they asked this woman that she regarded them as little miscreants. To answer them would be to involve herself in a war of words that could easily escalate into something a lot more serious.

To hear Steve say the paper wanted

to diversify the newsroom caused my eyebrows to arch and my mouth to draw down in an inaudible "Huh!" He had my attention more so now than the day I was introduced to him by Polly Stramm Powers, a freelance writer. She'd read a story I'd written about an early morning exercise class we both attended. I wrote the story after reading an article written by a visiting journalist who was on assignment to write about the effects of exercise on women over the age of 50. Our instructor wasn't pleased with that story and let us read it. I thought, "I could do better than that." Polly thought the newspaper would be interested in my work and arranged a meeting for Steve and me.

That day Steve told me what I'd written was good. He encouraged me to continue writing as a way to improve. He explained he was looking for human-interest stories and people who would be more than a one-time wonder to write them. The pay for each story would be enough for an evening at one of Savannah's finer restaurants. Steve's encouraging words stuck in my mind. Such words can be the catalyst that causes an ego to take flight and reach for perfection. Mine had certainly left the runway.

I left that meeting with a better idea of what the paper wanted. I wrote an article about a young woman whose fingernails were three inches long but still operated a cash register and put away stock. That story, along with photographs I'd taken, made the front page of the Closeups section in its entirety, almost as I'd written it.

For 19 1/2 years, I'd worked as a pipefitter, a job I'd been trained to do and had hoped to do for many, many years. But an injury made this impossible, so I was delighted to be able to think that I might be able to become a journalist. The Morning News Neighborhood Newsroom Program—a four-week training session created to prepare novices as well as experienced writers for what work in a newsroom requires—was the paper's vehicle to crack open the door to diversity, and it offered me a chance to step through. The program drew a cross section of mostly minority women including a college professor, a professional writer, college students, a sales clerk, teachers and me, a pipefitter in search of a new career.

Each night we met the chairs were arranged in a different configuration, a touch that added to the excitement and helped to get my creative juices flowing. Notebooks were supplied. Various groups were formed at different times and assignments were given.

One evening our nine chairs were arranged in a horseshoe formation. Ewan Watt, a Scottish journalist who was the featured speaker for the evening, stood before us and served up tempting morsels of information about the ways of journalism. Speaking in his entrenched accent, he told about his work at a newspaper in Glasgow. All ears tuned in as he spoke of "details, details" that make a story come alive. At another session, Doug Miller, assistant editor on the civic team, took the group on a walking trip around one of Savannah's beautiful downtown squares. Along the way, he demonstrated how story ideas can emerge from a simple walk, when one constantly asks questions and takes notice of the surroundings. Steve took us to cover a town hall meeting which helped us to use the lessons we'd learned in a previous class about how to sort through information gathered and decide what is the story to be written. What I discovered that day was that the story I thought I'd come to cover might take a back seat to stories I could find being told in the corners of the room, in the back row of the meeting room, or in the parking lot.

Through the four weeks of classes, informative instructors, and sometimes a seasoned reporter, came well prepared to teach us. Topics covered included libel laws and other legal issues, writing ledes and endings, and interviewing skills. David Donald, precision editor, spoke on prewriting techniques. He said the best journalism today answers lots of questions for readers. But the challenge is how a reporter asks the kind of questions that elicit these answers. He also said the writing doesn't start when you come back to the newsroom. It starts when you arrive on an assignment and begin taking notes. This is something I still struggle with.

One topic that held my attention was a presentation about "thinking outside the box." Thoughts other than the norm have always been with me, but in some circles my way of expressing things was thought of as a bit odd. As a consequence, often I repressed my thoughts. Learning this kind of thinking could be a useful tool in journalism seemed like a bonus for me.

Reception for Neighborhood Newsroom graduates attended by the graduates and staff members. ***Photo by Bob Morris, Savannah Morning News.***

I am not one to blame race for all the ills of the African-American community. There is good and bad on all sides. But try as I might to avoid it, situations frequently develop because of racial differences and can be brought about through their verbal or written exchanges or through action. Through my work in journalism, I hope I can help to rid people of the need to put another person down because of race.

Neighborhood Newsroom graduate Iris Formey Dawson evaluates the program. *Photo by Bob Morris, Savannah Morning News.*

As an African American, I'm keenly aware of the lack of stories that speak to me and to my experiences. As I read the paper, I flip past many articles after reading the headlines or seeing photos in which I am not represented. With the newsroom adding faces like mine, maybe the next recruit won't be caught off guard when the same question is asked of her, "What do you see?" and the answer pertains to race. And possibly readers will not instinctively feel that someone who wrote a story doesn't understand the colloquialisms or customs of the African-American community.

In the months since the Neighborhood Newsroom Program ended, several stories that my classmates and I have reported and written have been published in the newspaper. My stories aren't just about African Americans, but I do make a concerted effort to write stories that interest them. I am currently working as a freelance reporter. Most of my stories have appeared in Closeups, a section of the paper inserted into the Wednesday edition. When an opening comes up, I hope to become a staff writer or a columnist. One of the stories I wrote was a story Steve pitched to me about the Savannah Rotary Club's meeting and accomplishments. The club's president sent me a note to say thank you. It made me feel I'd done a service for the common good and the public appreciated it.

My goal is to write a story worthy of the front page. I want that story to be fair, honest and without bias. Then I'll feel I have arrived. The only thing standing in my way is me. ■

Margaret Bailey worked for nearly 20 years as a pipefitter. She now writes stories for the Savannah Morning News as a freelancer and hopes to have a full-time staff position soon.

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The Press Missed a Critical Post-Election Day Story in Florida

Charges of voting problems in black communities went largely uninvestigated.

By DeWayne Wickham

When George W. Bush met with the Congressional Black Caucus during his second week in the White House, the three members from Florida were no-shows. Representatives Alcee Hastings, Corrine Brown, and Carrie Meek boycotted the gathering to protest the treatment of black voters in the Sunshine State during last year's presidential election.

The media treated lightly their absence and the grilling President Bush got on the subject of the Florida voting irregularities. This handling by the press indicates again that many in the press still fail to comprehend the rage many blacks feel about what happened in Florida or its connection to the results of the 2000 presidential contest.

From the moment the outcome of last year's election was thrown in doubt by Florida's contested vote count, journalists from all corners of this nation and a good bit of the rest of the world took to that story like barnacles to the side of a sunken ship. But few of them paid more than fleeting attention to the howls of protest that came from the state's black voters.

By the time the Supreme Court's Republican-appointed majority handed Bush the Oval Office keys, most media organizations had reduced what happened to Florida's black voters to a minor subplot of the much bigger story, one involving fights about hanging

chads and dimpled ballots.

This media myopia is a haunting reminder of how much distance remains to be bridged if news organizations are to close the gap of understanding that exists between blacks and whites, a chasm the Kerner Commission decried in 1968. "Along with the country as a whole, the press has too long basked in a white world, looking out of it, if at all, with white men's eyes and a white perspective. That is no longer good enough," the commission said in the wake of a string of race riots that swept this country during the 1960's. That message bears repeating today, even though much has changed.

Minority employment in the media has increased, albeit slowly. And there has been discernible improvement in the attention that news organizations give to stories rooted in black America. But as the general coverage of what happened in Florida reveals, many broadcast and print organizations still have blind spots when it comes to reporting such stories. Of course, there are exceptions. The Miami Herald and the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel did a good job. But for the most part, well reported stories about the problems black voters encountered were missing in the coverage of Florida's hotly contested election.

Whether what happened to black voters in Florida was a calculated act of disenfranchisement or a calamitous confluence of bad luck, it helped put Bush into the White House and sent Democrat Al Gore, who won the nation's popular vote but was defeated in the Electoral College, into political exile. The nationwide totals turned in Gore's favor because black voters, the Democratic Party's most loyal constituency, turned out in record numbers. Ten and a half million African Americans voted in the general election, a million more than cast ballots in the 1996 presidential contest. Remarkably, more African Americans voted for Al Gore than voted for Bill Clinton four years earlier.

The story of what happened to black voters in Florida is the jarring tale of how George W. Bush found victory in the rejection of thousands of ballots cast by African Americans. Sadly, the media's failure to recognize the inextricable link between these two events gives new urgency to the chilling conclusion the Kerner Commission reached 33 years ago.

Florida was one of five states in which the black share of the total vote (15 percent) was larger than the black portion (13.2 percent) of the state's voting age population. Nowhere was the black electorate more energized than in Florida, and nowhere was its turnout more critical to Gore's chances of winning the White House. That state's massive black vote would have been enough to put Florida in Gore's win column if all the ballots cast by African Americans had been counted. That they were not is the source of great concern for black leaders and the reason for the lingering outrage among African Americans.

One-third of all the votes rejected by election officials in south Florida were cast in black neighborhoods, the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel reported in December. News organizations outside of the state paid virtually no attention to this finding. Of these disqualified votes, the Sun-Sentinel said, 22,807 would likely have gone to Gore and 4,474 probably to Bush. The difference—18,333 votes—would have been more than enough for Gore to overcome Bush's 537-vote victory margin in Florida and give the Democratic presidential candidate the winning margin in the Electoral College.

Republicans were quick to argue that many of the rejected votes were cast aside for technical reasons. On some ballots voters punched the chad next to a candidate's name and then wrote in a name somewhere else on the ballot. Some people used ink instead of a pencil to mark their ballots, something the counting machine couldn't read. Others were rejected when voting machines read erasures as a double vote. Media organizations were quick to report the GOP's contention that "voter error" was responsible for the rejection of thousands of ballots cast by African Americans.

However, when Republicans harangued Democrats for using technical reasons to challenge absentee ballots cast by overseas military personnel (believed to heavily favor Bush), virtually no news organizations pointed out how Republicans wanted "to have their cake and eat it, too" when it came to voter error. With the absentee ballots, some were mailed after the deadline or had no postmark, others didn't have the required witness signature, and some were mailed from locations inside the United States.

There were also troubling accusations that were reported but not vigorously investigated by the press. Polling places in black neighborhoods were said to have opened late, or not at all. Some legally registered African-American voters were not allowed to cast ballots. And state troopers were said to have set up a roadblock near a polling station in a black neighborhood that caused some African Americans to forego voting. These charges, by themselves, contain the guts of an issue that cries out for investigative reporting.

It is a cry that, thus far, has gone unanswered. ■

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Sources: Have Journalists Ceded Control?

For the public to be well served, transparency is crucial.

In January, the Nieman Foundation, the Institute of Politics, and the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, convened an orientation session for new Washington reporters at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The objective of the two-day seminar was to provide a forum in which they could gain knowledge from veteran reporters and Washington experts, who came as guests, and discuss with them approaches to their new beats. In a session called "Ethics in Journalism," Bill Kovach, chairman of the Committee of Concerned Journalists, and Tom Rosenstiel, director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, spoke with these reporters. Their remarks touched on interactions between journalists and sources and how those affect the quality of news that members of the public receive. In March, their new book, "The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect," will be published by Crown Publishers.

Bill Kovach: If we're going to live as we are in a world of supply and demand, then journalists had better find a way to create a demand for good journalism. The way you do that is to help the public understand what principles set you apart from gossipmongers and propaganda…in order that your work sets what you do apart from what Rush Limbaugh and others like him are doing. That's not journalism; it's a form of communication.

So with that notion, let me just share with you an experience I had when I went to Washington as chief of the Washington bureau [of The New York Times] and tell you what I think was the most important lesson I learned in the eight years I was in that job. I'm certain it's true today and maybe even truer now than it was then.

Jody Powell, who was President Jimmy Carter's press secretary, said it best when the President thought that because a southerner now was in charge of The New York Times bureau in Washington that the Carter administration might get a little better treatment from the Washington press. I understood some of it. He had me over to the White House and we talked about the relationship between the bureau and the White House. Jodie was there, and he interrupted President Carter and said, "But Mr. President, you don't understand. There will always be conflict between them and us because we use information to try to lead people where we want them to go, and they use information just to inform. And those are two goals that are in dynamic tension all day, every day."

The journalist's primary responsibility is to provide citizens with the information they need. You are just trying to take information from sources and put it into a form that's useful to a citizen, who can go either way on the subject. And if you're not in control of the situation then you tend to get frustrated, and you tend to overstate things you don't know. Or you're going to be controlled by the information, and you don't want to be in either of those positions. You want to be in control of the information that you're providing to your viewers.

Tom Rosenstiel: We have come to recognize that sources—those who want to manipulate members of the press—are gaining the upper hand in their relationships with journalists today, particularly in Washington. One reason is pretty simple: More news outlets are chasing a static number of sources. It's a supply and demand situation. It's a seller's market for the information, and a growing number of us doing the chasing have more varied standards about what is news and what is not than we should have.

In Washington today, a story will get leaked to you. Within two or three days, if that story isn't in the paper or on the air the way the source wanted it, then you'll get a call berating you, or the source will go down the street and leak it to somebody who will air it on their terms. This doesn't happen every once in a while. It happens on a regular basis. People over at The New York Times were telling me about how a source called back and said, "What the hell are you doing? I gave you that story four days ago."

Another key issue in terms of dealing with sources is how anonymity is used. Who is being served when you go off the record and when you go on the record? Is that something that you as a journalist are offering to the source as a way of coaxing more information out of them, or is that something that they're using to set the terms of the interaction with you? Be mindful of who determines the ground rules and also whether you have to agree. Is there another way to get the information? What would happen if you said to the person, "No, I need it on the record"? Would they really walk away or would they agree? Today in Washington you'll find situations where you'll agree to go on background and then you read the same quote by the same person on the record in another publication that same day. You realize that that other reporter just didn't have to agree, and this also happens on an everyday basis in Washington.

What are you granting a source the anonymity for? That is another key question. Walter Mears, a long-time

Associated Press reporter, said he can't believe how often anonymity is being given to political campaign surrogates to anonymously attack an opponent. He said it would have been unthinkable when he was coming up that a journalist would allow a press secretary or spin doctor or campaign consultant to go on background and say, "Well this just proves that Governor Bush doesn't really understand foreign policy," or, "This just proves that Al Gore, once again, can't tell the truth."

There are some journalists in Washington who actually have rules. Deborah Howell at Newhouse newspapers says one of the rules in her bureau is that you are not allowed to use an anonymous source to offer an opinion about another person. Somebody wants to provide you with factual information that you can independently verify, that's one thing; using an anonymous source to attack somebody, to offer spin on somebody, what's the justification? She also has another rule that is interesting. The first quote in the story cannot be an anonymous quote. These things are not designed to say, you know, it's morally wrong to do some of these things. In some cases, it's just a way of forcing you as a journalist to think harder: "Am I being lazy here? Is there a better way to do this?" This is not an anti-anonymous source diatribe. This is more an argument for thinking through when you do it.

'We have come to recognize that sources—those who want to manipulate members of the press—are gaining the upper hand in their relationships with journalists today, particularly in Washington.'

Another concept that Bill and I have thought through and learned in our work is what we call "the rule of transparency." When applied to using sources, it would mean that if you are granting somebody anonymity, you have to write in the story why. And it's an interesting little device because you discover that if it looks ridiculous—if your reasoning looks like you just couldn't think of anybody else to call—then don't do it. And if you grant somebody anonymity because it looks like the information then will somehow have the aura of more credibility because it's covert, then what are you doing? You are withholding information from your audience in order to aggrandize information that really isn't special. What's going on here? What are you working for—to impress your editor or to serve your reader? So our point here is, think through what you are doing in these little transactions and change the decisions you make.

At The New York Times, every time an anonymous source is used, editors ask, "How direct is the knowledge of this person, and does this person have an axe to grind that would bias the opinion of the reader?" Using that rule, a reporter would almost never use a press secretary on background to attack an opponent. Well, of course he has an axe to grind. And he has no direct knowledge. He's just offering an opinion. There's really no basis to offer him any anonymity. So if the rule of transparency kicks in, and you say, "Well, we're going to say here in this story, 'This is somebody who works for the President and he insisted that he be granted anonymity or he wouldn't give us the information any other way,'" then chances are you will not publish it in this way.

Another issue is what people mean by such terms as "off the record" or "on background." A source might say, "Hey, listen, this is off the record," and actually mean, "You can quote me but don't use my name." This is the traditional definition of on background. The lesson here is not that we need to codify these terms, but that when you are talking with a source about the conditions of the interview, don't assume that what you mean by on background is what the source means. Make the meaning clear. If the source says, "This is off the record," then you say, "What do you mean by that?" Or, "Does that mean I can use it but not quote you?" Be absolutely clear about what the meaning of your conversation is. Set the terms in the clearest possible way. You will avoid a lot of problems, and it may also get you more information than you think they have.

I think our goal should be to get as much on the record as we can. Then you're helping your audience the most. So, if you have the time and you're not absolutely on deadline, I find it a very useful technique to say, "Let's talk and at the end of the interview, I will tell you the quotes I want to use and you tell me if I can use them." I'd say 98 percent of the time, people agree to go on the record when they hear the quote that you want to use. You are giving them some control. They're not going to sit there fearing, "What is he going to use?" for the next 24 hours, thinking, "Did I make a terrible mistake last night?"

These terms and ground rules were established in an era in which there was more trust between source and reporter. That trust has been broken down, and it's become more consciously a manipulative relationship, so sources are protecting themselves against you. Once they know that you're not trying to screw them, often they're perfectly happy to go on the record.

Paul de la Garza: I think it's a confusing issue because of some of the guidelines that you get at the home office. For example, I just left the Chicago Tribune where I worked as a metro reporter and as a foreign correspondent. As a metro reporter, the guidelines were that you can't have anonymous sources. Yet as a foreign correspondent and as a national reporter you could use anonymous sources. Now I work at the St. Petersburg Times, and we can't use anonymous sources. Yet we use the New York Times and Washington Post news service stories, and they publish anonymous sources. This is ironic because

the editors at our paper have no control over the standards that are being applied in those stories. We have had discussions about this at the St. Pete Times. My title is diplomatic writer, and I've only been there a couple of months, and my experience in these couple of months has been that people in Washington automatically assume— well, maybe not automatically, but more often than not—that they want to go off the record. I feel kind of silly saying, "Well, we have a rule that we can't use unnamed sources," because everybody assumes that you can. I've talked with my editors about this, and they just won't budge.

Rosenstiel: I think that gives you terrific leverage in dealing with your sources. You can say, "We don't do that. You want to be in my paper? You've got to be on the record."… The problem isn't that there's something morally wrong with people being off the record. The problem is that that relationship has been converted from a tool that we offered to sources who were reluctant to provide us with information into a device that sources use to manipulate us. And we have to try to regain, to the extent possible, control over anonymity…. The more information that a reporter brings to the conversation, the harder it is for sources to stay out of the conversation because they don't want their points of view overlooked…. That's another way of saying that once you know that you're doing a story, you have some power, whether you called the source or the source called you. We have more power in these transactions than we realize. The story is going to be done, these sources can be in that conversation or they can be left out of the conversation. And if they're going to be in it, they can help to shape it.

Kovach: The whole notion of watchdog investigative journalism has not been carefully thought through. It's just been done. We have determined that the very first periodical published in England in the 17th century described its purpose was to let the people know what was going on in the kingdom and that, at some point to do that, they might have to go undercover. That's how they convinced the people that they should pay money to get the information. Before that, information came from the government and from some troubadour who came through town and sang songs. But to get you to pay for news, they were going to let you in on what the government was actually doing. So I mean the press started, really, as a watchdog industry.

'…using an anonymous source to attack somebody, to offer spin on somebody, what's the justification?'

Investigative reporting breaks down, we believe, into three kinds of investigative reporting that have different requirements, different techniques, and different pressures. The most obvious one, which is the one that you see most often in Washington, is not really investigative reporting so much as it's reporting on investigations. It's the journalist who talks to a government official who's doing an investigation of the mob or a contract with the defense department. They're coming together because it's in the interest of the investigator to get the information out in a certain form in order to lay the groundwork for a successful conclusion to the investigation. So that is not really journalistic investigation; it's an institutional investigation that the journalist is reporting on. It's a form that requires the journalist to make a judgment about whether or not she or he wants to be in the game to begin with, because it is an effort to dictate the thinking about the information that's covered. Somebody at a news organization has to make a decision. "We'll let somebody else have this story. We'll deal with it in another way, from outside the investigation." It's a hard position to take, but I would argue that there are cases where you need to take that position.

The other kind of investigative reporting is interpretive investigative reporting, and I would put the Pentagon Papers in that category. The Pentagon Papers were not an investigation that journalists did, but journalists gained the complete record of an investigation done by the government and reported it not as an investigation but as an analysis and a disclosure of the decision-making process of the government. So it required different skills and different techniques. It was analytical and interpretive reporting rather than investigation, an investigation only in the sense that it pried out information that was already put together. Without the journalists' analysis, readers wouldn't have been able to understand it. And nobody would have published it that way, just as raw documents. You might now with the Internet, but you wouldn't have then.

And finally there is what I consider true investigative reporting, which places the most difficult demands on the reporter. That is the initial Watergate reporting that Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein did; before there was an investigation ongoing by the Justice Department or anybody else, they were out knocking on doors, talking to people who knew what was going on and enticing them to talk about that.

Better than that for my purposes was a series that Loretta Tofani did on rape in the Prince George's County jail system. Now, you talk about a subject that would be the hardest subject on the face of the earth for a reporter to get people on the record. We're talking about the judges who let prisoners who were in there for a traffic violation get raped by killers in this prison, the guards who were complicit in it, who saw it happen and did nothing about it, and the rapists themselves, who admitted to Loretta what they'd done, and did so by name. They were rapists. And Loretta got every element of that story in The Washington Post on the record with names attached to every bit of it. And she did it against the advice of her editors, who said, "It's not a story,

nobody's going to talk to you, don't do it, you don't have time. We've got to do this story instead." Loretta did her eight hours a day, and at the end of the day then she drove out and knocked on the door and talked to a person and talked to another person and talked to another person. She spent her evenings and her nights knocking on doors. And Loretta produced what I consider to be one of the greatest pieces of truly investigative reporting that I've ever seen.

So there are those three levels to reporting, each of which has an ethical consequence. In every case, the ethical question can be dealt with if you are committed to your purpose in informing the reader, if your purpose is to let them known who you are, what you're doing, how you're doing it, and why it's important for them to have this information. Standing on that ground makes your decision-making process a lot easier. It helps you decide whether you want to get into exposing information that others do not want exposed or whether it's information that others want you to get out for them on their terms in an investigation.

Rosenstiel: Let me talk for a moment about thematic frames in your story. Increasingly in Washington coverage you will see that the thematic frame of a lot of the stories is, "What's the motive behind the actions you're describing? Why is this politician doing this? What's their strategy? What are the tactics? And why?" Scholars have called this the "interiorization of the news"—we're no longer focused on what happened but on the psychological reasons or the tactical reasons for what happened. There are a lot of reasons, I think, that we moved in this direction. One is that there was an assumption that news is a commodity in oversupply. People already know the news, so you have to provide context and interpretation and analysis to the news. Another is growing skepticism about people in public life and politicians.

But there are certain consequences that I think you should be mindful of as you get into this stream and get pulled along by it. There are questions you should ask yourself: Are your audiences getting all the information that they need, information that different stakeholders in your audience need, from your story? If you are talking about the strategy and the tactics and the politics of a piece of legislation, does your story have something in it—does it have an adequate explanation of what that legislation actually is, what it would do, what the effect would be? If it's a battle over a treaty with China, have you done more than just the boilerplate that identifies that it's a treaty with China? Could a reader who hasn't read all the other stories about this—or any other stories about it—know what the treaty would actually do? Do you know what the treaty would actually do?

'…our goal should be to get as much on the record as we can. Then you're helping your audience the most.'

It's very easy in the current climate in Washington to write a really sophisticated political analysis and not know what the treaty or the bill or the anything else would be. But you're really cheating your readers or your audience, and I think that there's a lot of research to suggest that it's a turnoff to people, that if you're not a political junkie, you don't care about the tactics and the strategy. You care about finding out what this treaty is actually about.

The second point, as you move into stream of motive reporting, is what's balance and fairness supposed to mean? Think about the difference between being fair to your sources and being fair to your audience. Our job, I would submit, is to be fair to your audience. What does balance mean? I would submit it means that the reader or the viewer gets a balanced view in terms of what they need to know to understand something. Balance should not mean that you've got an equal number of quotes from Republicans and the Democrats. That is such a false notion of balance. Not all stories are equal. You know, if 90 percent of scientists think that global warming is a fact, what's the purpose served by giving equal weight to the people who argue that it's not? Is that a balanced understanding for your audience, for your reader, for the citizen? So, with fairness and balance, you should think about, "Who am I being fair and balanced to in this story? Is the story offering a fair and balanced picture that I'm giving the public, or is it offering fairness and balance to my sources so that they won't be mad at me?"

A third idea is to identify the different stakeholders that would be interested in this story. This is a kind of concept that we hear about in civic journalism, but it's one that we think is very, very useful. Who are all the people who have a stake in reading the story or understanding this story, and have I given them the different information? There isn't a public out there. There's no such thing as John Q. Public. The public is, you know, is a pluralist society. So if this is a story about taxes, have you told rich people and poor people and this person and that person how they would be affected? If it's a story about education, there are lots of stakeholders—parents, teachers, administrators, people who don't have kids but are taxpayers. Just think through, "Do I know who those people are? Has the story addressed them?" It may be that the same information answers all of those stakeholders, but it's a useful exercise to go through. ■

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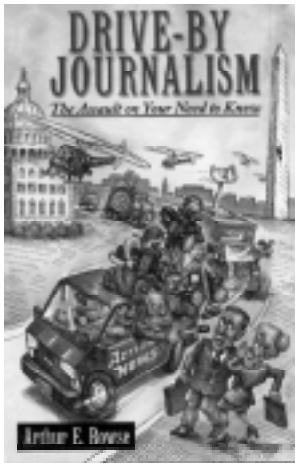
American Journalism Is Failing Democracy

An author and critic look in different directions to find solutions.



Drive-By Journalism: The Assault on Your Need to Know
Arthur E. Rowse
Common Courage Press. 274 Pages. $17.95 pb.

By Robert Jensen

My heart is with Arthur Rowse's critique of contemporary journalism. As a former journeyman newspaper reporter and editor who still writes frequently for popular audiences, I too feel betrayed by an American news media that is increasingly cowed by concentrated economic power and complicit with elites in the slow but unmistakable decay of real democracy.

Rowse offers a clear and compelling account of the symptoms of the news media's failures in "Drive-By Journalism," but in the end I think his diagnosis of the causes of the problems misses the mark, which sends his prescriptions veering off target. In short: Mainstream commercial journalism is in as sorry shape as Rowse contends, but not exactly for the reasons he assumes, and it can't be fixed in the ways he suggests. Rowse describes the disturbing trends in journalism, in regard both to what is and isn't covered in the news, and tells important stories about journalists asleep at the switch. But I think a more radical analysis is needed to guide reform.

From the first pages of the book, Rowse doesn't hold back on his critique: "Rather than using its freedom to foster the informed citizenry necessary for a vital democracy, the press has been merging competing voices into a homogenized newsamuse cartel. It exploits the First Amendment for commercial gain, shaping politics to its own needs, allowing advertisers and publicity agents to color the news and destroying public servants with cheap, shallow 'gotcha' journalism, the bastard child of informed investigative reporting." The book details the "self-censorship, predatory practices, commercial pressures and political bias" that Rowse says have plagued the press for years. Today, "the detrimental forces are stronger and the consequences more serious," he warns.

Rowse's impressive résumé includes stints at The Boston Globe, The Washington Post, and U.S. News & World Report, along with books and numerous freelance articles (including for Nieman Reports). He comes to the task with an obvious love of the craft nurtured through long experience in the business. This is both a strength of the book and a limitation. On the plus side: Rowse seems to have seen firsthand, or reported on, virtually every type of journalistic malfeasance, and he writes in a fierce and lean style infused with a passion for politics and the press. On the negative: He overestimates the influence of the media.

The book is at its best when it goes after the hypocrisy of the news business, such as in the chapter "Exploiting the First Amendment for Profit." Rowse details the shameful behavior of greedy and self-interested media corporations on such issues as telecommunications legislation, and he rightly charges the industry with helping redefine the First Amendment to protect corporate rights. The result, he says, is a process by which "citizen democracy is being replaced by corporate democracy."

Another of my favorite chapters is about public relations. Here he shows how managers' pressure on news organizations to save money makes the manipulation of journalists easier than ever for politicians' publicists and the propaganda machine of corporations. This happens not only through the usual p.r. mechanisms but also through the creation of phony "citizens groups" funded by the business community.

Despite all that I like about the way Rowse tells the story, I think his analysis is too media-centric, both in assessing blame for the country's political situation and in looking for solutions. In Rowse's view, "Controlling what people see and hear is the ultimate power." There's a way in which that is true, of course; if people aren't allowed to know certain things, it's hard for them to know how to act. People with power in the United States long ago learned that controlling the public mind is in many ways a more efficient form of social control than the violence that totalitarian systems use to control people's behavior directly.

But in our system this doesn't mean that ultimate control over the picture of the world presented in mass media rests with news organizations, let alone with journalists. Rowse argues that, "When it comes to running the country, there's no power higher than media power." Yes, media influence is powerful. But real power lies in the institutions that control resources and decision-making, and media corporations are but one segment of that power, not the ultimate power.

This means that Rowse's prescription for improving the health of our political system primarily through media reform misses the point. Media reform is crucial, but it has to be part of a larger social movement that addresses illegitimate structures of authority and unjust concentrations of power throughout the society, in private and public arenas. In other words, a revitalization of progressive politics more

broadly is necessary. But Rowse dismisses such hope for "sweeping changes in American politics" as a "pipe dream" and says we have a better chance of "changing media practices than political views."

I don't know of anyone concerned with the decay of democracy who doesn't understand the importance of mass media, but media reform cannot happen in a political vacuum. For example, one of Rowse's suggestions is "to seek broad agreement with Wall Street to allow media managers to remove news operations from the same profit goals imposed on other divisions and lower short-term profit goals in order to preserve long-term profitability and foster more responsible journalism." But why would Wall Street respond to such a plea? If investors thought it was in their interests to pursue responsible journalism because it was more profitable, they would. But for the most part they don't, and there's nothing in the structure of corporate capitalism to motivate them to change.

Rowse offers the beginnings of a radical analysis but doesn't head in the radical direction necessary. That illustrates another aspect of the problem with mainstream contemporary journalism—the way in which journalists reflexively operate within the narrow ideological framework of American politics. The visible political spectrum in the United States, which has always been far less expansive than in most of the rest of the world, runs from the hard right to the liberal. While all shades of reactionary ideas are routinely aired in the United States, very little of left/progressive/radical thinking is allowed in the mainstream. For an example, just look at how hard politicians of both major parties and journalists worked to keep Ralph Nader out of the 2000 presidential contest.

Rowse positions himself at the critical edge of that visible spectrum, but he is unwilling to step very far outside it. The reason for stressing this about a book that I think generally is on target is not to engage in a who-can-be-more-critical contest but to be clear about the assumptions that underlie our analyses so that we are clear about where we are heading. Like Rowse, I believe that serious media reform is essential. But that project should go forward yoked to a strengthening of labor rights, curbs on corporate power, and a host of other progressive political projects. For example, decision-making authority over the news should be transferred from corporate managers to working journalists, but that kind of change isn't going to happen without a revitalization of the U.S. labor movement. Greater control of the news by those who work in covering the news can't be separated from the larger goal of greater control by all workers over their working conditions.

At the core of all of these struggles has to be a rejection of the key ideological dogmas of the culture—that "free" markets in contemporary capitalism are a vehicle for democracy and that the United States is a benevolent force for peace in the world—accompanied by a willingness to ask tough questions and find honest answers. Journalists have a role in these struggles, maybe even a special role. But to place too much hope in journalism is both unfair to journalists and unwise for us all. ■

Robert Jensen is a professor in the department of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin. He has been a reporter and copy editor at several newspapers, including the St. Petersburg Times. Other writings are available online at http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~rjensen/freelance/freelance.htm

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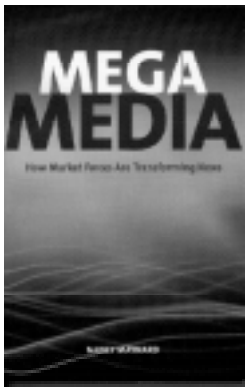
Unraveling the Story of Digital Media

A book confronts contentious issues of the new American media.



Mega Media: How Market Forces Are Transforming News
Nancy Maynard
Trafford Publishing. 176 Pages. $16.95 pb.

By Anil Padmanabhan

Every so often an author explains our culture in such an original way that from that day on we see the world around us in a new, if not clearer, light. This can be especially true when the topic is the business of media, because its influence is a thread woven intricately into our daily routine. Yet some are able to help us to see—as most of us aren't able in our daily interactions with it—that its contours are changing all the time.

"Mega Media," by Nancy Maynard, is a book that comes close to achieving this quality. The book is the outcome of a lengthy investigation and exploration which provides us with unique insights into the manner in which market forces, piggybacked on new technology, are transforming how news is gathered, delivered and consumed. It provides an informed outlook on the evolving business strategies that shape the media and affect the manner in

which we get news now and in what directions media entities are likely to head in the future.

After 30 long years of personal experience in the media—as a reporter, publisher, consultant and author—there is little doubt that Maynard knows something about the news business. The book testifies to this. Clearly, she knows enough and has done sufficient research (her interviews for the book date back to 1997) to make a compelling case about future media trends.

While the hammering of information technology stocks on the Nasdaq might have taken the sheen off the new economy, there is no doubt that the Internet has set in motion structural change within the media. Basic notions such as "readership" and "circulation" have given way to new generation terms such as "eyeballs" and "page-views." "The user"—a term that implies interaction—replaces "the reader," and publishing is now in real time and not necessarily on newsprint. The classifieds, the mainstay of newspapers, are fast being chewed away by digital competition and this, in turn, tosses up more financial challenges than opportunities. And, in no time, with the onset of convergence, there will not be any distinction in terms of how the news is delivered as television, the Internet and print will be squeezed out of the same tube. And this "tube" will be always on and ready to go.

It is anybody's guess as to where these changes will eventually lead. It is precisely for this reason that "Mega Media" is an important and good read. Without getting bogged down in the jargon of the digital age, the book brings the reader along on a ride through the contentious issues facing American media. While it is difficult to imagine an identical situation being replicated in other countries, there is no doubt that broad parallels can be drawn to help those of us who live in foreign lands comprehend and forecast—to some extent—the direction and speed of these changes in our surroundings.

The book includes a chronology of developments in the U.S. media. Because it sweeps across all segments of the media, it becomes a must-read for the uninitiated. For practitioners, Maynard's claims—some of which are provocative—are equally interesting to read. It is, for example, her contention that increasing corporate ownership of newspapers has not led, as some charge it has, to cutbacks of resources devoted to news coverage. Neither she nor those who disagree with her really have enough data at this point to back up either side of this ongoing argument.

Maynard devotes nearly three-quarters of her book to examining the impact of the digital age on the news business. She focuses on the impact of the new media on the existing genre of journalism. Traditionally, news has not necessarily been what newspapers publish or broadcasters air. Now, with digitization, this impact is even more amplified. As a result, the public now pays attention to a few major events or disasters, other matters we want to know about in the moment, plus more topics we stumble upon across the way. In other words, it is the public that controls what it wants to know or doesn't want to know. "That's a simple proposition on its face but one with potentially seismic consequences for news as we know it. It promises to change everything about the way journalists identify, organize, package and produce the news, 24-hour news cycles notwithstanding," she writes.

As might be expected, and as most of us witness in the newsrooms, there is resistance to change. Maynard refers to this when she writes about how journalists react to the same kind of events that they document dispassionately in their reporting. "These gatekeepers of civic literacy have become, instead, gatekeepers of generation-based traditions, unable to adapt their professional principles to changing times." According to her, it is not just frontline journalists but editors, too, who stand to be redefined in the new media environment. In a new management system, spurred on by a digital medium that allows users to "personalize" their home page, Maynard writes that "the editor, once archbishop of information, recedes in importance."

It is inevitable that all of these changes impinge on the traditional ethics of journalism. Running an advertisement on a traditional news page is very different from inserting it in the same page view. Given the increasing presence of e-commerce, the user, unlike the newspaper reader, is only a click away from the product. Is this fair? Maynard has no answers, but provides insight: "As news-media companies develop an array of new marketing and advertising practices, they will need to negotiate new standards and write new rules to compete in the digital information age both profitably and honorably." In a chapter devoted to a discussion of advertising and the changing ground rules, Maynard writes that "Clearly, businesses can target potential customers more discreetly online than in broadcast or in print. Advertisers will pay premiums for reliable niche audiences, so the new environment could support niche revenue flow at the expense of mass appeals."

The book's weakness—especially since it sets out to take such a sweeping view of these changes—is its inability to pinpoint a successful financial model in the world of new media. While most in media management have seized the fact that the Internet can no longer be ignored as an alternative medium, almost no one has come up with a financially viable vehicle. Inevitably, the survivors have been those which have sprung up as an offshoot of a well-established media organization. This provides sufficient financial muscle to absorb the bleed as well as "brand" identity to attract consumers.

In the final analysis, "Mega Media" offers no quick how-to-do-it advice or experience. Yet it is a useful tool because the insights it provides help us better understand the media business as it continues to evolve during the 21st century. ■

Anil Padmanabhan is a 2001 Nieman Fellow. He is the economic affairs editor for Business Standard and is based in New Delhi. Business Standard is an economic daily published out of Six Metros in India and with an established presence on the Web.

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Nieman Notes

Compiled by Lois Fiore

An Affair of the Heart

Parisians
Abbeville Press. 167 Pages. $50.
Photographs by Peter Turnley
Forwards by Adam Gopnik, Robert Doisneau, and Edouard Boubat

By Peter Turnley

Metro station, Cité, 1981.

When I arrived in Paris 26 years ago, at the age of 19, the city I encountered sang to my senses. My heart and mind were immediately stimulated by its light, vibrancy and texture. The French language entered my ears like music, and suddenly communication seemed not merely functional but a celebration of feelings.

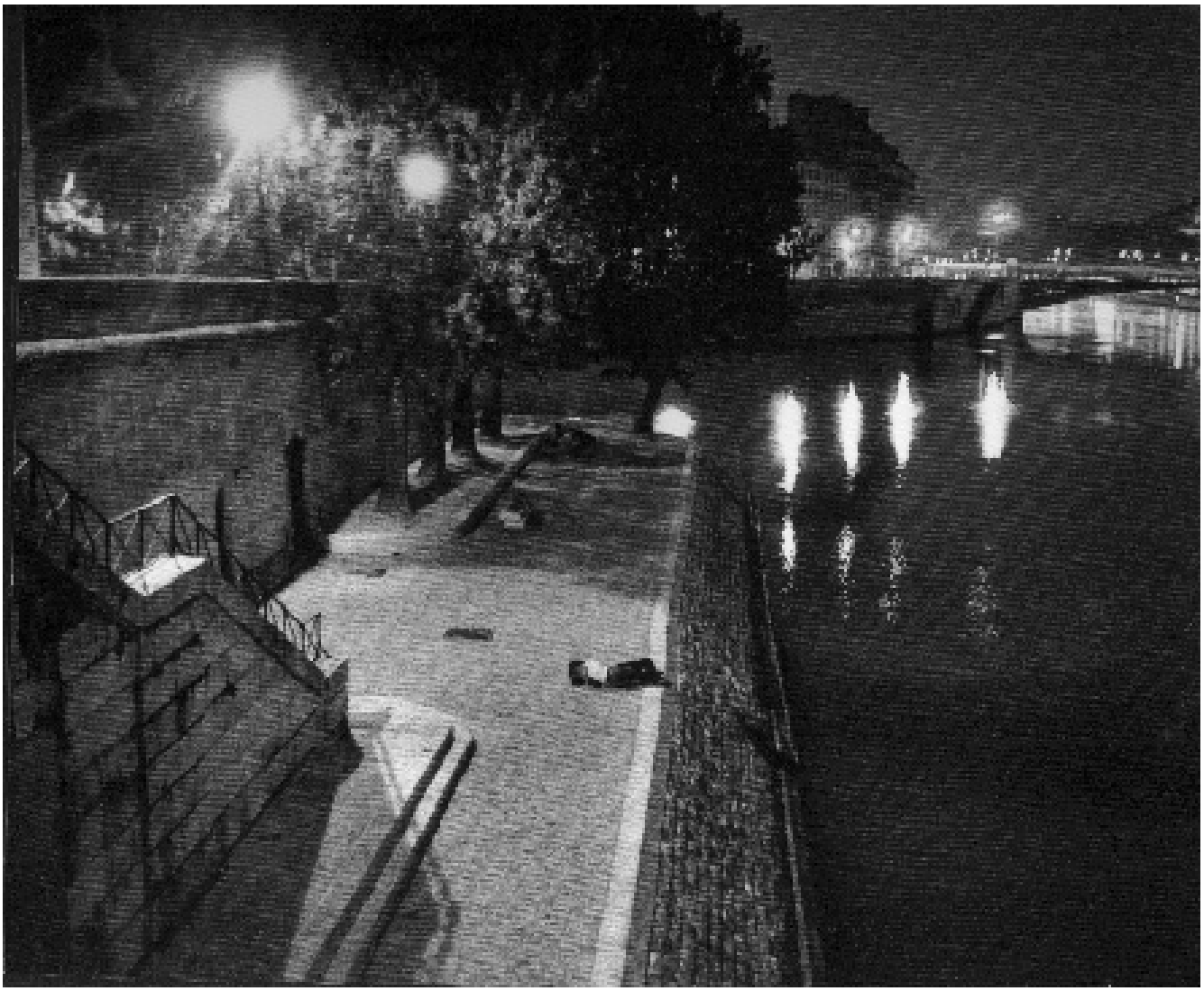
I was immediately captivated by the dynamic energy of my new city. During the mid-1970's and early 1980's philosophical and ideological debate was a fundamental and active part of the Paris scene. French political life encompassed a plurality of strong beliefs, with the electorate split down the middle between the left and the right. There were frequent labor strikes, numerous student demonstrations, and much political agitation. It was the height of the cold war, and given the centrality of Paris to Europe, just being there made me feel in close contact with world affairs. I remember vividly the mass protest marches in Paris when the Russians entered Poland in 1981. All of this was a strong stimulus for my young spirit.

Travel has been my way of life for many years now. As a contract photographer for Newsweek during the last 17 years, I've worked in more than 85 countries, speeding to almost every war, revolution, natural disaster, famine and genocidal conflict. Trying to communicate the human dimension of world events has exposed my sense of inner peace to countless horrors. The one constant in this often wrenching and frenetic existence has been that I always return to Paris, and the city is always the key to my recovery. The elegance and warmth of Parisian "art de vivre" has always offered a soft landing from painful experiences my heart might prefer to reject.

Having lived most of the two decades far from my immediate family, I've found a sense of family spirit at many of my Parisian haunts. In particular, I've been able to count on the warm and human ambience of the Brasserie de l'Isle Saint-Louis. This restaurant, and life in several Paris cafés, is the subject of many of the photographs that follow.

Many of the people who have contributed to the life of this city weren't born there, and so the "Parisians" of my book title encompasses anyone living in Paris. I haven't attempted to present an encyclopedic view of the city, nor have I tried to explain my photographs with words. Rather, I want to share a mosaic of images that express what I feel and cherish about this extraordinary place and its people. Though constantly changing, Paris always moves my heart. ■

Peter Turnley, a 2001 Nieman Fellow, is a contract photographer for Newsweek based in Paris.

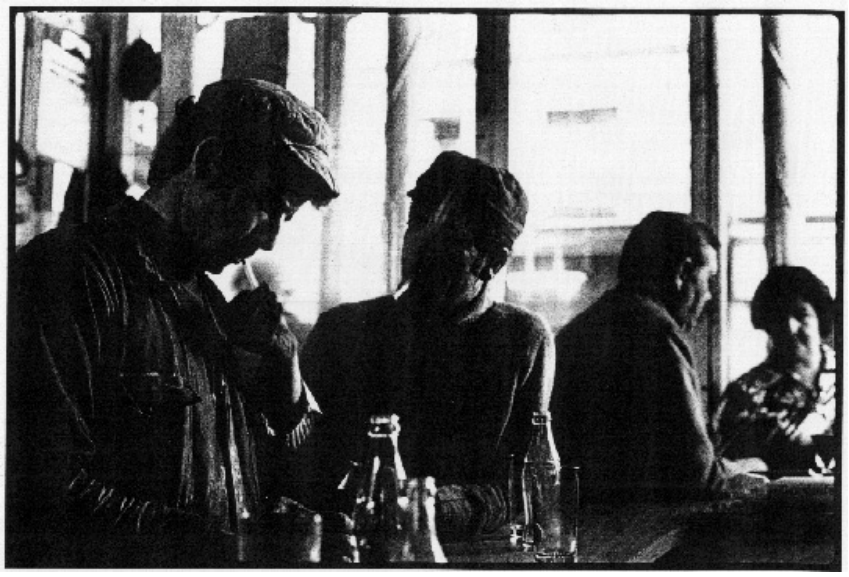


Île Saint-Louis, 1994.

Brasserie de l'Isle Saint-Louis, 1993.

Brasserie de l'Isle Saint-Louis, 1994.

Longchamp, 1980.



Café, Le Marais, 1975.

—1964—

Dan Wakefield's 1992 book, "New York in the 50's," has been adapted and turned into a movie of the same name. "New York in the 50's" documents Wakefield's time as a part of the intellectual, bohemian life in New York City during a time of great creative energy and experimentation in art, literature and lifestyle. In a New York Times review of the movie, film critic Stephen Holden describes a traumatic incident involving Wakefield's interview for a Nieman Fellowship. Holden writes that it was a "personal horror story in which romantic disappointment combined with too much liquor triggered a halfhearted suicide attempt the night before he was to be interviewed for a Nieman Fellowship in journalism. Patched up by a friend, the bandages on his wrists concealed, Mr. Wakefield staggered to the interview and to his own amazement triumphed." There have to be a great many unusual and even painful stories involving Nieman interviews, but this one reaches a particularly intense height.

Wakefield is the author of, among others, "Starting Over," "Selling Out," and "Returning: A Spiritual Journey."

—1976—

Ron Javers brings us up to date on his work: "At Newsweek International I have editorial responsibility for all of the editions of Newsweek that appear outside the United States. I was brought in to help expand this operation, and we have been plugging along, launching an Arabic edition last year. Other launches, in both Europe and Asia, are contemplated. We now have magazines in Australia, Japan, Korea as well as in 20 countries in Latin America (based in Miami). Our Russian-language magazine, Itogi, (Summing Up), launched in 1996, is produced in partnership with Moscow's Media Most, and it has been making the headlines lately. It has dared to be critical of the Putin government and, as a result, our partner publisher, Vladimir Gussinsky, has been in and out of jail as Putin pursues a rather single-minded crackdown on wayward media. As of this writing, Itogi remains Russia's most independent and respected news weekly, but its continued existence and mission are under heavy threat.

"With all of these magazines to look after, I spend about 35 percent of my time traveling. Fortunately, **Eileen** [Javer's wife] has been able to join me abroad on a number of trips, and we have visited together Japan, China and Russia and are planning a trip to Australia this year—if she can get away. Eileen is busy these days at her own job as vice president at Right Management, the world's largest human resources consulting firm. As the U.S. economy softens, all sorts of big companies are planning "restructurings." And that is Eileen's specialty. For our travel, it also helps that we are now empty nesters. Eamon, 28, lives in Washington, D.C., where he is editor in chief of Washington Business Forward.... Quinn, 23, graduated last year from the University of Pennsylvania and is hoping to find himself—in all senses of the word—in China, whose history and culture he studied at Penn...."

—1977—

Al Larkin, Jr. has been promoted to senior vice president/human resources, The Boston Globe announced in January. Larkin had been vice president/human resources and assistant to the publisher. Larkin, who has been with the Globe since 1972, had been managing editor/administration in the newsroom prior to being named vice president. As senior vice president, his responsibilities include overseeing a variety of employee services throughout the company.

—1979—

Michael McDowell was honored by the United Kingdom's government in its New Year Honors List with an O.B.E. [Order of the British Empire] decoration, in recognition of his longstanding work to create a balanced understanding in the United States of the conflict in his native Northern Ireland. Michael is an international relations consultant in Washington, D.C. and has been involved in conflict resolution work since both his Nieman Fellowship and his time as a senior fellow of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. His new e-mail address is MHCMcDowell@aol.com.

Two Niemans Awarded Alicia Patterson Fellowship

Phil Hilts, a 1985 Nieman Fellow, and **Marjorie Valbrun**, a 1997 fellow, are two of the nine journalists selected to receive an Alicia Patterson Foundation grant for the year 2001. Hilts, a contract writer for The New York Times, will focus on "Food and Drug Regulation in America." Valbrun, a reporter for The Wall Street Journal based in Washington, D.C., will focus on "Haitian Immigrants' Emerging American Identity and Political Activism."

The Patterson Fellowship is American journalism's oldest writing fellowship. Recipients of a grant spend their fellowship year traveling, researching and writing articles based on their grant project. The grant includes a stipend of $35,000 per year. The award was established in 1965 to honor the former publisher of Newsday. ■

—1982—

Alex S. Jones and journalist **Susan E. Tifft**, his wife, received the Ann M. Sperber Biography Award for their book, "The Trust: The Private and Powerful Family Behind The New York Times." The award was presented at a ceremony in December at the Fordham University Law School. The annual award is given in recognition of biographical works about journalists or media figures. Jones is director of the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

—1987—

Susan Dentzer and **Charles (Chuck) Alston** announce the birth of

Reunion of Indian Nieman Fellows in New Delhi

During the International Press Institute meeting in New Delhi, 10 Indian Nieman Fellows gathered under a warm sun on the spacious lawn of the Imperial Hotel for a luncheon with Nieman Curator **Bob Giles** and his wife, **Nancy**. For the Indian Niemans, it was the first gathering of this kind.

Dev Prasad Kumar (NF '66), retired editor of The Statesman and a member of Giles's class, and his wife, **Bindi**, contacted the other Indian Niemans and helped arrange the reunion.

Senior among the group was **Sharada Prasad**, the first Nieman Fellow from India, from the class of 1956. He later served for 18 years as Indira Gandhi's press spokesman.

Veetikad V. Eswaran (NF '60), formerly of the Hindustan Times and now a freelance journalist, reports that he has taken extended vacations in Cambridge and attended Reunion 2000.

Among the current leaders in Indian journalism in attendance were **Ramindar Singh** (NF '82), editor of The Sunday Times; **Raj Chengappa** (NF '91), senior editor at India Today, and **Rakesh Kalshian,** from last year's class, who is on the staff of Outlook.

Hiranmay Karlekar (NF '67) presented Giles with a copy of a recent book he edited, "Independent India," an examination of the first 50 years of Indian independence from British rule.

Others who joined in the lively discussion about their Nieman years were **Chanchal Sarkar** (NF '61), **K.R. Malkani** (NF '62), and **Sunil Sethi** (NF '89). ■

their daughter, Grace Campbell Alston, on August 31, 2000. Grace joins the couple's two other children, Willie, six, and Sammy, three. Dentzer, who is health correspondent for PBS's "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer," reports that Grace was inducted early into the ranks of journalism, having been called on to travel to Michigan three weeks after her birth as Mom reported a piece on the election campaign and the debate over prescription drug coverage for the elderly. Meanwhile, '87 Nieman classmate Chuck stayed behind to tend the home fires and keep things going at the Democratic Leadership Council, where he continues as executive director.

Nancy Lee has been promoted to vice president for business development for The New York Times. She had been director of business development at the News Services division of the Times. In 1998 Lee became the founding director of the photo archives, a unit within News Services, with responsibility to develop the marketing of Times pictures and create reprint publications. Lee has been with the Times since 1980, and was picture editor from 1991 until 1998.

Marites Vitug's book, "Under the Crescent Moon: Rebellion in Mindanao," has been published in Manila, the Philippines, by the Ateneo Center for Social Policy & Public Affairs. Vitug, a Newsweek stringer, and co-author Glenda M. Gloria's book is about the last 30 years of Muslim rebellion in the southern Philippines. In a review in the Hong Kong journal, "The Correspondent," Philip Bowring writes, "[The book] traces the evolution of the rebellion, provides excellent portraits of the men who have shaped affairs, analyses the political maneuvering, national and international, which have kept war and peace active for so long.... This book is short on optimism, but is an invaluable guide to how western Mindanao/Sulu got where it is today."

—1990—

Brett Alexander has been promoted to executive producer at CBS News Productions. Alexander has been with News Productions since 1996, first as senior producer and then as supervising senior producer. For the past four years, he has been involved in overseeing the production of most of the documentary hours that have been produced for A&E, Discovery, TLC and The History Channel. He is based in New York City.

Ann Marie Lipinski was named editor and senior vice president of the Chicago Tribune in February. Lipinski

Three Fellows From the Class of 2001 Receive Honor

Four international journalists, including three Nieman Fellows from the class of 2001, received special recognition at the 10th Annual International Press Freedom Awards organized by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Held at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City on November 21, the journalists received a citation for their courageous work while operating under great risk. They are: Ray Choto, a Zimbabwean journalist and Knight Fellow at Stanford University; **Sunday Dare**, general/online editor, The News, Tempo and P.M. News, Lagos, Nigeria; **Ignacio Gómez**, a reporter for El Espectador, Bogotá, Colombia, and **Senad Pecanin**, editor, Dani, Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The CPJ also announced the winners of the 10th Annual International Press Freedom Awards, given this year to journalists from Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Republic of Congo, Malaysia and Iran. ■

Ray Choto, Ignacio Gómez, Sunday Dare, and Senad Pecanin (from left to right) at the International Press Freedom Awards dinner in New York City in November.

Deputy Curator Named

Seth Effron, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, was named Deputy Curator of the Nieman Foundation in December 2000. In this new position at the foundation, Effron will have wide responsibilities in working with the Nieman Fellows and in helping to expand the journalistic work of the foundation.

In 1993, Effron launched an electronic publishing venture to cover North Carolina state government and politics called "the insider." The service was the first to offer the status and text of legislation online, as well as the first to provide online live broadcasts of state house and senate sessions and of key committees meeting in the state capital at Raleigh.

In 1996, Effron became the executive editor of Nando Media, the pioneering online news venture of the McClatchy Company, owner of the News & Observer of Raleigh, North Carolina. The news site was recognized by Editor & Publisher's Eppy Awards in 1998 for having the "Best Sports Section in a Newspaper Online Service." It also was one of three finalists for "Best News Section in a Newspaper Online Service."

Before working online, Effron was the Raleigh correspondent for the Greensboro (N.C.) News & Record for eight years. Before that, he worked at the Wichita (Kan.) Eagle and the Tallahassee (Fla.) Democrat. He began his newspaper career at The Fayetteville (N.C.) Times. For the past year, he worked for Capital Strategies, a public relations and public affairs firm in Raleigh.

In announcing Effron's appointment, Curator **Bob Giles** said, "Seth is a solid journalist with a demonstrated ability to bring good ideas to life. His innovative skills and can-do enthusiasm will help us build on the wonderful legacy of the Nieman program."

Effron is married to **Nancy Thomas,** a CPA. They have two daughters, Rebecca, 17 and Eve, 11. ■

had been the paper's executive editor and vice president since August. Lipinski has also held the positions of associate managing editor for metropolitan news and deputy managing editor. She has been a journalist in Chicago for two decades and was one of three people in a team that won a Pulitzer Prize for the series, "City Council: The Spoils of Power."

—1992—

Elizabeth Leland, a reporter with The Charlotte Observer, received first place for News Feature Writing in the 2000 North Carolina Press Association competition. In the feature "An American Tragedy," Leland told the story of Gene Cheek, who was taken from his mother in 1963 because of her love for a black man. The awards ceremony, which took place in Chapel Hill, was held in December. The competition is open to the 195 North Carolina papers that are members of the association.

Mark Seibel was named managing editor/news for The Miami Herald in February. In an unusual management structure, The Herald will have two managing editors. Along with Seibel will be Elissa Vanaver, who will be managing editor/features and operations. Both Seibel and Vanaver were assistant managing editors before this new appointment. Executive Editor Martin Baron said, "It just seemed to me, given the needs of the paper, that this was the structure that made the most sense." Seibel will oversee all news operations at the paper.

Seibel has been with the Herald since 1984, when he joined the paper as foreign editor. He was made assistant managing editor for Page One in 1997 and became assistant managing editor/metro in 1998. He played a central role in the paper's coverage of Iran-contra, which won a Pulitzer in 1987.

—1994—

Sam Fulwood, III has been named co-anchor of a new PBS multicultural news program, "The Calling." Produced by SideStep Productions, a Florida-based company, "The Calling" is described as the first regularly scheduled news program based on a multicultural perspective. Fulwood's co-anchor is Cindy Hsu, from WCBS-TV in New York. Fulwood, who left the Los Angeles Times after 10 1/2 years as a Washington-based national correspondent, is now metro columnist for The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer. He will continue in that position as he takes on his new assignment. Fulwood is also the author of "Waking From the Dream: My Life in the Black Middle Class."

—1996—

Regina Zappa is now working on her own. She writes, "I created my own company and have contracts to write articles and edit one magazine on the Internet. I'm also producing and writing for the site of the most famous cartoonist in Brasil. The two of us are doing all the sections and writings and videos, etc.

"It's fun now, but it was difficult making the transition. But I think that all the experience I gathered after more than 20 years working in newspapers gave me the ground I needed for taking this step. After working for six months with a company in the Internet, where I edited a cultural magazine and learned the basis for working in this new framework, I decided to take "The Leap" (as classmate **Tom Ashbrook** would say) and create my own company for writing and editing. I went sleepless for a couple of weeks and then decided to relax and think ahead. Many meetings and conversations with potential clients later, I realized that independent work can be secure, creative, interesting, rewarding and fun. I had to learn and get involved with a lot of numbers and documents while the company was getting structured and at the same time I had to do the work itself! Now I have a lot of work to do but it's nice to be in control of my own life and time. I'm happy. I guess I like challenging adventures and never a tedious moment."

Zappa's new e-mail address is zappa@visualnet.com.br. ■

End Note

A Spirited Force of Creative Change

Diana Thomson's innovations are embedded in the Nieman Foundation.

By Lois Fiore

Diana Butler Thomson died on November 29, 2000, at Cambridge Hospital in Cambridge, Massachusetts, of heart failure. She was 65. With her death, the Nieman Foundation lost a unique presence and one of the innovators of the modern Nieman program.

Diana and her husband, James C. Thomson, Jr., came to the Nieman program in 1972, when Jim was named Curator by then Harvard President Derek C. Bok. Despite the good work of the previous Curator, Dwight Sargent, to make the foundation financially sound, the Thomsons were encouraged to reshape the program to help Nieman Fellows and their families better cope with the dramatic changes that come, often unexpectedly, with a Nieman year. They also came to the program when the country was still reeling from the women's movement and ongoing struggles about civil rights. Many organizations were straining to rework the way women and minorities fit into the workplace. Inevitably, the Nieman program would have to reflect and respond to these changes.

Diana and Jim approached change with fearlessness and enthusiasm. Diana, in particular, relished the chance to bring a fresh eye to the role women and minorities played in the life of the program. Traditionally, spouses (usually wives) were not included in day-to-day Nieman life. Once each semester, they were invited to a "wives' dinner" at the Harvard Faculty Club. And while Harvard allowed spouses of faculty members (Nieman spouses fell into this category) to audit classes, they rarely felt comfortable enough to face a room full of intimidating Harvard students. Most spouses had to leave their homes, jobs, larger family circle and friends for a small, stripped-down, student-like apartment in Harvard Square. And there they often remained while their husbands were taken on an incredible intellectual and (largely) fraternal journey.

Diana changed all that. With Jim's input and support, she helped initiate a major policy switch: Nieman spouses were to be given the same privileges as fellows. They would now be welcome at all Nieman seminars; they would be given keys to our headquarters; they would be encouraged to audit Harvard classes. But how would they be able to participate when there were children to care for? Diana and Jim created a babysitting allowance, a stipend for parents to use so that both fellow and spouse could attend seminars, go to classes or the library, or just have a few quiet minutes together to walk along the banks of the Charles River. They made sure that the "two for the price of one" policy would not be in name only.

Diana also encouraged the selection of more women, minority and overseas journalists, and revived the tradition of offering fiction writing seminars for fellows and spouses. As a poet, critic and longtime Harvard teacher of fiction writing, Diana was the ideal person to reestablish the teaching of writing in the Nieman program. While some felt her style was too unconventional and her approach to critiquing writing too psychologically oriented, her keen mind and eye brought many writers to her seminars. The seminars met a strong interest then, and remain a staple of the Nieman program today.

I began working at the Nieman Foundation as assistant to the Curator in 1973, the year after Jim and Diana arrived. And my recollection is that the changes did not necessarily come about smoothly and that not all the fellows or spouses were happy with them. A few of the fellows felt we were intruding into their private world. A few said that at seminars they were uncomfortable "being a journalist in front of their wives" by asking questions of the guests. Some women fellows, who invariably were asked by Harvard faculty which fellow was *her* husband, felt spouses would add to the difficulty that they had being recognized as fellows.

But Jim and Diana would not allow the early tension and discomfort to stop progress. I knew we were going to be all right when, a few years into the new system, I overheard an outgoing fellow tell an incoming fellow not to worry: "Once you get here, you just forget who's the fellow and who's the spouse." It was exhilarating for me to be at the heart of the process, coaxing change, helping to make it work.

Diana was never a journalist herself. But her bold ideas and her and Jim's willingness to reshape the Nieman experience had a deep effect on the fellows and their families. To this day, the benefits that Jim and Diana designed for the fellows have remained in place. Through their efforts, the Nieman program adapted itself to changing times, sometimes struggling and straining to do so. It wasn't easy, and it might not always have been accomplished as gracefully as possible. But the passion and vision Diana instilled into the Nieman program became embedded in its structure and will benefit fellows long into the future. ■

Lois Fiore is assistant editor of Nieman Reports.

"…to promote and elevate the standards of journalism"

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

Vol. 55 No. 1 NIEMAN REPORTS
Spring 2001 THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Nieman Reports (USPS #430-650) is published in March, June, September and December by the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University, One Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138-2098.

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Internet Address (Business): nreports@harvard.edu

Internet Address (Editorial): nreditor@harvard.edu

WWW address: http://www.nieman.harvard.edu

Subcription $20 a year, $35 for two years; add $10 per year for foreign airmail. Single copies $5. Back copies are available from the Nieman office.

Please address all subscription correspondence to One Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138-2098 and change of address information to P.O. Box 4951, Manchester, NH 03108.
ISSN Number 0028-9817

Second-class postage paid at Boston, Massachusetts, and additional entries.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Nieman Reports, P.O. Box 4951, Manchester, NH 03108.

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