# NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VOL. 58 NO. 2 SUMMER 2004

Five Dollars

## The Energy Beat

### Complex and Compelling

Words & Reflections: War and Terror

"… to promote and elevate the standards of journalism"

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

Vol. 58 No. 2 NIEMAN REPORTS
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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.

Subscriptions/Business
Telephone: 617-496-2968
E-Mail Address:
nreports@harvard.edu

Subscription $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

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E-Mail Address:
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Internet Address:
www.nieman.harvard.edu

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Second-class postage paid at Boston,
Massachusetts and additional entries.

POSTMASTER:
Send address changes to
Nieman Reports,
P.O. Box 4951,
Manchester, NH 03108.

Vol. 58 No. 2
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# NIEMAN REPORTS

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**One of the offshore windmills set up in the North Sea, about nine miles west of the small village of Blavandshuk near Esbjerg, Denmark in October 2002. Standing 363 feet tall, the electricity windmills cover eight square miles of water.** ***Photo by Heribert Proepper/The Associated Press.***

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# Dedicating the Knight Center at Lippmann House

## The Nieman Foundation works to broaden its reach.

### By Bob Giles

*This Curator's Corner is excerpted from remarks made at the dedication of the Knight Center at Walter Lippmann House, May 24, 2004.*

The Knight Center is the physical expression of an idea that was more eloquent and visionary than anyone at Harvard could have imagined in the late 1930's. "Promote and elevate the standards of journalism and educate persons deemed specially qualified for journalism." That was the mandate that accompanied an unexpected gift of one million dollars from the estate of Agnes Wahl Nieman.

In deciding that the income from the Nieman gift would be used to fund a sabbatical for experienced journalists, Harvard President James Conant created a fellowship program that was a success from the start and gave virtue to the concept of continuing education for working journalists. For many years, the Nieman idea has been limited to a small group of carefully selected journalists who came to Harvard for a year of study—10 at first, then 12, and now, with the inclusion of international journalists, an annual class of 24.

The larger number of fellows and affiliates, and the addition of new initiatives, such as the Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism and the operations of the Nieman Web site, began to push the limits of Lippmann House and created an imperative for improving the educational environment for the fellows. And the opportunity to add more space inspired us to think expansively about the role of the Nieman Foundation and address a fundamental question: Should the Nieman Foundation be just for the 24 fortunate journalists who are awarded fellowships, or should Mrs. Nieman's mandate be expanded to serve the larger world of journalism through seminars and workshops where journalists can engage with leading practitioners, with Nieman Fellows, and with members of the Harvard faculty who are scholars on many subjects in the news?

The answer, of course, was to explore an expansion. As we set out to find a partner in this venture, we turned to the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, with whom the Nieman Foundation shares a common purpose in our dedication to provide training and education for journalists. The Knight Foundation responded with the lead gift for the construction of the new wing on Lippmann House that is being dedicated this afternoon as the Knight Center.

The Nieman Foundation's association with the Knight Foundation has been particularly meaningful to me, not only because Hodding Carter, president and CEO of the Knight Foundation, and I were Nieman classmates, but also because the first 17 years of my newspaper life were spent in the newsroom of the Akron Beacon Journal where Jack Knight was the editor. JSK was a plainspoken Ohioan who had become a national figure as chairman of Knight Newspapers. He found his voice in The Editor's Notebook, a Sunday column he had started in 1930 at the Beacon Journal that, by the 1960's, was reaching a national audience. The notebook was where JSK spoke his mind with blunt honesty, often to the discomfort of his social peers at the country club and business peers in the boardroom.

In 1967, public sentiment was building against the war in Vietnam. But by then, Jack Knight had been warning against U.S. involvement in Indochina since 1954. Increasingly, he saw the war as a quagmire and wrote with passionate indignation, "Either our government has no well-defined policy or stands guilty of lying to the people … or both." That year a reporting trip to Vietnam merely deepened his skepticism. "The American people," he wrote, "can't understand why the lives of our young men are being sacrificed to keep unscrupulous South Vietnamese politicians in power. … We are paying a tragic price for what may prove to be an unobtainable goal."

Back home, he denounced the rise of anti-intellectualism as a corrosive side effect of the war. "Although the right of dissent is clearly set forth in our Bill of Rights," he wrote, "there are those who would deny this right to others who view U.S. involvement in Vietnam as a grim and unending tragedy."

The following May, when the Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing was awarded to Jack Knight, then 74 years old, the Pulitzer Board noted his clearness of style, moral purpose, sound reasoning, and power to influence public opinion. JSK set a high standard for the stewardship of newspapers as a public trust. He was a smart and successful businessman who never allowed the imperatives of the bottom line to diminish the editorial strength or integrity of his newspapers.

In honoring Jack and Jim Knight today, we can recognize how Agnes Wahl Nieman's eloquent vision has been nurtured over the years by wise curators and accomplished fellows who strengthened the core program and expanded the reach of the Nieman idea to the larger world of journalism. Were Mrs. Nieman with us today, I believe she would heartily approve. ■

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# The Energy Beat

To a journalist's ear, the words "energy" and "crisis" belong together, in part because coverage of energy issues has been fueled largely by episodic coverage of difficulties people confront when sources of energy diminish—such as gasoline price hikes and shortages—or they vanish, as in electricity blackouts. To some degree this approach is changing as better-trained journalists pursue stories about energy and keep watchful eyes on a wider range of critical energy issues.

For three decades **Edward Flattau** wove reporting about energy issues into his nationally syndicated columns about the environment. In a 1973 six-part series, he focused attention on a new concept called "net energy" and the lifestyle changes Americans might need to make because of it. This resulted in one-third of his newspaper clients canceling his column. Today Flattau writes that he finds "much more awareness of energy's importance in our daily existence [but] energy pervasiveness is all too often still not appreciated, even by those who report regularly on it."

As Washington bureau chief for a daily newsletter, Platts Oilgram News, **Gerald Karey** does detailed reporting about oil news, the kind most news organizations don't give their audience. This daily beat provides him a good perspective on how mainstream reporting of these issues might be improved, and he offers suggestions for how some oil issues in the Congressional energy debate might be covered. **Margaret Kriz**, whose Washington, D.C. beat includes coverage of energy issues for the National Journal, describes how politics and energy policy intersect—and how this intersection is sometimes covered—and she provides a list of energy stories to watch.

In West Virginia, energy is equated with coal, and its mining drives the state's economy. To investigate whether companies were adhering to environmental laws regulating the removal of mountaintops to mine coal, **Ken Ward, Jr.**, who has covered the environment for The Charleston Gazette for more than a decade, dug through documents to develop a database of mining permits. His reporting revealed many flaws in the regulatory system that allowed companies to avoid their post-mining responsibilities in restoring the land. Ward says he and his newspaper have taken "a lot of heat" for his reporting but, as he writes, "This is where the months I spent reading mining regulations and studying dozens of mine permits paid off. I was armed with the facts, and that made my reporting stand up to all levels of criticism."

**Vijay V. Vaitheeswaran**, who is global environment and energy correspondent for The Economist, examines how well journalists navigate through the claims and counterclaims (what he calls "the hydrogen hoaxes") made about the hydrogen fuel cell's potential as an energy carrier. In showing why skeptics' concerns don't hold up, Vaitheeswaran contends that "reporters taking a global view would see that the question of hydrogen cuts right to the heart of the great debate over sustainable development itself …."

**Joseph A. Davis**, who edits the WatchDog, a newsletter about First Amendment issues for the Society of Environmental Journalists, explains the consequences to reporters of a change in regulations made by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and aimed at protecting information about the nation's energy infrastructure from terrorists. The rule "applies not merely to information about existing facilities, but to *proposed* facilities that *might be* built if FERC licenses them." This means neither journalists nor the public can gain access to information that until recently was made available to help people assess the risks and dangers posed by various energy facilities. At the Mobile (Ala.), Register reporters had difficulty obtaining key studies and documents from FERC regarding the siting of a potentially dangerous liquefied natural gas terminal in its city. **Bill Finch**, the paper's environment editor, writes about the Register's persistent coverage of this issue despite government officials repeatedly sidetracking or refusing "virtually every request we've made to obtain documents, even when documents had been distributed for review to scientists or legislators."

From California and Cleveland, Ohio comes coverage of electricity issues, including an article by **Elizabeth McCarthy**, editor and publisher of California Energy Circuit, who writes how secret dealmaking by companies and government officials made it difficult for reporters to help the public understand why the lights were going out and how much the energy deals were costing them. **Rick Jurgens**, a reporter with the Contra Costa Times in California, covered his state's yearlong energy crisis. To do so, the paper's team of reporters had to learn about the way deregulation works. Now, with the crisis over, Jurgens believes the challenge for his newspaper and others remains to "figure out how to be consistent and effective watchdogs" of a deregulated marketplace. The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer's business editor, **Debbie Van Tassel**, explains why her newspaper—which had thoroughly reported on problems of the nearby utility FirstEnergy Corp. since the late 1990's—was well prepared to lead the nation's investigative reporting after the massive electricity blackout in the summer of 2003. She also shows how Plain Dealer reporting revealed serious problems at FirstEnergy's Davis-Besse nuclear plant and lax oversight by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. In covering this same blackout story, **Mark Clayton**, a staff writer for The Christian Science Monitor, found a way to get inside a New York generating plant. He shared with readers a reconstructed narrative account of how power was restored in this old yet critical plant.

**Randy Gragg**, who writes about architecture and urban design for The Oregonian, describes some new challenges in writing about "green" buildings. As more developers and marketers make claims about energy innovations, he writes that "part of an architecture critic's job is to figure out if the message is truly captured by a building's design." A vigorous debate about a possible wind farm siting in Nantucket Sound off Massachusetts is being covered by **Doreen Leggett**, an environment reporter for The Cape Codder. Despite her weekly paper's small size, her editor sent her to Denmark to report on that country's experience with large wind farms as a way to better inform the residents of Cape Cod. She writes about this reporting trip—what she learned and the reaction her article had back home. ■

# Moving From a Backwater Story to a Front-Page Beat

## From homeland security to economic growth, energy issues weave their way into coverage as renewable energy sparks new controversies.

### By Edward Flattau

Prior to the first official Earth Day on April 22, 1970, what news coverage there was of energy issues consisted primarily of technical analyses of industrial processes and stories about rate adjustments. These stories were not attractive fare for general assignment reporters, who usually lacked the necessary technical expertise to effortlessly translate the complex into the comprehensible, much less make it scintillating reading. Moreover, few journalists had either the motivation or time to acquire the know-how this assignment would require. The stories usually had little impact, even when accurate, given that such articles often seemed better suited for geologists, chemists, engineers and statisticians than John Q. Public.

During those days, an endless supply of cheap energy was taken for granted by Americans, so there didn't seem much raw material for general-interest stories about energy-related issues in daily newspapers. Fuel sticker shock was reserved for those who ventured beyond the borders of the United States.

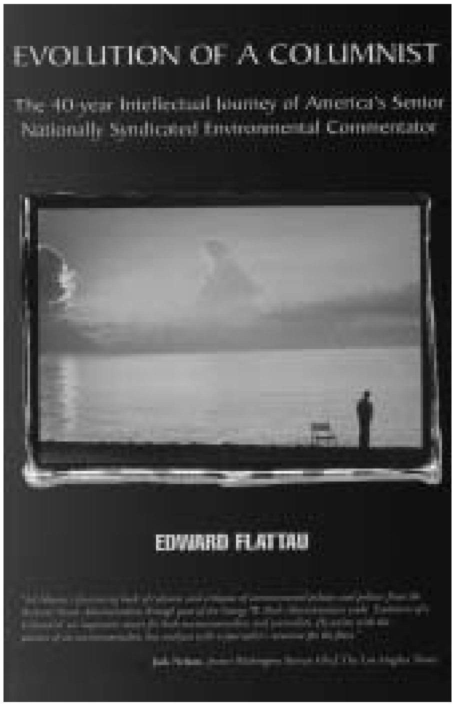
But in the 1970's, it became increasingly evident that inexpensive energy might not be as infinite as we had originally thought. The 1973 Arab oil embargo was the first jolt. It was followed by the late renowned geophysicist M. King Hubbert's well publicized projections of oil deposits' finite nature. The "net energy" hypotheses of University of Florida ecology Professor Howard T. Odum—that it takes energy to produce energy—created additional trauma. Odum's deceptively simple, yet revolutionary, premise can be illustrated as follows: If nine gallons of fuel are required to operate an industrial process that produces 10 gallons of finished product, then only one (not 10) gallon of new fuel have, in effect, entered the marketplace.

## Newspapers Reject His Energy Message

In a six-part series of columns I wrote in the final months of 1973, I explored potential ramifications of Odum's far-reaching theory. My reward for shining a spotlight on energy, specifically on Odum's perspicacity, was that 13 newspapers—representing approximately one-third of my clientele at the time—cancelled my nationally syndicated environmental column. Such a simultaneous cancellation was highly unusual, and even though these news organizations wouldn't directly say so, I knew their response was in reaction to this series.

What did they find so threatening about the topic of net energy? Most likely it was the suggestion of an end to the cheap, plentiful supply of energy that fueled America's great prosperity in the second half of the 20th century. Such a thought raised the prospect of some energy shortages, higher prices, and at least a temporary downturn in the economy at a later date. In this series of columns, I examined net energy's implications for lifestyle change, stressing the pressures to end conspicuous consumption. Continuing in that vein, I wrote of the need for us to put greater emphasis on recycling and reuse of materials. From the newspapers' perspective, all these changes raised the specter of a decline in advertising revenues.

Net energy's ramifications for agriculture and transportation were also significant. Our nation's farmers were among the most energy inefficient food producers in the world because of their heavy use of fossil fuel-based fertilizers and pesticides. This, too, was not something newspapers wanted to hear, especially those located in the farm belt. Net energy's lesson for transportation was greater emphasis on "people energy" in the forms of walking and biking, a switch to more fuel-efficient vehicles, and increased use of public transit. The message undoubtedly rankled those newspapers that relied on highly profitable automobile advertising supplements.



EVOLUTION OF A COLUMNIST

The 40-year Intellectual Journey of America's Senior Nationally Syndicated Environmental Commentator

EDWARD FLATTAU

Odum argued that products should be priced by how much energy was needed to make them, not by some contrived dollars and cents measure. I guess my temerity at treating such a thought seriously was enough for some editors to relegate me to the loony bin.

Initially, I was stunned at the visceral reaction to the series but, upon reflection, realized that Odum's hypothesis raised some uncomfortable questions, not only for newspapers, but also for many other segments of American society.

## Energy as a Front-Page Story

As we headed into the 1980's, the fear of oil embargoes and surge of dire supply forecasts faded with a return to an energy glut (however fabricated). Nonetheless, energy was fast becoming a more expansive and popular story line, and this phenomenon was reflected in how frequently I wrote about the subject in my column.

Reporters began to flock to this emerging beat and receive more assignments for their enterprise because energy use was increasingly being linked to pollution, various public health issues, transportation questions, wilderness preservation, and adequate food and medicine supplies. In another decade, energy would be drawn directly into the national security debate because of energy facilities' vulnerability to terrorist attacks. In short, by the time the 21st century arrived, a realization was growing that energy had an integral role in virtually every aspect of our lives. This added dimension propelled energy from the business page to the front page as it became not only a big story but, in many instances, *the* story.

During the past two decades, fewer articles have been published about the adequacy of future fossil fuel supplies. The previously mentioned artificial glut seems to have temporarily alleviated concern over energy shortages, as has the reassuring proposition that technological advances can squire us through a transition to the post-petroleum era without any need to cut back on our use of oil. Environmental hard news stories and advocacy columns such as mine have tended to focus on threats to wilderness preservation from energy development and the ecological impact of massive oil spills. The hazards of nuclear power proliferation and the adverse effects of industrial and vehicular fossil fuel emissions on air, water, wildlife and public health have also received more coverage.

There has been plenty of press on the battle to keep the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—America's Serengeti—free of any oil rigs. Reams of copy have been written about the nuclear power plant meltdowns and subsequent contamination at Pennsylvania's Three Mile Island and Russia's Chernobyl facility. During the past two decades, journalists wrote about widespread thermonuclear warfare's potential to wipe out life as we currently know it. Saddam Hussein's igniting Kuwait oil wells in the first Gulf War sent black clouds swirling as far away as Europe and drew attention to the scientists who theorized about a "nuclear winter" in the aftermath of an atomic war. Under that concept, fallout from extensive nuclear explosions would circle the globe for months, blotting out the sun and causing devastation, famine and possibly a fatal setback to modern civilization.

More recently, energy coverage is branching out to include international terrorism and an evaluation of military strategy. Journalists have reported about how renewable sources of energy tend to be decentralized in contrast to a main power grid and thus less vulnerable to sabotage. Nuclear power plants make tempting targets for attack, and questions have been raised about the quality of their security. And there has been much discussion in the news media about just how much our military interventions were motivated by our need for a guaranteed supply of imported oil.

## Renewable Energy

Because of its potential for reducing humanity's reliance on "dirty" fossil fuels, renewable energy has been drawing increased press attention during the past two decades. With so much gloom and doom in the daily renditions of news, the prospect of clean, renewable energy sources, such as sun and wind power, has become grist for upbeat features. Yet the enthusiasm is not universal.

It is ironic that hard-core conservatives, who routinely promote technology as the path to societal salvation, regard renewable energy with suspicion. Many consider environmentalists' advocacy of renewable energy a challenge to the capitalistic primacy of giant utilities that manage the nation's main power grids. Hence, conservative critics take every opportunity to question the practicality of renewable energy's widespread application. And this political bias is ideologically bolstered by the decentralized infrastructure of renewable energy and need for generous government subsidies to gain competitive parity with conventional energy sources in the marketplace. (That the U.S. government heavily subsidizes the fossil fuel industry is conveniently ignored.)

Conservatives dismiss widespread use of such energy alternatives as exotic figments of a science fiction writer's imagination. By contrast, those who champion renewables vehemently argue that without these sources, a sustainable energy future is likely beyond our reach. It is a controversy that makes for good copy, even for general assignment reporters.

Although there is much more awareness of energy's importance in our daily existence, energy pervasiveness is all too often still not appreciated, even by those who report regularly on it. We see this in the news media and public's frequent failure to recognize energy's vital, if sometimes oblique, influence on such knotty problems as urban sprawl and escalating food prices. Of greatest significance is the wariness journalists display in exploring what lifestyle changes future energy supply and demand will almost certainly impose. Perhaps this reluctance is not unlike the reaction to my columns of more than 30 years ago. Some editors seem reluctant to rock the boat. But isn't it their job to do so? ■

*Edward Flattau is the author of "Evolution of a Columnist" (Xlibris Corporation, 2003). During the past three decades, Flattau's twice-a-week environmental column appeared in as many as 120 daily newspapers and has received 10 national journalism awards.*

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# Energy Stories Shouldn't Be Just the Big Ones

## From reporting in Platts, complexities of energy issues can be woven together.

By Gerald Karey

Energy is something of a backwater beat, elbowing its way to the front pages of general interest newspapers (or at least of their business sections) only when certain events take place. Gasoline prices increase precipitously. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) meets. The lights go out in California and the Northeast. The battle over oil and gas leasing in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) heats up in Congress.

What tends to get overlooked—or buried on back inside pages—are the agencies and administration's handling of often arcane regulations, obscure policy initiatives, and the slow, relentless grinding of bureaucratic and legislative machinery. Yet the ultimate impact of these decisions on energy's use and costs—both monetary and environmental—can be dramatic.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. *Photo by The Associated Press/Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.*

### Collecting Every Bit of Energy News

Platts, a McGraw-Hill company, is the world's largest energy news and price reporting service. Our Washington bureau covers both ends of the energy spectrum—the arcana and the big issues. This is the kind of coverage our audience, which is comprised largely of industry professionals and government policymakers, demands and requires. The news and information we report hourly, daily and weekly informs their decisions. No item seems too insignificant for us to report. Putting it another away, any bit of news about energy can be put to use.

Our newsletters and real-time news services cover specific industry sectors—oil, natural gas, electricity, nuclear and coal. And we pay a great deal of attention to the minutiae of each of these sectors, making certain to report on Federal Register notices, industry filings with regulatory agencies, and the flood of reports and statistics from government offices. Of course, we cover congressional hearings, House and Senate floor debates, conferences and press briefings.

With this intensive coverage, we get to stories early. We start to track a regulation when it is a gleam in a bureaucrat's eye or follow an amendment when it first gets buried in a piece of legislation. We follow these stories well before they catch the attention of the general press. Having this kind of focus enables our reporters to learn the issues intimately, and they can then share expertise across the bureau because so many energy issues overlap industry sectors. And our reporters have the background and knowledge to frame a story when it emerges as *big* news and provide context and insight that cannot be matched by a reporter who parachutes in when an energy story gets hot and walks away when it cools.

Major news organizations, for example, covered the sharp increase in gasoline prices last summer and the record high prices earlier this year. Many of us dutifully trudged up to Capitol Hill to listen as politicians denounced rapacious oil companies for price gouging and demanded federal investigations, as well as pointed fingers at members of the other party for not doing anything to prevent the price increases. However, notwithstanding the culpability of the oil industry (and previous federal and state investigations have failed to find any illegal activity), a number of factors and events in the preceding weeks, months and even years—many of which received only scant coverage in the mainstream press—had set the stage for price spikes.

This story actually had its origins on Capitol Hill, where Congressional action concerning energy, or its first cousin, the environment, can and does affect gasoline prices. What led, in part, to the rise in gasoline prices involved the additional cost of producing a complex slate of less polluting gasolines to meet federal and state environmental requirements. Away from Capitol Hill, there had also been supply disruptions resulting from pipeline or refinery accidents, which occur in the course of running complex industrial facilities. Add to that the fact that refinery closures and industry consolidation had halved the number of U.S. refineries and the remaining refiners had reduced inventories to historically low levels, which is a reasonable business practice because it saves money, but can result in tighter supplies and higher prices. There is also an ever-growing U.S. demand for gasoline needed to fuel a vehicle fleet increasingly dominated by gas-guzzling sport-utility vehicles and minivans. Finally, there are OPEC production cuts to consider and the resulting increase in crude prices.

By knowing these factors—and interweaving their impact—it was not a surprise this spring when gasoline prices spiked well over two dollars per gallon in parts of the country. When adjusted for inflation, this price is still below prices of 20 years ago. But that fact hardly registers with irate motorists who don't pay with 1980 dollars.

## Connecting With the Mainstream Press

It doesn't require an army of investigators armed with subpoenas to learn these things. But neither does this kind of information have much day-to-day news value for the mainstream press. But this news and information gathering is the stock-in-trade for Platts's oil reporters who have a different role and approach their jobs differently than do mainstream reporters. As a reader of mainstream energy news, I don't expect each newspaper article about gasoline prices to include a primer on oil markets. But enough information should be conveyed over time to give the attentive reader at least a basic understanding of the web of issues.

Because energy issues affect so many critical areas of our nation's well-being and our daily lives—the economy, environment, health, national security, and even whether and where the United States chooses to go to war—superficial or ill-informed stories are inexcusable. This observation is not intended as a sweeping indictment of press energy coverage. I see some very good energy reporting from the mainstream press and then I see some stories that simply don't measure up.

The comprehensive energy bill, pending in Congress, has provided ample opportunity for both kinds of stories to surface. On balance, the coverage makes me wonder whether a lot of Americans can rely on their usual sources of news to learn what is actually in this bill, why it's in the bill, and how passage of it will affect them. What follows is a selective summary of information members of the mainstream press should provide about its more important oil-related provisions:

- **Gasoline prices:** A number of politicians contend that this year's record-high gasoline prices underscore the need to pass the energy bill. In fact, nothing in the legislation will affect current gasoline prices.
- **Energy or farm policy?:** The renewable fuel in this bill will be ethanol, because little else is or will be available. Ethanol is an oxygenate, which when mixed with gasoline provides a cleaner burning fuel. Refiners can make clean burning fuels without using an oxygenate. However, the renewable fuel's mandate means a guaranteed market for ethanol producers and farmers (most of the ethanol will be produced from corn), and the provision is in the bill at the insistence of farm-state members of Congress.
- **MTBE vs. ethanol:** Driven by the agricultural lobby (again), Congress mandated the use of an oxygenate in reformulated gasoline in 1990 with the expectation that corn-based ethanol would be the oxygenate of choice. Instead, refiners generally chose to use methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE) that was more widely available, easier to handle, and cheaper. However, as a result of gasoline leaks and spills, MTBE, which smells like turpentine, contaminated drinking water in communities across the country. Cleanup costs could run to hundreds of millions of dollars. The House bill will exempt MTBE producers from defective product liability lawsuits. Not surprisingly, both House and Senate bills will also exempt ethanol producers from any future liability for environmental damage.
- **The dream of energy independence:** The House version of the bill contains a provision authorizing oil and gas leasing in a portion of the ANWR. Advocates of ANWR leasing talk of a need to free the United States from dependence on oil imports by developing domestic resources. But it will take at least 10 years to develop ANWR and to begin moving its oil to market, if oil is found. When fully developed, and if the refuge contains as much oil as some studies estimate, ANWR would provide less than two percent of U.S. consumption. There is little in the bill to lessen U.S. oil demand, which makes talk of energy independence, or even significantly reducing oil imports, a pipedream.

These oil-related issues are just some of the complex items contained in this huge stalled energy bill. With each sector of energy, there are numerous topics whose coverage need to be strengthened and made more clear if Americans are going to be able to understand—and care about—what this bill contains and how passage of these new policies are going to affect them and all of us. When these, and a host of other energy-related issues, are not well covered by the press, the public—and its future—is being poorly served. ■

*Gerald Karey is Washington bureau chief for the daily newsletter, Platts Oilgram News, and its real-time news service, Platts Global Alert, and reports on the oil industry and issues related to it. Before joining McGraw-Hill, which publishes Platts, he worked for the Asbury Park (N.J.) Press and The Newark Star-Ledger.*

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# Energy and Politics: The Stories Never End

## 'If I could stomach dealing with BTU's and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, my job would never be dull.'

### By Margaret Kriz

In March 2001, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's main conference hall buzzed with Washington lobbyists. They were there to hear a speech by Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham—the first public preview of the Bush administration's national energy strategy. For these powerful energy lobbyists, the speech confirmed that the White House was delivering on its promise to make life easier for the coal, natural gas, oil and nuclear power industries in the United States. As journalists later learned, some of those business representatives had privately met with White House officials and had helped shape the strategy.

As an energy reporter jammed in the back of the room, shoulder-to-shoulder with dozens of other scribes and TV crews, the event was an "ah-ha" moment. The enthused reaction of the inside-the-beltway crowd and the pro-industry language in the speech signaled the emergence of a new era of federal energy policy. In fact, energy issues have served as a significant subplot in the war-dominated chronicle of the Bush administration. Long before President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney stepped into the West Wing, the two had served as energy industry executives and were sympathetic to the energy industry arguments. Since taking office, they have included energy issues in their decision-making on a variety of military, political and environmental matters.

Energy, economics and environmental policy have long been inextricably intertwined. At least that's how a National Journal editor explained it to me in the late 1980's when he talked me into adding the magazine's energy portfolio to my environmental beat. The late Dick Corrigan, who had written about energy and environment for The Washington Post and the National Journal, made me a promise. If I could stomach dealing with BTU's and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, my job would never be dull. It's an assessment with which I wholeheartedly agree.

The Yucca Mountain Project, Nevada. *Photo by Laura Rauch/The Associated Press.*

## Politics and Energy

In some ways, covering the Bush administration's energy policy began with the 2000 presidential race. Political pundits noted that Bush carried West Virginia, usually a Democratic stronghold, by promising to support the state's coal industry. In fact the Bush/Cheney ticket, which vowed to champion the interests of the extraction industries, did well in most energy producing states in the South and Rocky Mountain West.

But it became clear how much energy would win out, especially over environmental policy, once the administration's 2001 energy policy report was released. Among other things, it spelled out plans to expand oil and gas development on millions of acres of federal lands, including wild regions that had been protected by the Clinton administration. It also confirmed the administration's intention to ease environmental controls on older coal-fired power plants.

Congressional Republicans have incorporated many of Bush's energy proposals into their omnibus energy packages, which have included billions of dollars in energy-related tax incentives, two-thirds of which would go to the fossil fuel and nuclear power industries. But for the past three years, that legislation has been entangled in political wrangling in the Senate and recently raised new deficit-reduction concerns at the White House. Instead of waiting for Congress, Bush has made significant headway in reshaping national energy policy by working under the public radar screen, reinterpreting and rewriting the little-noticed federal land-use and environmental protection regulations in the name of energy development.

Many of the administration's energy maneuvers have been complex, technical and almost impossible to track. But from a policy wonk's perspective, a few have been fascinating. Take the administration's efforts to resurrect nuclear power. During the 2000 presidential campaign in Nevada, the Republicans won the state by promising that Bush would never use Nevada's Yucca Mountain as a permanent dump for the radioactive waste piling up at the nation's 110 commercial nuclear power plants—unless the proposal was based on the "best scientific evidence." But Bush officials knew that to lure potential investors into sinking money into building new nuclear power plants, the government had to solve the waste problem. Once in office, the President took immediate steps to speed approval of the Yucca project. Bush signed off on the Yucca facility in 2002, leaving continued questions about the long-term safety of the site to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Now several electricity companies are rallying around a plan to order the first new nuclear plant in the United States since the 1979 Three Mile Island power plant meltdown. Where will they build the facility? That industry consortium is apparently eyeing a site owned by the Tennessee Valley Authority, a quasi-federal corporation. The potential investors are also hinting that they will need hefty federal financial incentives to build the new plant.

Headlines about energy have changed since Abraham's 2001 speech, when California was suffering from rolling blackouts and the Western states were hit by historically high electricity and natural gas prices. Back then, politicians and consumer groups were beginning to cast a suspicious eye at energy wheeler-dealers like Enron and Reliant Energy. Meanwhile, car owners filling up at the pump were witnessing the signs of summer gasoline price volatility. Since then, California's energy crisis and the resulting economic downturn triggered, in part, the ouster of Democratic Governor Gray Davis and the election of the high-profile Republican Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. Energy trading scandals brought down Enron and resulted in huge fines against Reliant and other companies. Western electricity prices have stabilized. But high natural gas and gasoline prices continue to plague consumers across the nation.

## Energy Stories to Watch

What happens next? No matter who is elected President this fall, a handful of energy stories are certain to remain on my watch list. Those issues include:

- **Climate change:** In 2001, Bush withdrew the United States from the United Nation's Kyoto Protocol to control climate change. That treaty would have required the United States to dramatically cut its emissions of carbon dioxide and other pollutants that scientists have linked to global warming. Oil-burning cars and coal-burning power plants and boilers are among the worst emitters of greenhouse gases. Nonetheless, the European Union in 2005 will begin an unprecedented emission trading program that will allow companies to buy or sell credits as a way of reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. Most U.S. companies can't participate. The Kyoto treaty will become legally binding once it is ratified by Russia—a step that is guaranteed to increase international pressure on Bush.
- **Electricity demand:** By 2025, the nation is expected to use 40 percent more electricity than it used in 2002. Will it be reliable? Where will it come from? In the last decade, natural gas has been the favored fuel. But in the wake of high natural gas prices, some power companies are taking a new look at coal. Nuclear proponents say the nation can cut pollution and fulfill its power needs with new nuclear plants. Meanwhile, wind, solar and other renewable energy companies are waiting in the wings, hoping for new technology leaps, federal subsidies, or environmental regulations that could kick their industries into the big leagues.
- **Oil:** The United States has only three percent of the world's oil reserves, but uses 24 percent of the world's annual oil output. Even if the Bush administration convinces Congress to open Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil exploration, the new output probably won't impact world oil prices. Bush has no plans to significantly boost federal fuel economy standards. Meanwhile, Americans are paying the highest recorded price for gasoline. Oil has also become a foreign policy story.
- **Electricity restructuring:** For decades, electric companies were state-regulated monopolies. In recent years, several states have allowed independent electricity generators to sell energy directly to consumers. The change has been part of a revolutionary and currently incomplete transformation of the way the electric industry operates and is regulated. California's failed attempt at deregulation, for example, resulted in skyrocketing energy prices. Battles raging between the states that have opened their markets to competition and those that oppose such changes make this story one of the most complex, geeky and absorbing energy issues to watch.

Energy issues rarely make for sexy stories. They only draw front-page play during an energy crisis. And they are often so technical that they defy translation into plain English. But energy is the lifeblood of the economy. In our industrialized economy, electricity and transportation have become nearly as important to Americans as the air they breathe. As a result, energy will always be a hot topic with Washington policymakers and a fascinating beat for Washington reporters. ■

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WATCHDOG

# Using Documents to Report on Mountaintop Mining

## When coal industry officials and business leaders complain about coverage, 'the only way to counter such pressures is with good, solid reporting.'

### By Ken Ward, Jr.

My wife, Elizabeth, likes to tell people how I took her to a strip mine for one of our first dates. Usually, though, she leaves out the fact that it was her idea. It makes for a better story, I guess. It was July 1998, and I was in the midst of reporting a series of articles that would become the biggest story of my career: mountaintop removal coal mining. I'm sure I talked about it constantly—the huge shovels and dozers, barren hillsides, buried streams, and coalfield residents who live with gigantic blasts shaking their homes and dust clogging their lungs.

Elizabeth wanted to see what the big deal was. So we went on a little picnic to Kayford Mountain. It's a mountaintop removal site, just a 30-minute drive from downtown Charleston and the state's gold-domed capitol building. On top of the mountain, Larry Gibson tends his old family cemetery. White crosses dot the spot, at the head of Cabin Creek. At the end of a long ride up a battered dirt road, the cemetery sits as a solitary island of grass, brush and scattered trees among the strip-mined moonscape.

Larry's home place is surrounded on all sides by mountaintop removal. Various companies have mined thousands of acres in all directions. Larry's little cemetery is the last holdout. Everyone else sold to the mining companies. "I told the company they could have my right arm, but they couldn't have the mountain," Gibson told me on my first visit there in April 1997. "We're here, and we're here to stay. They just don't know it yet."

Within a few months, the company—and everybody else—knew it. Later that year, in August, Penny Loeb reported a stinging exposé on mountaintop removal for U.S. News & World Report. "The costs are indisputable, and the damage to the landscape is startling to those who have never seen a mountain destroyed," Loeb wrote. "Indeed, if mining continues unabated, environmentalists predict that in two decades, half the peaks of southern West Virginia's blue-green skyline will be gone."

An aerial view of Arch Coal, Inc.'s Hobet 21 mine after it had stripped more than 10,000 acres from mountaintops in Boone County, West Virginia. *Photo by Lawrence Pierce/ Sunday Gazette-Mail, courtesy of The Charleston Gazette.*

Now it's not like The Charleston (W. Va.) Gazette had never covered mountaintop removal before. My colleague, longtime investigator Paul Nyden, spent years uncovering coal-industry abuses and wrote numerous articles about mountaintop removal. But what Loeb's work did was to give the issue national prominence, and it prompted those of us at the Gazette to delve into it more deeply.

Was the situation as bad as Loeb portrayed it to be? More importantly, if it was, how had it gotten that way? In 1977, Congress passed a federal law to regulate strip mining. Was it not working? Were state and federal regulators falling down on the job?

### A Watchdog Emerges

After I got the okay from my editors, I started the hard work of digging through the documents to try to answer these questions. I read the 1977 law—the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA). I also read SMCRA's implementing regulations, the congressional history of the law, and as many law review articles on the subject as I could find. What I found became the basis for my stories: During arguments over SMCRA, Ken Hechler, then a Democratic congressman from West Virginia, tried to ban mountaintop removal altogether. As often happens, lawmakers compromised: mountaintop removal was allowed, but only under certain conditions.

Mountaintop removal is just what its straightforward name implies. Coal operators blast off entire hilltops to uncover valuable, low-sulfur coal reserves. Leftover rock and dirt—the stuff that used to be the mountains—is shoved into nearby valleys where it buries streams.

When Congress passed SMCRA, the lawmakers required coal operators to put strip-mined land back the way they found it. In legal terms, this means they must reclaim the land to its approximate original contour (AOC). Of course, when the top of a mountain is removed, achieving AOC is impossible. So lawmakers gave coal companies an option. They could remove mountaintops, ignore the AOC rule, and leave formerly rugged hills and hollows flattened or as gently rolling terrain. But to get a permit to do so, companies had to submit concrete plans that showed they would develop the flattened land after it was mined. Coal operators had to build shopping malls, schools, manufacturing plants or residential areas on their old mine sites.

I suspected this wasn't really happening and decided to find out for sure. As so often happens in investigative reporting, this was tougher than I thought. The state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) told me it didn't even know how many mountaintop removal mines had been approved. I then spent three months huddled at a table in a back office that DEP calls its file room. I befriended a couple of staffers there who seemed to be the only ones in the agency who knew where permit fields were, and I started combing through the records. Every mine permit file filled three to six thick binders. Each had hundreds of pages and dozen of maps and diagrams. DEP had changed the permit format several times over the years, so tracking specific items became more difficult.

Eventually I built my own database of dozens of mining permits. With it, I was able to pinpoint a shocking lack of enforcement by DEP and a complete absence of oversight by the U.S. Office of Surface Mining (OSM), the federal agency charged to make sure states properly enforce SMCRA.

How could this happen? Spending hour after hour in the DEP office looking through files helped me to answer this question. The agency's permit writers, inspectors and various supervisors got to know me. They felt comfortable talking to me, and we'd spend hours sitting and chatting over permit maps or reclamation cross-section drawings. As it turned out, DEP previously had a rule that any mine that chopped off 50 or more feet off a mountain had to get an AOC variance. But at OSM's urging, that rule was eliminated. Any mine—no matter what kind of changes it made to the terrain—could get a permit as an AOC mine. DEP staff who knew and trusted me told me about this policy and gave me the public records to explain it.

Sixty-one of the 81 mountaintop removal permits that I examined were approved, even though they did not propose or contain AOC variances. In May 1998, I published a long Sunday piece that detailed my findings. I led by describing two DEP staffers' reactions when I asked them about how one huge mountaintop removal mine that was being left flat could possibly meet the AOC rule. The DEP staffers just laughed. "Approximate original contour is the heart of the federal strip-mining law," I wrote. "But among many West Virginia regulators, it's becoming a joke."

Next, I turned to the post-mining development plans. It turned out that, even when DEP required AOC variances for mountaintop removal mines, it didn't require development plans. I returned to the file room for another three months of research. A few of the DEP staffers I'd talked with before were a little less helpful after my story showed their agency wasn't doing its job. But most of them wanted to do a good job policing the coal industry and were proud of their efforts and upset when politicians up the line got in the way of tough enforcement. I've found that most regulatory agencies are like this: the on-the-ground people work hard and want to do a good job, so if reporters show them they will be thorough and fair—and can be trusted—they will be helpful.

After more research, I was able to find 34 mountaintop removal permits with AOC variances. Only one included a post-mining development plan. There, the state built a prison. The AOC variance permits usually called for post-mining land uses such as pastureland, hayland or something called "fish and wildlife habitat and recreation lands." In simple terms, coal operators were leaving mountaintop removal sites—more than 50 square miles of land that used to be some of the richest and most diverse forests in North America—as leveled off grassland.

I published another lengthy Sunday article that explained how coal operators had gotten away with ignoring the post-mining development responsibilities and, in doing so, had broken the social compact that allowed mountaintop removal to continue in the first place.

## The Follow-Up Investigations Continue

These stories were published about six years ago. Since then, it's been a pretty wild ride. When fellow reporters ask me what I'm working on, I almost always say, "mining stories—still more mining stories." That's because the controversy about mountaintop removal has only grown since that day Elizabeth and I made our visit to Kayford Mountain.

There was a series of investigations to follow-up on what my stories alleged. Eventually, the OSM published a report that confirmed my findings—and promised reforms of the permitting process.

Then there were the lawsuits. The West Virginia Highlands Conservancy and other groups have filed a series of cases in federal court to try to force proper enforcement of the permit requirements for mountaintop removal. So far, there have been three major federal court and one state court assault on mountaintop removal. Two of the federal court suits resulted in rulings by the now-late U.S. District Judge Charles H. Haden II to strictly limit the mining practice. Both were later overturned on appeal. The third federal court and the state court suit are still pending. I've covered all of these cases, attempting to master and explain in simple language the complicated matters from Clean Water Act permitting schemes to the 11th Amendment constitutional prohibitions against suing state governments in federal court.

My paper and I have also taken a lot of heat. After one of Haden's rulings, the United Mine Workers of America protested outside the federal courthouse and picketed outside the Gazette's offices. Coal industry officials and various business leaders frequently call and write to the newspaper to complain that our coverage of mountaintop removal is hurting the state's economy. In a small and extremely poor state, such charges are taken seriously. They can create incredible pressure for a paper to back off.

One of the most important lessons I've learned is that the only way to counter such pressures is with good, solid reporting. This is where the months I spent reading mining regulations and studying dozens of mine permits paid off. I was armed with the facts, and that made my reporting stand up to all levels of criticism.

The other thing I've learned is that it's important to be able to give readers solid information about the economic impacts of environmental regulation. For example, through a federal Freedom of Information Act request, I discovered government studies that showed that the economic impacts of tougher mountaintop removal regulations were not nearly as drastic as the coal industry would have had people believe.

Reporting on this impact study took me back to when I began covering mountaintop removal. The environmental impacts from this practice are extreme—more than 700 miles of Appalachian streams have been buried and tens of thousands of acres of forests destroyed. That alone makes this a huge story, obviously. But my original series focused on a somewhat different aspect of this same issue: the social compact that allowed mining companies to destroy the environment, if they leave something for coalfield communities to live on when the coal is gone. The lack of regulation that allows hundreds of miles of streams to be buried also left the communities where this mining occurred without the economic benefits of new factories, schools, commercial centers, or parks. These facilities were promised to communities when lawmakers struck a bargain to allow mountaintop removal to continue.

Since my original series, I've written hundreds of stories about mountaintop removal. The subject has drawn the attention of every major newspaper, wire service, and TV network in the country. For the most part, stories done by outside news organizations focus on the environmental damage with the theme being a jobs vs. the environment fight. That's a simple story line that reporters, editors and media consumers are used to seeing and hearing. But most environmental issues are more complicated than that, and this one is particularly complex.

The real legacy of mountaintop removal is not just the scarred land and buried streams—or a battle of jobs vs. the environment—but the missed opportunities that proper regulation of the post-mining development rules would have provided to America's coalfields and to those who mined them. ■

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# Unraveling the Great Hydrogen Hoax

## 'How well reporters handle this blizzard of claims and counterclaims will surely help shape the public debate on the matter ….'

### By Vijay V. Vaitheeswaran

There's no denying it: Hydrogen is suddenly *hip.* If you haven't been paying attention to the news lately, you might think that hydrogen is still stuck in the dark and dusty corners of our minds, along with all the other useless things we learned in high school. In fact, this most elemental of elements is back in the limelight for the first time since Jules Verne trumpeted the possibility of a clean energy future based on hydrogen in "The Mysterious Island": "Yes, my friends, I believe that water will one day be employed as fuel, that hydrogen and oxygen which constitute it, used singly or together, will furnish an inexhaustible source of heat and light, of an intensity of which coal is not capable … water will be the coal of the future."

If you doubt it, just consider the evidence. George W. Bush, the oilman branded the "toxic Texan" by the British press, stunned the energy world by committing America to a hydrogen future during his State of the Union speech in 2003. The press coverage at the time focused on his questionable claims about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but future generations may see another part of the speech as more important: He vowed that "the first car driven by a child born today could be powered by hydrogen and pollution free."

Not to be outdone, the European Commission also unveiled its grand Hydrogen Roadmap last year. The European Union vows to become the world's first "hydrogen superpower" (whatever that means), and its president, Romano Prodi, longs to be remembered as the man who ushered Europe into the hydrogen age. Arnold Schwarzenegger, on the eve of California's already bizarre recall election, baffled voters by promising to build a Hydrogen Highway in his state—and now vows it will stretch from Tijuana to Vancouver.

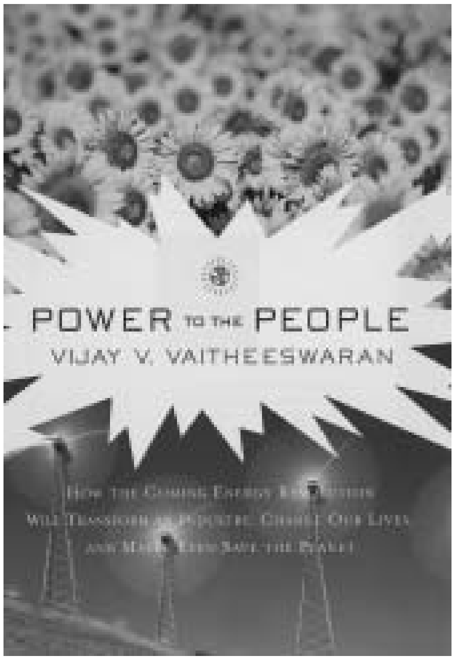
Hydrogen has clearly become the darling of politicians, but how much of this hoopla is really just hype? After all, the Terminator's grand promises of clean energy come from a man who owns not one but seven Hummer SUV's! I have grappled with this question in recent years as I followed this emerging technology for my magazine, The Economist—and even more so as I wrote my book on the future of energy, "Power to the People: How the Coming Energy Revolution Will Transform an Industry, Change Our Lives, and Maybe Even Save the Planet."

I determined that if we are to cut through the hype on this issue, we must first answer three questions:

1. What exactly is hydrogen energy?
2. Is it really worth bothering with?
3. Or could this possibly be the beginnings of the Great Hydrogen Hoax?

First, to the basics. Hydrogen matters because it can be used as a fuel in clean-energy devices called fuel cells. Fuel cells are, in essence, big batteries that run for as long as hydrogen (from some primary energy source) and oxygen (from the air) are supplied. They produce electricity that can be used to run a laptop, a house, or a car.

All very interesting, one might think, but so what? The reason to care is that the only local emission produced by fuel cells is water vapor. That means that cars powered in this way would not contribute to smog or other air pollution concerns that bedevil the world's cities. What's more, if the hydrogen is made from a clean energy source like renewables, then this approach would emit virtually no greenhouse gases as well. That would be a dramatic boost to efforts to tackle global warming. In a nutshell, a shift from fossil fuel-combustion to hydrogen fuel cells would speed the arrival of a zero-emissions energy future.



Will we really get to this green utopia? Maybe, but there are influential voices in industry, in the environmental community, and in politics who argue that all the current interest in hydrogen is at best a distraction—and at worst a giant hoax. How well reporters handle this blizzard of claims and counterclaims will surely help shape the public debate on the matter and ultimately help the public in evaluating the true potential of this radically different approach to energy.

## Evaluating Hydrogen's Hoaxes

One camp of skeptics argues that hydrogen amounts to a technology hoax. Either it won't work as promised, they say, or it will prove too dangerous to be viable. After all, we all remember the Hindenburg—the German passenger airship filled with hydrogen that blew up—and the H-bomb.

The first of these claims simply doesn't wash. Fuel cells are hardly new: The basic concept is over 150 years old, and fuel cells have been used successfully by NASA to power several generations of space craft. In fact, astronauts on the space shuttles drink the perfectly pure water that is the only exhaust of their fuel cells.

As for safety, hydrogen is indeed dangerous—but any fair analysis (unfortunately, these are not too common) has to put that risk into proper perspective. Gasoline is also a dangerous fuel and, in fact, would almost certainly not be accepted by the Environmental Protection Agency if it were proposed as a brand new fuel today. Most experts from the automobile, energy and chemicals industries now agree that hydrogen can be used every bit as safely as gasoline so long as we use proper (i.e. different) measures in handling it. What's more, a little digging reveals that the eye-catching Hindenburg anecdote is bogus. Excellent detective work done by Addison Bain, formerly the chief hydrogen scientist at NASA's Kennedy Space Center, shows that the zeppelin did not blow up because of its hydrogen; rather, it caught on fire. That is because the Germans had unwittingly painted it with chemicals that we today use as rocket propulsion fuel.

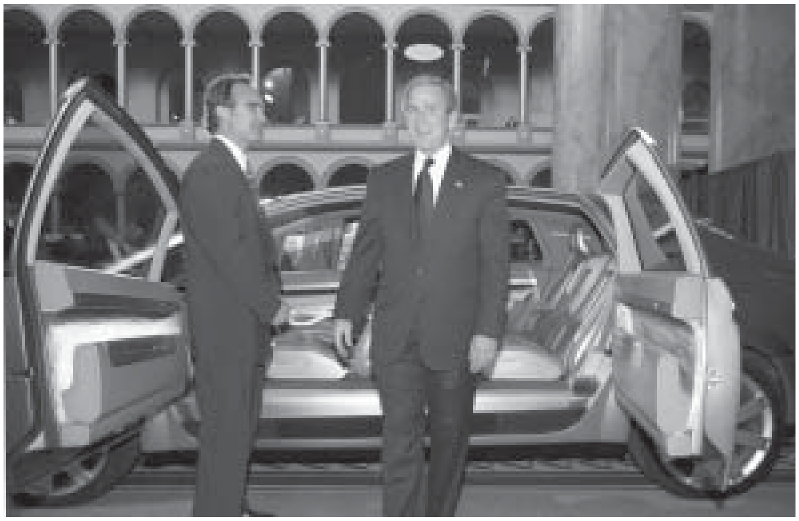
In short, hydrogen is not a technology hoax.

Even if the technology works, argues another camp of skeptics, it still doesn't make any economic sense. Such voices note that hydrogen is not in itself an energy source. To make hydrogen requires the use of a primary energy source, and that inevitably involves efficiency losses and "energy penalties." Given that we have a cheap and cheerful energy system that is wonderfully efficient today, they say, why bother with a costly and disruptive transition to something that could prove an economic hoax?

At one level, these critics are certainly right: Hydrogen is not a magical new source of energy. Shamefully, some reporters writing about this topic imply that it is. More often, though, even careful reporters bury this unobvious fact deep in the story—and so leave casual readers with a very misleading impression. Though hydrogen is the most abundant element in the universe, it is never found in its free state on earth—and so must be released from its molecular bond to carbon in hydrocarbon fuels or (along the lines of Verne's vision) from its bond to oxygen in ordinary water. That does take some energy and involves some inefficiencies. So it is really an "energy carrier" like electricity that has to be created from some primary energy source, be that windmills or coal plants or nuclear power.

But this does not necessarily mean that making hydrogen is economic nonsense. Journalists must look beyond the self-serving arguments offered by some critics (such as certain oil companies) to the fuller picture. Hydrogen conversion inefficiencies must be put in the proper context, for today's energy system is hardly a paragon of efficiency. More than half of America's electricity, for example, comes from aging coal-fired power plants; many run at barely 35 percent efficiency. Because they are located far from consumers, the heat produced is wasted, and more power is lost in transmission and distribution. We then burn more fuel to heat our homes since we didn't do "co-generation" (as in Thomas Edison's original vision for micropower plants situated close to users—a vision that fuel cells could help revive) in the first place. The iron nexus of the internal combustion engine and gasoline is even worse than the power plants: A typical car engine is so inefficient that it converts only about 15 percent of the energy content of gasoline into useful motion. In contrast, after just a few short years of commercial research, fuel cells are already converting more than 40 percent of the energy content of hydrogen into useful power.

So today's energy system is clearly no paragon of efficiency—but that glaring and relevant fact rarely gets much ink in articles about hydrogen. What's more, its economics look decidedly suspect if the hidden costs of guzzling fossil fuels are taken into account. Burning coal takes a tremendous toll on human lungs, leading to millions of premature deaths each year worldwide. Consuming gasoline contributes to global warming, a problem that may have devastating impacts on parts of the world. And at least part of the cost of stationing American troops in the Middle East must be attributed to Western nations' interest in the region's oil.


General Motors Vice President Lawrence Burns (left) stands with President George Bush in front of the Hy-wire concept car at an event promoting the use of hydrogen fuel cells in Washington, D.C. in February 2003. *Photo by J. Scott Applewhite/The Associated Press.*

## Hidden Costs and Motives

Balanced reporting that integrates energy and environmental issues would make clear to readers that all these "externalities" add up to a hidden cost that society pays for its use of fossil fuels—a price not paid at the pump, of course, but nonetheless paid through the health of our children, flora and fauna, and in the use of military troops. Investigative reporting would expose an even bigger outrage: Billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies and tax breaks are quietly lavished on the oil, gas and nuclear industries. Agricultural subsidies get lots of bad press, but not energy subsidies. Why not? Because too often the press allows self-righteous politicians or interest groups (be that oil companies or wind lobbies) to get away with claims that such subsidies enhance "energy security" or "energy independence" or other completely bogus notions. We must do much more to expose these claims for what they really are: efforts by wealthy and influential interests to get financial assistance through the political process.

Too often, reporters in the United States take the view that the current way of pricing energy is the only way possible—that is, the market sets the price for gasoline. That is too naive a view: For a start, the OPEC cartel does more to set the price than any market forces. That is also too parochial a view, as a look at environmental policies across the world reveals. If the external costs of fossil fuel are priced properly, as some European countries are now starting to do with "eco-taxation" reforms, then hydrogen would surely not appear so uneconomic.

So if the skeptics are wrong about the technology and economics of hydrogen, where exactly is this Great Hydrogen Hoax? The answer is that there is a political hoax underway today in America—and that lazy journalists risk falling victim to it. Both left and right are busy making claims about the virtues or villainy of this technology, and neither is being entirely honest with the public.

For a start, consider the reaction from most big environmental groups to the unveiling of America's hydrogen strategy. You might think that the vision for a net zero-emission future would have been applauded by them. After all, this is a far more ambitious energy goal than anything in current law. When Tony Blair unveiled a climate-friendly, hydrogen-intensive energy strategy for Britain recently, he was feted by greens as a visionary. Yet in America, most environmental groups have been deeply skeptical or outright hostile to the Bush administration's hydrogen plans. Their view is that this Texan oilman has proven so un-green in so many ways that he simply can't be trusted on this new-fangled hydrogen thing. Besides, they often whisper to reporters, Bush surely just wants to distract attention from shorter-term measures on efficiency and renewables. As clinching proof, they point to the fact that he wants to include evil coal as a possible source of hydrogen in the future—thus allowing "black" hydrogen to compete with "green" hydrogen made from renewables. Therefore, goes the argument, his hydrogen plan must be a scam.

Frankly, part of the environmental skepticism is justified. Hydrogen makes for sexy copy and surely gives an otherwise un-green administration an environmental veneer. But most independent energy pundits argue that neither short-term efficiency measures nor a long-term switch to hydrogen are enough: We need to do both if we are to tackle the very serious environmental problems that are linked to our energy use.

But rather than reflect that nuanced argument, much of the reporting on this topic picks up on the justified critiques of Bush environmental policies in order to damn hydrogen altogether. That surely kills a virtuous message because of the failings of the messenger. Richard Nixon didn't go to China because he loved Communists—he went because domestic and international political realities forced him to embrace an audaciously different strategy that undeniably changed the course of world history.

Set aside Bush's motivations, and you find that the vision for a net zero-emission future is actually even more breathtaking than Nixon's embrace of the Middle Kingdom. Look beyond the navel-gazing of Beltway politics, and one will see that the governments of Japan and Europe are also now forging ahead on hydrogen fuel cells—and nobody can accuse Eurocrats of being in the back pockets of the Texan oil lobby. Even China (which is very concerned about future reliance on OPEC oil and Russian gas) now has more than 400 different agencies, university labs, military divisions, and private firms working on fuel cells.

But where in the American press did you last read or hear about that intriguing aspect of the hydrogen story? Much broader coverage of this is found in the European and Canadian press than in most American outlets. In fact, that China example explains why the criticism of coal-to-hydrogen is misguided, or at least needs to be placed by reporters in proper context. It is true that coal used in today's filthy combustion plants is a big part of our environmental problem. However, that is not what the White House (or its partner in crime, the European Commission) proposes in its hydrogen vision: It wants to derive hydrogen from coal to use in tomorrow's clean energy plants and to "sequester" the resultant carbon dioxide emissions into the ground so that they won't contribute to global warming. Frankly, that's pretty green—and has little to do with the filthy way that coal is used in America today.

The inclusion of coal matters not just because it helps Bush's cronies in the domestic coal industry, though that is surely one of his motivations. The real reason this might be laudable arises from the distressing fact that India, South Africa, and especially China have nearly limitless domestic supplies of coal. As their economies soar in coming years, they will use that coal. If they do so with the same inefficient and filthy technologies that America uses today, as they are set to do on current trends, then many millions of unfortunates in those countries will die prematurely from air pollution.

What's more, any hopes of climate stabilization will be sunk—so much carbon dioxide would be released by China alone that the U.N.'s Kyoto Protocol becomes irrelevant. On the other hand, if the rich countries can speed the arrival of hydrogen-from-coal and carbon sequestration technologies and help transfer those technologies to the poor countries, then perhaps growth and greenery can be made compatible after all.

Reporters taking a global view would see that the question of hydrogen cuts right to the heart of the great debate over sustainable development itself: How can we reconcile the energy-guzzling growth required to alleviate poverty with the need to preserve the natural environment for future generations? This dilemma explains why the Natural Resources Defense Council, an environmental group with impeccable credentials and lots of lawsuits pending against the Bush administration, has courageously broken with the green herd and now supports efforts to develop hydrogen from coal.

The world will need more such creative thinking if it is to tackle the thorny challenges posed by the collision of energy, environment and economy—and it will need reporters willing to take a long-term, multidisciplinary, global view to explain this story to readers. The tension between the future economic growth and concerns about the environment lies at the heart of the debate over sustainable development—the greatest challenge of this new century. Clean hydrogen energy could well play an important part in the transition to a clean energy future and help us solve the sustainability puzzle—but only if we first debunk the Great Hydrogen Hoax. ■

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WATCHDOG

# Terrorism Fears Thwart Journalists' Reporting

## Is the public being well-served by the government's protection of information?

By Joseph A. Davis

A new federal rule aimed at keeping terrorists from learning about vulnerabilities in the nation's energy infrastructure might be resulting in the neglected safety of dams and pipelines and in less monitoring of an electric grid whose operators are unaccountable for its reliability—all of which will spare powerful, politically appointed regulators embarrassment. The reason: This rule—prompted by worries about homeland security—blocks journalists from reporting certain information about pipelines, transmission lines, hydroelectric dams, and other energy facilities. Whether this protection of information is resulting in the public being safer remains an open question and a difficult one to assess with reporters unable to obtain critical information.

### FERC's New Rule

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has jurisdiction over dams and hydropower, oil and gas pipelines, electric power plants and the grid connecting them, and many other aspects of the nation's energy infrastructure. For years it had issued licenses and enforced regulations in formal, quasi-judicial proceedings. As part of these proceedings, documents were filed in a public docket, and everything was supposed to be on the record.

Within a month after the September 11th attacks, FERC started to remove previously public information from its Web site. By January 2002, it began regulatory proceedings to excise entirely from the public record a whole class of information it called "Critical Energy Infrastructure Information" (CEII). On February 20, 2003, the CEII rule was finalized, and it defined CEII as information about "proposed or existing" critical energy infrastructure that "could be useful to a person in planning an attack on critical infrastructure." In response to protests from open-government groups, FERC amended its definition to include only information already "exempt from mandatory disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)" and that "does not simply give the location of the critical infrastructure."

But FERC's limitation to FOIA-exempt information might provide little consolation to journalists. By using an expansive FOIA interpretation, FERC exempted a great deal of the safety and environmental information it had previously disclosed having to do with internal personnel matters, trade secrets, and "certain law enforcement information, including information the disclosure of which might jeopardize a person's life or safety." So far, these interpretations are untested in court.

The final rule also allowed companies and utilities to claim protection for disclosure of information when they initially submit it to FERC. Such information would then remain undisclosed unless FERC's CEII coordinator decides otherwise. The rule applies not merely to information about existing facilities, but to *proposed* facilities that *might be* built if FERC licenses them.

FERC's system departs from FOIA in several important ways. First, it allows companies to shift the presumption to nondisclosure. Second, it requires that anyone requesting information prove their identity and "need to know." Third, people receiving CEII must sign nondisclosure agreements—a provision that reporters would balk at.

**Milltown Dam:** In December 2002 FERC removed from its Web site information on foot-wide gaps near the foundation of the aging Milltown Dam, five miles upstream of Missoula, Montana. The headline on The Associated Press story on December 28th said it all: "FERC Hides Dam Safety Flaws, Citing 'National Security.'"

Terrorists have shown little interest in Milltown Dam. But the Milltown Reservoir holds 6.6 million cubic yards of sediment laced with lead, arsenic, cadmium and other heavy metals washed from the Anaconda Smelter Superfund hazardous waste site (the "nation's largest") now owned by ARCO, who will have to pay for the cleanup. Arguably, hiding the flaws does more to help ARCO than it does to thwart terrorists. ARCO was hoping the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) would choose a less costly cleanup plan that would leave the dam in place and use the reservoir as a final containment structure. Partly as a result of the newly discovered (and unsuccessfully concealed) safety issues, Montana Governor Judy Martz in January 2003 said she favored a more expensive alternative cleanup plan—removing the dam and the sediments. The next day, the EPA said it would choose dam removal.

This story is a Byzantine web of political, economic and legal shenanigans, and it has been doggedly covered by Missoulian reporter Sherry Devlin over the years. While thousands of residents and businesses downstream would face flooding if the dam failed, another worry is environmental. If a massive ice jam (like the one that almost smashed into the dam in 1996) breached the dam, the flush of sediments would contaminate drinking water and endanger human health and affect recovery efforts for the endangered bull trout.

In January 2003, FERC apologized to Missoula County commissioners from whom it withheld information about the dam's structural flaws. But the information is still listed on FERC's Web site as "nonpublic" (meaning an FOIA request is needed to get it), as is

FERC's apology to the commissioners.

**Greenbrier Natural Gas Pipeline:** Few people's patriotism would be less subject to challenge than that of former U.S. Army Ranger Joseph McCormick, living in a rural Virginia community in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Yet when he asked FERC for information about a 30-inch natural gas pipeline that was going through his Floyd County community in the Shenandoah foothills, he couldn't get it.

This story emerged as part of a joint investigation, published in December 2003 by U.S. News & World Report and broadcast on PBS's "NOW with Bill Moyers." FERC denied information on the routing of the proposed Greenbrier Pipeline to McCormick and Gini Cooper (whose land it would run across) even before it had officially adopted its CEII rule—on the grounds that this information might help terrorists. Neither local residents nor reporters were allowed to get from FERC a map of the proposed pipeline's route or a list of landowners whose land it would cross.

McCormick and Cooper were, in fact, possibly more concerned about the security of their community than was FERC. McCormick was concerned that the pipeline would run close to a local school and right across the scenic Blue Ridge Parkway. "But what we were finding was this was having the effect of defeating our opportunity to organize people, to get people involved," McCormick told "Now's" David Brancaccio. "And when we couldn't get an exact route, the momentum, the groups actually that were forming, essentially disbanded."

Without effective public opposition, the FERC approved the pipeline.

**Liquefied Natural Gas Terminals:** In the past year energy companies have proposed building up to 30 liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals along the Atlantic, Pacific and Gulf coasts of the United States. At these offshore and onshore terminals, massive tankers would unload cargoes of super-cooled gas, which would be fed via pipeline to a nation hungry for the fuel. FERC appears to be in a rush to get them sited and built. High gas prices are only one reason for the hurry. There might never be a more permissive regulatory environment for building such energy facilities than there is this year with Congress, the White House, and FERC all in Republican hands.

The rush to build LNG terminals might prove hard to reconcile with the administration's concerns over terrorism. Looked at through the eyes of terrorists, an LNG tanker in a populated area could be a weapon of mass destruction. And such scenarios might not be far-fetched. Former White House counterterrorism czar Richard Clarke wrote in his book, "Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror," that the United States knew "that al-Qaeda operatives had been infiltrating Boston by coming in on liquid natural gas tankers from Algeria" and that shutting down Boston Harbor was one of his top priorities after September 11th because "we had also learned that had one of the giant tankers blown up in the harbor, it would have wiped out downtown Boston."

LNG terminals are considered by some experts among the most dangerous industrial facilities known. A January 2004 explosion at an LNG complex in Skikda, Algeria, killed 30 people and injured over 70 and raised serious doubts over the industry's assurances that LNG facilities are safe. While many of the proposed terminals are far offshore, some are onshore close to densely populated areas. And FERC's CEII rule is keeping safety and environmental information locked up out of public view.

Until recently, LNG terminals were rare in the United States—partly because of safety and partly because of economics. Three years ago, only three were operating in the United States—at Everett, Massachusetts; Elba Island, Georgia, and Lake Charles, Louisiana. One facility at Cove Point, Maryland has been shut down since 1980.

Fierce local opposition has caused companies to delay or cancel LNG terminal proposals for Mobile, Alabama; Vallejo, California, and Harpswell, Maine. Mindful of this, FERC on March 24, 2004 issued an unusual ruling that it alone has authority to regulate the siting and licensing of LNG import terminals. The decree came in the case of a proposed Long Beach, California terminal that California's Public Utilities Commission says it also must approve before it is built. FERC insists it's not trying to cut local authorities out of the decision, but local agencies are expected to challenge FERC in court.

In the summer of 2003, ExxonMobil Corp. proposed building an onshore terminal at a former Navy homeport in Mobile Bay, off Alabama. Since that announcement, the Mobile Register has given the issue prominent news coverage. [See Bill Finch's article on page 20.] Register reporters Sean Reilly and Ben Raines and their colleagues have found that expert scientific assessments of how much danger the facility would present to the community differed widely. The newspaper has also discovered that the CEII rule is likely to prevent the community from getting the full story.

In an era of terrorism, press and public access to information about energy infrastructure hazards might well be needed more, not less. The FERC's CEII rule has the potential for hiding information the public needs to ensure its own safety. For example, if a company proposes routing a gas pipeline next to a child-care center, people need to know that, if only to be able to pressure FERC to reroute the pipeline. Building energy facilities that are inherently safe—from their inception—is a better solution than keeping hazards hidden. But the public cannot make such decisions wisely—or hold officials accountable for making them—without access to information. ■

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WATCHDOG

# Government Studies Vanish From Reporters' View

## At the Mobile Register, journalists encounter barriers to reporting on possible hazards and risks of a proposed liquefied natural gas terminal.

### By Bill Finch

Say NO To LNG

**Hollinger's Island residents hold up signs of opposition during the October 2003 meeting of the Alabama State Port Authority to decide on the sale of the old Navy homeport to ExxonMobil for a liquefied natural gas terminal. The authority approved it by a vote of 4-2.** ***Photo by Mike Kittrell/Mobile Register.***

When communities such as Long Beach, California and Mobile, Alabama face the prospect of hosting a major new industry that has been identified as a significant terrorist target, then citizens and reporters naturally want to see evidence that the government carefully considered the risks before approving the facility. But in the past few years, government officials seem more reluctant to release this information, even when local communities must make critical decisions about whether to encourage the location of such facilities in their backyard. New legislation, including the USA Patriot Act and Homeland Security Act, have added to concerns that communities will have to take the decisions and actions of government agencies on faith.

That was the case last year, when the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) announced a major push to locate new liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals in a number of U.S. cities. LNG is a highly concentrated form of natural gas that can be economically shipped around the globe. Energy officials and economists have argued that LNG could be the key to stabilizing North America's energy prices in the future. But because LNG is highly concentrated, and spreads quickly when released on water, scientists have long warned that it could pose an unusual hazard when shipped into populated areas. Numerous federal officials promoting the siting of new terminals in cities such as Mobile indicated to the public that the risks and hazards were overstated. And they suggested they had studies that proved even nearby neighborhoods had little to fear.

Trouble surfaced when Mobile (Ala.) Register reporters asked to review those studies. None of the agencies that produced or cited the studies were willing to give them to our reporters to read and analyze. After more than a year of reporting by two staffers, Ben Raines and me, the Register finally obtained, through the use of back channel sources, most of the government studies used in analyzing LNG risks. In reporting on the studies' findings, the Register has been cautious about revealing the sources of its information out of concern that obscure provisions of the USA Patriot Act or the Homeland Security Act might later be used against the sources or the newspaper. Some sources were reluctant to turn over scientific research for fear of violating the law, though they couldn't point to a specific provision in these acts that they might violate by doing so.

Ultimately, the Register's reporting helped prompt both DOE and FERC to sponsor new studies of LNG risks. Using many of the Register's finding, community groups in Harpswell, Maine and Eureka, California turned aside proposals to build LNG facilities in those cities. The two LNG facilities that have been proposed for Mobile have now been put "on the backburner," according to the companies who proposed building them.

But it has become increasingly clear why some of the federal agencies might have been reluctant to release the studies. In many cases, the conclusions represented by the agencies were not supported by the actual studies, and the scratchwork in the studies was often critically flawed. Unfortunately, as the Register discovered, the devil is usually found in the scratchwork. One example among many: In the days following the September 11th terror attacks, the LNG facility near Boston's Inner Harbor was shut down. It was reopened a few weeks later, after government officials said that newly commissioned studies showed that an LNG terror attack would not be an issue. While Boston's mayor and some fire officials continued to question the safety of LNG shipments into Boston, the findings that supposedly led to that decision were apparently never closely examined in a public forum. Just now we are learning from the government—under Congressional pressure—that several Algerians who might have connections to terrorists entered this country by coming into Boston's LNG port by tanker.

When an LNG terminal was announced for Mobile in the summer of 2003, it quickly became apparent that what government officials were saying about LNG hazards was different than information being offered by many leading scientists. The Register asked the DOE for a copy of the study it most frequently cited, done by Quest Consultants Inc. The DOE response: It denied repeatedly that the study existed (even though it commissioned it) and also claimed it had nothing to do with such a study.

**An aerial photo from February 2004 of the former Navy homeport and proposed LNG site in Mobile Bay, Alabama.** ***Photo by Kiichiro Sato/Mobile Register.***

## Trying to Unveil the Findings

When Register reporters obtained the Quest study from other sources (who had earlier received copies for review), they discovered that its scope of work and conclusions did not support what DOE and FERC officials had presented to the public. The study's author also attempted to distance himself from DOE's conclusions, telling the Register that this study had been designed to answer a very narrow question. It was, he said, being "misused" by the DOE officials who had asked him to do the study. We also found that this document had not examined the possible consequences of a terrorist attack in Boston Harbor, even though DOE officials, and those from other agencies, repeatedly promoted it as evidence that a terrorist attack on an LNG vessel would not likely cause serious repercussions in Boston or elsewhere.

When the Register published its story detailing the disjunction between the substance of the Quest study and DOE's public representations of it, our reporters noted that the DOE officials claimed they knew nothing of the study. Our stories also noted that the Quest study was referred to in DOE presentations being widely circulated on the Internet as well as in Congressional reports, official FERC documents, and letters to members of Congress from administration officials.

After our story appeared in some newspapers around the country, DOE officials finally acknowledged that the study exists and that they commissioned it. Representative Edward Markey, the Massachusetts Democrat whose Boston-area district includes the only LNG terminal located in a major U.S. population center, described the DOE's refusal to acknowledge its responsibility for the document "a bizarre and Orwellian rewriting of history."

We've been able to find no provision of the USA Patriot Act or the Homeland Security Act that has been invoked that would require this kind of secrecy with such documents. The recent difficulties we've faced in obtaining information have likely resulted from the climate created by these new laws rather than by any specific language in them. But our experience in trying to learn more about the proposed LNG terminal siting in Mobile convinces us that some government officials seem prepared to go to great lengths to prevent disclosure of this research that goes behind their decision-making. It is also possible, however, that some of the silence about this subject might be due, in part, to an absence of broader and tougher press investigation and follow-through.

In recent months, DOE officials have been at least a little more direct in talking to Register reporters. But most of our hard data still have to come in over the transom rather than through government channels. DOE officials have repeatedly sidetracked or refused virtually every request we've made to obtain documents, even when documents had been distributed for review to scientists or legislators. DOE officials have never claimed that releasing this information would somehow aid terrorists, and our review of the Quest analysis finds that it would not have offered much new information to terrorists. It did not set forth any credible terrorist scenarios, nor did it produce one involving a threat to the surrounding community.

With the latest round of LNG safety studies commissioned by DOE and FERC, federal officials have willingly acknowledged their existence. But even during the solicitation of bids for these studies earlier this year, government officials made clear that any research developed as a part of these studies might be classified. Officials at Sandia National Laboratories, the quasi-governmental research lab conducting the latest LNG safety research for DOE, won't comment specifically on this. But sources close to its study said this upcoming analysis of LNG hazards would likely be presented in several forms—one for industry, one for government, and one for public consumption. It remains unclear whether the "public" document will reveal the critical scratchwork that allow us to see how its findings lead to its conclusions.

Register reporter Sean Reilly, who worked from Washington, D.C. in reporting on the paper's LNG stories, observes that the new emphasis on withholding information can be traced to two sources. The first is a memo by U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft, written on October 12, 2001 regarding Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests. In essence, this memo directed agencies to err on the side of caution when disclosing information and encouraged them to use existing disclosure exemptions to the fullest legal extent. This directive indicated a dramatic about-face from the Clinton era, when Attorney General Janet Reno advised agencies to err on the side of disclosure in regard to FOIA requests.

FERC's Critical Energy Infrastructure Information exemption was finalized in February 2003 and gave broad powers to the government and private companies, allowing them to exercise more control over what the general public can learn about the processes, infrastructure and plans of private industries. [See Joseph Davis's story on page 18.] Reilly highlighted for our readers how these new policies could make it extremely difficult for local communities to obtain information about the risks posed by local facilities such as the LNG terminal.

These provisions are new and generally regarded as untested. Perhaps, in the future, some rationale or legal basis for this approach to withholding information will be put forth. The clampdown on information might reflect a new attitude among the agencies. But as the Register's experience makes clear, in the current black box of administrative decision-making, government agencies have the means to withhold critical information, even when they have no apparent legal basis for doing so. ■

*Bill Finch is the Mobile Register's environment editor. Register reporter Ben Raines contributed to this article. Their LNG coverage won the 2003 Community Service Award and a Freedom of Information Award from the Alabama Associated Press Managing Editors' competition.*

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WATCHDOG

# Keeping Reporters and the Public in the Dark

## Secret dealmaking creates big challenges for journalists trying to cover the risks and benefits of energy decisions.

### By Elizabeth McCarthy

When California's deregulated energy market crashed and couldn't be put back together again, there were widespread fears that the lights would go out in homes, schools, hospitals and businesses. Politicians, regulators and the public were on the edge for months, with candles and batteries in hand. In spite of dire predictions, the lights did little more than flicker, but there were serious outages of another kind.

There were rolling information blackouts that continue to this day, along with a multibillion dollar tab. Since the deregulation fiasco, the public has been left in the dark about energy issues. Facts are being hidden at both the state and federal levels on matters that affect human and environmental health and people's pocketbooks. Light thus must be cast on the secret deals to fight violations of a fundamental principle of democracy—open government.

While the energy crisis was at full tilt, one might have thought that state legislators and regulators would be adverse to being kept in the dark about crucial policy issues given all the unanswered questions about deregulation prior to its enactment. In 1996, the complex bill responsible for the debacle was rammed through the legislature with few lawmakers taking the time to understand its potential ramifications. Only a few short years later, the results came back to haunt politicians, utilities and Californians. It also was largely responsible for the demise of Governor Gray Davis.

When the energy market cracked in early 2001, wholesale power prices soared so high that the state's investor-owned utilities, which serve millions of customers, couldn't pay their energy bills. The key concern was the crisis's impact on the fifth largest economy in the world. Manufacturers and other commercial interests feared there would be widespread blackouts, costing them billions of dollars. Stories about aging people in hot climates dying because high utility bills would force them to turn off their air conditioners were rampant, as were warnings that all or part of the state would be left without power.

The vast majority of Californians, including many lawmakers and regulators, were indeed left powerless. They had no information to challenge deals worked out in secret that would affect them for years to come. That includes arrangements with the private utilities and several agreements between the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) and those who generate energy.

## Reporting on Secret Deals

During the ongoing crisis, I covered numerous hearings and press conferences each week. Running among legislative hearings—more than 300 energy bills were introduced in early 2001—was par for the course. Because I had a lot of company, I often shared information with reporters from other small media outlets because, try as we might, we couldn't be two places at once. It was a months-long marathon to report these stories, but the most challenging part was dealing with the information blackouts.

Governor Davis cut to a trickle the flow of information from his office and energy agencies about efforts to reduce the disfigured market's damage. He met in secret with investor-owned utilities about ways to pay off their multibillion dollar debt. The state also took the unprecedented step of entering into the power business to ensure that juice kept flowing into the grid. DWR signed $42 billion in long-term contracts at breakneck speed.

Neither consumer nor environmental representatives were included in the negotiations. A large part of reporting on the crisis involved raising unanswered questions for our readers and highlighting potential conflicts of interest. Some of the key players in the governor's inner circle, for example, had ties to utilities sitting on the other side of the negotiating table. I discovered—and reported—that renewable power suppliers had been virtually shut out of the market. Nearly all the state's long-term energy contracts were for fossil-fuel power.

Although few knew the size of the deregulation tab being discussed behind closed doors, everyone knew it would be picked up by small ratepayers who had no say in the matter. It wasn't until deals were done and several news agencies forced their public release via the Freedom of Information Act that the actual numbers involved in the bad news could be reported. Many of the contracts were overpriced, often for unneeded power, and there were virtually no alternative power supplies in the mix. The state is still fighting, too, to recover nine billion dollars in refunds from generators for claimed excess power prices.

Californians are still paying for deregulation's aftermath and will be for some time. But the lesson to emerge from that crisis—the benefit of open decision-making—just hasn't stuck. While energy has not been front-page news during the two years following the crisis, it is still a big story. The state still lacks a long-term energy blueprint and another energy disaster might be on the horizon. In spite of that, secret dealmaking is alive and well. Consequently, covering the beat in a meaningful way continues to require digging for basic facts to reveal details of the shady arrangements—whether it is about price, risks and/or environmental impacts. For reporters, determination, resourcefulness and persistence are the equivalent of a flashlight.

There are several examples of closed-door government decisions. The most

## The Language and Culture of the Energy Beat

The first time I communicated in French and actually understood the response, I was elated. Those foreign syllables really did mean something, and as my misunderstandings and mispronunciations decreased, my fascination with the new world opening up to me increased.

It was much the same way when I plunged into energy reporting. My first weeks on the beat were painful. I was overwhelmed by the words I was hearing—megawatts, BTU's, capacity charges, and dedicated rate component. I didn't have a clue what these words meant. But when I began to get a grip on the beat's terminology and its culture, I entered another world. As with learning French, I've found this experience to be challenging, enriching, frustrating and fascinating.

In energy, the stakes are high and dollars huge. The success or failure of an energy policy or practice—whether it is regulation, deregulation or some combination of the two—has saved as well as taken lives. Decisions about energy have destroyed political careers. Recently, some impoverished Bolivian Indians lost their lives when they protested their government's plan to export natural gas to California and southwestern United States. After winning a second term as California's governor, Gray Davis was ejected from office by voters in a recall election largely because the state's deregulation experiment with its energy policy blew up in his face.

The energy beat involves covering flamboyant characters. There is Erin Brockovich, who helped to uncover how water supplies contaminated by Pacific Gas & Electric killed and harmed people in a small town in Southern California and Enron's Ken Lay, whose decision-making led to the scandalous implosion of his company, which was once the United States's largest energy trader.

Don't let a few BTU's, gigawatts or multisyllabic power lingo get in the way of tackling this beat. Plunging into the energy story and learning to speak its language and understand its culture is a journey well worth undertaking. ■
—E.M.

notorious is Vice President Dick Cheney's pro-industry secret energy task force that developed the administration's energy policy. A court case in which plaintiffs are seeking to learn the identity of those who served on this task force is now before the Supreme Court. Less well-known are secrecy issues involving several liquefied natural gas (LNG) plants now being proposed on the shores of California and in other U.S. areas and Mexico. Many people are concerned about the safety of these facilities that are used to reconstitute frozen imported natural gas to fuel homes, schools, business and power plants. This fear has intensified since a recent explosion at an LNG terminal in Algeria that killed 30 people and injured more than 70.

While investigating the matter, my fellow reporters at California Energy Circuit, an independent weekly publication about energy issues, and I learned that the U.S. government, which plays a large role in the gas market, has no intention of shedding light on this issue. Instead of fully informing local and state officials and the public, federal regulators are hiding safety studies. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) was expected to release LNG risk studies on proposed terminals, but Energy Circuit discovered that new rules under the USA Patriot Act placed those documents out of reach. [See Joseph Davis's story on page 18 for more on the impact of FERC's regulations.] While awaiting release of the California Energy Commission's risk assessments, we subsequently learned they were stamped "confidential" because of the federal rules. Our reports, therefore, have focused on the denial of information and how what you don't know about an LNG plant—be it consequences from an earthquake, accident or terrorist attacks—could hurt you.

Other questions I have explored include ones about comparative risks and possible alternative sources of energy. If LNG projects supplied by foreign gas are restricted, what fuel sources will fill that supply gap? Will it be dirty domestic coal or more nuclear energy and/or wind, solar or other renewable sources? What will be the health, environmental and financial impact of the chosen supplies, near and far?

There are also many unanswered questions about energy policy at the state level. The last few months, a number of costly, secret power agreements have been approved by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), including the eight billion dollar ratepayer bailout to bring an end to the bankruptcy of Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), which was the largest private utility bankruptcy in U.S. history. When PG&E and the CPUC reached a closed-door deal to settle the bankruptcy, only those involved in the negotiations knew the specifics. Questions by reporters, and those of some CPUC members who were required to vote on the multibillion dollar deal, were left unresolved.

Consequently, I focused my stories on the few known costs, including the professional fees of those involved in the struggle. The total cost was $400 million, with some attorneys and accountants reaping $700 an hour. My reporting also has highlighted issues the dissenting CPUC members raised. The minority members challenged the agreement in court, claiming they were denied access to essential facts, which interfered with their constitutional duties by keeping them from being able to judge the justness of the bankruptcy costs and reasonableness of alternative scenarios.

Another area of my investigation involved the deal's potential costs. I have looked at what the real vs. the purported savings to ratepayers would be if legislators approved a refinancing deal after the settlement. This arrangement was touted as shaving one billion off the ratepayers' bankruptcy costs. Early this year the refinancing measure was introduced, but neither PG&E nor lawmakers seemed in a hurry to pass it. My reporting revealed that each day's delay in passing this measure cost PG&E customers an additional $300,000.

Other examples of closed-door deals include a handful of agreements between investor-owned utilities and some generators given the green light by the CPUC. One involved a questionable power deal between Southern California Edison and an industrial solar energy company that had ties to the CPUC's president. The terms of these agreements were not aired until after they were signed. Thus it was not possible to report on the negotiations. Nor could the public put them to the test of reasonableness or ask if the agreements were fair and whether there were better and cleaner alternatives out there. Also not debated prior to the decisions has been who pays how much and who reaps the benefits.

Affected community members and public officials are, however, fighting back. An increasing number are insisting that deals be made in the open. In early April, at the Port of Long Beach, California, those in government who are considering an onshore LNG plant announced they would disclose safety information about the project to the public. They pointed to open government requirements under the California Environmental Quality Act and vowed that if FERC tried to slam the door shut, the project would not be approved. While FERC has shut the front door, the local agency has cracked open the back door, allowing reporters to access crucial information. Working with the agency, rather than at odds, allows for more detailed information to be assessed and conveyed and results in a better informed public.

A growing chorus of cries over the CPUC's hidden dealmaking also resulted in a bill being introduced that would require information that utilities submit to the CPUC—with the exclusion of trade secrets—be made public. This bill supports healthy debate on short and long-term implications of various power arrangements. This is a promising step, but until energy policy is fully lit, reporters—and the public—should keep candles, batteries and flashlights in hand as they work to find ways to cast light on deals being made in the dark. ■

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WATCHDOG

# Why Did California's Lights Go Out?

## A reporting team looks for answers amid a new and complex electricity market.

By Rick Jurgens

For a reporter, covering California's recent yearlong energy crisis was not without its guilty pleasures. The story was exciting, fast moving, and a ticket to Page One. It was a bare-knuckled brawl with billions of dollars at stake. What the story lacked in colorful characters it more than made up for in bizarre twists and hidden clues of gross financial abuses and market manipulation.

But how well did we, as journalists, serve our readers? Writing in a recent New Yorker, Nicholas Lemann, dean of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, noted that society has "given journalists what we think is a critical task: amassing, digesting and getting across important material that isn't readily accessible to ordinary citizens." Journalists, he wrote, act as "intermediaries between the public and realms that are otherwise moated by power, distance and complexity."

During the California crisis, reporters faced especially daunting challenges in moving information across this moat. A slowly evolving system of monopoly utility regulation, with carefully documented costs and profits, had been replaced by a complex network of markets in which electricity and risk—contracts for future delivery of power and arcane securities such as "weather derivatives"—were traded like pork bellies. We headed out to cover a bank robbery and discovered that the place had been turned into a casino.

### Adjusting to Cover the Electric Story

On energy beats, the question usually asked first by reporters is, "How will this event or proposal affect the rates paid by consumers?." When utilities operated as government-sanctioned monopolies, being a vigilant reporter mainly required looking over the shoulder of regulators whose job it was to make sure that utilities kept the lights on and costs down. Higher rates were bad, and lower rates were good. The challenge was to extract readable stories from the regulators' quasi-judicial proceedings, in which agendas read like invoices from auto parts dealers and policy choices were buried inside of 300-page alternate rulings. A former newspaper editor who now works as a public relations advisor to an energy company told me the phrase he and his colleagues used to describe this kind of process-encrusted beat—MEGO, for my eyes glaze over.

But with the opening of the electricity industry to competition, the role of reporters began to change. Rates were freed to move up and down. As a means to judge the health of a market, price fluctuations became almost meaningless. More complex criteria, a broader view, and a longer time frame are needed. In reporting on a competitive electricity industry, the soundness of many business, economic and engineering decisions need to be assessed. With competition, sleepy utility companies with low-risk, dividend-paying stocks got pushed aside by new merchant energy companies promising rapid growth and rising stock prices. That drew the interest of business reporters, like myself, who are always looking for stories about hot stocks and booming industries.

Many newspapers, including mine—the Contra Costa Times—normally give only limited coverage to the electricity industry. When the energy crisis hit, we responded by assigning three reporters—one from the environment beat, one from the state government bureau, and me, from the business section. To keep up with the explosion of news and provide context to our readers, each of us had to depend on and value the knowledge of our colleagues and figure out ways to smoothly handoff reporting and writing duties, even while resolving any disagreements we had respectfully.

One big challenge for us was dealing with energy experts. None of us had been on the energy or utility beat regularly while deregulation's law and regulations were taking shape. Now we had to learn quickly, while relying on and trusting our instincts and also mixing skepticism with open-minded gathering of information.

Framing the energy story was also difficult. Most Americans embrace the idea of free markets and competition, but they do so selectively, depending on results. When the price of a gallon of gasoline or a kilowatt hour of electricity soars, so does populist outrage. But when the market value of one's house or stock portfolio climbs at the same time, well, that's called living the American Dream.

Beginning in the 1980's, deregulation proposals blossomed across the country. In the early to mid-1990's, a little-known Houston company called Enron acted as a sort of Johnny Appleseed, planting and financially nurturing seeds of change in the electricity industry in states from California to New Hampshire. Economists predicted that electricity markets would work magic, sparing consumers from costs passed on by bloated monopolies. Rising rates, it was argued, would induce consumers to conserve and investors to build power plants. Low rates would squeeze out inefficient and polluting producers and boost demand when power was available.

Some economists rooted their predictions in an understanding of previous deregulation experiments, including airlines and telecommunications and knowledge of the electricity system. Others—like the one who explained to me the workings of a national power market, an impossibility due to limitations of the current transmission grid—were just reiterating their faith in the inherent superiority of markets. What drew more limited attention were critical issues such as electricity's unusual characteristic as a commodity that can't be stored. Also the difficulty of setting up new billion-dollar commodity markets received little attention. Sometimes, warnings of deregulation's pitfalls dealt only with minor issues, such as the undesired prospect of annoying dinnertime calls from retail marketers.

## California's Electricity Crash

In 1998, California launched its aggressive move to competition. At first, things went pretty smoothly. Then, in the late spring of 2000, a sudden jump in wholesale power costs jolted electricity customers in the San Diego area, where market competition had gotten to the point at which regulators no longer set the retail electricity rates. This exposed the customers to the pain of rising costs, and soon consumer outrage prompted legislators to step in and recap rates in that area.

That episode caused little stir elsewhere in California, where retail rates had remained frozen. San Diego's problems were easily dismissed as a local aberration in a solid energy system that typically made news only when disrupted by fire, storm or other natural or man-made disasters. With the implication of changes in the power system not yet clear, few saw San Diego as a warning sign of possible problems elsewhere. "We were kind of watching curiously, wondering what the hell this means," recalls Mike Taugher, my colleague on our paper's energy beat.

Energy hadn't normally been a big story in California. In much of the state, a temperate climate means that heat and air conditioning aren't big issues. Energy costs aren't central in the defense, entertainment and technology industries, which are the main economic engines.

By the fall of 2000, the power shortages that hit San Diego were spreading throughout the state. Californians faced occasional rolling blackouts that were made more ominous by the block-by-block pattern in which outages were imposed. Meanwhile, the utilities hemorrhaged money when it turned out the rate freeze they had agreed to as compensation for their lost monopolies was much lower than the cost they were now paying to supply the electricity.

As the state's electricity system crumbled, it was easy for reporters to find victims and tell their stories. There were residents in unlit and unheated houses, motorists stuck at malfunctioning traffic signals, and businesses forced to pay soaring costs and endure mandatory shutdowns. Interest groups nominated themselves as heroes of the unfolding story. Power sellers welcomed reporters onto trading floors in their Houston skyscrapers, but back home, California politicians were pointing to these Texas addresses as being where the villains in this story worked.

The story was portrayed as a modern-day war between states, with California at the mercy of ruthless energy giants with cowboy hats and protection from the federal government. Soon this story line was strengthened when it surfaced that owners were shutting down power plants to create shortages and slick trading was raising prices. Prosecution of wrongdoers began as the state sought relief from overcharges and overpriced contracts.

For us to help readers understand where the crisis came from meant we needed to explore new dimensions of the energy story. There were complex questions to be asked about electricity markets and the engineering of power systems and their answers conveyed in ways nonexperts could understand. We had to go back and look at why the decision to deregulate electricity had been made and determine its wisdom. And then we had to report on the flawed transition plan and how it opened the door to criminal and unethical market manipulation.

Covering these important dimensions of the story taxed the resources and the abilities of daily papers' newsroom staff, just at a time when economic slowdowns were driving down newspaper revenue. Internally, each of us coped with pressures (or personal desire) to return to our previous beats.

## Watchdog Reporting on Energy

The electricity crisis ended not with a bang but a whimper. During the summer of 2001, energy usage declined. Politicians credited public-spirited conservation and touted the market-calming effects of long-term contracts the state had signed with power sellers. In reality, an economic recession had driven down consumption. Nevertheless, controversies continued.

The energy story—and those who were reporting it—moved into courtrooms. PG&E, the state's largest utility, sought shelter in bankruptcy. State officials and utilities pursued refunds from power sellers. Administrative actions and criminal prosecutions targeted sellers who had shut down plants, fabricated data, and gamed the market. Electricity rates remained elevated by payments on deferred costs and the now-controversial contracts. When the story moved to the courtrooms, we needed to find ways to draw compelling stories out of droning proceedings and forests of complicated legal briefs. Even the most stubborn reporters now faced pressure (alternating with reduced interest) from editors looking for big headlines from the resources they were devoting to this story.

Viewed in the rearview mirror, the energy crisis appears smaller than in real life. The psychological shock of rolling blackouts far exceeded the actual hurt to public health and safety and the costs incurred by businesses (with the exception of a few in power-intensive industries). And even though the state's energy crisis was a big factor in the public's disaffection that led to the recall of Governor Gray Davis, energy issues barely surfaced in the successful campaign of Arnold Schwarzenegger.

California newspapers moved on to other crises, even as the structural problems exposed during the energy crisis remain unsolved. Key interest groups are still deadlocked over such basic issues as how to attract investment in new power plants, even as a new chorus of warnings about impending blackouts sounds. And big questions linger about the wisdom of deregulation in the electricity markets and the unleashing of competition.

One thing is certain: The deregulation project will continue, and newspapers will need to figure out how to be consistent and effective watchdogs. What the California crisis demonstrated is that for us to be the public's watchdogs means reporters need to spend lots of time wandering around the energy beat's equivalent of junkyards. And editors—at a time of shrinking newsroom budgets—will need to devote the necessary resources to enable reporters to do this—even when the lights are on. ■

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WATCHDOG

# Being a Watchdog of FirstEnergy Corp.

## The Plain Dealer led the nation's reporting after the massive 2003 blackout.

### By Debbie Van Tassel

Ohioans long knew FirstEnergy Corp. as the utility supplying electricity to the northern part of their state and as a near-monopoly that also owned power generation and distribution assets in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The rest of the country became acquainted with the Akron, Ohio company after August 14, 2003, when a cascading series of power failures knocked out electricity to eight states and parts of Canada. It was the worst power failure in history, affecting more than 50 million people and causing six billion dollars in economic losses in the United States alone.

Within days, FirstEnergy came under the glare of national media and government investigators from the United States and Canada for its probable role in the blackout. By mid-November, when the joint task force investigating the power failure concluded FirstEnergy and its reliability coordinator bore the brunt of responsibility, reporters at The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer were deep into telling this story as a part of their investigative reporting on this local power company since the late 1990's. This examination of

**A darkened city skyline can be seen in Cleveland after the largest blackout in U.S. history left millions of people in the United States and Canada facing a second sweltering night without electricity. Ohio faced the worst water crisis in its history.** ***Photo by Marvin Fong/The Plain Dealer.***

FirstEnergy's business practices, reliability record, and relationships with regulators was undertaken in response to proposed changes in national energy policy and Ohio's move to deregulate its utilities.

These reporting efforts intensified after 2000. From both Cleveland and Columbus, the state capital, Plain Dealer reporters wrote that state regulators agreed to let FirstEnergy pass on $8.7 billion in transition charges to consumers in exchange for freezing rates. A collaborative investigation by reporters in Washington, D.C. and Cleveland led to stories being published about a rust hole and cracks in the reactor lid's components at FirstEnergy's Davis-Besse Nuclear Power Station and loose oversight by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC).

This meant that when power failed on the afternoon of August 14th, a core of FirstEnergy-savvy reporters were ready to take the lead in this breaking news story. There were no silver bullets. Ultimately, what led to some of the most compelling stories about this blackout was a smart blend of old-fashioned journalism and skillful use of information-age technology.

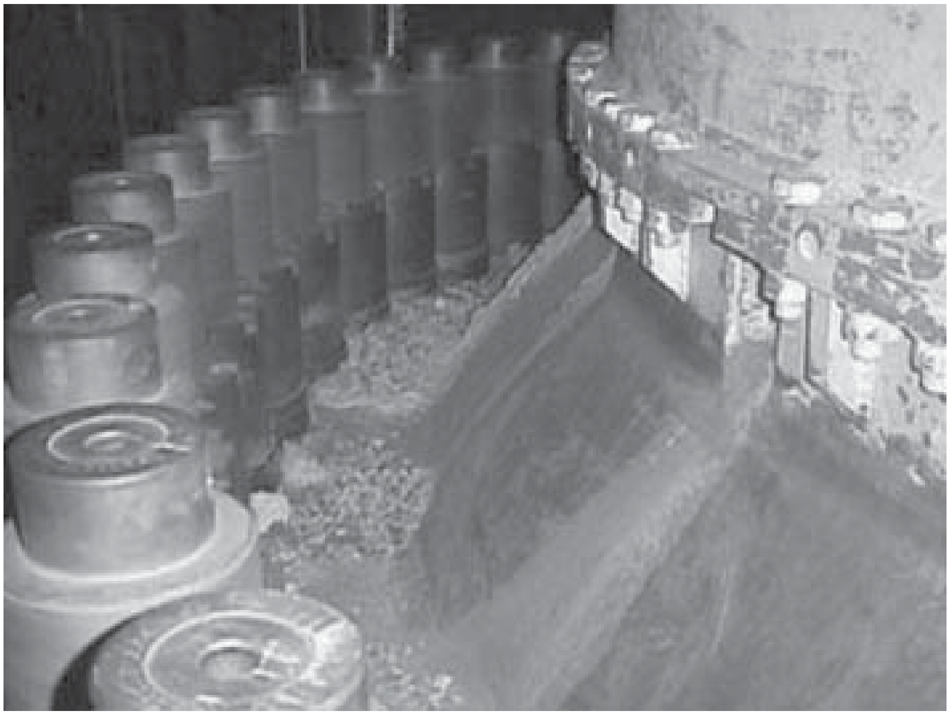
## Reporting on FirstEnergy

Working under a state mandate to relinquish monopolies of its three electric companies—Cleveland Electric Illuminating, Toledo Edison, and Ohio Edison—FirstEnergy proposed to state regulators in 2000 that it be allowed to recover the costs of the nuclear power plants it built as a regulated utility. In exchange, FirstEnergy would freeze electric rates through the end of 2005. State officials signed off on an agreement on July 19, 2000, and this allowed the utility to recover the costs of its nuclear projects by adding what appeared as transition charges on customers' monthly bills. The deal allowed the utility to pass those charges, which average about $15 a month, even to consumers who switched to another electric supplier.

Julie Carr-Smyth, our paper's statehouse reporter who covers regulatory issues, wondered how FirstEnergy and state officials justified the pass-throughs to consumers. Carr-Smyth asked to see a study prepared for the Ohio Consumers' Counsel by an independent consultant, LaCapra Associates of Boston, to determine how much FirstEnergy should be allowed to collect. Even though taxpayers bore the cost of the report ($579,000), the Consumers' Counsel, Robert Tongren, successfully blocked at least a half dozen Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests from The Plain Dealer and other organizations. Tongren claimed the study was protected by confidentiality arguments and pending litigation.

More than a year later, energy reporter John Funk and science reporter John Mangels began looking into discussions between FirstEnergy and the NRC over when to shut down Davis-Besse, an aging nuclear power plant near Toledo, for a crack inspection. Davis-Besse is one of 69 pressurized water reactors in the nation's nuclear fleet. Workers had spotted cracks and corrosion around the reactor head at least three years earlier, and the NRC wanted the inspection done by the end of 2001. FirstEnergy argued it could wait until the following April, during a scheduled refueling. Performing both tasks at the same time would save the utility millions, since when it is not operating the utility must buy replacement power at an average cost of $500,000 per day. (Davis-Besse supplies about seven percent of FirstEnergy's generation.)

The NRC compromised and gave FirstEnergy until February 16, 2002. That inspection found the cracks were more serious than suspected because they involved the nozzles that carry control rods through the reactor lid and into the nuclear core. And on March 6, 2002, a worker trying to repair a cracked nozzle found something far more insidious: a pineapple-sized hole in the reactor lid. Only the lid's thin stainless steel liner held back the 87,000 gallons of pressurized radioactive and superheated water from jetting through the rust hole and into the reactor's containment building.



This photo of the lid of the Davis-Besse reactor was taken during a refueling in April 2000. It shows where rust and dried boric acid were streaming off the reactor's lid nearly two years before the rust hole was detected. This was one of a set of photos handed by workers to an inspector for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in 2000—but never acted on. *Photo by David I. Andersen/The Plain Dealer.*

Two months later, Funk and Mangels learned much more was at stake than inept management and lax government oversight. A source informed them that the NRC had launched a criminal investigation into whether FirstEnergy withheld key information from federal agents about conditions at Davis-Besse. And in the early summer, another source sent them a box containing more than 3,000 pages of internal NRC documents. None of the content was redacted, as certain highly sensitive portions might have been had the reporters obtained the documents through an FOIA request.

Among other things, the documents showed how much FirstEnergy had pressured the NRC to delay the crack inspection. Roy Lessy, Jr., a veteran nuclear utilities lawyer, a partner in the nation's 10th-largest law firm and former deputy chief counsel for the NRC, accompanied FirstEnergy engineers when they visited the NRC to make their case. Most interesting was that the papers revealed NRC managers themselves had pushed for the compromise that allowed FirstEnergy to run the reactor until the middle of February.

After the reactor lid hole was discovered, the NRC ordered FirstEnergy to replace, rather than repair, the reactor head, and this process was completed in September 2002. Still, Funk and Mangels pounded the Davis-Besse drum relentlessly, keeping the pressure on the NRC not to allow the utility to restart until all its acknowledged problems had been corrected. The reporting team produced an impressive array of major reports on some of the reactor's problems, including the following public revelations:

- Davis-Besse's emergency equipment had been seriously compromised and could not be counted on to work properly. Had the cracked lid burst, operators would have been challenged to keep the reactor's nuclear core covered with water and safe from catching fire or melting. Experts called the existence of the hole, coupled with the compromised equipment, the closest to a nuclear disaster since the near-meltdown at Three Mile Island in 1979.
- The utility lacked a safety culture and environment of trust that would encourage workers to report possible safety violations or equipment flaws.
- FirstEnergy had largely ignored repeated reports over many years from workers of the accumulation of corrosion deposits on the lid. And NRC inspectors ignored a photograph of corrosion around the reactor lid given them by Davis-Besse workers on April 6, 2000.

**A South Euclid, Ohio woman shops in near darkness following the power outage on August 14, 2003 that affected up to 50 million people.** ***Photo by Eustacio Humphrey/The Plain Dealer.***

## The Internet's Role in Reporting

Funk and Mangels augmented their reporting through skillful use of the Internet. The Plain Dealer posted all Davis-Besse stories on a separate URL at cleveland.com, the newspaper's online cousin. From e-mails, they learned that their stories were being read by people throughout the United States as well as in Europe and Asia. They also joined a Yahoo nuclear listserv on which every Davis-Besse problem and every response by the NRC was debated. The Internet presence meant Funk and Mangels could bypass government and media specialists and deal directly with NRC engineers, who quickly recognized that this reporting team understood the highly technical issues. This was true for engineers at other reactors across the nation, and they became invaluable sources.

Beyond that, the NRC itself is nearly transparent with its day-to-day work product. If somebody writes a report, then by learning how to search the NRC Web site, this report can be found and read. However, access to the NRC's Internet library, a source of records distinct from its official Web site, required special free software that The Plain Dealer installed to allow Funk and Mangels to make daily checks of the NRC's enormous report output.

## After the Blackout

Davis-Besse had been down about 18 months—still straining FirstEnergy's power generation—when the lights went out in The Plain Dealer newsroom at 4:11 p.m. on August 14, 2003. With characteristic gallows humor, reporters and editors wondered jokingly whether Davis-Besse was to blame. The

Plain Dealer had no wire service feeds or television operating in Cleveland to find out what was going on, but reporters in Columbus and Washington, D.C. had service, so we quickly learned that the blackout was a national story.

We published a remarkably thorough paper the next day, using a press and facilities at the Akron Beacon Journal and laptop computers, flashlights, candlelight and a portable generator in Cleveland. By the second day, it was clear the power failure likely began in FirstEnergy territory, but where and why were mysteries. And we wanted to break that news, so we assembled a team of reporters to attack the story on multiple fronts. The goal: to find out what went wrong on the fateful afternoon.

From Cleveland, Funk, Teresa Dixon Murray, Tom Breckenridge, and Peter Krouse were assigned to find out whether FirstEnergy had been cutting corners since deregulation. Funk also made regular checks with the Midwest Independent Transmission System Operator, FirstEnergy's reliability coordinator, and respected consultant groups such as Cambridge Energy Research Associates. In Washington, Stephen Koff developed sources at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the NRC, and the Union of Concerned Scientists; Sabrina Eaton handled the North American Electric Reliability Council and the East Central Area Reliability Council, a regional watchdog. From Columbus, Sandy Theis and Carr-Smyth focused on state officials and regulators, including the Consumers' Counsel and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO).

Based on phone tips and a police incident report, on August 26th we published a story about a suspicious boom and fire involving a major transmission line that sagged into a tall tree in Walton Hills, a Cleveland suburb. Though the line was not overloaded, it was the second to fail in the cascading sequence on August 14th. This story outlined nearly the same series of events—including other suspected transmission-line tree contacts—that was identified nearly three months later by the government task force. Two days later, after pursuing inside tips confirmed by company and investigative sources, we told our readers that FirstEnergy's alarm system had failed, and its computers were not supplying the real-time data operators needed to deal with growing instability on the grid. Once again, our reporting was echoed by the task force report that cited FirstEnergy's equipment failure and operator errors.

Officials at Ohio's other electric companies—American Electric Power, Cinergy Corp., and Dayton Power & Light Co.—pointed our reporters to obscure filings with names such as "Annual State of Power" and "Annual Service Quality Reports." Electric utilities must file those reports yearly with the PUCO, detailing such information as maintenance and repair records and predicting future energy needs and risks to the system.

We asked the PUCO for those reports going back to 2001 so our reporters could do year-to-year comparisons. No one had asked to look at those reports before and, uncertain of its responsibility, the PUCO asked FirstEnergy for permission to release them. FirstEnergy requested that large sections be redacted, rendering the documents we received worthless. When we promised not to publish addresses of substations or other sensitive or competitive information, we finally got unredacted copies of the reports.

On August 31st, Murray reported that FirstEnergy fixed 75 percent of its so-called common problems—broken wires and poles—in 2001. But by the next year, the utility had only repaired 17 percent, leaving a backlog of nearly 11,000 items in need of repair in 2003. We could not compare FirstEnergy's repair record to other Ohio utilities because each has a different system of reporting. The report also said FirstEnergy had cut back its voluntary tree-trimming schedule from three years to five.

On September 6th, we reported that since 2001, FirstEnergy had shed 500 skilled workers whose jobs included vital upkeep of electrical lines and power plants.

## Revisiting the Rate Hikes Issue

In October, Carr-Smyth decided the climate was right—and sufficient time had passed—to renew her earlier requests for the LaCapra report on transition charges. But staff members at the Consumers' Counsel told her the report had been destroyed and that Tongren had changed a records' retention policy to allow for its destruction. On October 17th, Carr-Smyth wrote her first story about the document's destruction. Then she began to construct a paper trail, obtaining the Consumers' Counsel's records' retention schedules, document destruction orders, years of public records' requests and Tongren's calendars, phone records, and time sheets.

Carr-Smyth eventually learned that LaCapra had recommended FirstEnergy be allowed to collect only $2.6 billion in transition charges (instead of the $8.7 billion that state officials agreed to). Yet Tongren, who was paid $140,000 a year to represent consumer interests, signed off on a deal giving the utility the billions more. FirstEnergy's customers, who pay the highest electric rates in Ohio, to this day are still paying transition costs. The documents also revealed that Tongren accepted meals, refreshments and golf outings from utilities on 71 occasions between 1999 and 2003 and failed to properly report more than $1,000 in gifts from utilities.

Carr-Smyth followed her story about the report's destruction with at least a dozen more. Less than a month later, under pressure from state officials and consumer groups, Tongren resigned.

## Task Force Conclusions

The bi-national task force (United States and Canada) issued its first report on November 19, 2003. It was something of an anticlimax; it said FirstEnergy almost single-handedly caused the largest blackout in U.S. history because its computers didn't work, and the utility had not trimmed trees around power lines. The report also said the Akron-based company could have prevented the power failure had it cut off electricity, or shed load, to parts of northeast Ohio when it detected instability on the grid. It also criticized the response of FirstEnergy's reliability coordinator, the Midwest independent transmission system operator.

The Davis-Besse nuclear plant had played no role in the blackout. But continuing press coverage of FirstEnergy's failure to maintain the nuclear plant in mint operating condition—and keeping a major power generator out of play during a peak summer month—only added to the notoriety from the blackout.

No single chapter in this FirstEnergy saga has concluded.

- In November 2003, the criminal investigation of Davis-Besse was referred to a federal grand jury to look into how key information might have been withheld from the NRC by company officials. As of this date, the grand jury still has not reported. Also in November, a company survey revealed Davis-Besse employees still don't have full confidence in their bosses' commitment to safety.
- In December 2003, FirstEnergy filed an application, known as a rate case, with the PUCO to collect another two billion dollars in transition charges and extend its rate freeze through 2009. The company says the deal is good for consumers because it protects them from "rate shock." Consumer groups and other power companies argue that the rate freeze and transition charges are what have effectively prevented competing electric utilities from offering service to FirstEnergy customers. The rate case is still under review.
- On March 8, 2004, the NRC finally allowed FirstEnergy to restart the Davis-Besse reactor. It had been down for more than two years, costing FirstEnergy more than $607 million for repairs and replacement power purchases. The plant remains under NRC supervision for at least another year.
- On April 5, 2004, the second U.S.-Canada task force report reiterated that FirstEnergy could have isolated the blackout to Greater Cleveland had it cut power to some of its customers when voltage on its major transmission lines began to collapse. It also rebuked the company for its computer failures, sloppy operating procedures, lack of emergency planning and poor training of grid managers, and called for Congress to create tough mandatory reliability standards for electric utilities, with penalties, to prevent massive power failures in the future.

The task force made 46 recommendations for changes and pledged to operate for another year to make sure things get done.

At The Plain Dealer, our coverage of FirstEnergy continues. Though our blackout reporting team has been disbanded, Funk and Carr-Smyth are paying careful attention to the negotiations over FirstEnergy's latest rate freeze proposal, keeping consumers' interests foremost. Funk also keeps an eye on nuclear power, a task that involves more than Davis-Besse. Recently, the NRC cited another FirstEnergy nuclear plant, Perry Unit # 1 in northeast Ohio, for three safety violations. ■

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# Using Narrative to Tell the Blackout Story

## Reporting from inside a power plant helped to tell the dramatic story of decision-making when the lights went out.

### By Mark Clayton

High on a catwalk, I paused to look down into the dim void between two 90-foot-high boilers, steel-riveted dinosaurs of another era guzzling hundreds of gallons of heavy #6 fuel oil each minute. It was late on a hot Saturday afternoon in August 2003, and I was deep inside the Albany Steam Station, a 1950's power plant owned by PSEG Power, a New York utility. An enormous monolithic brick building hard by the Hudson River, it housed four giant-but-elderly boilers—two of them growling beneath my feet—straining to generate the super-heated steam and megawatts desperately needed to re-energize the Northeast power grid, darkened by the largest blackout in U.S. history.

Power was slowly being restored by the time I found myself there—two days after the lights went out. Sweat poured off me in the 120-degree heat of the tight, dimly lit passage between the giant boilers. A few steps away, station manager Wayne Bolton-Engelhardt, who had brought me to the highest and hottest level of the boiler building, spoke with a bemused smile, his brow barely damp. Amid the din, I strained to hear Bolton-Engelhardt speak, as waste heat pulsed from the steel walls into this hot spot where a human could linger only a few minutes. Notepad out, I scribbled as he explained how he and his men had brought the old plant—which like so many others had been knocked into darkness by the blackout—back to life and how the crew, with a synchronization NASA might envy, ever-so-gingerly snapped it back into the grid the day before. As he spoke, four 100-megawatt turbines far below were greedily receiving the 1,000-degree steam each boiler shot into them. They were all spinning flat out.

Despite the Dante-esque quality of the moment, there was joy and excitement, too. I had finally arrived where I had been struggling to get to—inside the belly of a generating behemoth, the bowels of an Eisenhower-era power station straining desperately against its own age to pour its pitifully small, yet still critical 400 megawatts of electricity, into the vast emptiness of the Northeast grid.

## How to Report the Blackout

Like so many calamities, the great blackout of 2003—that knocked out power for millions from New York to Michigan—was both a great news story to tell and a mystery. Early reports rumored a lightning strike at a power yard in Canada near Niagara Falls had knocked the system down. Some speculated terrorism might be responsible. It would be weeks and months, and an investigation by an official commission, before the pieces of truth began to fit into a coherent picture of human and technical error involving computer software, lax standards, and poor communication.

In Boston, where I work at The Christian Science Monitor, the lights had not gone out in the newsroom, and television and wire service reports in the first hours were, naturally enough, bare bones. Someone, I thought, should get into a generating plant to tell the story of just one power plant's role in the huge network that had gone suddenly dark. Downsizing this massive outage to one plant might yield insights into what went wrong and capture the human dimension, too.

I began my quest with only faint hope of actually wangling my way inside any power plant. Because of terrorism rumors, security was extra tight, and the big energy companies and their public relations armies were on full alert. Phone lines were jammed, too. I immediately decided not to bother calling any company headquarters. The only way into one of those plants was to be invited inside by one of its senior employees. Yet those people would be under intense pressure to solve a mountain of technical problems that "civilians" like myself could barely imagine in order to get the lights back on, making it quite unlikely that any would welcome a reporter at this time.

But this was the only way I could think of getting in, so I began my search with Google, looking for Web sites and phone numbers of those connected to the power industry, the power stations, industry associations, and regional power authorities. I was looking now for anyone who might pick up a phone and talk to me—who might in turn know someone inside one of those big power plants. By day's end, I'd had no success.

This was not too surprising. Back then, I was not an energy writer with a long list of great sources. I was an education reporter with no energy sources. (When the blackout occurred, I was working on a college tuition increase story. Today I write full-time about both environment and energy issues.) At other major newspapers with much larger staffs it might seem odd for an education writer to jump onto a story like this. Yet the Monitor has a long tradition of successfully drawing on all corners of the newsroom when major events break. And the blackout had more than a little of that 9/11 feeling, thanks to the first day's terrorism rumors. So I dropped the tuition story and began pondering power plants.

By the next morning, power still wasn't back on in New York. This encouraged me to continue pursuing my idea. Also, most TV and newspaper accounts seemed to be relying on engineering professors and power company representatives to give them a clue about what might be going on. I'd seen no reports of what had happened coming from anyone inside those power plants. Finally lightning struck as I recalled a casual conversation with the boiler maintenance chief in the

**Wayne Bolton-Engelhardt, an operations adviser at Albany Steam Station in New York, recounts the blackout. It was the second time the plant had ever gone dark.** ***Photo by © 2003 Mark Clayton/The Christian Science Monitor.***

basement of the Monitor building who had told me he once had worked in a power plant. I called him. Where had he worked? When? (Twenty-six years ago.) Did he still know anyone at the plant? It was the Albany plant—and he knew a guy who he thought still worked there.

I spent the rest of the day trying to reach the contact he'd suggested—Bolton-Engelhardt. To find his home number and leave messages, I used switchboard.com. His wife called me back. Her husband was at the plant, working to get it back on the grid. I told her it was urgent. She took a message, but also reluctantly gave me her husband's work number in the control room at the Albany Steam Station. I reached him in the middle of multiple crises at the station that Friday afternoon. I told him who I was—and he told me tersely that he could not talk. I pleaded for him to call me when he could and gave him my number. It was the next day before he called me back at my home. We talked for more than an hour—and, finally, he told me I could come take a look if I wanted. The plant had been back on line only a few hours. I was out the door.

After touring the boilers, I went with Bolton-Engelhardt to the control room. There I interviewed a half dozen men, most of them industry veterans who had seen the computer printout spit out warning of a troubling frequency fluctuation on the grid. I learned how the lights went out, the ensuing confusion punctuated by battery-backup warning sirens and banks of flashing control-panel warning lights. It was almost like the movies.

I learned, too, how the emergency power had come on for the Albany Steam Station for only the second time in its history. But I also found out that the power wasn't nearly enough to avoid rapidly escalating danger to its four big turbines. And there was the threat that the entire plant might not be able to come back online if those turbines failed. I was told about how multiple crisis conditions had rapidly developed—among them the threat of a dangerous hydrogen leak—and also how the sheer weight of the one huge turbine, spinning at thousands of RPM's when the blackout struck, would warp its thick axle and be lost if the plant remained on emergency battery power for more than a few minutes. With only minutes remaining before these escalating crises would culminate, Bolton-Engelhardt and his team talked through a situation only he and another engineer on the team had seen once before, and that was during a blackout in the 1960's.

**Wayne Bolton-Engelhardt and a colleague in the control room at the Albany Steam Station.** ***Photo by Mark Clayton.***

With the help of Bolton-Engelhardt and others in the control room, I reconstructed a narrative account of what took place during these precious minutes. I found out how the team had picked two critical relays out of a wall full of hand-thrown relays, selecting the two that connected them with a nearby hydroelectric dam that was their reserve backup. This was a system they had never really used before. They threw the switch and prayed it would connect—though it didn't the first time. But the second time it did, and thousands of watts suddenly flowing from the small dam lit up the Albany Steam Station, as its corridor lights suddenly went from winking dim "fireflies" to fully on.

Hours later, after the boilers were brought up and the turbines were spinning, the tense and delicate process of connecting the station to a still unstable grid might have knocked the entire station back off line. But it didn't.

## What Readers Learned

Monitor readers were among the first in the nation to find out what had happened minute-by-minute inside a small and old, yet critical plant on a key power pathway in the wake of this enormous blackout. They were among the first to learn, too, one of the clues to the system's failure: A strange variety of electricity measured in "megavars"—not megawatts—that was vital to maintaining the stability of the grid was, for some reason, in short supply. This odd duck of the power-generating world called "push-back power" and "reactive power" turns out to be a kind of electricity the Albany Steam Station specializes in supplying. It provides stability and back-pressure to keep the megawatts of much larger power plants flowing where they needed to go—to places south like New York City.

I took pictures with my digital camera and raced for home on the Massachusetts Turnpike. By nine o'clock on Saturday night, I was ready to write, and by seven the next morning, the story and pictures were in an e-mail message to the Monitor's assistant managing editor for features, Cheryl Sullivan. She did a quick edit, then handed it to National News Editor Scott Armstrong and, in Monday's paper, the lead story on the blackout, written by a team of staffers, was accompanied by a tick-tock tale from "Inside the Belly of a Generating Beast." Like Col. Kilgore in "Apocalypse Now," I felt that something about the whole story smelled like victory. Still, that sensation might have just come from the essence of sweat and #6 fuel oil on my shirt. ■

*Mark Clayton is a staff writer for The Christian Science Monitor. "Inside the Belly of a Generating Beast" can be found at www.csmonitor.com/2003/0818/p01s02-usec.html.*

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# Green Buildings Need Sharp-Eyed Architecture Critics

## 'Like other journalists, architecture critics need to be inquisitive and skeptical about what they see.'

### By Randy Gragg

When writing about energy issues as an architecture critic, it's hard to know whether I am tackling the topic as a story about science, a political cause, a fad or religion. These days energy innovations in buildings are frequently portrayed by developers and politicians as "green design" and "smart growth," but within these movements, factions are as apt to be led by marketers, preachers and sycophants as they are by earnest researchers and farsighted practitioners. Part of an architecture critic's job is to figure out if the message is truly captured by a building's design.

The historic Rapid Transfer Building in Portland, Oregon was renovated to become the new Jean Vollum Natural Capital Center. It is headquarters for a variety of "green" banking, development and advocacy groups and is a showcase of sustainable building practices. The building was the first in the country to get the top "gold" certification for green building practices and the first historic building to get it. *Photo by Marv Bondarowicz/The Oregonian.*

Portland, Oregon, where I live and work, is considered to be the nation's most advanced practitioner of *both* smart growth and green design. That can be a slippery brand identity and one that an increasing number of cities clamor to claim. But Portland has a 30-year legacy of far-reaching political decisions and regulatory frameworks to back up its reputation. In the early 1970's, Oregon's legislature required every metropolitan area in the state to circle itself with an "urban growth boundary" to preserve farmland and forests. And well before most other American cities, Portland revitalized its downtown, weaning a few folks from their cars with a light rail system and one of the nation's first new streetcar lines in over 50 years. A regional authority set up to oversee garbage collection morphed into the nation's first elected regional government, Metro, and it now has extraordinary powers to oversee growth management for Portland *and* its suburbs.

The state also offers a smorgasbord of tax credits for the use of innovative energy systems. All development that uses any public dollars must be certified under the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) program, a kind of U.L. rating for energy and environmental consciousness.

If I sound like a cheerleader for the way Oregon does things, it's probably a little out of guilt. In covering (and critiquing) the city's built environment, I've written only one article specifically devoted to the city's environmental-design trailblazing. Generally, I will mention only major accomplishments, such as Portland's building of the nation's first "gold" LEED Green Building Rating System-certified historic renovation, the Jean Vollum Natural Capital Center. Even as I write about things I believe in, I feel like I'm singing with a chorus that I can't quite get in tune with. Partly that is due to the "loner" instinct many journalists have, but mostly it is because a critic's news peg needs to reach beyond the newest innovation and the latest fad.

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## Judging What Is Called Green

A LexisNexis search of architectural critics throughout the country indicates a similar, if not deeper, ambivalence about writing on these green issues. Cross-reference these critics' names with the word "green" and what comes up are more references to parks, carpets or furniture upholstery than to environmentally conscious design. Reaching some of these critics by e-mail, I received copies of articles they had written on environmentally and/or energy-conscious buildings. Pulitzer Prize-winner Blair Kamin of the Chicago Tribune, for instance, skewered one of the most important green-building icons, the Commerzbank Tower in Frankfurt, Germany, as he described how poorly it actually works. Another Pulitzer winner, Robert Campbell of The Boston Globe, reviewed Genzyme Corporation's new headquarters, a much-ballyhooed green-designed building. While he acknowledged its environmental innovations, he argued that the building's more resonant values were in its architectural clarity.

Like other journalists, architecture critics are skeptical, but in a somewhat different way. Critics need to be "speculative historians." At our best, our job is to look at what is being built today and figure out what will be relevant about it in the future. Energy efficiency and environmentally conscious construction techniques certainly are part of the equation, but as Philadelphia Inquirer's architecture critic Inga Saffron succinctly put it, "Real environmentalists recycle cities."

Indeed, the chief plunderers of energy and materials are buildings. To build them and use them consumes roughly half of the world's energy resources. The United States has more than 80 million buildings, according to Department of Energy estimates, and 38 million more are projected to be built by 2010. One of the largest contributors to landfills is buildings—old ones torn down and leftover waste from the new ones we build. Keep in mind that the U.S. government pioneered planned obsolescence in buildings through its tax system that depreciates commercial "assets" in 39 years.

Too many architects and urban planners today begin their pitches for jobs—and for press coverage—with a sermon about how and why their projects are "green" or "smart." Some of them are earnest and innovative about the integration of sensible growth management and green practices into their work. But some do little more than borrow green rhetoric and use it as a marketing tool. This becomes a real problem when there is blind acceptance of the simplistic equation that smart growth + green design = building excellence.

True excellence in buildings—architecture, urban design and planning—is less about innovation than about long-term vision. As in literature or art, architectural excellence is found in the creation of things that people will cherish, meaningfully experience, and preserve. Energy use and environmental innovations are, of course, important. But the best way for an architecture critic to help readers think wisely about energy use is to nurture the deepest possible understanding of why buildings—and the neighborhoods and cities they shape—endure. ■

*Randy Gragg writes on architecture and urban design for The Oregonian and has written regularly for a wide range of national design magazines. He was a 1995 fellow in the National Arts Journalism Program.*

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# A Local Newspaper Invests in a Foreign Reporting Trip

## To inform readers about wind farms and energy, The Cape Codder sends a reporter to Denmark.

### By Doreen Leggett

When The Cape Codder—a weekly newspaper in Massachusetts—published a series of articles about Denmark's wind energy initiatives, most of the congratulatory comments I received ended with these words: "The Cape Cod Times must be livid! This is something the daily should have done."

Week to week our newspaper goes up against this larger prize-winning daily. We report on the same geographic area, with its news and issues. With four full-time reporters, who cover eight towns on the lower Cape, The Cape Codder is a profitable paper that belongs to a chain of community newspapers owned by the Boston Herald. The Boston Globe is also a major presence among our audience. So for us, the smallest among these papers—each of which is covering a quite combative wind energy story in waters just off our southern shore—to report and publish these stories from Denmark proved that daily papers do not have exclusive rights to big stories.

In fact, with a little bit of forethought and passion, weekly papers can bring readers stories like this that resonate in their communities. Even so, for a newspaper like ours, reporting trips far away from where we live and work won't usually gain us readers or improve our reader loyalty, no matter how interesting the topic might be. (In this case, we did get new subscribers.) But this isn't just any story. It is about the first offshore wind farm ever proposed in North America. And the battles over the farm's proposed siting in Nantucket Sound have national implications for energy policy and ocean zoning.

The Nantucket Sound wind farm story is one that has been picked up also by virtually every major paper in the country. But its local implications were the most significant to our readers, and big media outlets only give them cursory attention. Residents of Cape Cod—and the islands of Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket—are being asked to support 130 wind turbines scattered across 24-square miles of Nantucket Sound, a natural resource beloved for its beauty. And the proposal comes from a developer, Cape Wind, which is planning to make a profit off of this wind farm that, if built, will be located in waters that Cape Codders think of as their own.

There are strong environmental arguments swirling around on all sides of the wind farm debate. Questions posed have no easy answers: Would the large turbines endanger the ecosystem—the flight paths of sea birds, for example? Would the wind farms siting in Nantucket Sound hurt the Cape's economy or would it add to the sound's environmental allure? Would benefits outweigh the sacrifices? How opponents and supporters of the wind farm answer these questions differ widely.

## Denmark Offers Guidance

As the debate intensified—and each side began its own advocacy campaign—residents of Cape Cod had a hard time distinguishing fact from fiction. My editor felt that the only place that could offer needed insights was Denmark, which was the world leader in offshore wind energy. Denmark has been discussed mainly by wind farm supporters, but opponents used the country as an example of a place that had zoned its oceans before putting the wind farms up. It had small offshore wind farms, and it also had what was then the largest wind farm in the world—the 80-turbine Horns Rev, located in the North Sea.

**One of the 20 turbines included in the Middelgrunden Offshore Wind Farm located just outside the Copenhagen Harbor.** ***Photo by Mads Eskesen/Courtesy of the Cape Codder Newspaper.***

Sending me to Denmark meant making budgetary sacrifices for our small weekly. But because our paper is on Cape Cod, it has always dedicated budgetary resources to covering environmental issues. That's why it has an environmental reporter, and that is why the editors decided to send me to Denmark to break new ground on the wind farm story. The benefits of getting ahead of the day-to-day news coverage and moving past the "he said, she said" dialogue that was hijacking much of the ink outweighed the financial sacrifices.

My reporting trip was done on a shoestring. I traveled in bone-chilling February on an all-night flight on a budget airline. I stayed in cheap hotels, ate cheaper food, and used a disposable camera, except for a Danish photographer whom I hired for a couple of hours. I rode on trains and in cars with sources. I did a lot of my legwork before the trip via e-mail and the Internet. I gathered background information before I went and pored over studies. Because phones in our office were not equipped to call overseas, I had to make special arrangements through our corporate headquarters, and those did not come through until I returned. I didn't have a lot of time overseas—only about four days—but with careful planning I managed to talk to 10 people involved with everything from research institutes to the government and to the tourism industry.

For three weeks in March 2003, eight articles—close to 600 inches of reporting from and about Denmark's experience with wind farms—were published in The Cape Codder. They had an instant impact on the debate. Participants in the Cape Cod wind farm debate could no longer throw salvos at each other without respecting the scientific evidence of and real-life experience with these European wind farms. Almost immediately the debate became more focused: People here began to demand more facts, rather than relying on the propaganda they were hearing from each side.

While many decision-makers did not alter their positions because of our coverage, they appeared to become more balanced and open-minded in their discussions. That a relatively small paper invested the time and resources to document Denmark's costs and benefits with wind energy convinced others interested in these issues to go across the Atlantic to weigh the evidence. In this way, these stories empowered Cape Codders to look beyond their own shores.

Doing this reporting also led to our covering other related energy issues, such as the paucity of natural gas and its effect on electric rates and the energy picture, and the ongoing discussions in Washington, D.C.

## Energy Coverage Expands

A focus on renewable energy convinced local towns to begin looking into installing wind turbines on public lands to help power landfill and water department facilities. It also resulted in renewed interest in "green" buildings, and this interest has spurred a number of community forums and residents to begin to incorporate renewable technologies into their homes. As important policy questions about how the oceans are governed also arose, Massachusetts governor, Mitt Romney, established a committee to look at the possibility of zoning the ocean.

**… these stories empowered Cape Codders to look beyond their own shores.**

This Cape Wind reporting experience is an example to small newspapers that national and global issues of consequence can be found in local stories. Coverage of this also convinced the paper to follow the wind farms story wherever it goes, and this has meant that I took a cross-country trip to California, Colorado, Texas, Iowa and Nebraska. The view of wind and its relation to energy, especially in Texas, was far different than the perceptions of those who live on the East Coast and who have had little experience with it as an energy source.

Reporting from afar provides an interesting juxtaposition for our readers and gives the issues being debated back here added relevance and adds breadth to my local coverage. For example, the contacts I developed in Texas tipped me off to the fact that the state was looking to charge fees to wind developers to lease the ocean bottom. As it stands now, there are no lease fees required for Cape Wind's project.

The extensive reporting on this wind farm debate offers a stark reminder to readers that energy is something they need to think about and not just when their lights go out or they get their electric bills. Significant changes in energy production and policy are taking place, and these bear watching and reporting, even in small local papers. Likewise, decisions on wind farms are related to our nation's foreign policy, its economic growth, and environmental and human health. And they affect each of us as individuals.

The energy beat is a vital one. The Cape Wind project underscores for us on Cape Cod that the energy beat is fraught with many reporting challenges, including side alleys from which many other important stories can be touched on. And good reporting can give people the information they need to make informed decisions about issues that will affect generations to come.

Our newspaper's coverage of Denmark's wind farm policies and practices is reminiscent of The Cape Codder's coverage of the Cape Cod National Seashore in the 1960's. In those days, Malcolm Hobbs, longtime editor of The Cape Codder, championed the creation of the Cape Cod National Seashore in editorials, and he covered its lengthy and painful birth on the news pages. History tells us that he did so against fierce local opposition and with the threat of great loss of revenue from advertisers opposed to the idea.

Decades later The Cape Codder's editor, Glenn Ritt, felt as passionately about the beauty of the Cape and her surrounding waters, but decided against taking an editorial stand until all of the environmental ramifications, good and bad, have been tallied. The Cape Cod Times has come out against the wind farm, but The Cape Codder is taking a wider and longer view: In this case, simply saying no to a possibility for a renewable energy source was not an option. ■

*Doreen Leggett covers the environment for The Cape Codder. Leggett was named weekly journalist of the year in 2003 by the New England Press Association, mostly for her Denmark coverage.*

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# Words & Reflections

## War and Terror

"Government has no legitimate claim to sole control of secrecy decisions, even on matters of common defense," **Barton Gellman**, a Washington Post project reporter observed when he spoke about reporting on stories such as the hunt for weapons of mass destruction. "The lawful application of a classified stamp is the beginning, not the end, of my inquiry." In excerpts from two lectures he delivered at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Gellman describes the struggle between the government's urge to suppress secrets and the watchdog role journalists play by unearthing evidence. The military put roadblocks in the way of UPI senior editor **Dan Olmsted** and reporter Mark Benjamin as they worked on stories involving Iraq War veterans. Olmsted details their encounters with military personnel as they tried to report on squalid conditions and substandard health care given at military bases in the United States and about possible effects of a controversial malaria drug. Photographer **Nina Berman** visited Americans wounded in Iraq as they coped with severe injuries, and she created portraits of them in images and words. "Lately, I've been asking them for their definitions of freedom and democracy, a question that often leaves them puzzled," she writes.

**Jeffrey Fleishman**, Berlin bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times, writes about his reporting in Iraq to demonstrate the essential role foreign correspondents play in giving firsthand accounts of what audiences back home are told is happening. **Anthony Shadid**, who won a 2004 Pulitzer Prize for his reporting from Iraq for The Washington Post, delivered this year's Joe Alex Morris, Jr. Memorial Lecture at the Nieman Foundation. He spoke of consequences his reporting had on sources who trusted him and the escalating dangers journalists in Iraq face and how some respond. "In a chaotic, precarious landscape we're arming ourselves and fortifying against danger without understanding the implications of that process," he said. When former New York Times columnist **Anthony Lewis** spoke at a conference about national security and a free press, he expressed concern about the inadequacy of coverage of the Bush administration's record on civil liberties after September 11, 2001. Also, images of coffins from Iraq appear on our pages, as do words about what happened due to their publication.

**Steven Kull**, who directs the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland, shares findings from a study about misperceptions Americans have about the war in Iraq. The wide variance in misperceptions, connected to a person's primary source of news, "strongly suggests that the way that the press reported the news played a role," he writes. **Susan Moeller**, who authored the study "Media Coverage of Weapons of Mass Destruction," describes why many in the press "amplified the administration's voice" rather than investigating its claims. **David Domke**, who heads the journalism department at the University of Washington, examines press response to "characteristics of the Bush administration's political fundamentalism" and to the President's "overtly religious language." **David D. Perlmutter**, a journalism professor at Louisiana State University's Manship School of Mass Communication and **Lesa Hatley Major**, a PhD candidate at the school, examine how news organizations decided which pictures of the Fallujah violence to publish, as they weighed news value against sensationalism.

How journalists respond psychologically to the violence they report on is written about from three perspectives. **Anthony Feinstein**, a psychiatrist and author of "Dangerous Lives: War and the Men and Women Who Report It," tells what he has learned from journalists about why some reporters choose to cover war and the impact this has on them and their colleagues, including the incidence of posttraumatic stress disorder. **Roger Simpson**, executive director of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at the University of Washington, describes the value for news organizations in offering training and support for those who report on violent situations: "The absence of that support is costing news media in terms of staff energy, productivity and morale," he says. And **William J. Drummond**, a journalism professor at the University of California at Berkeley, shares what he learned in developing and teaching an experimental course on emotional balance. "… journalism education needs to make self-care a central part of its focus," he writes.

From a diary he kept while photographing the war in Chechnya, **Stanley Greene** shares his response to the violence he documented. "No man or woman can view a field of battle and witness so much death and destruction without becoming detached and callous," he writes. From his book, "Open Wound: Chechnya 1994 to 2003," we see his photographs. French journalist **Anne Nivat**, author of "Chienne de Guerre," tells of the dangers in reporting from Chechnya and writes that "as journalists—serving as witnesses to this brutality—we pay an emotional price for the work we do." **Thomas de Waal**, Caucasus editor of the Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR) who reported from Chechnya in the mid-1990's, writes about his attachment to "the place and the people" and how he relies now on other journalists to learn about its fate. **Timur Aliev**, editor of Chechenskoe Obshchestvo and the Chechnya coordinator for IWPR, writes about the vulnerability he, his newspaper, and other independent-minded journalists experience as pressures build to "practice a sort of internal self-censorship" due to vigilant government monitoring of the press.

## Books

**Barbie Zelizer**, the Raymond Williams Professor of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication, tells us about "Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime," a forthcoming book she coedited. **Kay Mills**, a former Los Angeles Times editorial writer, describes how her book, "Changing Channels: The Civil Rights Case That Transformed Television," examines the impact a 1960's Mississippi case about race has had on TV news and the Federal Communications Commission. New York Times reporter **David Cay Johnston**, the author of "Perfectly Legal: The Covert Campaign to Rig Our Tax System to Benefit the Super Rich—and Cheat Everybody Else" details the path he's taken in reporting on tax since he set out nearly a decade ago to focus not on what politicians say about the tax system but on how and how well it actually works and for whom. And **Dante Chinni**, a senior associate at the Project for Excellence in Journalism in Washington, D.C., summarizes findings from the project's first annual report on the state of the U.S. news media and explores how the Internet might offer news organizations ways to deal with some industry challenges. ■

WATCHDOG

# Revealing a Reporter's Relationship With Secrecy and Sources

## Washington Post reporter Barton Gellman explains how he handles classified information in reporting on war and weapons.

*In the fall of 2003 Barton Gellman, a special projects reporter based in New York for The Washington Post, spoke at the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University in a lecture series called "Secrecy, Security and Self-Government." He entitled his first lecture "An Argument for Unauthorized Disclosures" and his second "How I Learn Secrets and Why I Print Them." In January 2004, Gellman wrote an article about what weapons investigators were finding in Iraq, entitled "Iraq's Arsenal Was Only on Paper: Since Gulf War, Nonconventional Weapons Never Got Past the Planning Stage." What follows are excerpts from his lectures.*

I tell stories for a living, so I'll start with one tonight. A few months ago, I returned from hunting for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. I didn't have much luck. But I did spend a lot of time among the hunters. I did not choose to be "embedded" with the U.S. military. I cadged my way, more or less, into a search team, living and traveling as a reporter among its soldiers.

I'll tell you about May 1, 2003, a fairly typical day. The team gathered up its gear—sledgehammer, flame spectrometer, pathogen assay kit. We drove to a walled compound that the Defense Intelligence Agency called "Possible SSO Facility Al Hayat"—SSO being Saddam Hussein's Special Security Organization. U.S. Central Command ranked the site 26th of 90 top prospects for weapons of mass destruction. I watched the search team test for booby traps, scan for chemicals, cut through locks, and move by flashlight through a darkened corridor, lined with steel doors. The demolition guy broke through to the innermost chamber. And before our eyes there stood a cache—of vacuum cleaners.

I tell this tale not to make sport of the weapons hunt. Vacuum cleaners will take us soon to questions about secrecy, but a little context first. Site 26 produced much the same result as sites one through 25 and 27 through 90. Since I am here to talk about tensions between self-government and secrecy in the cause of national defense, I'd suggest that if you wish to assess the U.S. government's motive for and conduct of the war, you might think it relevant that there were no weapons in 90 of the top 90 suspected weapons sites. I don't say this is dispositive of anything, simply that it sounds like something relevant.

So now I come to the point about site 26. Everything I told you about it—that it *was* 26 on the priority list, that there were 90 on the list, the date and location of the search, the connection to the SSO and, yes, the vacuum cleaners—every bit of that is classified *secret*. A few of the things I wrote that we published in the newspaper were *top secret.* I learned some of it by direct observation, some by persuading people, against the rules, to share their records and memories.

### Publishing Secrets

There is nothing anomalous here. I'm a projects reporter, and now my project is the weapons hunt. Nearly everything I want to know, and much of what I write, is classified. One day my adopted survey team seized a suspicious document, handwritten in Arabic and illustrated with sketches of laboratory glass. The document turned out to be a high school science exercise. The survey team's report was classified. The schoolbook exercise was appended to that report—which means that some Iraqi teenager's description of Boyle's Law is a classified U.S. government secret. A qualified authority made a binding judgment that disclosure of this text would do "serious damage to national security." So don't ask me about the relationship between the pressure and volume of a gas held at constant temperature. I'd tell you, but I'd have to kill you.

The same survey team found a distillery where a biological warfare factory was supposed to be—that's classified—and a swimming pool U.S. intelligence called a chemical bunker. Classified. Looting, as you've read, has been an enormous problem for the weapons hunters. When I was there, Central Command had forces available to guard 153 of the 372 buildings it considered important. That's classified, too.

All these are secrets, and I put them in The Washington Post. What are we to make of that? What the Defense Department made of it was clear enough. Today the weapons hunting team, the Iraq Survey Group, receives no visitors. It will not disclose the number of its personnel, the military and intelligence units involved, or any of the evidence it is collecting. My question: Was the Pentagon right? Was I wrong to publish things the government tried to withhold? You're waiting for me to cite the First Amendment. You can stop waiting. Today, at least, I will look elsewhere. …

I do not need you to believe that governments measure wrongly the risks of disclosure, or that publication of secrets does no harm, or that any particular story is essential to public debate. What I want to consider is *how* to navigate disputes over national security secrecy and *who* gets to hold the rudder. And my answer, or part of it, is that government is incompetent to do so on its own. By incompetent, I do not mean unskilled. I mean that government has no legitimate claim to sole control of secrecy decisions, even on matters of common defense. The lawful application of a classified stamp is the beginning, not the end, of my inquiry.

## Government Secrecy and Decisions About War

Hard questions about government secrecy involve a clash of core values. Call them self-preservation and self-government. Any answer that fails to take both of those values seriously, and address them both explicitly, has not even engaged the central problem. …

What happens when government conceals from us its deeds on behalf of our defense? With stakes of life and death, it is easy to see the vital need to deny advantage to an enemy. But life-and-death stakes give equal urgency to the project of holding our leaders accountable for their use of power. If we are sovereign, we rule those who rule us. Secrecy corrodes self-government, just as it strengthens self-defense. Both interests reach peak importance in time of war.

Consider the debate of the moment in hypothetical form. Suppose the President lied about Iraq's nonconventional weapons and thereby took the nation to war in Iraq by a kind of fraud. There is nothing like enough evidence on the public record to prove that charge. There is nothing like enough evidence to refute it, either. This is not an epistemological problem. The evidence exists. It stands behind barriers of classification and executive privilege. The question is whether to pierce them. …

Opening files would resolve the mystery but undoubtedly carry high costs. It might put the safety of human sources at risk, reveal enough about intelligence methods to enable their defeat, compromise ongoing operations, or warn enemies of operations to come. Withholding the evidence, on the other hand, renders citizens unable to judge what may be the most consequential act of this presidency. It deprives us of information that might define our votes on Election Day, but that is not the only stake for democracy. Ignorance hobbles us as participants in an *ongoing* act of national choice. Iraq will cost lives and money for a long time to come and many decisions lie ahead. The President cannot make most of them by command. He must use powers of suasion to carry the public and Congress. Is it suasion, though, if those persuaded form their opinions in the dark? …

Return now to our hypothetical. Who might resolve the inherent conflict over prewar intelligence on Iraqi weapons programs? Two weighty interests are on the scale, democracy and defense. Is there anyone with a legitimate claim to balance them? A long list of incompetents comes to mind. Suppose we begin with me. I am not qualified to assess harms to national security. Don't tell my editors, but they aren't, either. Our newsroom, in truth, has some relevant expertise and experience. But we are not trained to weigh the risks, and we are not responsible to anyone for the consequences.

The President, for his part, is not qualified to decide what the public needs to know in order to hold him accountable. That is actually too weak a formula. The President is *forbidden* to define the terms by which we may judge him.

Where else might we turn? The judiciary comes to mind, but for one thing it is disinclined to play the role. The leading judicial doctrine on national security is deference to the executive branch, which is a judicious way to say, "Leave us out of it." … What about the legislative branch? By constitutional design, Congress shares war-making authority with the President. In practice that day is gone. It is true that the government's secrets are overseen by the House and Senate Select Committees on Intelligence. It is equally true that the committees know only the secrets the President chooses to tell them. Even when they know something, legislators are helpless to call it to public attention. Public attention is not only the most powerful tool of challenge to the executive, it is the only tool that could carry the burden of our argument about accountability to the people. … Could a quasi-independent government entity—say, an inspector general—perform the balancing role? I think not. An inspector general's office has no power to declassify, and its independence is compromised at least potentially by the agency within whose budget, culture and personnel system it resides. …

## The Struggle Over Secrets

It turns out that I am making an argument for something like the status quo. In practice, the flow of information is regulated by a process of struggle as the government tries to keep its secrets and people like me try to find them out. Intermediaries, with a variety of motives, perform the arbitrage. No one effectively exerts coercive authority at the boundary. And that's a good thing.

Formal and informal structures keep this system in equilibrium. The letter and practice of law enforcement make it difficult, but not enormously dangerous, to broach secrets in print. That is a fine balance, and the status quo I'm describing depends on it. Those with lawful access to classified information are forbidden by contract to disclose it and face loss of their jobs, civil and potentially criminal penalties. A government official needs a very good reason to take these risks. Having found such an official, reporters and their publishers incur little risk themselves. No law on its face, and unambiguously, forbids me to possess or publish a government secret.

It is surely possible for a government to work harder than this to suppress its secrets. If we look overseas, most do. Every White House would prefer a tighter grip on its secrets. But on balance, at the systemic level, the behavior of recent presidents implies a tacit belief that such a grip cannot be had at acceptable cost. And there is a comparable form of self-restraint on the part of the press, which leads to an unexpected collaboration when a secret is nearing disclosure.

The Washington Post and its peers routinely consult responsible agencies before publishing anything classified. My most frequent interlocutor says his job in these conversations is to "shed light and shed darkness." Sometimes he corrects a fact or supplies a point of context. Sometimes he blusters. Sometimes he chooses not to engage. And sometimes he asks on behalf of his agency that the Post suppress publication of something he acknowledges to be true. We often ask for explanation of the stakes. And it happens from time to time that the government tells me something very sensitive, which I did not know, to explain why I should not publish something I did know.

Usually we find accommodation at the working level. Now and then it

## Making Decisions About What to Publish

Several examples demonstrate how the press and government officials interact when it comes to secrecy.

*In lectures he gave at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson school, Barton Gellman described situations when he and his editors met with government officials as part of determining what information to publish. What follows are some examples he cited.*

I promised to talk about how we decide what to publish and what to hold back. It's easiest to talk in detail about older cases, so I'll begin there. In the 1991 Persian Gulf War, I was skeptical of General Norman Schwarzkopf's briefings on bombing progress. From one week to the next he increased his estimate of the daily damage to Iraqi tanks by a factor of 10. How could that be? Most of the tanks were buried, hard to find or hit. My colleague Rick Atkinson and I found out that pilots had found a new way to use the forward-looking infrared sensor (FLIR). Usually they search for hot spots, but pilots found that armor sheds heat at a different rate than desert sand. If they looked soon after sundown, they could find tanks by aiming at cold spots.

The Washington Post did not seriously consider publishing that story. We did not bother to consult with the government. We just sat on it. I was sorry to give up a scoop, but this was obviously a technique to which Iraq could take countermeasures. Publication would do concrete harm to the war effort, and it served no grand public policy interest to disclose it. I do so now because it has since come into the public record.

### Unveiling Washington's Shadow Government

A more recent and more complicated example happened in 2002 when my colleague Sue Schmidt and I learned that President Bush had deployed what we called in shorthand a "shadow government" of senior officials into underground bunkers far from Washington. There had been contingency plans for this through the Cold War, called continuity of government and continuity of operations plan (COG/COOP). Bush was the first President to activate them. This was a watershed. For the first time a President was saying, because of al-Qaeda, that he could not be sure that Washington would be here tomorrow. It spoke volumes about the new insecurity of a post-9/11 world. And the whole thing was very highly classified, top secret code-worded information.

When the government learned I was asking questions, White House chief of staff Andrew Card called the executive editor of The Washington Post. He said he couldn't believe the Post would publish such a thing, and if we seriously contemplated doing so he wanted an opportunity to be heard. Len Downie, the editor, called me. I phoned Card's office the next day and said, here's your opportunity to be heard. His deputy invited me to pay a visit.

I asked what exactly the government sought to protect. He said everything. I said I didn't think that would fly, and I had the impression he did not expect it to. We talked some more. He cared most that we not disclose the sites of the bunkers, the names of those deployed, and the mechanics of the deployment. I told him that I thought he had good reasons for concern, and I thought I would agree, but I wasn't completely convinced. Details are vital in a story like this. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. If we are going to break something big, we need to show readers we know it's true. These bunkers had been designed to withstand a hydrogen bomb. What exactly, I asked, did the White House think Osama bin Laden could do to them?

On the other hand, I knew already from my executive editor that there was no way we would publish the details. But it was the uncertainty on that point that got me into the chief of staff's office, and I maintained it in part to continue the conversation. I said, "I'm sure you don't think I came here only to take things *out* of the story. What can you tell me?" I learned a few things, including the numbers of those deployed. Once he was sure we would run the story, he gave me an on-the-record quote. Only for that reason can I tell you I was talking to Joe Hagan. The on-the-record quote served his purpose, but it also made our story much more credible.

A related case. In December [2002] I learned that the Energy Department's national labs had undertaken a crash deployment of a prototype system to detect nuclear materials entering the nation's capital. It was a distributed goes higher. In December, on a particularly sensitive point, we did not reach a meeting of minds until a conference call—at her request—with National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice. Twice that I know of, a President has called the publisher or executive editor. …

I am quite certain I do not speak for The Washington Post, but here are some personal observations about its behavior in secrecy cases. We seldom if ever agree to withhold information that exposes a government lie, even a well-intended one. We give no special weight to preventing diplomatic embarrassment. We acknowledge no right of privacy for individuals acting *in their capacity* as government officers and so their positions in internal debate are fair game.

One last word about our hypothetical. Did the U.S. government dissemble about Iraq? On a question of this magnitude, a journalist's highest calling is to unearth evidence. Not opinion, not surmise. Evidence. In August 2003, I

network of sensors called, aptly, "Ring Around Washington." It didn't work. Again, very highly classified. The story I was writing, a very long one, asked the question: Are we safer after 14 months of war with al-Qaeda than we were on 9/11? "Ring Around Washington" was highly relevant. I consulted with high-ranking officials I can't name. They wished we would not mention the ring at all. What they really cared about, though, was that we not describe exactly why the system failed—how it could be defeated. I proposed a very general way to describe the flaws, and after a while we came to a formula we all could live with. …

## Investigating Unscom's Investigations

The most complicated example had to do with Unscom, the U.N. arms inspectors in Iraq through the 1990's. In August of 1998, I learned—the reporting began with a guess—that the U.S. government was quietly urging Unscom to back off. I described a phone call in which Secretary of State Madeleine Albright persuaded Richard Butler, Unscom's executive chairman, to rescind his order for a surprise visit to the headquarters of Saddam Hussein's special security organization. Washington was even then professing support for anywhere, anytime inspections, and threatening the use of military force to compel them, but it had lost backing for that position in the U.N. Security Council. Albright tried to have it both ways, and I showed that.

Governments find it useful, often in good causes, to say conflicting things in different forums. I am in the information arbitrage business. I don't collaborate in that effort. We believe in my business that the truth—an accurate depiction of the world as it is—has an elemental value. We will not conspire to hold it back in support of some particular diplomatic result. Unscom was dying. Saying so might or might not have sped the death, but staying silent would not have saved it. We would probably not have stayed quiet regardless.

As I traced the death throes of Unscom, I discovered its extraordinary development into the first—and probably last—U.N. intelligence agency. It was actually improvising high-technology spy tools against Iraq. The first time I wrote about that, authorities told me I would put the lives of inspectors and clandestine operatives at risk if I included details. We compromised on the following language: "inspectors deliberately triggered Iraq's defenses against a surprise search and used a new synthesis of intelligence techniques to look and listen as the Baghdad government moved contraband from the site." A bunch of mumbo jumbo and deliberately so.

I knew a great deal about the operation, and I sat on it for months. But U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's office started hearing rumors, and Annan assigned a competent investigator to learn more. Anything that smacked of espionage against a member state represented a huge threat to the U.N. system, as he saw it. In January 1999, I told my sources that the story was beginning to seep out. Le Monde, Al Hayat, and The Boston Globe were pursuing it. On January 6th, with notice to authorities, I wrote some of what I knew: Unscom had used eavesdropping equipment, carried by inspectors, to monitor communications that Iraq knew were safe from satellites. I knew the type of equipment, the identities of the inspectors, even the radio frequencies. I pursued those details to be sure my sources knew what they were talking about. We never considered publishing them.

A few months later, I discovered the most stunning aspect of the story. There had been yet another level of espionage. The U.S. government planted listening devices in Unscom equipment to spy on Iraq in ways that Unscom itself did not know about—and that had nothing to do with Unscom's mission. All those years, Unscom said Iraq was hiding weapons, and Baghdad said Unscom was a nest of spies. It turned out that both sides, more or less, were right. The CIA told me that there were clandestine operatives still in Iraq and asked for time to get them out if we planned to publish. We waited. Then we published. That was a hard decision—it is possible that we stopped a productive intelligence operation—but I think it was the right one on balance. ■ *—B.G.*

wrote a very long story examining prewar claims that Iraq had revived—or "reconstituted," as the Bush administration put it—a nuclear weapons program. My partner Walter Pincus and I found a striking disparity between what the White House knew and what it said.

The most important example had to do with specialized aluminum tubes, which Iraq tried to buy overseas. The Bush administration said Iraq planned to use the tubes to build a gas centrifuge cascade to enrich uranium for a bomb. Iraq said the tubes were for artillery rockets. The Bush administration scoffed. No one, it said, would use so costly an alloy for expendable munitions.

You know what? Someone does use that alloy for rockets. The rocket is a standard NATO munition, called the Medusa. The Bush administration knew that. It also knew that the Medusa tube is identical in every dimension to the ones at issue. And it knew that Iraq reverse-engineered the Medusa and was building copies just outside Baghdad. There was another secret. The U.S. government's centrifuge physicists—all of them, unanimously—said the aluminum tubes were grossly unsuitable for uranium enrichment.

As curious citizens, you might ask the Bush administration for an explanation. You might ask about the Medusa or the persistence of a theory that the government's own scientists debunked. You might ask what Iraqi scientists say now about the nuclear program, or what U.S. forces have discovered on the ground. Do not expect an answer. All those things, too, are classified.

*In his second lecture Gellman spoke at length about ways in which his reporting intersects with the practice of government secrecy.*

National security secrecy presents us with a conflict of core values—self-government and self-defense. If we don't know what our government is doing, we can't hold it accountable. If we do know, our enemies know, too, and that can be dangerous. That's our predicament. Wartime heightens the case for secrecy because the value of security is at its peak. But secrecy is never more damaging to self-government than in wartime, because making war is the very paradigm of a political choice. No individual, and no institution, can be trusted to draw the line for us when these two interests collide. …

Good reporters—and by this I mean *most* reporters at serious news organizations—do not transmit a source's claims unexamined. One difference between reporters and readers is that we do know who we're talking to. This is not something I boast about; I'm as unhappy as anyone about the ubiquity of unnamed sources in the published product. My point is simply that we understand where our sources fit into the organizations and events we write about. We usually know their motives and biases and, armed with that knowledge, we test their assertions against other evidence. … In the end I don't care all that much why someone talks to me, as long as I understand the motive and can verify what I learn. …

Unearthing information is a little bit like borrowing money: you need some to get some. By far the most common way we learn new things is the iterative work of beat reporters. I don't mean this in some grand investigative sense. It's routine, the collection of bits and pieces over time. … This is what the folks in Langley, Virginia, call "assembling the mosaic." …

## Finding Government Secrets

So how do I find out government secrets? I could dignify the process as "reporting by hypothesis," but I like the military term better. The term is "SWAG." It's an acronym, and it stands for "scientific wild-ass guess." I do a lot of guessing. And no, I don't put guesses in the paper. I use them to guide my reporting. The metaphor I like best is pulling on threads.

A lot of what I learn is off the page. I'm unlikely to put it in the paper, not because it's a secret but because it doesn't fit the conventions of a news story. It has to do with organization charts, the language and background of specialists, the trajectory of careers, the process of bureaucratic decision-making, the equipment and methods of people who do things I write about, the history of an issue, the relationships and rivalries of individuals. I go to conferences and collect obscure reference works. The Army field manual on helicopter maintenance helped us follow both Iraq wars, for instance.

This kind of background helps me guess, from little clues and emanations, what might be happening now. It also helps me figure out who would know it if my guess is right, and who might have a reason to talk. …

What we call "enterprise reporting" almost never comes from one or two sources who spill the whole thing. It comes from an accumulation of small facts that lead eventually to the big fact in our lead. A lot of my guesses are wrong. If I spent my time trying to prove them, rather than explore them, I would be breaching a basic obligation to readers. I abandon far more guesses than I confirm.

In many cases, the ultimate story I'm reporting is classified, but there are unclassified signs around the edges. In the early 1990's, I suspected that the Clinton administration was going to shift course and intervene in the Balkans. I asked myself, which combatant command would take the lead? Had it formed a joint task force of the kind that runs most military operations? Had the task force "stood up a CAT"—a 24-hour crisis action team? Had the units cancelled leaves and called back personnel? All those things were discoverable, and they gave me strong reason to think I was on the right track.

Sometimes silence is meaningful. … When organizations stop answering questions they usually answer, and when old acquaintances stop returning calls, it tells me something. When I ask something sensitive, the *way* my interlocutor does not answer hints at whether I've touched a nerve.

When I think I'm onto something, I make a list of everyone who might know whether it's true. Sometimes I know the person, sometimes I know the name, and sometimes I know only the job title. I'm a collector of phone books and lists. I ask myself, who cares least about protecting some small part of this secret? An energy or defense or justice department official might not know or care that a given detail is diplomatically sensitive. A career official at state may not care about the political implications for the White House. Once I have all I can get from those who have the least stake in a subject, I begin to ask questions of those who have the most.

Hardly anyone in government is comfortable about explicitly crossing the line into classified material. Sometimes a person will rationalize it with the notion that he is saying something I already seem to know. Sometimes the person thinks the subject is of overriding importance. Last year I wrote a story about al-Qaeda's efforts to acquire biological weapons. White House and CIA spokesmen told me categorically that there was no U.S. intelligence assessment that al-Qaeda was looking for smallpox. I had heard otherwise. I went back to my original source, who had carefully skirted the line on classified material. The source got angry. I said, the only way to resolve this is for you to read me the language of the document. And that's what the source did. It was a PowerPoint briefing for top White House senior officials. It said: "al-Qaeda is interested in acquiring biological weapons, to include smallpox." I went back to the spokesmen. Oh, they said, you mean *that* assessment. ■

Watchdog

# Telling Stories the Military Doesn't Want Told

## 'Dear Mr. Olmsted, I regret to inform you that we can't honor your request to speak with anyone at Fort Carson ….'

**By Dan Olmsted**

If war is hell, then the aftermath for too many of those who fought the war in Iraq is worthy of another biblical metaphor—purgatory.

Last fall, UPI's Mark Benjamin got a call from the husband of a soldier who had served in Iraq and was in "medical hold" at Fort Stewart, Georgia, suffering from a serious heart problem. Benjamin had been working on stories about a number of mysterious illnesses afflicting troops in Iraq and after they came home. This man said his wife's illness was bad, but the treatment and housing she and other soldiers were getting was truly deplorable—no running water, no air conditioning in the cement barracks, and filthy, buggy showers and toilets in an adjacent building to which some of the wounded had to limp on crutches. His wife waited six weeks for a doctor to see her about her heart condition.

With a go-ahead from UPI editors, Benjamin got on a plane, went on base, got the story, and got on the phone to talk about what he'd found with the Army. For three days, he sought comment, with no response. Not one of his calls was returned. His story ran on a Friday and began:

### Sick, wounded U.S. troops held in squalor

FORT STEWART, Ga., Oct. 17 (UPI)—Hundreds of sick and wounded U.S. soldiers including many who served in the Iraq war are languishing in hot cement barracks here while they wait—sometimes for months—to see doctors.

The National Guard and Army Reserve soldiers' living conditions are so substandard, and the medical care so poor, that many of them believe the Army is trying to push them out with reduced benefits for their ailments. One document shown to UPI states that no more doctor appointments are available from Oct. 14 through Nov. 11—Veterans Day. … A half-dozen calls by UPI seeking comment from Fort Stewart public affairs officials and U.S. Forces Command in Atlanta were not returned.

By Monday morning, the Army was more than ready to respond. "Fuck you!" were the first words from the Army spokesman Benjamin talked to, claiming Benjamin had called no one about the story. That outburst of candor was followed by an e-mail, copied to 21 other Pentagon public affairs officers.

"I don't believe you did try hard enough to get an Army response. … As you can see by the volume of information I am sending you—We could have responded. … Apparently you said your calls to Fort Stewart public affairs officials and U.S. Forces command in Atlanta were not returned. That's not what they said, and I trust them more than I do you."

A dense fog of facts, figures and acronyms followed—"The CSA has included the improvement of installations in the Army's top Focus Areas and priorities. Additionally, the FORSCOM Commander is aware …." Months later, in front of a congressional committee, the fog lifted and our reporting about the testimony follows:

### Army fixing medical failure exposed by UPI

WASHINGTON, Jan. 21 (UPI)—With the biggest troop rotation since World War II under way, Pentagon officials told a House panel Wednesday they would do whatever it takes to avoid the mistakes that last year left sick and injured troops at U.S. bases waiting weeks and months for doctors. Many had served in Iraq.

The solutions include moving ill soldiers from steamy cement barracks without running water into nearby hotels, adding more doctors, and setting aside $77 million to improve conditions.

"We recognize that last fall, we temporarily lost sight of the situation," Daniel Denning, an assistant secretary of the Army, told the House Total Force Subcommittee Wednesday.

OFF LIMITS
TO UNAUTHORIZED
· PERSONNEL ·
EMERGENCY CALL
624-1171 OR 911

**The paint peels off the wood of a World War II-era barrack where soldiers on medical hold were originally placed on their arrival at Fort Knox in Kentucky. These soldiers were later moved to what the Army says are better living conditions. One of the barrack's roofs collapsed two days after soldiers were moved out.** ***Photo by Michael Kleinfeld/UPI.***

## Barriers to Military Reporting

That is the way it works when you cover the military, at least a part of the military that the brass doesn't want to talk about. NBC News's Tom Brokaw might have the run of an aircraft carrier, and it's easy for reporters to get interviews with grunts who tell how good morale is and how happy they are to be fighting thousands of miles from home. It gets different when a reporter tries to cover stories about soldiers who believe they are getting shafted—especially when they are.

After Benjamin's Fort Stewart story ran, UPI was tipped that similar conditions also existed at Fort Knox, Kentucky. He flew there, this time with a UPI photographer. Soldiers, again, invited him on base. At Fort Knox, the Army had moved soldiers out of despicable living conditions—including a barracks that the roof fell in on two days later—but the lack of medical care was just as acute. As our photographer, Michael Kleinfeld, tried to photograph gimpy soldiers standing in formation outside the medical hold barracks, he was detained and taken to the garrison commander's office. (They didn't try to confiscate his film, at least.) A mildly menacing, slightly comic scene ensued, with base officials telling Benjamin we could have our photographer back, but only if he returned to the base to pick him up. Sensing an ambush, he declined. Finally, the intervention of a Senate staffer who admires UPI's reporting worked to free Kleinfeld.

But that wasn't the end of it. The next morning, a top Army public affairs official called one of UPI's top executives to say that UPI had "been caught trespassing." We would be issued a "ban and bar" letter prohibiting us from going on base unescorted, he was told.

Apparently, if Benjamin and Kleinfeld asked nicely, this person indicated that base officials "would still be willing to escort them to the things they want to see and speak to the people they want to interview."

Nor was *that* the end of it. Shortly thereafter, that Army official's boss, Brigadier General Bob Gaylord, also called this UPI executive and, as it was delicately put to us, "expressed his concern." A few weeks later, the claim of "trespassing" started to look a bit blustery. At Benjamin's insistence, a Pentagon official clarified the policy about reporters going on base. He e-mailed us to say that while Benjamin "did not identify himself as a journalist … since there is no posted policy directing that he do so, he met the requirements for entry."

In March, Benjamin and I went to Fort Carson, Colorado, to report a story about mental health problems among troops—including suicide—and the possible role an anti-malaria drug might be playing. We gamely called ahead and told them what our story was about, in detail; asked to meet with base officials; offered to take the public affairs officer out for coffee, and requested a tour of the base. They declined: "Dear Mr. Olmsted, I regret to inform you that we can't honor your request to speak with anyone at Fort Carson …."

They said we had to talk to an Army official at the Pentagon. That official referred us to a spokesman at FORSCOM in Atlanta. Here is what Benjamin wrote to FORSCOM: "If you can arrange any input for our story, please help. … I'd be glad to discuss our findings so far with any Army officials at any time." That official never responded to any of our written pleas.

Meanwhile, for four days we sat in Colorado calling and e-mailing four different spokespeople. No one would let us on base or answer our questions. They said we weren't banned—just that we couldn't come on base under any circumstances no matter how long we stuck around Colorado Springs.

The most Orwellian—or perhaps merely absurd—moment came when we tried one final time to get the military's attention on a shocking incident in which the controversial malaria drug, Lariam, was an issue. A Green Beret based at Fort Carson, Bill Howell, had come home from Iraq and, three weeks later, shot and killed himself in front of his wife, Laura. She was convinced the drug triggered what appeared to be the sudden onset of madness, and her evidence was compelling. A combat veteran with no history of mental problems or pattern of domestic abuse, he snapped one Sunday evening in March—first trying to shoot her in the face ("I want you to watch this," he said)—then shooting himself.

Lariam is known to cause severe psychiatric problems in a number of people who take it; the question of whether it causes suicide remains officially open. Mark and I began investigating the drug more than two years ago, and we reported in May 2002 that mounting evidence suggests it has triggered suicides. Just a month after that, in June 2002, a string of domestic murder-suicides began at Fort Bragg, committed by soldiers back from Afghanistan who had taken the drug. After a perfunctory investigation, the military blamed marital problems and absolved Lariam—which, perhaps not incidentally, it invented. (The Army has also complained to our editors in writing about our continuing coverage of the Lariam issue, to similar avail.)

Now, two years later, Laura Howell not only believed Lariam caused her husband's suicide, she believed the Army was planning to blame martial problems for her husband's violence and death, just as they had at Fort Bragg. No one at Fort Carson even bothered to talk to her while conducting an investigation of his suicide, she said. "Doesn't that just make your radar go 'beep, beep, beep?'," she asked in an interview.

Obviously, accusing the Army of a cover-up in a death investigation is serious business, and we needed a response. We tried in this May 3rd e-mail to a Fort Carson public affairs officer:

"Greetings. I left you a voice message just now—we're doing a story on Green Beret Bill Howell's suicide. His wife says she has not been contacted by the Criminal Investigative Division at Fort Carson although she understands the report about his death is done or nearly done, and she suspects that is because the Army is intent on blaming his death on marital problems rather than probing deeper into possible causes. Please let me know by Tuesday afternoon if you have any comment. As always we are anxious to hear what the military has to say and to get any other information that will help make our reporting fair and accurate."

At 6:25 p.m. on that Tuesday, we did indeed get a response. Here it is (and yes, it makes no sense):

"Dear Mr. Olmsted,

"I found out that my reply to you was out-of-line in that I was not authorized to send you the information I relayed. My boss is in the process of telling the Army side of the story. My zeal in answering your inquiry got in the way of our media relations efforts. For the most part, the info I sent you is correct, but there are some inaccuracies I am told."

But we had not gotten a "reply"—out-of-line or otherwise—and we had no idea what he was talking about. We pointed that out in a follow-up e-mail and asked for a response we could print. We never heard another word. A few days later, The (Colorado Springs) Gazette ran our story across the top of the front page with the headline, "Green Beret's suicide not fully investigated, wife says." I am sure some people feel we didn't try hard enough to get comment from the Army.

If, in reading this, you leap to the conclusion that the Army employs aggressive tactics to prevent or discredit negative reporting—obfuscation, personal attacks, or if necessary a retreat to the bunkers—you're right. The Pentagon's P.R. apparatus is also big and bullying and used to throwing its weight around. That's why many reporters find military stories so hard to cover: Some give up or settle for whatever the spokespeople hand out.

Benjamin hasn't given up. In fact, he keeps doing stories that are pursued by few other reporters. Editor & Publisher recently called him "Iraq reporter of the year," even though he has never been to Iraq, and he won the American Legion Fourth Estate Award for coverage of veterans' issues. In overseeing his coverage, I've seen clues emerge about how best to get at these stories. A few follow:

- Start at the bottom. The best stories come from talking to soldiers, their families and friends, and health care workers outside the military's reach. Only go to the top brass when you have a specific question that they will either have to ignore, deny or respond to.
- Think of military brass as being on the same level as administrators at any other federal agency—as bureaucrats who happen to have stars on their shoulders.
- When confronted with overwhelming evidence of a serious problem, do not be deterred by obfuscation of the data. We've taken to calling the military's statistics operation the "Vege-matic"—a machine that can chop, slice and dice data until there is no discernable pattern. For instance, the military isn't counting suicides that occurred after troops returned as part of the toll of Operation Iraqi Freedom—even if they were helicoptered off the battlefield in a full-blown psychosis and hanged themselves at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington.
- A related point: Can't figure out the answer, and the military won't tell you? Report what the answer is *not.* For example, it can be hard to determine the total number of casualties in Operation Iraqi Freedom. But we know it's more than the dead and wounded—it's also the (thousands of) injured and ill. How do we know? Because that's how the Army itself defines casualties.
- From the UPI 1929 stylebook: "The coolest man on the hottest story makes the fastest time." Don't get drawn into hostile conversations or escalating e-mail exchanges. Focus

on the story and don't nurse grudges.

- Remember what George W. Bush said during the campaign: "I trust people. I don't trust the federal government." And as John Ashcroft said, "Information is democracy's best friend." Hold him to it.
- Put it in writing. Leave a paper trail of e-mailed correspondence stating exactly what kind of story you are working on, why you need the military's help, what your deadline is—and how hard you are working to get it right.

And offer to meet with officials anytime, anywhere, to get their part of the story. Just be prepared to wait until hell freezes over. ■

*Dan Olmsted, a UPI senior editor for the past four years, edits Mark Benjamin's stories, which can be found by going to UPI.com and clicking the "investigations" button.*

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# Portraits of the Wounded

## A photojournalist conveys the lives and feelings of those injured in the Iraq War.

### By Nina Berman

An image of an American soldier wounded in the Iraq War is one of the few pieces of documentary evidence the American public can see to begin a process of separating propaganda—that war is quick and bloodless—from truth. As of May 2004, close to 10,000 American soldiers have been wounded in action and in combat support in Iraq. The number of injured Iraqis—insurgents and civilians—is believed to be about triple that number.

There are no lists of the wounded, unlike the dead. In The New York Times, the names of the dead are published almost every day. I look for their ages, their hometowns, caring less about their command units. I feel sorry for their families and friends, but then it's finished. The dead tell no stories. The wounded survive and present us with our own complicity, since war is fundamentally evidence of our failure as individuals and as a state to be civilized and restrained.

Since October 2003, I have been making portraits and conducting interviews with Americans who were wounded in the Iraq War. I seek them out at their homes after they have been discharged from the military hospitals at Walter Reed in Washington, D.C. and Brooke Army in San Antonio, Texas. I stay away from the homecoming parades, the VFW initiation events, the yellow ribbons, the appearances with politicians. I want to see the soldier alone as each confronts his or her loss and considers the experience of war and life ahead.

## Contradictions and Loss

These portraits are not sentimental; if anything, they are detached. They are done in a formal manner in that the person is aware of being photographed. The process takes a few hours and always begins with a taped interview in which I ask questions about life at home, the recruitment process, the injury, what he or she liked about the military, and the experience in Iraq. Lately, I've been asking them for their definitions of freedom and democracy, a question that often leaves them puzzled.

When viewed together, the words and photos create a complex, sometimes contradictory portrait. For example, one severely burned soldier whose face is a painful patchwork of scar tissue and skin grafts said without irony that he is "the perfect face of the Army." He desperately wants to continue his military career, saying he became "addicted" to the Army. Another soldier, blind, without a leg, living alone in a camper, abandoned by his parents as a child, said that Iraq "was the best experience of my life." One Marine said he joined because that's what men should do. He sits on his bed, without a leg. Behind him, on the wall, is a giant airbrushed painting of a naked woman.

Despite the enormity of their physical injuries—most are in chronic pain and permanently disabled—when asked if they would go back, all of them reply "yes." Television journalists reporting on the wounded, as well as some newspaper writers, tend to make a big deal out of this answer, as though it's proof of the soldiers' pro-war sentiment. I've learned that the question, asked in such a way, is completely meaningless and only perpetuates a simplistic understanding of service and loyalty. I ask the wounded two questions. "If you could go back, would you?" The answer is always "yes." Then I ask, "If your platoon was home and your friends were out of Iraq, would you go back?" The answer is almost always "no," or "I'm not sure."

When I started this project, I wasn't prepared for the physical damage I would see. I remember the first soldier I photographed was completely blind. His world is black from morning to night. Titanium plates hold his brain together. He has seizures and mood swings and sleeps often. I photographed him in his bedroom standing next to a giant deer that he had killed when he was 16 years old. Dangling from the antlers were the soldier's dog tags and his army ranger berets. Below the deer was a picture of the soldier in uniform. This young man, tall and strong, first in his class of 228 rangers, trembled at the sound of the camera's shutter.

They volunteered to serve in the military, but how much free choice went into their decision is debatable. "No option. There were no jobs," said one. "I thought going to war was jumping out of planes. I didn't know it could be bad," said another who remembers having watched Desert Storm as a child and thought it was "interesting." A rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) ripped through this soldier's leg during a firefight in Fallujah on Halloween. He has had 15 surgeries, seven blood transfusions. He can barely walk and stands hunched over like an old man. His wife has to tie his shoes.

None of them expressed bitterness or self-pity. Some still seemed in a state of shock. Only one was openly angry and critical of what he called the Bush administration's lies. This soldier, 20 years old, had his right arm blown off and his left leg mangled in a grenade attack. He agreed to be photographed because he said people need to know what's happening. He was alarmed by the ignorance in his neighborhood in Santa Ana, California and described an encounter with a friend. "Dude, what happened to you?" his friend asked, seeing the hook where his right arm used to be. The soldier replied that he was wounded in Iraq, and the friend said, "I thought that war was over."

Pro- and antiwar groups each want to use the soldier in their rallies, but he has declined all requests. Instead, he said, he is reading books about Iraq and asked me if I had seen the movie, "The Battle of Algiers." He spoke to a group of high school drop outs, kids like he was before he joined the Army, and wants to do more public speaking or counseling. He is worried about his younger brother and sister, who both want to join the military. He blames television and movies for giving them a false impression of war. ■

*Nina Berman is a photographer based in New York City. She has been documenting the political and social landscape in the United States for more than 10 years. Her pictures have been published in magazines throughout the world including Time, Newsweek, Fortune, Mother Jones, Harpers, Geo, and National Geographic. She teaches part-time at the International Center of Photography in New York. A book of the soldiers' portraits and interviews, "Purple Hearts," will be published by Trolley Books in August 2004.*

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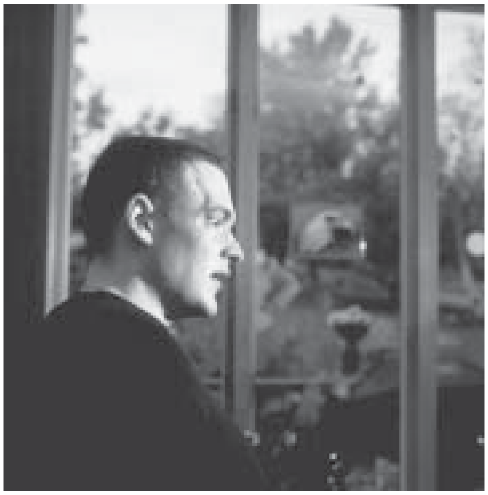
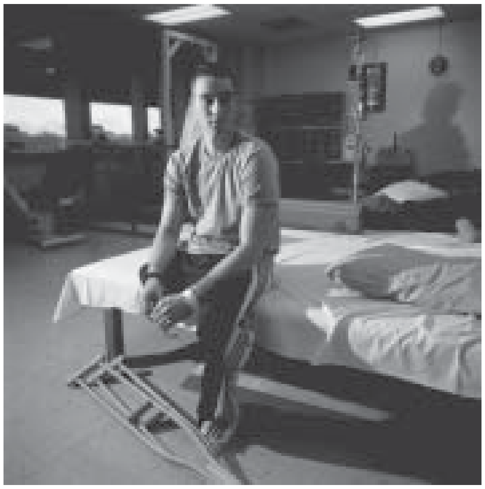
Sgt. Jeremy Feldbusch, 24 years old, an Army Ranger from the 3rd Battalion, 75th Regiment, was injured April 3, 2003, defending the Hadithah Dam and awarded the Purple Heart and Bronze Star with valor. He is completely blind, his brain is held together with titanium plates, he suffers seizures and has some brain damage. Photographed in his home in Derry Township, Pennsylvania, October 18, 2003.

*"I graduated from the University of Pittsburgh. I was a biology major. At one point in my life, I wanted to be a doctor. Even while I was going through college, I thought about going into the military. … I knew about the Middle East as much as I needed to. But it didn't make a difference. I wasn't fighting a political war with them anyway. That was already taken care of. That's about it. I don't have any regrets. I had some fun over there. I don't want to talk about the military anymore."*



Pfc. Tristan Wyatt, 21 years old, 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment, lost his leg in a firefight in Fallujah on August 25, 2003. Wyatt has undergone 10 surgeries because of massive infections as a result of his wounds. Photographed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., October 29, 2003.

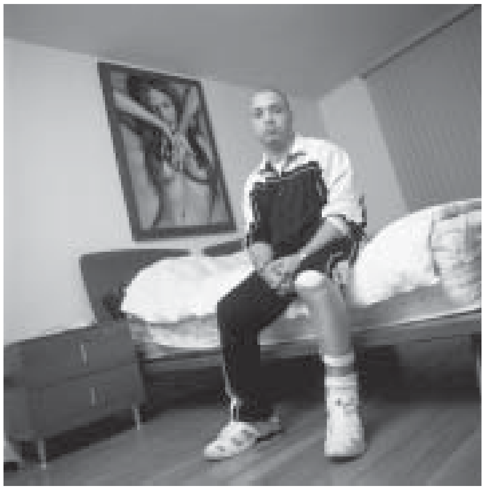
*"I was in the back of an armored personnel carrier. We got hit by a rocket-propelled grenade. It was a shitty day to say the least. I just kept shooting. I thought I was dead anyway. I've had to relearn everything from standing up to walking. I'd been snowboarding for close to eight years before I got hit, and I'm just hoping to be able to do it again. I want to go back to the military. I want my old job back. I was a combat engineer. We blew things up. I felt like my heart was in the right place over there."*



*Photographs by Nina Berman/Redux.*

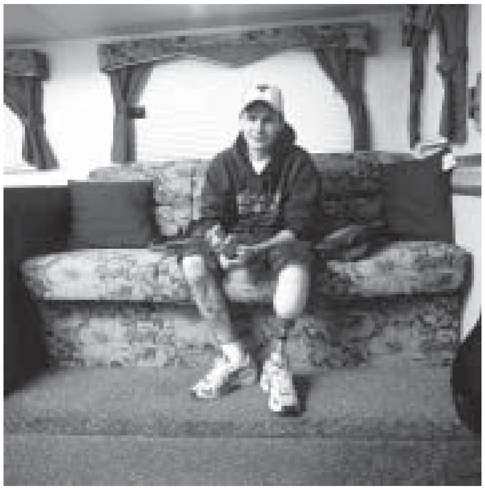
Marine Corporal Alex Presman, 26 years old, was injured outside of Baghdad, July 15, 2003, when a mine exploded in front of him. Photographed in his apartment in Sheepshead Bay, New York, October 28, 2003.

*"I was born in Russia. We came in '94. I think a man has to go through the military. … I just thought it was the right thing for me to do. We stopped for a break … four guys in front of me. I was following them, and boom, it took off my foot. It threw me up, and I just fell down. At first, I was a little shocked. I didn't understand what happened. They medevaced me out, took me to Bethesda Naval Hospital, and they told me it had to be amputated. Nobody can prepare himself for that. But you know, it could have been worse."*



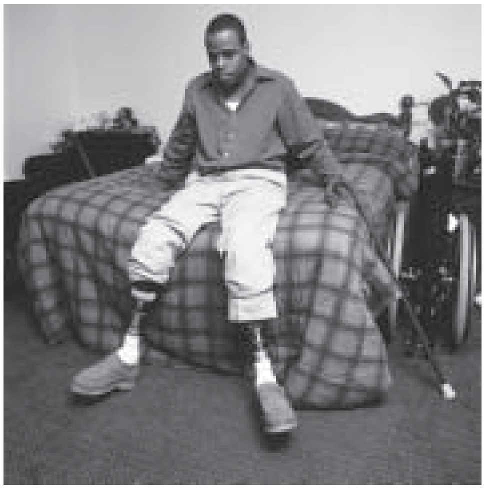
Sam Ross, 21 years old, an Army paratrooper and combat engineer with the 82nd Airborne Division, was gravely injured May 18, 2003, in Baghdad when a bomb blew up during a munitions disposal operation. Photographed at his home in Dunbar Township, Pennsylvania, October 19, 2003.

*"I lost my left leg, just below the knee. Lost my eyesight …. I have shrapnel in pretty much every part of my body. Got my finger blown off …. I had a hole blown through my right leg …. It hurts a lot, that's about it. You know, not really anything major. Just little things. I have a piece of shrapnel in my neck that came up through my vest and went into my throat and it's sitting behind my trachea, and when I swallow, it kind of feels like I have a pill in my throat. It was the best experience of my life. … I've jumped out of airplanes, I got to play with mines, got to see how the Army works. I got to interact with people of another culture, people who live their lives 100 percent different than the way we live here. That's something that one in a million people will never get to see in their lifetime—another culture."*



Pfc. Alan Jermaine Lewis, 23 years old, a machine-gunner with the Army's 3rd Infantry Division, was wounded July 16, 2003, on Highway 8 in Baghdad, when the Humvee he was driving hit a land mine blowing off both legs, burning his face, and breaking his left arm in six places. Photographed at home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, November 23, 2003.

*"I remember every detail about my legs. Every detail from the scars to the ingrown toenails to the birthmarks to the burn marks. … I've always thought about death—just growing up in Chicago and living out here in this world. I had a friend when I was six years old …. He was shot in the head—I think it was a stray bullet. My oldest sister was killed by a stray bullet when I was just a couple of months old, and my father was killed when I was seven. … I'm actually glad that I did the military the way I did—that I lived in the world for a couple of years—because I never would have known what it would be like to live on my own and be able to have parties at my house and own a car and do things like that."*



*Photographs by Nina Berman/Redux.*

Platoon Sergeant John Quincy Adams, 37 years old, a National Guard reservist with Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 124th Infantry, was in a Humvee on August 29, 2003, when a remote controlled bomb exploded under his vehicle sending shrapnel into his brain and body. He has metal in the right lower quadrant of his brain, rock and shrapnel in his face, entry and exit wounds in his arm that damaged nerves and tendons in his hands and fingers, and is on medication for seizures, mood swings, and depressions that leaves him drowsy. He is not permitted physical activity since any fall could jiggle the metal in his brain, leaving him without speech or motor skills. Photographed at his home in Miramar, Florida with his wife, Summer, December 18, 2003.

*"It was scary but I knew I had to do it. … It was pride. And to serve my country. It ran in my family. My father. My uncle. Everybody. … There is not that much I can do now. … My head doesn't let me work, plus my arm. I was doing landscaping and lawn service in North Miami with my father-in-law. I loved it. … Now I like being with the kids and my wife. I try to be with them always."*

Pfc. Randall Clunen, 19 years old, an infantryman with the 101st Airborne, was on guard duty the night of December 8, 2003, when a suicide bomber broke through the perimeter and blew himself up along with his vehicle. Fifty-eight soldiers were wounded in the attack, including Clunen. The blast sent chunks of shrapnel into his face causing heavy bleeding and massive structural damage to his jaw and cheek. An emergency tracheotomy was performed so that he could breathe. He has had three surgeries and has several more to go. Photographed in his home in Salem, Ohio, February 14, 2004.

*"I liked it. The excitement. The adrenaline. Never knowing what's going to happen. I mean you could walk in the house, and it would blow up. Or you could go in and get fired at. I'm an adrenaline junky …. Start changing my life so I'm not as much an adrenaline junky. All the excitement that was going on, now it's nothing. … My dad, we'd sit there and watch [television]. A lot of John Wayne movies too, you know, the cowboys and Indians, and then the war movies."*

Sergeant Wasim Khan, 24 years old, of the 2nd battalion First Armored Division, was manning a guard post on June 1, 2003, when an RPG ripped through the guard post shattering Khan's leg and slicing his body with shrapnel. He has had 17 surgeries. Once an avid cricket player, Khan is now in constant pain and has limited use of his leg. An immigrant from Pakistan, Khan received his citizenship while recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Photographed in his home in the Richmond Hill section of Queens, January 10, 2004.

*" I have shrapnel in my arms and my legs. I can feel them, they're moving. In the shower, little pieces are falling out. I'm not really down to be honest with you. What happened, happened. … The good news is that I'm still alive, and God bless I still have both legs. I feel like I am part of history. In Washington we go out together, the Korean veterans, the Vietnam veterans, and now the Iraqi veterans. … Actually when I was here [in New York City] a couple of weeks ago they killed two Pakistani Muslims here in Brooklyn. … They called them Taliban, Taliban, and they shot them. But I've never had any problems."*

*Photographs by Nina Berman/Redux.*

# Developing Word Pictures to Inform a Complex Story

## 'Eighty percent of foreign reporting is about getting there.'

### By Jeffrey Fleishman

Men with bandoliers and Kalashnikovs led us up the mountain road. Their Toyota pickup truck jerked and shimmied. Grenades dangled as we rolled past caves, grazing sheep, bunkers, minefields and a guerrilla graveyard. So unfolded the high terrain of Ansar al-Islam, the extremist group of Kurds and Arabs that had been terrorizing northern Iraq.

Days earlier, on February 5, 2003, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell delivered the most important speech of his career to the United Nations. He urged war by claiming the Iraqi regime possessed weapons of mass destruction and had ties to Ansar and other militant groups. Powell showed an aerial photograph of a stone and cinder-block compound in the Ansar-controlled village of Sargat. He described the buildings as a "poison factory" capable of manufacturing dangerous chemicals that could be smuggled across the Middle East and Europe.

Ansar knew Powell's assertions meant cruise missiles would be aimed at the group's bases scattered in the wrinkle of these snowy mountains. The terrorist organization decided it was time for some P.R. of its own, so it invited a handful of international journalists—those of us earlier considered persona non grata—to Sargat to inspect the cinder-block compound. We wondered if we should go. Was it a ploy? A religious leader who was close to Ansar informed us it would probably be safe. The potential news value was high, and we decided to take the chance.

This invitation, which came through the static of a satellite phone, made me realize again the importance and responsibility of foreign reporting. Powell's allegations were made thousands of miles away in New York, and his charges were a part of a larger case being made by the Bush administration to justify an Iraqi invasion to the American people.

After the U.N. speech, 12 other Western journalists and I were standing with the bearded, Koran-quoting guerrillas whom the United States was preparing to annihilate. We had the opportunity to report and observe and thereby offer an independent assessment of the evidence. The Bush administration probably never believed that Ansar, with its links to al-Qaeda, would allow reporters into its domain. Yet it was. While we knew Ansar wasn't permitting us access to everything in the compound, we had been informed by Kurdish officials that the organization had been crudely experimenting with chemicals akin to rat poison. But I also suspected—and was later able to verify through numerous visits to Ansar bases, access to the groups computer files, and interviews with captured fighters and Western intelligence sources—that Powell's claims about Ansar's destructive capabilities were, at the very least, exaggerated.

### Supplying Essential Details and Color

Foreign reporting is full of such exhilarating moments. The job of helping to unravel contradictions and putting them in context is vital to increasing Americans' understanding of a confusing world. This seems especially relevant given recent revelations that U.S. intelligence about the capability of Iraq's weapons was flawed. Being de-

Foreign correspondence: Marine newsmen work at a makeshift press center on the volcanic sands of Iwo Jima in February 1945. *Photo from National Archives and Records Administration/Courtesy of Newseum.*

tached, as they are, from the spin and buzz of Washington pundits and policymakers, foreign correspondents bring an independent eye, ear and voice to providing information that ought to be part of policy deliberations. By following goat trails and entering caves, we can often find clues that help to decipher fact from embellishment and offer more of a clear-eyed portrait in a developing story.

Logistical setbacks intrude, and following a consistent thread of news can be difficult. A day that begins with one set of plans is reinvented hourly. A firefight whirls across the dirt road and delays you for hours. A village elder refuses to meet with you and does not care that you drove 60 miles across mountains to see him. A Tibetan guide decides he must consult an oracle before taking you on a journey into the Himalayas. The phrase "the right to know" draws a grimace or a confused scrunch of the face from the thug standing at a roadblock with a weapon and a bottle of liquor. The story you think of being able to report in the morning is often not the one you are able to file at night.

Eighty percent of foreign reporting is about getting there. The rest—at least for me as a newspaper reporter—centers on sketching a sense of place and providing analysis of how what is happening here affects events of our time. Because the 24-hour news networks flicker with breaking news but often fail to illuminate context and probe the deeper story, newspapers, magazines and to some extent the Internet are critical in describing the nuance and broader context of events.

Most Americans know little about other countries and cultures. This means foreign correspondents must find ways to bring readers and viewers an understanding of other people and places by using more than cursory images and stock phrases. It is all about moving away from stereotypes and accurately conveying essential details and color. Without these specifics, readers can't see in our words the burned-out villages and scattered bodies in Kosovo or the mountain bunker in northern Iraq where Kurdish warriors eat roasted sheep and wait in starlight for the enemy to breech the ridge. If a sense of place is not conjured, no bond is drawn with the reader, and the hours and miles spent traveling are in vain. The story has no resonance and, ultimately, will fail to inform them about policies affecting the decision-making of their government.

**The job of helping to unravel contradictions and putting them in context is vital to increasing Americans' understanding of a confusing world.**

One of the best lessons I received about the value of foreign reporting came from a village elder in Kosovo in 1998. He and other ethnic Albanians operated a safe house in the mountains for young men wounded by Serb paramilitary units. It was almost dusk and bandaged men—and at least one dying boy—hid in silence, except for the tapping of cigarettes and the soft clinking of spoons in pialas of tea. I made some notes and, as I was walking away along a hilltop, the village elder stopped me. Neither could speak the other's language. Yet he looked at me and pointed to my notebook, then scrawled his finger across the sky. I understood. He wanted me to write what I saw.

## Observing and Analyzing

Simple. That's what we do. We write and analyze what we hear and observe and send our words to those who depend on us to draw a word picture of another place. Ours is not always a complete picture, but over time—with perseverance and luck—its form does take shape. Often, the truth about complex and contentious stories—whether it be Saddam Hussein's weapons' capabilities or the ethnic hate that propelled the carnage in Rwanda—is found in a gray area that needs more explanation than a nut graf or a soundbite.

Days after U.S. air strikes killed and routed hundreds of Ansar guerrillas, I went back to Sargat. The "poison factory" compound had been destroyed by U.S. missiles, and its rubble was flecked with tattered papers, shoes, medicines and a life preserver that had been fashioned into a vest for a suicide bomber. Ansar was—and remains—a dangerous terrorist organization in pursuit of jihad, a group that once sent a car bomb into a crowd of refugees. But it did not possess a deadly chemical arsenal, just as it appears that Saddam Hussein had no fleet of biochemical mobile labs.

What Ansar did possess were science books, and it experimented with a cyanide-laced cream it rubbed on animals. In the reporting I was able to do there both before and after the war, and the access I had to Ansar's strategies and ambitions, I saw no evidence of mass chemical production. I detected no technical capabilities one would associate with a factory. Most of the group's potions—discovered by journalists and later shown to U.S. forces—were stored in a cinder-block building about the size of an outhouse. Ansar never staged a chemical or biological attack. Its forces were more focused on Kalashnikovs, rocket-propelled grenades, and suicide bombs.

The U.S. intelligence was flawed. And foreign correspondents who could reach the mountains of northern Iraq were able to report what they saw. ■

*Jeffrey Fleishman, a 2002 Nieman Fellow, is the Berlin bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times. He reported as a unilateral correspondent during the Iraq War.*

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# The Iraq Experience Poses Critical Questions For Journalists

## 'How do we protect against violence while protecting our image as noncombatants? How do we guard against danger without sealing ourselves off?'

*Anthony Shadid, who for the past year has been reporting from Iraq for The Washington Post, delivered the 23rd Joe Alex Morris, Jr. Memorial Lecture at the Nieman Foundation on March 11, 2004. This lecture series was established by Morris's Harvard classmates and journalistic colleagues to honor his life as a reporter who covered wars, revolutions, coups and uprisings as a foreign correspondent. When he died of a bullet wound in Tehran in February 1979, Morris was covering the final days of the Iranian revolution as the Los Angeles Times's Middle East bureau chief. In his remarks to the Nieman Fellows and invited guests, Shadid spoke of the responsibilities and risks of working as a reporter in Iraq. A few weeks after the lecture, Shadid won the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting. Excerpts from his talk and his responses to questions follow.*

I want to speak to you very much from the day-to-day work I've been doing over the past year in Iraq. Maybe I can bring experiences that might shed something new on the business that we're all involved in. By the end of the talk I hope I will have raised more questions than answers with the knowledge that in these questions there are no good answers available.

For the past year I've tried to understand Iraq, admittedly with varying degrees of success. Let me recount to you three stories that drive to the heart of the changing nature of the profession of foreign correspondents and the growing dangers in carrying out that work. What troubles me is a tendency I've noticed over the past year for a profession to make what you might describe as seismic decisions about how we conduct our work, often by simply backing into those decisions.

I wrote the first story in July, and I'm going to recount a few paragraphs from it. It was datelined Thuluya, which is a very scenic town about 90 miles north of Baghdad.

"Two hours before the dawn call to prayer, in a village still shrouded in silence, Sabah Kerbul's executioners arrived. His father carried an AK-47 rifle, as did his brother. With barely a word spoken, they led the man accused by the village of working as an American informer behind a house girded with fig trees, vineyards and orange groves. His hands trembling, his father raised his rifle and aimed at his oldest son. One shot tore through Kerbul's leg, another his torso. He fell to the ground still breathing, his blood soaking the parched dust near the banks of the Tigris. His father could go no further. Some accounts say he collapsed. His other son then fired three times. Villagers said, at least once at his brother's head. Kerbul, a tall, husky 28-year-old, died. 'It wasn't an easy thing to kill him,' his brother Salah said.

"In his simple home of cement and cinder blocks, his father Salem nervously thumbed black prayer beads this week as he recalled the warning from village residents earlier this month. He insisted Kerbul was not an informer, but he said his words meant little to a village seething with anger. Their threat was clear: Either he killed his son, he said, or villagers resorted to tribal justice and killed the rest of his family, the retaliation for Kerbul's role in a U.S. operation in the village in June.

"'I have the heart of a father, and he's my son,' Salem said. 'Even the prophet Abraham didn't have to kill his son.' He dragged on a cigarette. His eyes glimmered with the faint trace of tears. 'There was no other choice,' he whispered."

The second story was datelined Baghdad. It was a piece that I did in June. It focused on the ordeals of a U.S. military police unit, in particular the sentiments of its commander. One quote I'm going to read was slightly edited when it appeared in the paper. You might see why.

"To Staff Sgt. Charles Pollard, the working-class neighborhood of Mashtal is 'a very, very, very, very bad neighborhood.' His frustration in training Iraqi police is matched only by his suspicion, and he has one desire. 'U.S. officials need to get our asses out of here,' said the 43-year-old reservist from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. 'I say that seriously. We have no business being here. We will not change the culture they have in Iraq and Baghdad. Baghdad is so corrupted. All we are here is potential people to be killed and sitting ducks.'"

The last one I wanted to mention is a brief passage from a story I did in Basra, a large city in southern Iraq. I did the piece in August, after weekend riots erupted over collapsing infrastructure. In it, I quoted a guy named Iain Pickard, who was the British civilian spokesman in the city. I was struck in our interview by how forthright he was, how outspoken.

"Pickard acknowledged there was 'an understandable degree of frustration' and complained that the priorities of British officials in Basra—power, water and fuel—are not shared to the same degree by U.S. officials in Washington and Baghdad. 'It seemed so bureaucratic, so difficult to get things going,' he said, from a building looted of everything but its windows before they moved in. 'We have not had a great deal of say. We don't feel we've been able to influence the reconstruction program.' He pointed to a U.S.-funded project to renovate 200 schools in the region. 'While admirable,' Pickard said, 'painting schools isn't going to stop people from rioting.'"

## The Price Paid for Coverage

Why do I bring up these stories? To me, they all had something in common. Looking back, they were some of the toughest stories I had to report. Gaining access was difficult. Even more difficult was gaining a small degree of trust that led those people to talk. But it wasn't necessarily what went into reporting them—not really the content itself. Rather, it was what followed their publication—what the stories prompted—and the landscape that made that response possible.

Within weeks of the story about the father killing his son, the U.S. military started a manhunt for the father along the irrigated farms that border the Tigris. To this day, he remains in hiding. The same village that forced him to kill his son is now trying to protect him.

Sgt. Pollard? His story is a little more colorful. He never recanted his quote, and he was disciplined. He was removed from his command and sent back to base. He became a folk hero of sorts. People hung up the article on the walls of the base known as Mule Skinner. They asked him to sign their T-shirts. They said that, somehow, he was giving voice to what they had wanted to say out loud for quite a while. His family sent out e-mails to protest his circumstances. But in the end, he was still punished for speaking out by a military that doesn't tolerate dissent.

Finally, the spokesman in Basra. He was fired the next day after the story was published. That kind of criticism, it was made clear to him, was unacceptable. It probably goes without saying that getting a quote out of his replacement, which I've tried to do, is next to impossible.

My first reaction in learning of the repercussions was deep unease. "At what cost?," I asked myself. Were the stories worth the pain they caused? Did they illustrate something that readers would have suffered if they had not known about them? Can we be too reckless in pursuit of a story that has somehow at the time, at least to us, seemed to define the events going on around us?

It was easy to rationalize. All the men spoke on the record. All knew they were talking to a journalist. But then I realized something that has grown in importance in the months since last summer. While every story is admittedly unique, Iraq is far, far different than any other. The judgment that went into writing and reporting stories, rules I've adhered to for perhaps a decade or so (and many people in this room probably have, too) don't hold up in the current Baghdad environment. While Iraq is unlike any other story in the world, there are elements of that story of Iraq that we may start to see elsewhere, in other assignments in the very near future.

## Government and the Press

What do I mean by that? For the first time, perhaps, since Vietnam, we're dealing with a foreign story in which the U.S. government—a government very aware of the power of image—is the central, dominant player. Across the country, we're dealing with a level of violence that has grimly escalated at every turn to the point that reporters and those who work for them are operating at great risk. It's a risk that I'm increasingly believing may be too great. We're dealing with the locale in which the independence of journalists, in particular Arab reporters, is questioned by both the U.S. government and those who are opposed to it in Iraq.

Let me briefly take a look at each of these points. I reported in the Middle East for 10 years and then in Washington for two years. In many ways, what I've learned in Washington helps me better understand what's happening in Iraq. There's an unending struggle between reporters and U.S. officials to set the priorities of coverage. Reporters see it as newsgathering. The U.S. administration sees it as overemphasis on gloomy news. Their response has been wide-ranging.

From an almost overwhelming flow of news releases to the Pentagon's own newsgathering efforts, there has been an insistence on getting out the government's version of events. The latest innovation, "a gaggle"—that fixture of background reporting at the White House—was instituted last month in Baghdad's conference center. There's nothing wrong with that. It's their job to best market their message. It's a new pressure for foreign correspondents to deal with. The U.S. government is an integral part of the story, to a degree unmatched anywhere else abroad, and it plays favorites. Leaks occur, as they do in Washington. Briefings and news conferences take on greater importance. Those who talk, meanwhile, are fearful for their jobs—rightfully so, as I saw with the story in Basra.

If I understood then what I understand now, would I have quoted the spokesman in Basra knowing that he might get fired the next day? Would I have asked the U.S. military about Sabah Kerbul's father, giving them a lead on the manhunt that, according to the villagers, is still going on? Would I have hesitated to quote Sgt. Pollard by name? I don't know the answers. I do keep asking myself the questions.

## Assessing the Risks of Reporting

The second point I mentioned was violence, and that has been far easier to grasp. For much of the last year, many reporters felt the greatest danger came from being in the wrong place at the wrong time with U.S. troops in the area, it's sad to say. It was a tragic irony that given all the talk about what the Iraqi government might do to journalists during the war—talk about human shields and hostage-taking—it was the U.S. military blamed for the deaths of two journalists in the Palestine Hotel during the war's final days. No less tragic was the death of Mazen Dana, a 43-year-old father of four and an award-winning Reuters cameraman, who was killed in August outside of Abu Ghraib prison. The U.S. military apparently mistook his camera for a rocket-propelled grenade, even though a U.S. soldier at the prison had granted them permission to film.

We're seeing a very alarming increase in violence from insurgents directed against journalists. My newspaper was one of the first to experience it. In February, the house of one of our assistants was bombed, and he along with his family was forced to flee into exile. The same day, we noticed men in a car taking pictures of our house in Baghdad. Last week, a translator for the Voice of America was killed, along with his mother and his sister. While no one knows the motive for sure, both had been targeted after helping work on stories that try to get inside the strategy and the tactics of insurgents battling U.S. troops. I think it's quickly becoming the consensus among journalists that any kind of resistance reporting is off-limits, if not for one's own safety, then for the safety of those who help them.

Finally, there was the point of journalists losing their status of independents. This is perhaps the most far-reaching, if least noticed, aspect of what's happening in Iraq today. Arab journalists with Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya have been routinely harassed, both by the U.S. military and the U.S.-appointed Iraq Governing Council. The word in Baghdad is that it would take very little for either to be closed permanently. The military suspects them of actually cooperating in some attacks. Both networks have already suffered varying levels of sanctions that, I think, if imposed on a U.S. network, would have raised vociferous protests.

Their treatment has given rise to fears that what might emerge in the future is a more permanent distinction between those who are embedded and unilateral journalists—reporters who are somehow sanctioned and unsanctioned with the ensuing risk difference. On the other hand, "insurgents," or however we want to describe them, have been drawing fewer and fewer lines: A journalist is a foreigner, and a foreigner is a target. Those working with foreigners are targets. It's that simple. In Iraq, we've seen the image of noncombatants erode to a point where the act of newsgathering has become as hazardous as anywhere else in the world.

## News Organizations Respond

What's been the response? I mentioned earlier that some decisions of vast importance seem to be made by simply backing into them. Journalists are facing a threat in Iraq—a threat that no one would dare understate. In response, TV networks have hired armed guards—guards very willing to shoot. The most recent example of that was two staffers with CNN who were killed at a checkpoint south of Baghdad. At least one reporter started wearing a weapon, for a brief time. Newspaper journalists, many of whom prided themselves on working low to the ground, had begun openly debating whether or not they should adopt television's tactic of riding with armed security or providing weapons to their drivers. Houses have become fortified. Hotels where journalists work are often behind two-story, concrete barricades, their entrances manned by checkpoints with U.S. soldiers, guard dogs, or contracted security.

We're cut off from the very city we cover. The psychological barriers are my greatest fear. Since they affect the very nature of our reporting, there's always this question of sentiments, and I think sentiments since the start of the conflict have been the great unknown. Is it occupation or liberation? Is it freedom, or is it something short of that? I don't know that we've seen the long-term implications of our growing isolation.

The question that should be asked is: What happens when we start losing touch with how a city feels, how a city responds, how it reacts—its very energy? Can we afford to ignore such a central component of the story, when that component may very well determine the outcome of the project underway in Iraq?

Again, I'm struck by this question: At what cost? Is this the future of reporting in war zones—the scenario in which we require the blessing of the dominant military, where we fortify ourselves against the country we're supposed to cover, where we travel in the same fashion as armed combatants would?

That's quickly describing reporting in Iraq. Perhaps that's all it describes. But I fear the momentum of some of the changes taking place will carry over into other locales that require our work.

In a landscape like Iraq, how do we protect ourselves, or how do we protect our sources and our story—protection that may have been a secondary concern in a less hostile environment? With a changing U.S. role abroad in places like Central Asia, Afghanistan and Iraq, how do we keep our distance and an independent role? This is ever more important as foreign conflicts, like Iraq, become domestic stories in themselves. How do we protect against violence while protecting our image as noncombatants? How do we guard against danger without sealing ourselves off? No less important, how do we guard our profession in a changing world?

In conclusion, I wanted to mention a proverb, and if anybody's traveled the Middle East, they know that the region is full of them. It's one of my favorite sayings in Iraq. It goes something like this. It's set in a market with a man shopping. He's talking to a vendor, who says: "If you want a rabbit, take a rabbit. If you want a gazelle, go ahead and settle for a rabbit."

Sometimes I fear that, as journalists, we might be settling for rabbits. In a chaotic, precarious landscape we're arming ourselves and fortifying against danger without understanding the implications of that process. We're making concessions to authorities—and those who defy authority—without recourse. Perhaps there is no recourse. We're losing our status as noncombatants while not recognizing the danger of the alternative. None by itself is decisive, but these actions have the tendency to set precedents. Precedents, in the freewheeling work that we do, have a way of gaining momentum. It remains a question today whether that momentum can be stopped.

*The following is an edited transcript of the question and answer session that occurred after Anthony Shadid's speech.*

**Erik Eckholm, 2004 Nieman Fellow:** What do you think are the alternatives to the concerns you raise? Reporters can't just be totally reckless.

**Shadid:** The reason I'm raising more questions than I have answers is because I'm not sure what the answers are. There clearly are two trends going on for reporters working in a place like Baghdad. Do you have a large footprint in that city? Do you protect yourselves accordingly? In other words, do you have armed guards? Do you fortify your compound? Do you live behind cement barricades? Or do you shrink down to a much smaller operation? Do you have one person, maybe two people? Do you keep as low a profile as possible? You try not to attract the attention that's going to endanger you in the first place.

Obviously [because I speak Arabic], I'm going to speak a little differently than many of the other correspondents and be able to operate perhaps a little bit more discretely in Baghdad. But is an armed guard in a car going to protect me? I don't think so. Is being behind a barricade going to necessarily not attract attention? I don't think so. I think some of these precautions that are being taken are almost an instinctive reaction to what we need to provide our security. But I don't think we're necessarily providing more security. They make us feel better about what we're doing. But in the end, are we having any better chance of getting out of this conflict alive? I don't think that's necessarily the case.

**David Beard, Boston Globe regional editor:** Don't these changes have a greater effect on you because you're the street guy in a team? Somebody else can be covering the news and stay in the fortified area and covering that side, if the news organization's got somebody covering the streets.

**Shadid:** I agree with that. The street reporting is the stuff that we're talking about that's becoming more and more difficult. There's also this precedent that gets set. That is what I was talking about a little earlier—about backing into decisions without necessarily thinking of the implications. If journalists are beginning to arm themselves, if they're beginning to carry armed guards in cars as the networks do, there is going to be an assumption that emerges pretty quickly. That assumption is that all journalists are armed and all journalists are carrying weapons. It's my sense; it's not necessarily the right sense, and a lot of colleagues in Baghdad disagree with me strongly. But rather than serving as a deterrent, it seems to me [that being armed or being protected with armed guards] just attracts more firepower.

**Adrian Fortescue, 2004 Weatherhead Center for International Affairs Fellow and special adviser within the European Commission:** Did you say you're worried about Western journalists? Do reporters for other non-Western news organizations such as Al Jazeera face the same concerns?

**Shadid:** When I come back to the United States, I realize what a different kind of perception there is of Al Jazeera or Al Arabiya. As somebody who's been in the Middle East for a long time and who is used to state broadcasting in the Middle East—a pretty dreadful thing to watch—I found it refreshing to see networks that are extremely competitive with each other trying to get the news out. They are very suspect in Baghdad. There is almost a conviction within the U.S. military that they do have foreknowledge of attacks that are carried out on U.S. soldiers. Whether it's true or not, I don't know. They have an ability to get very deep into Iraqi society, but they're also not welcomed in Iraq, in some ways less so than Western correspondents. So while they do have the cultural flexibility, they carry a lot of baggage with them. They take a lot more risks. They come [in] for a lot more harassment than probably anybody else in that country.

**Tom Regan, 1992 Nieman Fellow, The Christian Science Monitor, associate editor:** When you were shot [covering a story in Ramallah, West Bank], there was some question about who it was who actually shot you—which side. You talked a little bit about some of the incidents involved when the U.S. military actually accidentally shot a journalist. Are we reaching a point where if you're not an embedded journalist or [if] either side thinks you're not on their side, you become the target?

**Shadid:** That's my fear. I don't think it's gone down that path yet, but I think there is a deep fear on my part that what we are seeing is the creation of two classifications of journalists—a kind of a looser distinction between journalists who are embedded and nonembedded and that they have the certain protections that follow. The bigger picture that we're looking at is that in places like Iraq and in the West Bank, journalists aren't off limits anymore. The U.S. military is not trying to shoot journalists, but there have been some really tragic accidents. I think journalists have been targeted in the West Bank. It worries me in the bigger sense of what we do as reporters. We're losing this independent status already. Operating in Baghdad as armed combatants I'm not sure is the way to necessarily preserve that status.

**Alan Cullison, 2004 Nieman Fellow:** Are reporters responding effectively to hostilities?

**Shadid:** In Baghdad right now, what's struck me is how paranoid the place is. That's a strong word, and I hesitate to use it, but there is an incredible sense of conspiracy going on. You can try to explain the conspiracy theories that circulate in the city as just a disillusionment and a disenchantment with the way the past year has gone, but it's directed at foreigners. When we were in Karbala two weeks ago, I was with a photographer from The Washington Post. We went to the scene right afterwards [of violence by insurgent suicide bombers], and the anger was unbelievable. Men yelling at us: "It's your fault. You guys are responsible for this, and you should pay for this, too." Can they be dealt with in any way other than trying to just stay out of it? I don't know. I still think the West Bank remains the most dangerous place on earth, but Baghdad is becoming an incredibly tricky place because you're dealing with suspicion, you're dealing with paranoia, you're dealing with incredible violence. You're not dealing with trust from any side. Reporters basically don't have any friends in Baghdad right now.

**Ju-Don Marshall Roberts, 2004 Nieman Fellow:** What are you reporting on now?

**Shadid:** There were three families that I met and spent time with during the war. I've spent time with them in the year since. I finished doing very long pieces about what their experiences were like and what their lives were like. They're all using their names. They didn't use their names during the war. I'm being very specific about what I was going to use in the story, what I wanted to use from it and, in a way, it makes me uncomfortable. I almost don't like the person that I'm interviewing being that involved in the process. Given the risks that are going on in Baghdad, you almost have a responsibility to engage those people more in exactly what's going to be coming out. When we talk about those three stories, I don't know if I would have done them differently. I just don't know the answer to that. I've been able to get back to two of the people and talk to them about it. Sgt. Pollard wasn't angry. He felt like he was saying something he wanted to say. Pickard was a different story.

**Alex Jones, 1982 Nieman Fellow and director of The Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics & Public Policy:** Did The Washington Post discourage you from changing identities or not specifically attributing information in your stories?

**Shadid:** They have a different sense of it from Washington than we do on the ground. I understand the suspicion and skepticism of readers right now about what we write, especially when the person doesn't use their name. I understand the importance of it. One of the families that I mentioned did not want to use their name initially, and it was a very long process. It went on over a week and probably a dozen e-mails: "What you guys are saying is important and people will not believe what you're saying without your name being attached to it." But what can you say without taking great risk? It was a long process of negotiation. I think the Post still defers to the people on the ground on this, but they made it very clear that they wanted their name as part of that story we were just mentioning.

**Bill Delaney, WBUR-FM radio news:** Will this Iraq become a model of democracy for the Middle East in five to 10 years, or not?

**Shadid:** I have no idea. The longer I'm there, the less I understand it. There's one character—and not that he's necessarily a representative—but it was a very striking conversation I had that took place over a year. This guy was a doctor, a Shiite doctor in Baghdad. I visited him during the war. I went to see him alone. We sat in his house. It was dark. The electricity had been cut, and he would just kind of smile the whole time. This guy's finished. Everybody hates him. The Iraqi Army hates him. It's a matter of time. I remember the last part of the conversation with him just sitting there silent with a smile on his face. I guess it was kind of a smile of satisfaction. When I went back to see him in July, he was jubilant. His hands were in the air. He was like: "Victory! Victory! Bush is my President. America is my country. I like Bush more than most Americans." It was this incredible conversation. There was a very interesting exchange between him and his wife, because his wife was much less optimistic. But he kept insisting to her: "You've just got to wait. You've got to see how things happen."

I went back and saw him again in October, and his mood had changed a little bit. Then I saw him again in February. It was disturbing because he gave a very angry quote to me. He said: "Don't tell me this is Russia. Don't tell me this is Germany. Don't tell me this is England. This is America. America can do everything, and why haven't they done it?" He said: "I try to understand why they haven't done it, and I wonder … what's going on?" He'd gone from this incredible excitement over what was ahead to actually believing that the United States military was behind the bombings that were going on in Baghdad. And this isn't somebody who had a grudge, by any means, against the government. It was somebody who was so disillusioned and disenchanted that he almost lost touch with what was going on. It was jarring. It was a vivid example of the way sentiments have gone in the city and how bleak it is in Baghdad.

**Melinda Patterson Grenier, Nieman Foundation senior Web editor:** There are a lot of misconceptions in the United States about the Middle East. Which ones do you think are the most dangerous, in terms of long-term relationships between the United States and the Middle East? What can journalists do to help people in America get a better understanding about the people and situation there?

**Shadid:** I have spent so much more

time over there than I have here that it's hard to say what the misperceptions are here. One thing that strikes me, as a reporter in the Middle East, is that it's very easy to hear what you want to hear. Sometimes it's a little harder to let people say what they want to say. There was a story that I did on Mutanabi Street, which is a storied thoroughfare in Baghdad. It's where the intellectuals hung out. It's where the bookstores are. It's had very much a revival since the collapse of Saddam. It just struck me in the conversations there that they were chaotic. They were all over the map. They were confusing. The only way you could report that story, basically, was to let people talk and write it that way. We often wonder, how do Iraqis feel? How do Baghdadis feel about something? I often think back—what they're going through is something along the lines of what the United States went through after September 11th, this incredible cataclysm. They're trying to come to grips with it. Just as sentiments here were chaotic, confused and conflicted, the same reactions are going on in Baghdad.

**Indira Lakshmanan, 2004 Nieman Fellow:** How do you feel about the matter of bodyguards for journalists? What kind of position do you feel that puts you in? Do you have conversations with other journalists about it, or do you just go your own way? …

**Shadid:** The talk among reporters in Baghdad is to go with armed guards. That's definitely the way things are headed. My sense has been leave it up to everybody. You have to make decisions on your own, and nobody should impose this kind of rule on other journalists. I do worry about the precedent I mentioned earlier: If many are being armed, then are we all suspected of being armed? What does that mean for us? Again, it's a question. I understand somebody who wants to carry an armed guard, but it does put you at risk. I don't see that it necessarily makes them safer. In fact, I think it makes them less safe.

**Ulla Morris Carter, widow of Joe Alex Morris, Jr.:** How many stories do you think you could not have covered if you had not been of Lebanese origin and speaking Arabic?

**Shadid:** I think the war would have been the most difficult thing, because my goal during the war was to try to get people talking as much as possible without the presence of a minder or an escort. I was able to do that. But I couldn't have done it without Arabic. ■

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*Rod Nordland*

*Newsweek, April 12, 2004*

## 'Avoiding the Cross Hairs': Excerpts

"They live in hiding. They move around Baghdad by stealth. They sneak into and out of the country by gloom of night, and when challenged by strangers for their nationality, they're ready with a practiced lie. Asked where they live, they name any old hotel rather than their safe house, which is littered with guns of a half-dozen types. They even resort to disguise and camouflage. Perhaps this is what it's like to be a terrorist hunted by the American military; I can't say. But for sure this is what it's like for those of us who are American civilians living and working in Iraq. …

"In the last few weeks, terrorists have repeatedly attacked Iraqis working for Western journalists, killing translators for both Time and Voice of America. The assassins of VOA translator Selwan Niemi were so savage they also murdered his 5-year-old daughter and his mother. At the funeral, banners were draped on the mosque threatening his grieving wife as well. …

"And yet there's something uncomfortably sleazy about telling strangers you're a Dane, which was my cover story until an Iraqi replied to me in perfect Danish. I muttered the only two words I knew, "kroner" and "skol," and edged away. (Now I say I'm a Spaniard.) … It's a shame because Baghdad is a big, bustling metropolis of five million people, and most Iraqis are genuinely friendly toward Americans. Outside of a few hard-core places, like Fallujah, the bad guys are a small minority. But they're a minority with lots of explosives, and no scruples at all. …

"No place can be fully safe. Mortars sometimes even hit the heavily protected Green Zone; one killed a Bechtel employee recently. The Blackwater Security guards killed last week in Fallujah were by reputation some of the best in the business—ex-SEAL's and Special Forces types—yet they couldn't even save themselves. My colleagues debate this all the time: Is it wiser to bring along ever more armed guards and raise our target profile, or stay low to the ground and just slink around? Whichever, it's a hell of a way to cover a country." ■

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# The Responsibilities of a Free Press

## 'Coverage of the administration's record on civil liberties since September 11th has, in my judgment, been sadly inadequate.'

*On March 2, 2004, Anthony Lewis, a former New York Times columnist, spoke at Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law at Yeshiva University in a conference called "Weapons of Mass Destruction, National Security, and a Free Press." Lewis began his remarks by referring to past interactions involving the press and government—notably the government's attempts to suppress publication of the Pentagon Papers and The Progressive magazine's article about the H-bomb. What follows is an updated version of Lewis's speech.*

Today I am going to talk about where we are on the issues of national security and the Constitution. The first thing I have to say is that the issues now are utterly different from those in the Progressive or Pentagon Papers case. In 1971, in the Pentagon Papers and, in 1979, in The Progressive, the government tried to prevent the press from publishing material that officials asserted would threaten national security. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the government has not directly engaged the press. It has not sought to enjoin a newspaper or broadcast station from disclosing something. It has invoked national security, rather, to deprive individuals of fundamental rights. In the name of fighting terrorism, it has abruptly overridden guarantees in the Constitution and international law. Ideas that we had regarded as alien to American beliefs—detention without trial, denial of the right to counsel, years of interrogation in isolation—are now American practice.

Let me tell you—or remind you—of one far-reaching claim of national security authority by the Bush administration. It claims the power to designate any American citizen as a supporter of terrorism and then to hold that citizen in detention indefinitely, in solitary confinement, without trial and without the right to consult counsel. And the imprisoned person, according to the administration's legal argument, is to have virtually no chance to challenge his designation as a terrorist.

Two American citizens have been imprisoned in that way for more than 20 months now. I shall briefly describe one. Jose Padilla was born in Brooklyn, became a gang member, served several prison terms, and in prison converted to Islam. In May 2002 he flew into O'Hare Airport in Chicago from abroad. Federal agents arrested him as a material witness before a grand jury in New York investigating the attack on the World Trade Center. He was taken to New York and brought before a federal judge, who appointed a lawyer, Donna Newman, to represent him. A hearing was set for June 11th. But on June 10th Attorney General [John] Ashcroft announced that Padilla would be held without trial as an enemy combatant.

"We have captured a known terrorist," Ashcroft said on television. "While in Afghanistan and Pakistan, he trained with the enemy …. In apprehending him, we have disrupted an unfolding terrorist plot to attack the United States by exploding a radioactive 'dirty bomb.'" That sounded frightening, but of course there had not been—and still has not been—any legal process to determine the truth of Ashcroft's colorful pronunciation of Padilla's guilt.

The Bush administration's lawyers at first said that Padilla should have no right to challenge his imprisonment in court at all. Then it said he could have a habeas corpus proceeding—the traditional way to test the legality of imprisonment. But it argued that the government had to show only "some evidence," not prove its case by a preponderance of evidence or, as in a criminal case, beyond a reasonable doubt.

Newman, Padilla's lawyer, filed a petition for habeas corpus. The evidence produced by the Bush administration was a statement by a Pentagon official, not subject to cross-examination and without any firsthand witnesses. The judge found that that was enough to justify Padilla's detention. But he did say that Newman should have a right to talk with Padilla, for the limited purpose of getting from him any facts inconsistent with his designation as a terrorist. The government reacted to that with outrage, saying that any visit to Padilla by a lawyer might damage his interrogation by destroying the necessary "atmosphere of dependency and trust between the subject and interrogator."

On appeal a panel of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit held that President Bush had no authority to hold Padilla in detention. The vote was two to one, and even the dissenter thought Padilla should have an unrestricted right to counsel. The Supreme Court is reviewing the case.

In March, Newman and her co-counsel, Andrew Patel, were allowed to visit Padilla at the Navy brig where he is held in South Carolina. They did not expect to learn a lot—or even ask very much, for the Defense Department ordered that two department officials be present at the visit and that the conversation be videotaped. Under those circumstances, counsel cannot, of course, have a candid discussion of facts or strategy.

The Defense Department still maintains that it can deny the right to counsel to a citizen held, like Padilla, as an "enemy combatant." It said it was allowing the visit to Padilla as a matter of grace. Two hours after announcing that the lawyers would be permitted to see Padilla under restrictive conditions, the government filed a brief in the Supreme Court arguing that the issue of the right to counsel in the case was now moot.

## Press Coverage of Civil Liberties

The theme of this conference has been national security and a free press. You might be wondering what the free press has to do with the Padilla case and other repressive actions by the Bush administration. My answer is that the press has had little to do and, more to the point, little to say about them. Coverage of the administration's record on civil liberties since September 11th has, in my judgment, been sadly inadequate. An example: I first heard about the administration's claim that it could indefinitely detain American citizens simply by calling them enemy combatants when it held the other detainee, Yaser Esam Hamdi. I saw it in a story a few paragraphs long in The New York Times. I was bewildered. Why wasn't that claim important news?

The fate of Hamdi and Padilla has rarely made it to Page One since then. When the Supreme Court agreed to hear, first, the Hamdi case, it was quite rightly a Page One story. But during the more than two years since the Bush administration first made its audacious claim, it has had little prominence in the print or broadcast press. I doubt that one American in a thousand knows about the cases—knows that his government claims a right to put an American citizen in detention forever on its own say-so.

The Bush administration is often accused of unilateralism in foreign affairs. But the unilateralism is just as striking at home in enemy combatant cases. The administration asserts, on its own, a legal right to detain citizens without trial. Then it claims the right to define not only the law but also the facts, because it allows the detained person no effective opportunity to challenge his designation as a terrorist.

Think about those enemy combatant cases in comparison with the Progressive case. Which constitutes a worse threat to the constitutional freedoms of Americans? It seems to me obvious that our rights are far more menaced by the proposition that the government can put any of us in prison without trial or access to counsel.

In the Pentagon Papers' case Justice Potter Stewart, in his separate opinion, addressed the role of the press on issues related to the national security. On those matters, he said, the usual legislative and judicial checks on executive power scarcely operate; Congress and the courts tend to defer to the President. So, he wrote: "the only effective restraint upon executive policy and power … may lie in an enlightened citizenry—in an informed and critical public opinion which alone can protect the values of democratic government. For this reason, it is perhaps here that a press that is alert, aware and free most vitally serves the basic purpose of the First Amendment. For without an informed and free press there cannot be an enlightened citizenry."

It is not only in the enemy combatant cases that the press seems to me to have failed to perform the function described by Justice Stewart. Another example is the sweep of aliens ordered by Attorney General Ashcroft after September 11th. Thousands were arrested on suspicion of having something to do with terrorism. They were held for weeks or months, their names and places of detention kept secret, then mostly charged with such immigration violations such as overstaying a visa and deported after secret hearings. In prison, while they were being detained without charge, they were humiliated and assaulted. At the Metropolitan Detention Center in Brooklyn they were allowed one telephone call a week to try to find a lawyer. Guards informed them of that by asking, "Are you okay?" That was supposedly shorthand for, "Do you want to call a lawyer?"

We found all that out when the Justice Department's inspector general, Glenn A. Fine, investigated and filed a report. He told about the abuse of the prisoners. He said they had been arrested more or less at random, with no probable cause to think they had a connection with terrorism. The whole process of arrests and confinement had relatively little coverage in the press—until the inspector general's report. Then there were serious reports. The New York Times's legal writer, Adam Liptak, wrote in an analytical piece that the treatment of the aliens "inverted the foundation principles of the American legal system."

The secrecy that pervaded the alien sweep—even families were not told where their missing members were—is the sort of thing that usually arouses the press. But with some honorable exceptions, notably a fine series in the Chicago Tribune, the detentions were not treated as a major story. Again, I wonder why.

## Why the Press Ignore These Stories

One reason for the relatively tepid response to the incursions on civil liberties since September 11th, I think, is that they have on the whole been directed at marginal figures. Editors are not going to see a Jose Padilla as a person with whom readers or viewers can readily identify. But the principle that the Bush administration seeks to establish in his case—that a President can jail any American indefinitely without a trial—is what matters.

Another reason may be that the interests of the press itself have not been directly attacked. A case like [the] Pentagon Papers, in which the press's freedom is at issue, always gets more attention from editors. Justice William J. Brennan, Jr., who was one of the press's great friends, once noted its habit of crying "doom" or "fascism" whenever it lost even a minor case in the courts.

Finally, I think the press, like politicians and the rest of us, were so traumatized by September 11th that we felt it right to unite behind the President. That urge was so strong that we hardly reacted when Attorney General Ashcroft told us that dissent—concern about civil liberties—was unpatriotic.

It was not an offhand statement by Ashcroft. In his prepared testimony for a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing three months after September 11th he said: 'To those who scare peace-loving people with phantoms of lost liberty, my message is this: Your tactics only aid terrorists, for they erode our national unity and diminish our resolve. They give ammunition to America's enemies." I know of no other attorney general in my lifetime who has expressed such contempt for First Amendment values.

The impulse to get on the national security team in the face of a terrorist threat had a particularly egregious example about a month after September 11th, when five major television networks broadcast a taped message from Osama bin Laden. President Bush's national security adviser, Condoleezza Rice, got top executives of the networks on a conference telephone call and urged them to cut "inflammatory language" from any future bin Laden tapes. She also warned that his talks might include coded instructions to terrorists—a singularly unpersuasive notion, since the original tapes had already been broadcast by Al Jazeera, the Arabic-language station. The network executives agreed among themselves to broadcast only short segments of future tapes. Walter Isaacson, who then was CNN's president said, "We're not going to step on the landmines Dr. Rice was talking about." A more candid explanation would have been, "We don't want to look unpatriotic."

There was a similar press tendency to take its lead from the White House, I think, in the run-up to the Iraq War. Diligent digging would have found the doubts that we now know existed in the intelligence agencies about the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. If the press had been more critical—more independent—the public would not have been led so easily from al-Qaeda to Iraq as the enemy that 44 percent of respondents in a poll thought there were Iraqis among the airplane terrorists on September 11th. I think The New York Times would have reported more fully what political opposition there was to the rush to war on Iraq, including a masterful speech by Senator Robert Byrd that it ignored. I think The Washington Post would not have reported an antiwar protest with a snide article calling the demonstrators "dudes" and "patchouli girls."

I earlier quoted Justice Stewart on how we need an informed and free press to check the great power of the President when he invokes national security. To those two adjectives I think we have to add a third: courageous. When we look back at the Pentagon Papers' episode, it is the courage of The New York Times and then other newspapers that stands out. I have been critical of the profession I love, so it is only right that I now quote a ringing statement in praise of that courage. It is from the concurring opinion of Justice Hugo L. Black in the Pentagon Papers' case.

"Paramount among the responsibilities of a free press," Justice Black wrote, "is the duty to prevent any part of the government from deceiving the people and sending them off to foreign lands to die of foreign fevers and foreign shot and shell. In my view, far from deserving condemnation for their courageous reporting, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and other newspapers should be commended for serving the purpose that the Founding Fathers saw so clearly. In revealing the workings of government that led to the Vietnam War, the newspapers nobly did that which the Founders hoped and trusted they would do."

The duty is not only to report with courage what underlies government decisions to send Americans off to die of foreign shot and shell, but government actions menacing the constitutional protections that have kept us free. ■

# The Unseen Is Made Visible

## Americans see photographs of military coffins, and repercussions follow.

For hundreds of U.S. soldiers from the war in Iraq, their final journey home has not been witnessed by fellow Americans for whom they fought. A ban on photographs of coffins was reinforced by the Bush administration as it prepared for war in Iraq. According to The Washington Post, in March 2003 the Pentagon sent a directive to U.S. military bases that read: "There will be no arrival ceremonies for, or media coverage of, deceased military personnel returning to or departing from Ramstein [Germany] Air Base or Dover [Del.] Air Force Base, to include interim stops."

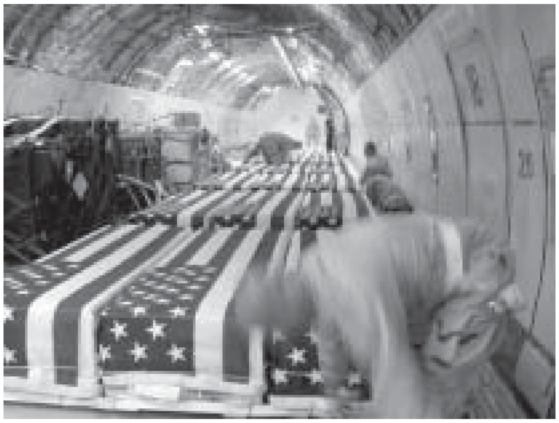
This directive reinforced a U.S. military policy, dating from the last few months of the Clinton administration, that had gone unheeded during the Afghanistan conflict, when photos of coffins coming home were taken at bases such as Ramstein, before the planes landed at Dover. Restrictions on press coverage were put into place at Dover in 1991, at the time of the Persian Gulf War, though on some occasions this last leg of the journey home has been shown.

In April, photographs of flag-draped coffins surfaced from two sources—Tami Silicio, a civilian airport worker in Kuwait, and thememoryhole.org, a Web site that is devoted to combating government secrecy. First, The Seattle Times published on its front page Silicio's photograph of long rows of coffins in the cargo hold of a military plane bound for Germany. Publication of Silicio's photograph resulted in her *and* her husband, both contract workers for the military, being fired by the

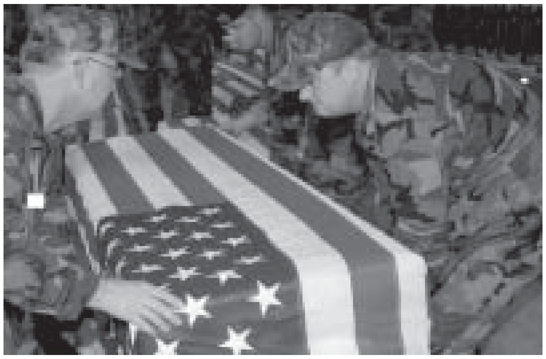
U.S. company for whom they worked in Kuwait. A few days later, 361 Air Force photos of repatriation ceremonies at Dover Air Force Base appeared in many publications after Russ Kick shared images he received and posted on his Web site (thememoryhole.org) as a result of submitting a Freedom of Information Act request (and an appeal) to officials at Dover. Following Kick's posting of the photos, the defense department ordered that no more such images be released.

Publication of these images—along with the employee firing and reaffirmed Pentagon ban on the release of photos that followed—led to much discussion among Webloggers, journalists, commentators, family members of the war dead, military and First Amendment advocates. They shared opinions about the possible political reasons for the government's enforcement of this policy and its legality, which was upheld by a U.S. Court of Appeals in a 1996 civil liberties case. ■ —Melissa Ludtke

Flag-draped coffins are secured inside a cargo plane on April 7, 2004 at Kuwait International Airport. *Photo by Tami Silicio/Courtesy of Zuma Press.*



Photos taken at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware between February 1, 2003 and April 14, 2004. Dover processes the remains of most, if not all, U.S. military personnel killed overseas. Russ Kick at thememoryhole.org obtained these photos by filing a Freedom of Information Act request. *Photos courtesy of the U.S. Air Force via thememoryhole.org.*



# The Press and Public Misperceptions About the Iraq War

## A study looks at whether the press failed in its reporting about the war.

### By Steven Kull

When historians take a look back on this period, the Iraq War will surely stand out as a remarkable event. A major power went to war, overthrew another government, and occupied the nation on the basis of stated assumptions that turned out to be false. Equally striking, following the invasion, large portions of the public of this major power—a democratic one no less—failed to get accurate messages about what had occurred, which raises compelling questions about the role and practice of the press in a democratic society.

During the summer of 2003, the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland, together with the polling firm Knowledge Networks, conducted a large-scale study of U.S. public perceptions and misperceptions related to the Iraq War, with a special eye to determining what role the press might have played in this process. The polls were conducted from June through September with a nationwide sample of 3,334 respondents.

The study found three widespread misperceptions:

- 49 percent believed that the United States had found evidence that Iraq was working closely with al-Qaeda;
- 22 percent believed that actual weapons of mass destruction had been found in Iraq;
- 23 percent believed that world public opinion favored the United States going to war with Iraq.

Overall, 60 percent of those we polled had at least one of these three misperceptions.

## Misperceptions and the Press

Naturally, this raises the question of how these misperceptions developed and persisted when no evidence of such links between al-Qaeda and Iraq had been found, no weapons of mass destruction had been located, and polls of world public opinion have found clear majority opposition to the U.S. war with Iraq. Was it simply a function of people seeking out information that confirmed their biases in favor of the war? Or did this represent some failure on the part of the press?

If these misperceptions were strictly a function of individual bias, then we would expect to find them distributed according to political preferences, no matter where respondents got their news. To find out if this was the case, respondents were asked about their primary source of news. It turned out that the frequency of misperceptions varied dramatically depending on respondents' primary source of news. As shown below, the percentage that had at least one of these misperceptions ranged from 23 percent among those who primarily got their news from National Public Radio (NPR) or PBS to 80 percent among those who primarily got their news from Fox News.

It would seem that such misperceptions might be derived from a failure to pay attention to the news. Indeed among those who primarily get their news from print sources (just 19 percent of our sample), misperceptions were lower among those who paid more attention. But overall, those who reported paying greater attention to the news were no less likely to have misperceptions. Most striking was a finding that among those who primarily watch Fox News, the people who paid more attention were *more* likely to have misperceptions.

Of course, this leads to the question of whether such variations are due to difference in the demographics of the audiences. However, when these demographics were controlled for, the effect remained. For example, when we looked only at Republicans, or only at Democrats, the same pattern of misperceptions between the various audiences was found. Extensive multivariate regression analyses that included numerous variables, including party identification, attitudes about the President, education and others, found that respondents' primary news source continued to be a very powerful predictor of the frequency of misperceptions. Clearly, this suggests

| Number of misperceptions per respondent | Fox | CBS | ABC | CNN | NBC | Print media | NPR/ PBS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| None of the 3 | 20% | 30% | 39% | 45% | 45% | 53% | 77% |
| 1 or more misperceptions | 80% | 70% | 61% | 55% | 55% | 47% | 23% |

**Frequency of misperceptions by respondent's primary source of news.**

Americans had these misperceptions not simply because of internal biases but because of the important role being played by variations in the stimuli they received from their external sources of news.

## Consequences of Bad Information

Such misperceptions can potentially have significant consequences: We found they were highly related to other attitudes. Among those with none of the misperceptions listed above, only 23 percent supported the war. Among those with one of these misperceptions, 53 percent supported the war, rising to 78 percent with those who have two of the misperceptions, and to 86 percent with all three of the misperceptions. While such correlations do not prove that these misperceptions caused the support for the decision to go to war with Iraq, it does appear likely that support for the war would be lower if fewer members of the public had these misperceptions. Such misperceptions are also highly related to the likelihood of voting for the President. Analyses suggest that if these perceptions changed, this could have a significant impact on voting decisions, apparently because they have an impact on perceptions of the President's honesty.

Earlier PIPA studies also suggest that during the run-up to the war misperceptions played a role in support for the decision to go to war. Before the war, approximately one in five Americans believed that Iraq was directly involved in the September 11th attacks, and 13 percent even said they believed they had seen conclusive evidence of it. Among those who believed that Iraq was directly involved in September 11th, 58 percent said they would approve if the President were to go to war without U.N. approval. Among those who believed that Iraq had given al-Qaeda substantial support, but was not involved in September 11th, approval dropped to 37 percent. Among those who believed that a few al-Qaeda individuals had contact with Iraqi officials, 32 percent were supportive, while among those who believed that there was no connection at all, just 25 percent felt that way. In polls conducted *during* the war, among those who incorrectly believed that world public opinion favored the United States going to war, 81 percent supported doing so, while among those who knew that the world public opinion was opposed only 28 percent supported going to war.

## The Role of the Press

Such data lead to the question of why so many Americans have had these misperceptions, even after controlling for their political biases. The first and most obvious reason is that the Bush administration made numerous statements that could easily be construed as asserting these falsehoods. On numerous occasions the administration made statements strongly implying it had intelligence saying that Iraq was closely involved with al-Qaeda and was even directly involved in the September 11th attacks. The administration also made statements that came extremely close to asserting that weapons of mass destruction were found in postwar Iraq. On May 30, 2003, President Bush made the statement: "… for those who say we haven't found the banned manufacturing devices or banned weapons, they're wrong. We found them."

But the fact that misperceptions varied so greatly depending on their primary source of news strongly suggests that the way that the press reported the news played a role. This might be partly due to prominent reporting of official statements saying that it appeared that clear evidence of weapons of mass destruction had been found, while the later conclusions—refuting such assessments—were given little play. But it also appears that misleading assertions were often not challenged.

There is evidence that in the run-up to, during, and for a period after the invasion of Iraq, many in the press appeared to feel that it was not their role to challenge the administration. Fox News coverage of the invasion included a U.S. flag in the corner of the screen, and its correspondents and news anchors assumed the defense department's name for the war, "Operation Iraqi Freedom." Fox's reporting on Iraq during the occupation phase was conducted under the banner "War on Terrorism," implicitly confirming the administration's association between Iraq and al-Qaeda. When Fox News was criticized for taking a pro-war stance, one of its anchors, Neil Cavuto, replied: "You say I wear my biases on my sleeve. Better that than pretend you have none, but show them clearly in your work." Dan Rather of CBS News commented in an April 14, 2003 interview with Larry King: "Look, I'm an American. I never tried to kid anybody that I'm some internationalist or something. And when my country is at war, I want my country to win …. Now, I can't and don't argue that that is coverage without a prejudice. About that I am prejudiced."

A study conducted in 2003 by Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) tracking the frequencies of pro-war and antiwar commentators on the major networks found that pro-war views were overwhelmingly more frequent. In such an environment, it would not be surprising that the press would downplay the lack of evidence of links between Iraq and al-Qaeda, the fact that weapons of mass destruction were not being found, and that world public opinion was critical of the war.

When the press are reluctant to challenge what government leaders say, they can simply become a means of transmission for an administration, rather than serve as a critical filter for information. For example, when President Bush made the assertion that weapons of mass destruction had been found, the May 31, 2003 edition of The Washington Post ran a front-page headline saying "Bush: 'We Found' Banned Weapons."

There is also striking evidence that readiness to challenge the administration is a variable that corresponds to levels of misperception among viewers. The FAIR study found that the two networks notably least likely to present critical commentary were Fox and CBS. These are the same two networks whose viewers in the PIPA study were most likely to have misperceptions.

Clearly Americans had hoped and expected that once the United States went into Iraq, evidence of Iraq's link to al-Qaeda and of the development of weapons of mass destruction would be found, thus vindicating the decision to go to war as an act of self-defense. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that many people have been receptive when the administration has strongly implied or even asserted that the United States has found evidence that Iraq was working closely with al-Qaeda and was developing weapons of mass destruction. However, there is also evidence that news outlets—some more than others—have allowed themselves to be passive transmitters of such messages. ■

*Steven Kull is director of the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. PIPA is a joint program of the Center on Policy Attitudes and the Center for International and Security Studies. Kull is a leading scholar on public opinion toward U.S. international engagement after the Cold War. Clay Ramsay and Evan Lewis of PIPA contributed to the research and writing of this article. PIPA's study, published in April 2004, can be found at www.pipa.org/OnlineReports/Iraq/IraqReport4_22_04.pdf.*

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# The President, Press and Weapons of Mass Destruction

## 'Why has the WMD story been so difficult for the press to investigate and tell?'

### By Susan Moeller

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) have a simplistic, if terrifying, presence in the public's imagination—as instruments of doom that threaten Americans where they live. Since September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush and other administration officials have used WMD threats as powerful tools of public persuasion and as forceful rationales for policy initiatives. And many members of the press have stenographically reported the White House's homeland security arguments without independently attempting to verify the ostensible evidence behind those arguments.

Why has the WMD story been so difficult for the press to investigate and tell?

President Bush set the tone for an apocalyptic approach to the WMD issue, not only through his administration's insistence that Saddam Hussein possessed WMD that posed an urgent and immediate threat, but also through his identification of WMD as an integral part of the 21st century terrorist arsenal. In his "Mission Accomplished" speech onboard the USS Abraham Lincoln on May 1, 2003, President Bush declared that "with the liberation of Iraq and Afghanistan, we have removed allies of al-Qaeda, cut off sources of terrorist funding, and made certain that no terrorist network will gain weapons of mass destruction from Saddam Hussein's regime."

In an article that appeared in The Washington Post on the day the President gave this speech, reporter Mark Leibovich noted the hyperbole: "The nation is being trained to consider terrorism only in its most apocalyptic forms," he wrote. "Many sociologists, scenario planners, and counterterrorism experts believe the government and the media are too focused on extreme menaces—namely the terrorist attacks that involve weapons of mass destruction."

## Press Coverage of WMD

A recent study that I authored, "Media Coverage of Weapons of Mass Destruction," conducted by the Center for International and Security Studies at Maryland (CISSM), at the University of Maryland and released in March, evaluated how the American and British press covered events related to weapons of mass destruction. The study assessed press coverage of WMD during three critical periods of time: May 1998, when nuclear tensions escalated between India and Pakistan; October 2002, when Congress approved military action to disarm Iraq and when revelations about the North Korean nuclear weapons program surfaced, and May 2003, when combat operations in Iraq were officially said to have ended and the hunt for WMD's escalated.

This study was based on reporting by four U.S. newspapers (The Christian Science Monitor, Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, The Washington Post); two British papers (The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian); three newsweeklies (Newsweek, U.S. News & World Report, The Economist), and two radio programs ("Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered" on National Public Radio).

In May 1998, the study found, most news organizations made careful distinctions between acts of terrorism and the acquisition or use of WMD. During the height of the South Asian nuclear tests that month, for example, few stories emphasized potentially dramatic risks, either by indicating that a nuclear holocaust threatened or that India or Pakistan's nuclear weapons' programs would aid and abet terrorists. (Although, with the more recent revelations about A.Q. Khan, perhaps this should have happened.) Because the Clinton administration did not represent the Indian and Pakistani tests as a national security crisis for the United States, news organizations covered the regional situation in measured tones. Neither India nor Pakistan was reflexively categorized as a "rogue" country as a result of its detonation of nuclear devices, nor did the tests prompt the labeling of either country as "evil." News stories cited White House's statements that Clinton was "deeply distressed," and reports quoted Clinton calling the testing "a terrible mistake," a relatively mild rebuke when compared to his successor's labeling of North Korea as an "evil" regime. The comparative calm over what could have been represented as a WMD crisis was reflected in a Newsweek headline referring to Russia that dismissed the South Asian tests, "If You Really Want to Worry, Think Loose Nukes."

## Terrorism Is Rarely Investigated

By October 2002, however, President Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's constant linkages of terrorism and WMD and Iraq had engrained these three as a triple threat. The press accepted that linkage. Both the U.S. and U.K. media in the study tended to repeat the Bush administration's formulation about the "war on terror" and its assertions that a core objective of this war is to prevent WMD from falling into the hands of terrorists. All "terrorism" ended up being conflated. For example, Rumsfeld's characterization of North Korea as a "terrorist regime," for its export of nuclear technology, was quoted frequently, but what he meant by the words "terrorist regime" was seldom explored. Nor was North Korea's "terrorism" contrasted to al-Qaeda's or that of Saddam Hussein.

Press reporting on the President amplified the administration's voice. In front-page and top-of-the-news stories, the press led with the President's analysis. When alternative perspectives were presented as part of their coverage, that evidence and analysis tended to be buried. When Bush told Americans they were vulnerable to WMD in the hands of terrorists, reporting of these statements by the press served to magnify such fears by highlighting the notion that Americans were at risk at home (rather than the case that nuclear and chemical material, in particular, are greater threats to citizens of the regions that have developed weapons programs—such as Iran and Iraq, South Asia, and the countries of the former Soviet Union). The net effect was that the coverage not only disseminated but also validated the administration's message. Investigation and analysis of the evidence behind his statements tended to be rare—and was typically buried when it appeared—as did serious coverage of alternative voices and policy options.

By May 1, 2003, when the President made his "Mission Accomplished" speech declaring an end to major combat operations in Iraq, more journalists were seeking independent confirmation of the White House and Pentagon's pronouncements. Still the press, as a whole, continued to show by how they reported these stories that the administration's set of priorities was still the dominant narrative. If the White House characterized the WMD story as important, so, too, did the media. And when the White House ignored a story (or a particular angle on a story), the media were likely to do so as well. Russia's loose nukes, for example, fell off the radar in favor of WMD stories that featured "rogue" states or terrorist groups.

The Bush administration's message that a central objective of its war on terror was to prevent weapons of mass destruction from falling into the hands of American-hating terrorists made WMD a security issue of compelling importance and consistently catapulted this issue into the news. Yet seldom did news stories remind readers and listeners of the quotidian realities of terrorism—that box cutters and commercial planes were used on September 11th, for example, not vials of smallpox or dirty bombs. Nor were the real but often prosaic threats related to WMD—bio-security, for example, or fissile controls—a part of this reporting. WMD became a way to provoke a knee-jerk reaction: protect America.

Most journalists did not report evidence that might have helped readers and listeners challenge the Bush administration's argument that WMD were inseparably part of a global terrorism matrix. The study noted that although the press usually reported individual "facts" about WMD accurately, they tended to represent nuclear, biological, radiological and chemical weapons as a single blurred hazard—a pattern of imprecision abetted by the White House's obfuscations. Stories glossed over important differences between nuclear *energy* programs and nuclear *weapons* programs or between nuclear weapons *programs* and *actual* nuclear weapons. In the rush to coverage, substantial qualitative and quantitative differences between chemical and biological agents were also conflated. Most critically, journalists failed to recognize that these and other distinctions distorted reporting on the cost-benefit calculations to manage such risks.

The study also discovered that the priority news organizations give to breaking-news stories—and the inverted pyramid style of storytelling—gave greater weight to the administration's point of view on WMD issues, at the expense of presenting alternative perspectives. Poor coverage of WMD appeared to result less from outright political bias on the part of journalists, editors and producers than from the journalistic convention of leading stories with the most "recent" and most "important" information as enunciated by the most "important" newsmakers. That tendency single-handedly ensured that the administration's perspective on issues of national security and intelligence would lead the news—as long as the White House came out with a new message for each news cycle. This circumstance was reinforced by the lack of a strong political opposition in the fall of 2002 and into the spring of 2003.

### What Distinguished Good Coverage

Despite these general failures in the press, the study found that not all journalists covered the WMD arc of stories similarly. The British media reported more critically on public policy than did their American colleagues—in part because there was consistent and vocal opposition among senior British political figures to some of the Blair government's WMD policies—even though the media in both countries typically prioritized the same international WMD events.

Yet among the news organizations studied and for the time periods investigated, there were U.S. reporters who demonstrated a consistent level of skepticism in their coverage of WMD events and issues. Reporters Barton Gellman [See Gellman's article on page 40], Walter Pincus, and Dana Milbank of The Washington Post; Bob Drogin of the Los Angeles Times, and David Sanger and William Broad of The New York Times avoided verbatim coverage of White House statements (as did Warren Strobel, Jonathan Landay, and John Walcott of Knight Ridder and Dafna Linzer of The Associated Press, whose work was looked at for comparative purposes).

These reporters worked to include more voices, articulating different policy options, higher up in their stories. In the admittedly difficult WMD beat, they steered away from using unverifiable contentions of anonymous sources, including Iraqi exiles and defectors, and when they did use anonymous sources to shape a story, they identified the limitations and probable skew of such information. They explained the inherent uncertainties of intelligence gathering and distinguished between intelligence collection and intelligence analysis. Their stories made clear that evaluating a country's WMD status with incomplete data was both an intelligence problem and a policy problem.

Yet before the summer of 2003, it was rare for even these reporters to probe deeply into the political choices that underlay the linkage among the events of September 11th, weapons of mass destruction, and Iraq in the war on terror. The stultifying patriotic climate not only prompted sympathetic coverage of White House policy by the American press, it silenced much of the political opposition that the media could have sought out to provide alternative voices and policy options. As a result, the American press did not act to check and balance the exercise of executive power, essential to the functioning of a civil democracy. ■

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# A Matter of Faith: The White House and the Press

## Journalists' focus 'on religion and the presidency was unusual for an "objective" news media that usually relies on empirical evidence ….'

### By David Domke

President George W. Bush delivered the 2003 State of the Union address before Congress and a national television audience estimated to be more than 60 million. He emphasized goals and accomplishments of his administration as well as challenges posed by terrorism and other perceived threats. In particular, Bush devoted a bit more than half of the address to the administration's campaign against terrorism and his focus on confronting Iraq and Saddam Hussein.

Near the end of the address, the President turned to discussion of the nation's character and its purpose in the world. He declared that: "Americans are a free people, who know that freedom is the right of every person and the future of every nation. The liberty we prize is not America's gift to the world, it is God's gift to humanity." He then added: "We Americans have faith in ourselves, but not in ourselves alone. We do not know—we do not claim to know all the ways of providence, yet we can trust in them, placing our confidence in the loving God behind all of life and all of history. May He guide us now."

Four days later, on the morning of February 1st, the space shuttle Columbia exploded, killing all seven crew members. The President spoke to the nation from the White House that afternoon. Included in his comments were these words: "In the skies today we saw destruction and tragedy. Yet farther than we can see, there is comfort and hope. In the words of the prophet Isaiah: 'Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these? He who brings out the starry hosts one by one and calls them each by name. Because of His great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.' The same Creator who names the stars also knows the names of the seven souls we mourn today. The crew of the shuttle Columbia did not return safely to earth. Yet we can pray that all are safely home."

The explicitly religious language in these two addresses, combined with the administration's push for war in the Middle East (the Holy Land's region), prompted a spate of popular analyses of Bush's religious faith. For example, Newsweek devoted its March 10, 2003 cover to "Bush & God," The Washington Post took up the topic with stories and columns, and New York Times's columnists and guest writers weighed in. To focus on religion and the presidency was unusual for an "objective" news media that usually relies on empirical evidence and verifiable opinion claims by sources—elements often missing from matters of religion and faith.

Yet in their coverage of this issue, the press missed the deeper story. While Bush's overtly religious language, what scholar Martin E. Marty termed "God talk" in one of the Newsweek articles, was manifest, the more important and far less obvious matter was that the administration converged a religious fundamentalist worldview with its political language. This political fundamentalism was used to offer familiarity, comfort and a nation-affirming moral vision to the American public in the aftermath of September 11th.

## Analyzing News Media Response

Between September 2001 and the President's speech declaring "Mission Accomplished" on May 1, 2003, I examined the response of mainstream U.S. news media to characteristics of the Bush administration's political fundamentalism. Specifically, I analyzed how the press responded to each of Bush's national addresses (15 in 20 months, a remarkable pace) and the administration's push for key policies and goals in its struggle against terrorism, including passage of the USA Patriot Act in autumn 2001, the creation of the Department of Homeland Security in summer and autumn 2002, and congressional and U.N. resolutions regarding Iraq in autumn 2002. I examined news stories and editorials in 20 leading and geographically diverse U.S. mainstream newspapers and content on evening newscasts of ABC, CBS and NBC.

My analysis revealed that the news media consistently amplified the words and ideas of the President and other administration leaders. And they did this by echoing throughout their coverage similar claims made by multiple administration members, thereby having the administration's perspectives establish the terms of public discourse. In particular, four key fundamentalist messages by the administration were uncritically given voice in this news coverage:

1. Binary, zero-sum conceptions of the political landscape, most notably good vs. evil and security vs. peril.
2. Calls for immediate action by Congress and the United Nations on administration policies as a necessary part of the nation's "calling" and "mission" against terrorism.
3. Declarations about the will of God for America and for the spread of U.S. conceptions of freedom and liberty.
4. Claims that dissent from the administration was unpatriotic and a threat to the nation.

**… the Bush administration benefited from a U.S. news media that gave it the benefit of the doubt in a manner unprecedented in the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate era. The typically inquisitive approach of journalists toward government was dropped—at least for a period of time.**

These messages were rooted in a religiously conservative worldview, yet they were often framed—by the administration and, in turn, the news media—to emphasize a sense of nationalism. This explicit emphasis on American identity, with omnipresent use of words such as freedom, made the administra-tion's fundamentalist approach attractive or at least palatable to the U.S. press and public in the wake of the terrorist attacks when Americans were trying to understand why so many others hated them. For example, only two of more than 300 editorials that I analyzed in response to the President's national addresses criticized the administration's description of the campaign against terrorism as a monumental struggle of good vs. evil—with the United States clearly on the side of angels. With so many around the globe expressing a different view during these 20 months, by uncritically echoing these fundamentalist messages within these editorials, the press failed its readers.

## The Press in Times of Crisis

Anecdotal and systematic evidence suggest that news organizations consistently treat presidential administrations favorably in times of external threats to the nation. However, the Bush administration benefited from a U.S. news media that gave it the benefit of the doubt in a manner unprecedented in the post-Vietnam, post-Watergate era. The typically inquisitive approach of journalists toward government was dropped—at least for a period of time.

CBS News anchor Dan Rather made this shift in journalistic sensibilities explicit in a September 22, 2001, interview on "CNN Tonight," in which he said: "I want to fulfill my role as a decent human member of the community and a decent and patriotic American. And, therefore, I am willing to give the government, the President, and the military the benefit of any doubt here in the beginning. I'm going to fulfill my role as a journalist and that is ask the questions, when necessary ask the tough questions. But I have no excuse for, particularly when there is a national crisis such as this, as saying—you know, the President says do your job, whatever you are and whomever you are, Mr. and Mrs. America. I'm going to do my job as a journalist, but at the same time I will give them the benefit of the doubt, whenever possible in this kind of crisis, emergency situation."

Such a nationalistic reaction by the mainstream press in the immediate aftermath of September 11th pleased significant segments of the public, whose impression of news media became more favorable in the days following the attacks.

The press's favorable response to the fundmentalism-cum-nationalism offered by the administration continued for months as leading news outlets offered special "America Challenged" sections and sprouted flag-waving television network logos. This process was facilitated by the commercial success of unabashedly pro-American Fox News Channel. Fox's viewership rose significantly after September 11th. It ended 2002 ahead of CNN in the ratings competition and received the highest ratings in its history during the Iraq War in spring 2003. Other news media took notice and became further hesitant to question the administration. CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour, for example, said in September 2003: "I think the press was muzzled, and I think the press self-muzzled. I'm sorry to say but certainly television and, perhaps, to a certain extent, my station was intimidated by the administration and its foot soldiers at Fox News. And it did, in fact, put a climate of fear and self-censorship, in my view, in terms of—of the kind of broadcast work we did."

What pleased the public in the aftermath of September 11th and ultimately drew audiences to the more nationalistic news outlets is not always what is best for democracy, however. This deference to the administration and echoing of the administration's messages left the American public without a critical outsider's eye from autumn of 2001 until the spring of 2003.

To be clear, the U.S. news media did not emphasize the administration's messages to the same extent as the White House did during this time. Such an equation would imply that the commercial, independent news media merely served as mouthpieces, and that is not the case. Disagreement with the administration sometimes appeared in news stories—either as a presentation of different factual information or of divergent observations by other sources—and in newspaper editorials. Coverage also included occasional strong criticisms of government policy, in particular in regard to the administration's diplomatic failures in early 2003.

The chief failure of members of the press is that they didn't adequately cover the deeply religious motivations of the administration's actions and, as a result, too rarely questioned the administration's *discourses*—of good vs. evil and security vs. peril, for example. Rarely did they highlight in their reporting administration pushes for immediate action on policies in order to fulfill a divine mission, or about the "God-decreed" universality of freedom and liberty, or the administration's emphasis on unity over dissent. Once these fundamentalist discourses became consistently amplified—but not analyzed—in leading press outlets, the administration gained the rhetorical high ground, and that went far in determining policy decisions.

But democracy doesn't function when a free press is beholden to those in power because it is by dominating the news discourse that public opinion is controlled. When the press echoes government leaders, and almost no one else, they are not acting as a neutral press.

The First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of the press exists and has been upheld by many courts as a safeguard against the corrosive tendencies of power. The press are expected to provide a bulwark against governmental oppression, rather than serve as a buttress to it. Never is this more necessary than in times of crisis. Yet the evidence after September 11th (and, indeed, throughout American history) suggests that during times of crisis the press become most likely to echo the perspectives of governmental leadership.

This pattern must not continue. U.S. democratic ideals will have the opportunity to be fully realized only when journalists sustain consistent checks on the absolute power of government during—and not solely after—times of national crisis. ■

*David Domke, a former journalist, heads the journalism program at the University of Washington. His research focuses on the relationships among political leaders, news coverage, and public opinion in the United States. This article is adapted from the book "God Willing? Political Fundamentalism in the White House, the 'War on Terror,' and the Echoing Press," to be released in July 2004 by Pluto Press (www.press.umich.edu).*

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# Images of Horror From Fallujah

## ‘The transparency of angst and indecision about the Fallujah images have been good for journalism.’

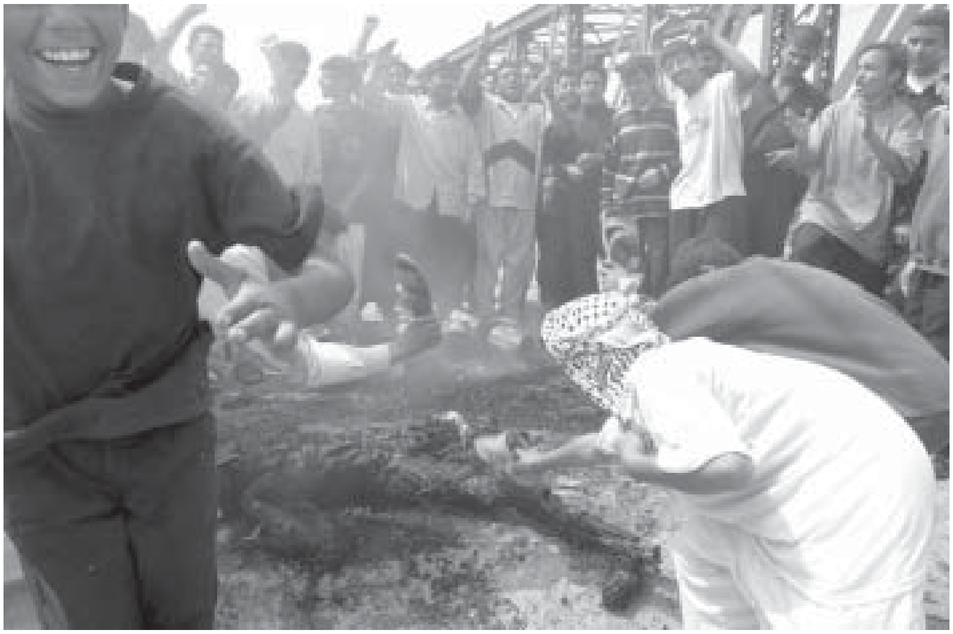
### By David D. Perlmutter and Lesa Hatley Major

On March 31, 2004, Iraqi terrorists, throwing grenades, killed four American civilian contractors who were driving through the city of Fallujah, Iraq. A quickly swelling crowd of civilians then beat the burned bodies (with anything in hand, including shoes), dragged them through the streets, and hung two of them from a nearby Euphrates River bridge. Many onlookers and participants danced with joy and chanted anti-American slogans.

The horror was caught on camera. Within hours, Fallujah video footage and photographs were made available to the world’s newspapers, magazines and television newscasters. Almost as quickly, in nearly every U.S. newsroom, a debate on whether and how to handle these images began. “It was one of the toughest calls I’ve ever had to make,” wrote Ellen Soeteber, editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

The basic questions, whether one edited a small-town daily or a network newscast, were:

- What pictures should we use, where and why?
- Which ones should we not use and why not?
- Should we digitally edit those we use to reduce their “horror” quotient?
- For print editors, should pictures go on an inside page or the front page?
- How should we caption and contextualize what we are showing?



**Children cheer around burned bodies that had been cut down after being hung from a bridge following an attack in Fallujah.** ***Photo by Ali Jasim/Courtesy of Reuters.***

Importantly, the process of addressing these quandaries was not kept secret or restricted to insiders: Many news outlets editorialized their reasons for using one image rather than another, and media columnists and commentators throughout the country expressed their views about these decisions on air or in print. In many of their columns and stories, they quoted editors and producers about why they made the decisions they did, and several of these explanations appear below. And readers and viewers responded. Papers and broadcasters received thousands of letters, e-mails and phone calls. And it is almost certain that no journalism class escaped discussion of the ethics and professional codes affecting the editors’ decisions about using these grisly news photos.

The public ferment—in many cases, furor—about the photographs was no less divided. Many publications extended their usual letters’ section to accommodate the large number of letters and the range of opinions voiced in them. And editors listened. U.S. News & World Report, which published the “burned bodies” picture, received letters such as one from the wife of a military person serving in Iraq, who wrote, “You may feel inclined to report these happenings, but the photos were not necessary.” She said she was “appalled and disgusted by the photos of the horrendous act.” A Marine who served at Iwo Jima called the use of the photograph “blatant sensationalism.” Another reader, saying the magazine “went too far,” ripped the pages out and returned them with a message, “Please consider carefully how much gore and carnage your readers need to see to get the full scope of war and human suffering.” In the face of such negative criticism, Brian Duffy, the editor, replied: “Our intention was not to offend but to present a faithful record of a transformative moment. In doing so, however, we did offend, and for that I apologize. We erred."

## Digital Photography and News Images

Another issue to emerge from the Iraq War coverage, as noted in recent Congressional testimony by no less than Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, is the omnipresence of digital photography. Amateur pictures have always found their way into the news stream; some have become icons of photojournalism, such as the photo of the Oklahoma City fireman and baby.

Now, with the advent of cheap digital cameras and the Internet, a dynamic is emerging in which anyone able to shoot an image can distribute it easily to the entire world. The picture of the "cargo of caskets" was transmitted via e-mail to The Seattle Times. [See Tami Silicio's photo on page 63.] Images of the abuse of Iraqi prisoners were more easily brought to public attention because, apparently, the photographs were taken with digital cameras.

This technology makes censorship harder. A photo can be "leaked" with the click of a mouse. But there is an ominous aspect to this issue as well. Digital technology—especially Photoshop-type image manipulation software—makes photo fakery by amateurs and professionals easier as well. Earlier in the Iraq War a Los Angeles Times's photographer was fired for creating a composite image from two separate pictures. And via the Internet any number of "incredible" news pictures circulate through chain mail messages. But many of these images are simply *not* credible.

So far, the number of manipulated (or faked) photographs that have been published or broadcast is low—we think! But a muddled future for war photography could lie ahead as editors will have to confront—and make quick decisions about whether to print or air—increasing numbers of amateur-produced images of sensational content but unknown truth. ■ —D.P.

### Decisions About Images

What Americans saw from Fallujah was determined by their news source. [See table showing Fallujah photos used by American newspapers on page 73.] The New York Times ran on its front page The Associated Press (AP) photo (Contractors Hanging on Bridge) in color, which included the clearly visible bodies with celebrating Iraqis in the foreground. The Times's executive editor, Bill Keller, said of this decision: "You can't shy away from the news, and the news in this case is the indignities visited upon the victims and the jubilation of the crowd. At the same time you have to be mindful of the pain these pictures would cause to families and the potential revulsion of readers, and children, who are exposed to this over their breakfast table." The Washington Post ran a cropped version on page A11 of the Ali Jasim (Reuters) photo with a smiling boy in the foreground. [See photo on page 71.] Len Downie, the paper's executive editor, stated: "We owed readers photographic as well as print reporting about what took place. We chose photos that actually were on the less graphic end of available photos."

For regional papers as well, the predicament was as palpable. The Palm Beach Post ran the AP photo (Contractors Hanging on Bridge) on its front page. John Bartosek, the paper's managing editor, claimed, "We selected that photograph, after a lot of thought and discussion, because it's a powerful news image of a dramatic, horrific and brutal day in Iraq." In contrast, Richard Tapscott, managing editor of The Des Moines Register, noted, "The photograph (Contractors Hanging on Bridge) is detailed enough that you can see the bodies hanging from the bridge and that they are charred." The Register chose to run the photo on the inside in black and white.

For the major television networks, decisions were visible in the editing. Not one network newscast showed the most graphic images, at least initially, without cropping, blurring or using long shots of the gruesome details. CNN spokesman Matt Furman explained: "We told the story throughout most of the day using wide-angle images of the cars burning, without what we would describe as graphic images. We held off until 7 p.m. [Wednesday] for the explicit reason of giving officials the opportunity to notify next of kin." Steve Capus, executive producer at NBC Nightly News, argued, "Quite honestly, it doesn't need to be seen in full in order to convey the horrors of this despicable act." Fox News Channel limited its images to shots of the burning vehicles in which the contractors had been riding and to footage of joyous crowds in Fallujah. Bill Shine, Fox's vice president of production, said, "We made the call that it [footage of the charred bodies] was too graphic in nature to put on our air."

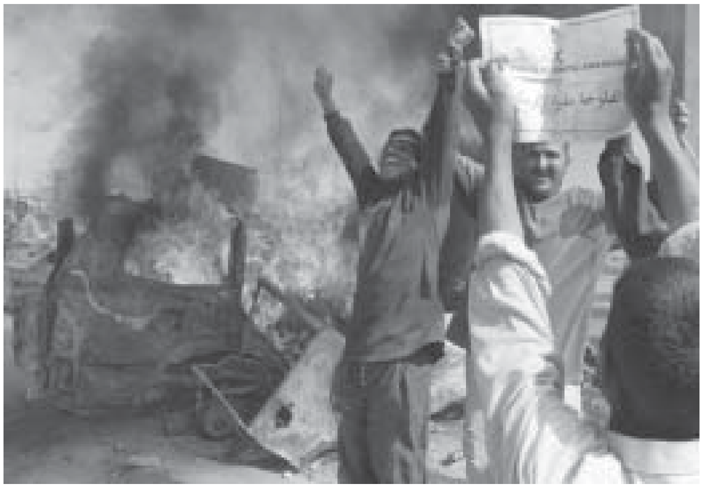
Foreign responses were as varied. Britain's Channel 4 showed blurred images of bodies being dragged through the street, but offered clear shots of the corpses hanging from the bridge. Yet normally unabashed Al Jazeera showed only fuzzy footage of burned bodies. And, of course, unedited collections of images were available to look at on some Web sites.

### Showing Images of War

For photojournalism, the decision-making dilemmas prompted by the Fallujah images are as old as war photography itself. Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote in an Atlantic Monthly essay in August 1863 of his reaction to photographs of the dead from the bloody Civil War battle of Antietam: "Let him who wishes to know what war is look at this series of illustrations." Yet Holmes, whose son served in the Union Army, felt the pictures were too powerful to witness more than once: "[It was] so nearly like visiting the battlefield to look over these views, that all the emo-

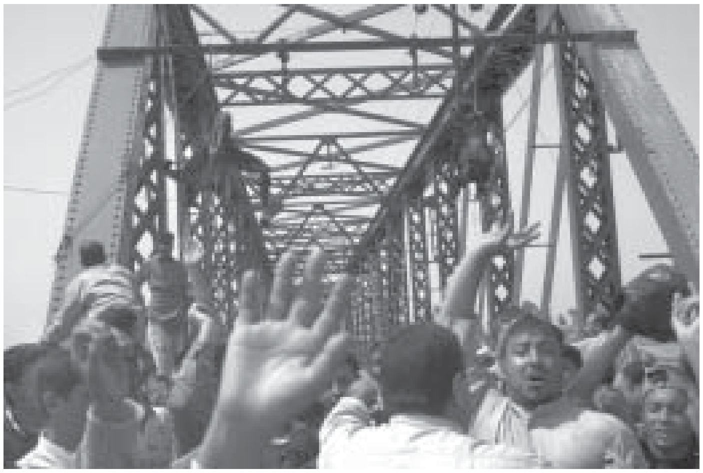
continued on page 74

# U.S. Newspapers Decide Which Images of the Fallujah Killings to Publish



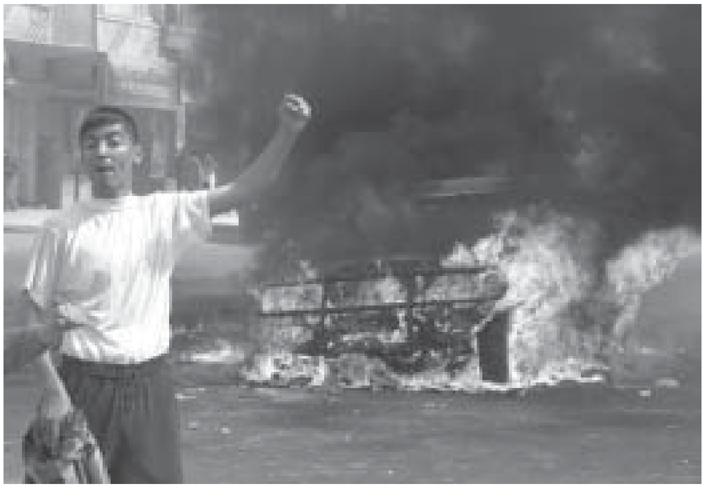
Cheering Iraqis with burning SUV. *Photo by Karim Sahib/AFP/Getty Images.*

Akron Beacon Journal
Anchorage Daily News (cropped)
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
The Boston Globe
Chicago Sun-Times
The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer (cropped)
The Columbus Dispatch
Daily News of Los Angeles
The Dallas Morning News
Fort Worth (Tex.) Star-Telegram
Houston Chronicle
Newsday
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
The (Portland) Oregonian
The Sacramento Bee
San Jose Mercury News
Seattle Post-Intelligencer
The Seattle Times
The Star-Ledger (N.J.)
The Times-Picayune
The Washington Times



Contractors hanging on bridge. *Photo by Khalid Mohammed/The Associated Press.*

The (Baltimore) Sun
The Buffalo News
The Charlotte (N.C.) Observer
Chicago Tribune
Daily Herald (Il.)
The Des Moines Register
Detroit Free Press
The Hartford Courant
New York Post
The New York Times
The Palm Beach Post
The Philadelphia Inquirer
St. Louis Post-Dispatch
St. Petersburg (Fla.) Times
The San Diego Union-Tribune
The Tampa Tribune



Man in white shirt in front of burning SUV. *Photo by Abdel Kader Saadi/The Associated Press.*

Asbury Park Press
The Beaumont Enterprise (Tex.)
Courier News (N.J.)
The Des Moines Register
The Dothan Eagle (Ala.)
The Greenville News (S.C.)
The Honolulu Advertiser
The Idaho Statesman
Las Vegas Review-Journal

This information was compiled by David Perlmutter and Lesa Hatley Major.

tions excited by the actual sight of the stained and sordid scene, strewed with rags and wrecks, came back to us, and we buried them in the recesses of our cabinet as we would have buried the mutilated remains of the dead they too vividly represented."

For today's editors, the parameters of this debate revolved around the concerns Holmes wrote about more than 140 years ago. On one hand, there is the photographs' news value—their content as it relates to current public policy or public affairs issues. This is set against the images' sensationalism—with their disturbing images of death or violence. When photographers capture gruesome images—whether it be of mutilated civilians in the Japanese rape of Nanjing, a self-immolated Vietnamese monk, a street execution in Saigon, the charred bodies of Iraqi children killed by a U.S. bomb while in their air raid shelter in the first Gulf War, or a dead Marine in this Iraq War—journalists and the public wonder what should be shown, how it should be shown, and why.

Certainly, the pictures from Fallujah are relevant to the public debate about the Iraq War, touching as they do on both the reasons why the United States went to war and the wisdom of its present course. After all, the Iraqis rejoicing at the abuse of these Americans are people whom U.S. forces were allegedly sent to Iraq to liberate. If French citizens were dancing over the bodies of dead G.I.'s in France in 1944, the image would be similarly upsetting but it would never have been published, except by the Third Reich. The Fallujah images are also related to the debate about other issues involved with the Iraq situation—such as whether the U.S. military is stretched too thin as many quasi-military tasks are subcontracted, and the reality that civil contractors are risking death to help the Iraqis but are also earning high pay for their risks. Then there are the questions that arise from what was not in these pictures. Where were the American military while these mob actions were taking place? In short, the pictures, it can be argued, are most definitely news.

But was this news value only able to be expressed in its grisliest detail? To show horror solely for its shock value is akin to being a pornographer of war. Most editors who did not run the grimmest images cited the "breakfast table" test and "next of kin" rationale. Newspapers and television newscasters are, after all, mass marketers: Anybody can be watching at any time—including toddlers and the families of the dead. As one editor put it, "People watching [network news or reading the morning paper] with their children do not expect to be surprised." The Dallas Morning News editorialized, "We didn't think it was appropriate to show bodies on Page One." Many papers and networks deliberately cautioned readers or viewers about what they might see.

There are other contextual issues. Veterans and military historians could point out that such images are a part of every war. Is it problematic to show ghastliness and imply it is evidence against *this* particular war? Consider that in World War II, most Americans never saw pictures of American combat deaths in the papers or newsreels. Home-front audiences had to go to a Warner Brothers movie to see a G.I. get killed at Omaha Beach, Monte Casino, or Iwo Jima. And even then, as infantry combat veteran and cultural critic Paul Fussell complained, many Hollywood images of death in the war were "Disneyfied." No blood, no guts, just heroics.

Generals and editors during World War II—the last major war involving American troops that resulted in an unequivocal victory—assumed that the public did not want to see images of war's horrors and that, indeed, the war effort would be undermined by their daily display. Would American victories, like the Normandy invasion, have been viewed differently if the American public had been shown thousands of dead G.I.'s carpeting the beaches? Perhaps it is just as important to provide readers with historical, as well as political, context to war images.

In all, the transparency of angst and indecision about the Fallujah images have been good for journalism. One reason why public esteem for and faith in the fairness, accuracy and honesty of journalism is so low is the public's feeling that news professionals are not "people." That is, as the late columnist Mike Royko once accused, those who go into news these days are no longer working-class folks who can write, but rather upper middle-class products of top universities—elites who are just like politicians or lobbyists. This claim is no doubt true: In our combined 40 years of teaching journalism and working in the field, we've met only a handful of reporters (or journalism teachers) who were war combat veterans. The star system is another sign to the public that reporters are not qualified to be populist tribunes.

Yet many people don't appreciate that journalism is a messy process, not a conspiracy. When editors and reporters make public their gut-wrenching debates about what is news, their humanity is revealed, even more so when they admit error. Readers and viewers get the opportunity to listen in as editors say, with sincerity, how much they care about the reactions and opinions of those they serve. For the public then to be included in the ongoing discussion and feel their voice matters makes the news delivery process appear neither inaccessible nor inflexible. Because of the Fallujah debate, bus drivers, insurance salespeople, and firefighters heard and saw that journalists, like everybody else, face tough decisions in their jobs and struggle through them with a similar reliance on professional codes, ethical constraints, and thoughtful uncertainty. ■

*David D. Perlmutter is an associate professor at Louisiana State University's (LSU) Manship School of Mass Communication and a senior fellow at the Reilly Center for Media & Public Affairs. He is the author of "Visions of War" (St. Martin's 1999) and "Photojournalism and Foreign Policy" (Praeger 1998). Lesa Hatley Major worked as a journalist in TV, radio and print. Currently she is pursuing a PhD at LSU in Mass Communication and Public Affairs.*

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# The Psychological Hazards of War Journalism

## A psychiatrist examines how journalists respond to what they witness and report.

By Anthony Feinstein

War journalism can be a hazardous occupation. The current conflict in Iraq has left 33 journalists dead and many more wounded. Measuring danger by mortality is, however, only one way, albeit the most visible, of assessing the toll war takes on reporters, photographers and cameramen. What can follow in danger's wake is often more difficult to discern and quantify for it lies within the realm of the abstract. Fear, sadness, guilt, nightmares, agitation, are just some of the symptoms of psychological distress that are a consequence of experiencing or witnessing life-threatening events.

It is important to emphasize that the majority of individuals exposed to a traumatic event will not develop any formal psychiatric disorder. However, what distinguishes war journalism from other professions is repeated exposure to danger. And because journalists are not schooled in how to react to violence, as policemen and soldiers are, for example, theoretically they are more likely to be vulnerable to danger's troubled aftermath.

### Journalists' Response to Danger

Over the past four years I have undertaken a series of studies that have assessed how journalists respond to the dangers inherent in their work. Funded initially by the Freedom Forum and later by news organizations such as CNN and the BBC, I have collected behavioral data on hundreds of journalists who define their careers by work they do in conflict zones. My first observation, which predated any data collected, was surprising. When I did a thorough computer search of all the medical and psychological literature, I failed to find a single article devoted to this subject. In an era that has seen a dramatic increase in research devoted to the psychological effects of trauma, the subject of war and journalism had largely escaped attention. Anthropologists had explored the world of the combat journalist, but the questions they asked were fundamentally different from those I proposed to answer.

Before giving the findings from my studies, some basic clinical descriptions are needed. There are a number of well-defined syndromes that can arise as a consequence of exposure to a traumatic event. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the most common. PTSD consists of three symptom clusters—re-experiencing, avoidance and arousal.

- **Re-experiencing:** This refers to unwanted intrusive recollections of the traumatic event that may occur during waking hours as flashbacks or recurrent thoughts and during sleep as nightmares.
- **Avoidance:** Its symptoms reflect a reluctance to return to the scene of the trauma, but may also encompass a numbing of emotions or a damping down of emotional responsiveness to people and events.
- **Arousal:** This refers to the heightened responses of the body's nervous system that may manifest as a startle response, an expectation of further violence even in situations deemed safe (e.g. after a return to civil society), problems falling asleep, irritability and poor concentration.

PTSD frequently occurs with other conditions such as major depression and substance abuse. Major depression denotes a syndrome of sadness that is accompanied by combinations of other symptoms including sleep and appetite disturbance, loss of enjoyment of life, lack of sex drive, feelings of worthlessness and guilt, poor concentration, low energy, and suicidal thoughts.

In my first study, 140 war journalists were assessed for the presence of these disorders. Results were compared with data obtained from 107 domestic journalists who had never seen combat. Significant differences between the groups were found. This was not surprising, with the war journalists endorsing many more symptoms across all domains. Notable, however, was the high lifetime rates of PTSD and major depression in the war journalists' group: They were four to five times those found in the general population and more than double those in traumatized policemen. These lifetime rates among these journalists approached those recorded in combat veterans. Alcohol consumption, but not illicit drug use, was also markedly increased in the war journalists. An important observation was that journalists who had PTSD and major depression were not receiving the necessary treatment.

### After September 11th

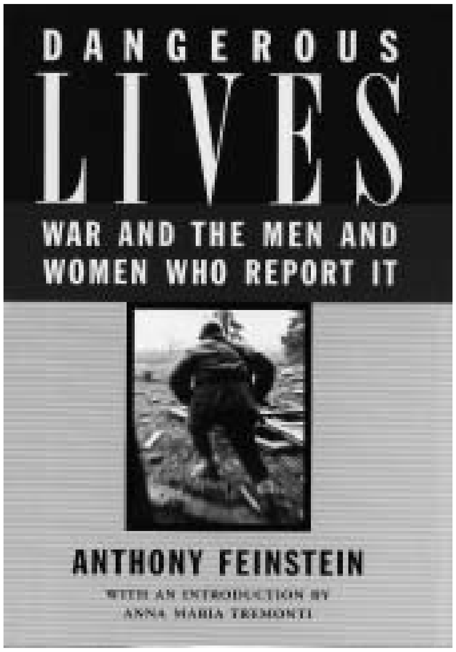
My second study took place after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Data were collected on a group of 46 journalists working for a New York-based news organization. Of particular interest was the fact that these journalists had never been exposed to war; many of them had deliberately decided not to report from zones of conflict. Then suddenly destruction and mayhem were thrust upon them. Among the 46 journalists I studied, 30 percent of them lost a friend in the attacks, and about 12 percent lost a colleague. In the months after the collapse of the World Trade Center, symptoms of PTSD were common amongst these journalists. And their profile resembled that of the war group I'd collected earlier. However, as time passed their symptoms dissipated; one year later, their scores had returned to baseline. Here it is germane to emphasize that such a pattern of spontaneous symptom resolution is unlikely to be found in war journalists given their ongoing exposure to the conflict.

A third study looked at whether embedded journalists are at greater or lesser risk for developing PTSD and major depression when compared with their unilateral colleagues. Data from the war in Iraq reveal no differences between the groups: Their psychological scores are virtually identical. What is the reason for this? The answer lies in the frequency with which the two groups are exposed to danger. This, too, is virtually identical. Within the first month of the war, journalists in both groups reported an average of three life-threatening incidents, underscoring once again the hazards that accompany this type of work.

## Why Journalists Return to Cover War

Given the dangers confronted, the high mortality, and increased risk of developing PTSD and depression, what motivates journalists to return repeatedly to war zones?

The journalists in my study spent, on average, 15 years covering war. Those I interviewed spoke of factors such as the importance of bearing witness, keeping the public informed of important events, having a ringside seat as history unfolded, and personal ambition. Yet there seems to be another pivotal factor that may override all of these. There is evidence that individuals who are attracted to risky and dangerous professions are to a high degree biologically primed for this type of activity. The biochemistry underpinning all human behavior steers particular journalists in this direction. These are individuals who eschew the nine-to-five routine and comfort of a predictable office job for the drama and excitement of the battlefield.



Preliminary data from a recently completed study in my laboratory demonstrate that final year Canadian journalism students who propose following a career in foreign lands not only have a fundamentally different personality profile from their peers who wish to remain at home, but also possess different cognitive attributes. This last point refers to a certain pattern of thinking and approach to problem solving that correlates with well-defined neural networks. To use a computer analogy, the behavior and decision-making processes of journalists who chose a hazardous work environment might be, to a considerable extent, hard-wired. This does not, of course, remove personal choice from the equation. Rather it should be seen as tilting the probability in a certain direction—towards a favoring of novelty, risk and uncertainty, even as it encompasses compassion and the promise of giving voice to the victims of war.

These theories are applicable in varying degrees and permutations to other professions as well. When it comes to making a career choice, those who become journalists are no more susceptible to biological determinants than those who become stockbrokers, librarians and mountaineers. Or psychiatrists, for that matter!

## Responding to the Findings

From the moment I first began researching journalists and war I have been at pains to stress that this work was never meant to pathologize a profession. And the data bear this out. For the most part, journalists who spend a decade or two in conflict zones are a resilient group, physically and psychologically. It is, however, inevitable that when faced with intermittent danger of life-threatening magnitude, year in and year out, some will develop psychological problems. PTSD and depression are not uncommon to find in such journalists. Indeed it would be naive to think otherwise.

Now that the problems have been defined and placed in context, responsibility rests with news organizations to decide what should be done about it. PTSD and depression are treatable. If left untended they can cause enormous misery, both to the individual and his or her loved ones. I therefore find it reassuring that the management in some of the big news organizations such as CNN and the BBC are at last waking up to this fact and providing the necessary help to journalists. Good journalism requires healthy journalists, not those who might filter the news through their own emotional problems. ■

*Anthony Feinstein, author of "Dangerous Lives: War and the Men and Women Who Report It," is a professor in the department of psychiatry at the University of Toronto and a neuropsychiatrist at Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre in Toronto, Canada.*

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# Journalism and Trauma: A Long Overdue Conjunction

## Covering violence 'chews at the vitality of those who must cover it day after day.'

**By Roger Simpson**

It's our fifth year of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma and, by now, we have as our guide a mantra that goes like this: "Training. Support during the assignment. Post-assignment support." To us this means working hard to train reporters how to do journalism that involves violence and work equally hard to train news organizations how to support them while they are doing it and after.

The basic ideas emerge out of a decade of observing closely how journalists and news organizations respond to the coverage of violence at home and in other countries. Our approach reflects what we've learned in thousands of conversations with reporters, photographers, editors and human resources directors, and include insights gained in discussions among journalists and mental health professionals in places as diverse as Papua New Guinea, South Africa, and Croatia as part of the work of the Dart Center.

At the Dart Center, this effort rests on two simple and connected beliefs.

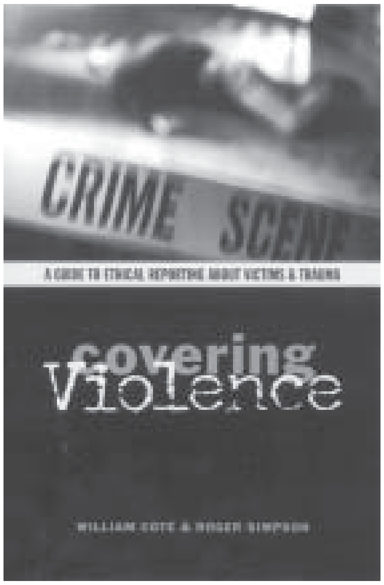
1. Journalism about violence and its victims will best inform readers and viewers when the reporting reflects a solid understanding of the rapidly developing science of traumatic, or emotional, injury.
2. The most creative and productive journalists will be those who understand trauma and know how to cope with it for themselves and for co-workers.

These convictions emerged for me during 20 years of seeking an ethical way for journalism to be practiced in an era of extensive media attention to violence. They also underscore the commitment of the Dart Foundation, which provides the largest part of our funding, as well as that of Frank Ochberg, a psychiatrist whose vision won our loyalty in the early 1990's and has guided us steadily since. (Ochberg brought the University of Washington and the Dart Foundation together to establish the Dart Center in Seattle in 1999.)

### Learning About Trauma

By 1999, when we set up the center, the University of Washington journalism faculty had been teaching students about trauma and about interviewing victims of violence for six years. We also had talked with Oklahoma City journalists who'd covered the bombing of the federal building there that killed 168 people and injured 853 others. The staff of The Oklahoman, that city's daily newspaper, helped me grasp a defining characteristic of journalism at the millennium: An event—a bombing, a school shooting, an act of terror—shatters the security of a community and changes its focus immediately. As time goes on, the event and its aftermath remain a story that won't go away.

Journalists in communities of all sizes know this. One weary reporter on a small city daily told us about beginning each day of reporting in the aftermath of a violent event feeling as though she had to jump into a wild, raging river and swim across it. Everyday, the image she saw was the same. In describing this, she spoke for many of the journalists in Oklahoma City, as well as for those in Denver (who reported on the Columbine shootings) and reporters in many other cities where school shootings killed adults and youngsters. She also gave us an understanding about what reporters were going through on September 11, 2001 in New York, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania.


CRIME SCENE
A GUIDE TO ETHICAL REPORTING ABOUT VICTIMS & TRAUMA
Covering Violence
WILLIAM COTE & ROGER SIMPSON

The story doesn't go away. And it chews at the vitality of those who must cover it day after day.

More recent tragic events make clear what we should have learned from the experiences of veterans of 20th century wars—how exposure to trauma creates emotional wounds that need help to heal. Military personnel who suffered trauma in combat in Korea, Vietnam, the first Gulf War, and other actions often still endure the pain of their emotional wounds. Just as some Vietnam veterans found it difficult to pull back from the endlessly televised scenes of September 11th, firefighters in New York today are drawn by their own traumas to the troubling scenes of death and destruction in Iraq shown on television news.

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition that physicians can diagnose and treat, was not taken seriously by the journalism craft before 1999. In 1996, I conducted the first research on trauma among journalists. At that time, no one knew if, how or how much journalists were affected emotionally by events they covered. It seemed as though everyone assumed that journalists were immune to emotional injuries. Since 1999, a series of studies has given us a rough benchmark reading on how reporters and photographers are affected. These findings affirm the resiliency of most journalists, while showing that some have lasting emotional effects from their work. They also underlined the critical absence of the kinds of training and support received by other first-responders to violent events—police, firefighters, military personnel.

### Training Journalists

For the Dart Center, the training mission plays out in several ways. We help newsroom managers and professional organizations train employees and members about traumatic injury and self-care. We've provided workshops for National Public Radio, The Newspaper Guild, Society of Professional Journalists, the Unity Convention, the Houston Chronicle, and others. Although we have been asked to respond to particular tragic events, we emphasize training to prepare for the possibility of covering such events. The center also regards college journalism teachers as key agents in the training mission, so in 2003 it began offering a series of seminars to help college instructors shape a reporting curriculum so that students can use trauma knowledge in their reporting. Each year, we train six or more mid-career journalists in a five-day seminar. These reporters keep us honest by relentlessly asking us to show them how to interview, write and investigate better, given this newfound knowledge about trauma.

Teachers must cope with similar barriers to dealing with trauma as those that confront many editors. Teachers and newsroom managers share an impatience when it comes to expressions of emotion. Teachers work at suppressing emotional reactions in classrooms in the interest of imparting ideas or information. In the newsroom, emotions are often ignored or viewed as indications of weakness.

At the University of Washington, we employ professional actors to help raise the emotional intensity in sessions on interviewing to a level that promotes—indeed, ensures—learning. The actors are trained to present a wide range of emotions likely to be found in persons at the scene of a tragedy—struggling to speak, frightened, angry, tearful, desperate for information. Confronting an emotional person, the student must find a way to communicate both humanely and productively. In the debriefing that follows each interview, students are encouraged to speak about how their own emotions surface, and the discussion leads to useful collective reflections on handling them.

We will continue to invest in promoting effective training in college classrooms until the news industry turns seriously to providing consistent training programs about trauma for staff journalists. When we began our work, the expressions of resistance from newsroom managers persuaded us to place our bets on the long-term benefits of better college training. Today, with the overt industry resistance fading, the way is open to encourage better training efforts by news corporations.

### News Organizations: Training and Support

A sterling example is the British Broadcasting Corp. (BBC), which prepared for the 2003 Iraq invasion with the first training of war-bound correspondents to help them recognize and manage trauma reactions. The BBC, like much of the industry, also provides hostile-environment training and counseling services for staff and family. But trauma was the new and significant element in the run-up to the war.

The Iraq experience showed numerous good efforts by news organizations to keep in touch with journalists, whether they were embedded or operating independently of the military. Newsrooms developed effective, sensitive ways of responding to colleagues caught in the storm of war. Journalist helped journalist by staying in touch, relaying news, listening for signs of stress or anxiety. The more thoughtful editors embraced families as well as staffers in their attention to emotional needs.

It's a sad fact, though, that this well-deserved attention now given to training war and international correspondents isn't being shared with domestic reporters, whose daily work may also entail close encounters with the victims of violence, threats to personal safety, and exhausting concentration on stories that never seem to end. Journalists readily share with us their frustration about this. Recently, a reporter told of being sent into a neighborhood riot where her car was torched and a colleague injured. She had had no training for such dangers and had little support at the scene. After the incident, when she needed attention, editors' concerns had moved on, leaving her with scant appreciation for the risks she'd taken to tell this story.

Indeed, the post-assignment needs of frontline journalists receive far too

## Resources for Reporting on Violence

Much of what we have learned, and of what we teach, is included in the book I co-wrote with William Coté of Michigan State University called "Covering Violence: A Guide to Ethical Reporting about Victims and Trauma," published by Columbia University Press. We are revising the book to update our sense of how to apply knowledge about trauma to the ever-changing terrain of news practices. Our Web site (www.dartcenter.org) is a robust forum for ideas about the conjunction of trauma and journalism. And each year we give the Dart Award for excellence in reporting on victims of violence, our way of honoring those journalists who do understand trauma and who accurately and usefully plow that knowledge back into the reporting that captures the essence of enduring and surviving violence. ■ —R.S.

little attention even after terrorism and the Iraq War have emphasized the lingering effects of doing journalism under stressful conditions. The BBC now conducts a pre-assignment assessment of its correspondents and then follows their return with regular interviews, aimed at spotting signs of trauma effects. But we suspect that few organizations offer follow-up support other than the invitation to seek out confidential counseling.

The absence of that support is costing news media in terms of staff energy, productivity and morale. Ultimately, the public pays that cost in the reporting we rely on for knowledge of our community, nation and world. Granted, we don't have a good measure of the gap between the work of a journalist adequately supported and one whose managers look the other way after the stress is past. It is a commonsense response, though, to urge greater attention to those who suffer stress and trauma on our behalf.

Among journalists, one group struggles harder than the others to deal with the effects of trauma: Television and electronic journalists struggle against industry indifference to the longer-term effects of their work and against the unremitting pressure of assignments. In our workshops, we hear repeatedly about these pressures and the sense, whether justified or not, that managements do not want to open the door to discussion of the effects of assignments. Such conversation could help the editors, like one in Seattle who dispatched a father who had recently lost a child to cover the Oklahoma City bombing, or like another who sent a reporter who had lost a loved one in a plane crash to cover the aftermath of a plane crash.

After five years, though, there is pleasure in knowing that opportunities for enhancing the training and support of journalists are increasing steadily. And they are doing so, in part, because more editors are connecting their ability to respond to the needs of their reporters to the ultimate benefit of the public by providing good and consistent stories. ■

*Roger Simpson is the executive director of the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma at the University of Washington and associate professor in that school's communication department. He is coauthor of "Covering Violence: A Guide to Ethical Reporting About Victims and Trauma."*

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# Equipping Journalists With Tools for Emotional Balance

## A former reporter uses Eastern concepts to prepare future journalists to cope with the stresses of their jobs.

*"This is the only profession I know of where you get on an airplane and fly first class, drinking champagne and eating caviar, only to arrive in some hellhole where you check into a third-rate hotel and see 50 of your best friends."—Comment from an unidentified correspondent in the bar of the Hotel Alexandre, Beirut, summer 1982*

### By William J. Drummond

I've seen my share of war zones and heard enough shots fired in anger to last a lifetime. The first war for me was India-Pakistan, in the 1971 battle for Bangladesh. Mercifully that conflict ended in just two weeks. Then Israel from 1974 to 1976, the infamous no-war, no-peace period, following the Yom Kippur War, but before the Camp David Accords. There I had to contend with terrorist attacks and Israeli reprisals. The conflicts were infrequent, but bloody.

After that, there was the Israeli invasion of Beirut in the summer of 1982, which was the most perfectly arranged of these wars, at least from the journalist's standpoint. A vest-pocket sized battlefield, roughly half the size of Manhattan, Beirut provided more bang-bang per square mile than any war in recent memory. PLO fighters were dug in West Beirut and surrounded by Israelis and Lebanese forces in East Beirut. A journalist could interview combatants from both sides of the conflict and file by dinnertime. At night, to drown out the noise of the Israeli bombardment, I'd lie in bed with my headphones on, listening to Warren Zevon tapes. My favorites were "Lawyers, Guns and Money" and "Roland, the Headless Thompson Gunner."

I knew I had to quit when I began to like the whole scene. I withdrew voluntarily from that most exclusive of news media clubs—the dogs of war.

Those experiences stayed with me, as did the battleground images that haunted my dreams. Then, after 20 years of teaching journalism at the University of California, I came to realize that being a journalist can damage one's mental as well as physical health, even apart from the coverage of war. There is no doubt that day-to-day encounters with trauma and loss—the bread and butter of war journalism—take a heavy toll. But so does working the police beat in any major city. More people die in homicides or traffic accidents in the United States than die in Iraq on any given day. In fact, my first encounter with mangled bodies was when I covered an airplane crash in the San Fernando Valley.

In addition, the industry is changing. Technology now puts reporters under relentless pressure to be more productive. The idea of "convergence," in which reporters often are expected to file for radio, television, Web sites, as well as print, has sped up the demand for news. Also the news industry is much more volatile and jobs are less secure than ever before. With constant pressures from deadlines and daily competition, stress has always been intrinsic to the practice of journalism. But in recent years it has grown so intense it has become a serious occupational hazard in covering the news, whether from the cop beat in Fresno, California, to the political beat in Annapolis, Maryland, to the Shiite neighborhoods of Baghdad.

**… many reporters are afraid to admit to colleagues and supervisors that they are distressed because such an admission can be seen as a sign of weakness.**

## Emotional Balance: The Journalism Course

Just as clergy can undergo a crisis of faith, I, too, found myself questioning what I was doing. As a journalism professor, I was training bright, attractive young people for jobs that were likely to leave them bitter, burned out, and unhappy after a few years. It was time for a change, and I drew inspiration from words sung by the blues singer Rice Miller, also known as Sonny Boy Williamson II:

"It took me a long time, to find out my mistakes
"Took me a long time, to find out my mistakes
"(it sho' did man)
"But I bet you my bottom dollar, I'm not fattenin' no more frogs for snakes"

My wife, Faith Fancher, a longtime broadcast reporter who worked for CNN, NPR, and then for KTVU-Channel 2 in the San Francisco Bay Area, developed breast cancer seven years ago. To help ease her discomfort from chemotherapy, I enrolled in a massage therapy course in July 2003. The 150-hour course was based on principles of Chinese Traditional Medicine (CTM). I earned a diploma as an acupressure massage practitioner and immediately enrolled in an additional 200 hours of CTM training.

Faith died in October 2003. The months of giving her massage did not save her life, but it made her more comfortable, and it gave me a strong sense of having done something helpful.

Out of that sad experience, I wondered whether the self-care strategies I learned as part of my CTM training might actually find a place in journalism education. Of course, it would be a radical departure from conventional notions of training reporters. I wrote a proposal to the faculty at Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism offering to teach a self-care course, titled "Emotional Balance for Working Journalists." Here is the summation that went to my teaching colleagues:

"Acupressure is based on Chinese Traditional Medicine, a 2,000-year-old system of holistic healing with a rich literature and history. My meager 350 hours of training has only scratched the surface of CTM. But I gained enough experience to realize that massage, along with other kinds of bodywork, nutrition, meditation and related techniques derived from CTM, can make a difference in people's lives.

"During my course work at the Acupressure Institute I discussed with the faculty the peculiar conditions under which journalists work. For example, they are the storytellers. When they tell stories of trauma, loss, suffering, they do not walk away clean. Yet, as an industry, the news media offer little if any preparation or comfort to its workers who face this kind of emotional meat grinder. Instead the journalists are expected to suck it up and move on. When somebody shoots up a schoolyard, the school officials routinely call in grief counselors to tend to the survivors. But the reporters and camera people who covered that story get no such attention. They saddle up and go off to the next crime scene."

Some horselaughs were heard. One colleague believed that "emotional balance for journalists" is an oxymoron. "Journalists are prone to living highly vulnerable lives that are basically unbalanced—emotionally, spiritually, psychologically," he said. But the faculty agreed to support this experimental course and, in January 2004, I began to teach it.

## What's Been Learned

The three-unit course for graduate students met for one hour three times a week from 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. On Monday and Wednesday, the class met in a seminar room, where we discussed readings and listened to occasional guest speakers. On Fridays, the class was held in the Hearst Gym, in a large exercise room with floor mats and mirrors like a yoga studio. During the 15-week semester, the class received demonstrations in bodywork, including massage, tai chi, chi gong, cranial-sacral therapy, and guided imagery. A dozen massage practitioners and other therapists from around the Bay Area volunteered their time to present the self-care techniques. The first session was a demonstration of Pilates exercise techniques. Little by little I introduced concepts from CTM.

As the course developed, the students were encouraged to share their experiences and reactions to what they were learning. Observations about themselves and their chosen career path were insightful. Here are postings from the class Web site:

- "In everyday life I see how friends talk too slow; people don't get to the point fast enough (my brother exploded with a 'stop being a damn journalist for a second and listen to my story …')."
- "I think this is where the recommendation of dating/having friends who are *not* journalists comes in. (I don't remember who made that point, but it was a good one.) Because, hopefully, they *will* call you on being too much of a journalist in your personal life and remind you that there are other things in life than grilling people."
- "In the paper in Oregon, a lot of the reporters were the same age, late 20's, early 30's, and everyone hung out together. This helped in that you could talk about whatever story was stressing you out. But it contributed to a lot of alcohol entering my system. Those stereotypes about journalists being alcoholics, etc. are true, as far as I've seen."

The 13 students in the class began to take a longer, more philosophical view of the work ahead of them. They accepted the idea that journalism can be corrosive, unless one takes protective measures. As part of the class, during the semester each student had to have one session of therapeutic massage and to participate in at least six sessions of some kind of energy exercise, such as yoga, Pilates or tai chi.

After the San Francisco Chronicle did a story about the class, I received words of support from throughout the world. One veteran network news correspondent sent me this message by e-mail: "You're way ahead of the pack suggesting ways to cope after the story. Trust me—crying and drinking too much are often not enough, although I've done my share of both. This is an amazingly unexplored area. Surprisingly, it has nothing to do with gender. I've seen women suffer as much as men."

Morley Safer of CBS reports in August 1965 on the devastation of a torching of the Cam Ne village in Vietnam by Marines. *Photo from CBS/Courtesy of The Associated Press.*

This correspondent sent me a videotape of a piece he did from a camp for Rwandan refugees at the height of the genocide. It showed one of the rare moments when a veteran journalist comes close to breaking down emotionally. This tape was immensely helpful in showing students that even those at the top of the profession have to struggle with their feelings.

As the semester drew to a close, I asked myself what had been learned. First, journalism education needs to make self-care a central part of its focus. I won't teach this as a stand-alone course again, but I will incorporate these lessons and techniques into the school's introductory writing and reporting course. Self-care is as important as learning to write a nut graf. Second, the industry itself needs to revise the prevailing "suck it up" approach. Newsrooms do not as a rule provide the same counseling and support services as the local sheriff's department. Consequently, many reporters are afraid to admit to colleagues and supervisors that they are distressed because such an admission can be seen as a sign of weakness.

As journalism becomes more competitive we, as educators, have pushed students to do more, faster and leaner. How they live their lives outside the office and cope with what they see and do as part of their job has not been thought of as our concern. It's time now to rethink this premise, but doing this will require change in the culture of newsrooms—a change that is long overdue. One Bay Area journalist wrote me a note about the course: "It's so hard to strike that balance between doing good work and living healthy lives. But worth the effort." I agree. ■

*William J. Drummond is professor of journalism at the University of California at Berkeley. He's a former editor and correspondent for National Public Radio and Los Angeles Times's bureau chief in New Delhi and Jerusalem. He's a certified acupressure massage practitioner.*

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# 'Welcome to Hell'

## A photojournalist records his thoughts during the battle for Grozny.

*Since the war in Chechnya began, photojournalist Stanley Greene has been there to document its devastating toll. Eighty-one of his images, along with his diary entries and other commentary, have been brought together in a book, "Open Wound: Chechnya 1994 to 2003," published by Trolley Press in fall 2003. In the following 1995 diary excerpts, which he adapted for this magazine, Greene describes the death, destruction and survivors he encountered when the Russian military began its bombardment of Grozny, the capital of Chechnya.*

**January 7:** The only way to reach Grozny is by car, like most of the Chechen soldiers who commute to battle from their villages. Usually it's an old beat-up one, and you hope that nobody stops or shells it. Driving on back roads through Ingushetia to reach the Chechen border and finally entering Chechnya, you immediately hear the sound of Russian war planes and helicopter gunships. Then you see them streaking across the sky. My driver shows no fear, only contempt. He is Ingush, "but Ingushetia and Chechnya are one," he explains. "We are all brothers. The Russians want to scare us. They want us to die. Chechen soldiers will fight to the death. Russian soldiers will fight for nothing. This is not their land. They should go home." My first sight of Grozny, Chechnya's capital, is grim. Dead people strewn in the streets, wild dogs chewing on their corpses. In Russian, the name "Grozny" means "terrible."

Welcome to Grozny, a city to die in. There is a sign on the road when you enter Grozny that says "People, keep the peace." Beneath it now someone has written, "Welcome to hell."

**January 10:** The soldiers and civilians express only defiance and scorn for Boris Yeltsin and the Russian military's effort to crush them. Russian planes and helicopters have bombed villages on the edge of town, they say. One woman grabs my arm and in broken English and Russian screams that she will fight for Chechnya's independence until she and every member of her family are dead.

Life in the city has become chaotic: no food, no water, men and women searching for sustenance in the midst of bombs exploding around them. Bodies remain on the street because it's too dangerous to try to remove and bury them.

The 999 bar is a blown-out storefront where Chechen fighters warm themselves next to a fire. In another destroyed store nearby, old women huddle near a burning Smirnoff sign. Journalists photograph, interview and film the two groups. Asked about the war, they have the same response, "Allah Akbar," God is great.

There are 70 or 80 corpses lying in the street. It's wet and cold and I'm there to photograph but I can't when I see the dogs eating the faces of the dead. I try the long walk down Lenin Prospekt, curious about the ceasefire which most civilians haven't heard about. At 57 Lenin Prospekt, near a blasted department store, two huge craters in the sidewalk. Russian bombs aimed at a Chechen Howitzer position dropped instead into the courtyard of an apartment building and on the building opposite. Both are badly damaged. Old women wander dazed, buckets in their hands, wailing at strangers, holding their hands up to the dark grizzly sky. A woman who lives at 61, wrapped in shawls, cries that her children are in Vladivostok, her husband is an invalid and can't walk, there's no light or water, and no way she can rejoin her children. "They are crying there, and I'm crying here. Why are they bombing civilians? Can't they see what they're hitting?" Mogamed Mutayev, a doctor who lives in the building, says that on Sunday Chechen guerillas came to warn them that Russians were coming and herded everyone into the cellar. While one man guarded them, many apartments were looted. "They weren't Russians, but our people," he said bitterly. "You see what war is."

**January 20:** A thick blanket of snow covering the bombed-out city muffles everything except pounding of artillery and the Russian warnings, broadcast by loudspeakers mounted on helicopters, telling Chechens to "surrender or be destroyed without mercy."

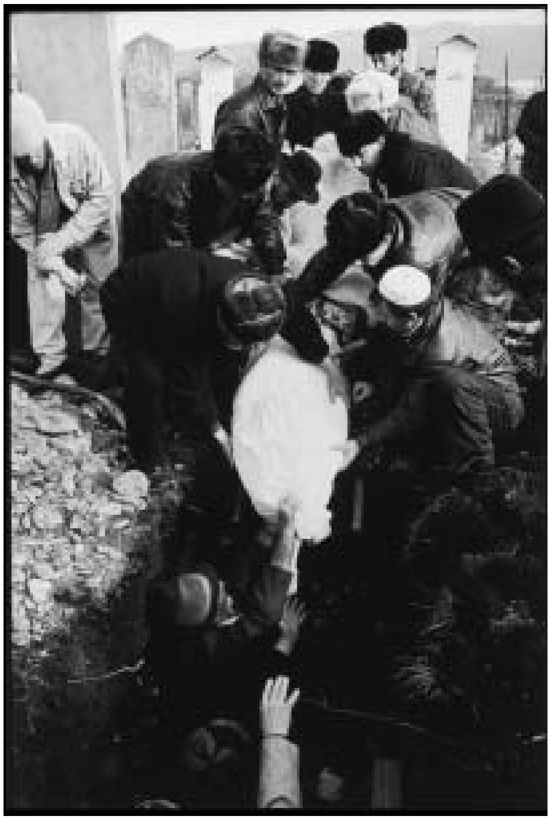
Though fighting continued in some areas, it was unusually still among the ruins of the city center. Residents and rebels are despondent and surly. At a sidewalk market a man shouts to women to stop talking to journalists, waving a hand grenade to show he means business.

**January 21:** In a graveyard outside Grozny, about 30 men stand in the snow holding hands in prayer at the funeral of a Chechen elder. He was a man of peace, says one of the mourners, who was shot to death by Russian troops as he traveled a road near Grozny. His body, wrapped in a white sheet and a carpet, lies on a stretcher awaiting burial. During the ceremony, a Russian plane flies low, dropping a bomb that explodes a few hundred yards away.

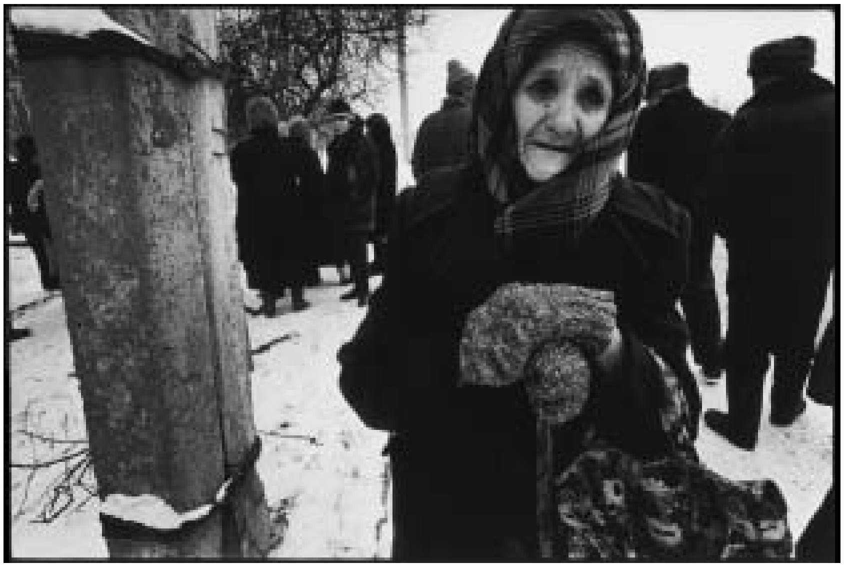
**January 30:** "A bullet, a shell, a bomb, or a missile cannot, will not, destroy us. This will not end. We will sooner or later revenge ourselves upon you for the deeds you have done to us." —Open letter to the people of Russia from the Wolves of Islam.

**February 11:** I'm leaving today, getting out will be difficult, there's no regular transport, but tanks and water trucks ply the roads, along with busloads of refugees. I too am a refugee, I feel part of Grozny, of Chechnya. And at the same time detached from the rest of the world, my world in Paris. No man or woman can view a field of battle and witness so much death and destruction without becoming detached or callous. I mean you lose it for a while, it's like going on vacation and putting your feelings in a suitcase temporarily until you return to reality. When a journalist risks everything to get to a war, he gets down to it and does the work. You mask out that paralyzing fear of death. It becomes your unspoken duty to depict the truth as you see it breaking around you. There is no such thing as taking pictures from a place of safety. You become part of the unfolding story. It marks you! The battle of Grozny has marked me forever. In war you realize that all the photos you might take or do make will fall short of showing the full horror of war—but you keep trying in a hope that you will succeed. ■

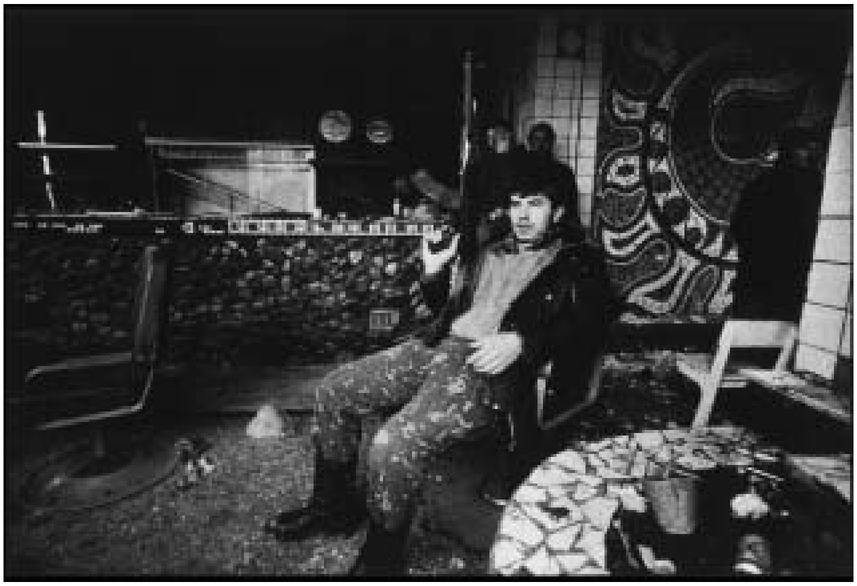
*Stanley Greene photographed conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Croatia, Kashmir, Sudan and Rwanda before he went to Chechnya to document the war.*



**In a graveyard in Staryy Atagi, Chechnya, about 30 men stand in the snow at the funeral of a Chechen elder, a mullah. He was shot to death by Russian troops as he traveled on a road near Grozny.**

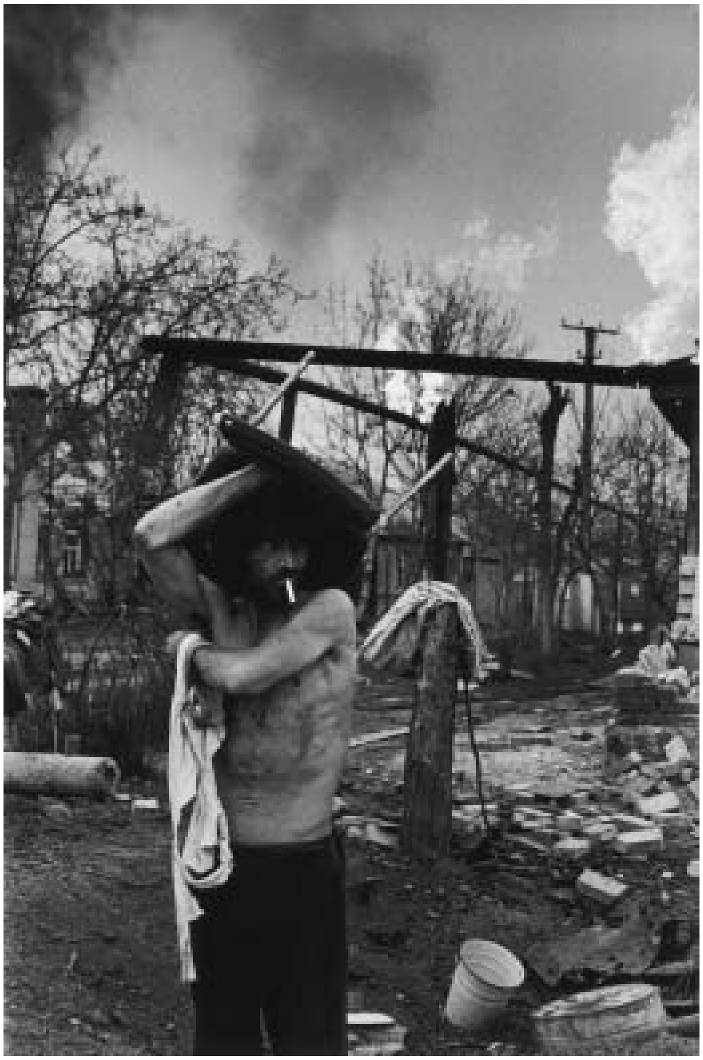


**After a Russian shelling of a civilian neighborhood in the suburbs of western Grozny, a 71-year-old shawl-wrapped Russian woman cries. Her husband, an invalid, is unable to walk, and they are without electricity, gas and water. They also do not have enough money to leave the city and join their children in Vladivostok.**

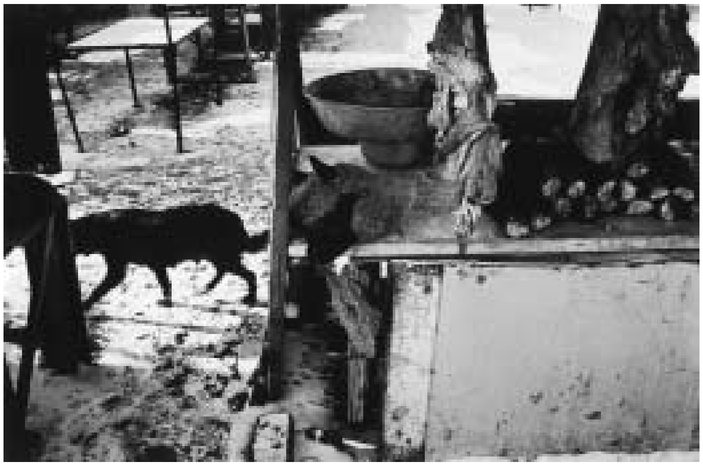


**The 999 bar, headquarters of the rebels in Grozny.**

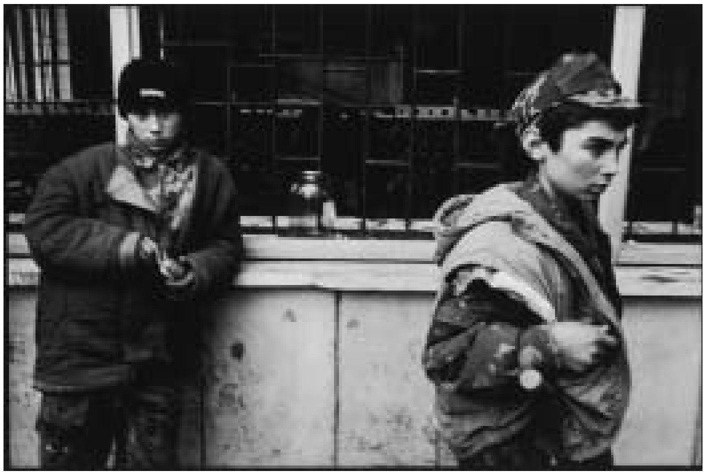
*Photos by Stanley Greene/Agence VU.*



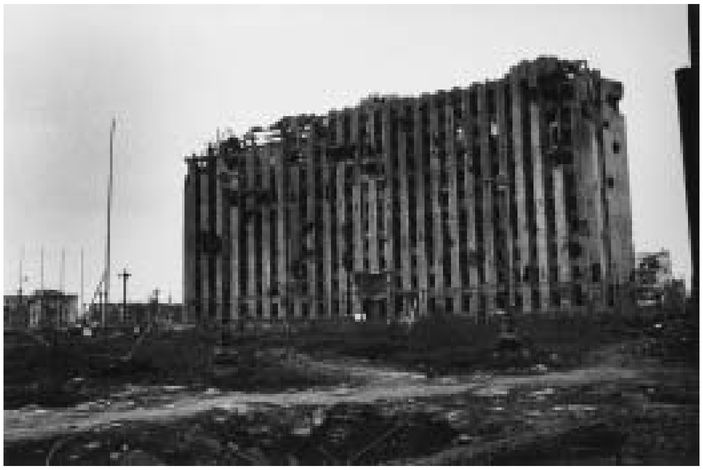
Gas flaring from fractured pipes creates a backdrop for fighters, civilians, stray dogs, cats and deranged homeless victims.



People were afraid to shop at the three main markets in Grozny during a battle in which people were killed daily. Smaller markets away from the main fighting survived, but what few goods remained went unsold for days. Civilians and stray dogs survived together, both hungry because of the fighting.

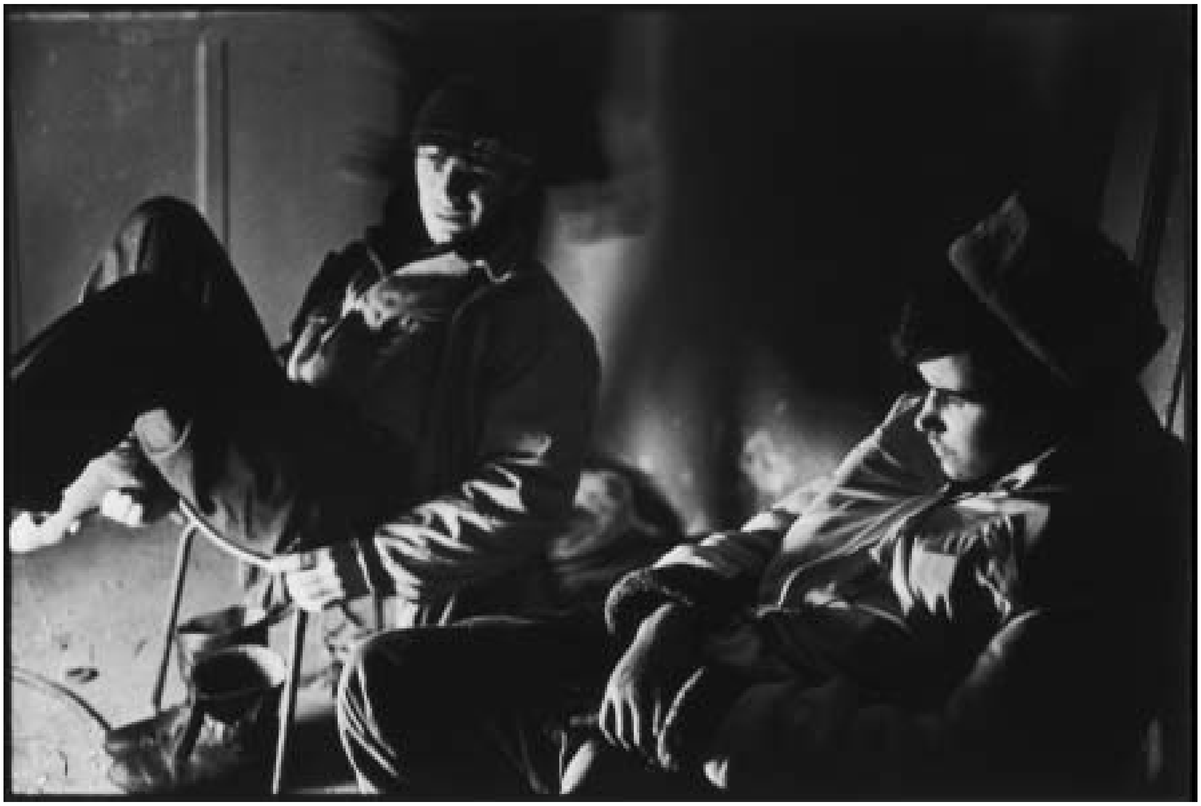


At the 999 bar, in front of a blown-out storefront, young Chechen rebels play with grenades, their toys of war.

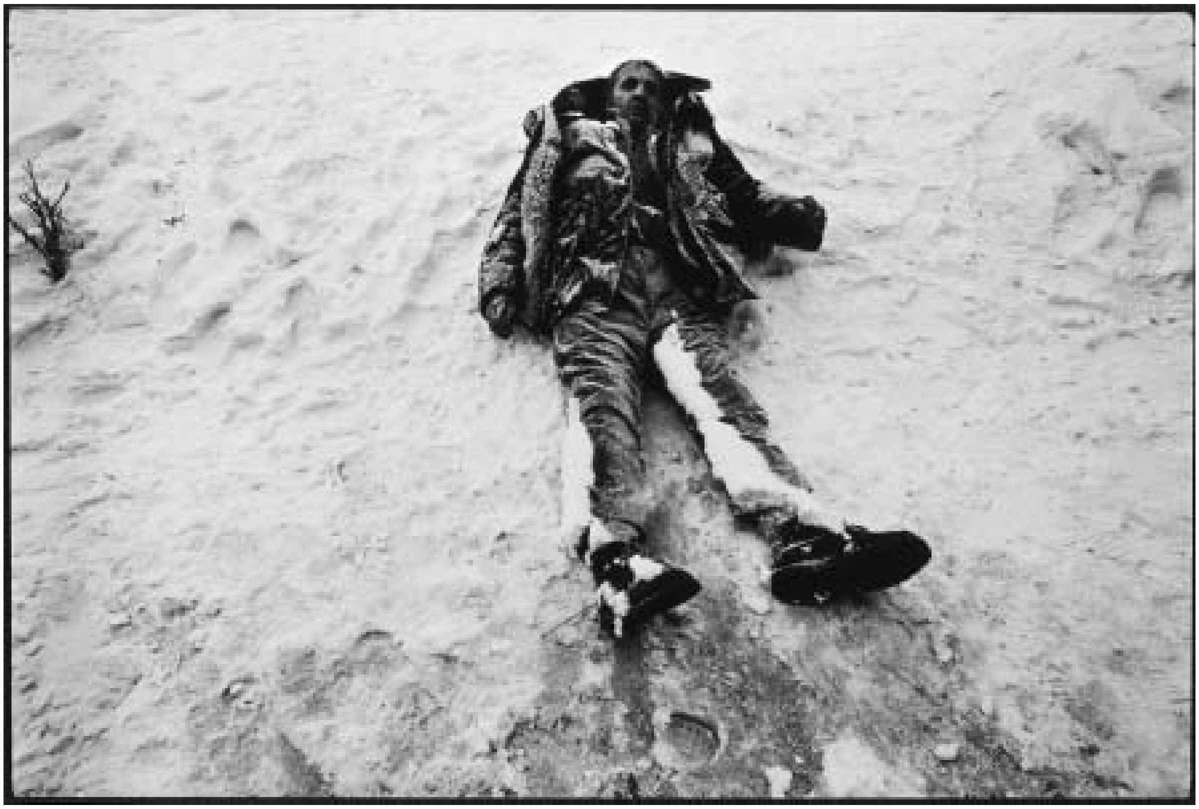


Ruins of the presidential palace in Grozny, Chechnya.

*Photos by Stanley Greene/Agence VU.*



Chechen fighters, waiting for the end of Russian shelling, warm themselves by a fire.



The body of a Russian man killed by mortar fire rots in the streets of Grozny. The bodies of civilians remain on the road because it is too dangerous to move or bury them.

*Photos by Stanley Greene/Agence VU.*

# Acting as a Witness to a Forgotten War

## 'Even if nobody for whom I write this story cares, it is difficult for me to forget Chechnya.'

### By Anne Nivat

The war in Chechnya, the second one in a decade, has been raging ever since Moscow sent its troops to the breakaway province in the fall of 1999, promising to rapidly solve "the problem"—Chechnya's demand for independence from the Russian Federation. Yet while separatist rebels and Russian troops continue to fight, Chechen civilians are both deliberately targeted and accidentally killed in the crossfire, or are living miserably in a war zone without hope of an end in sight.

In the West, it's been easy to remain ignorant about this front in the "war on terror" because it is politically complicated, located in an area of the world few Westerners could point to on a map, and overshadowed by the postwar violence in Iraq that swallows up the time and space for war coverage in the press. Wars are fashionable, and Chechnya was a la mode during the winter 1999-2000, but not anymore. Then Afghanistan came along, and now Iraq is *the* place to be. Who really knows any longer what is happening in Afghanistan?

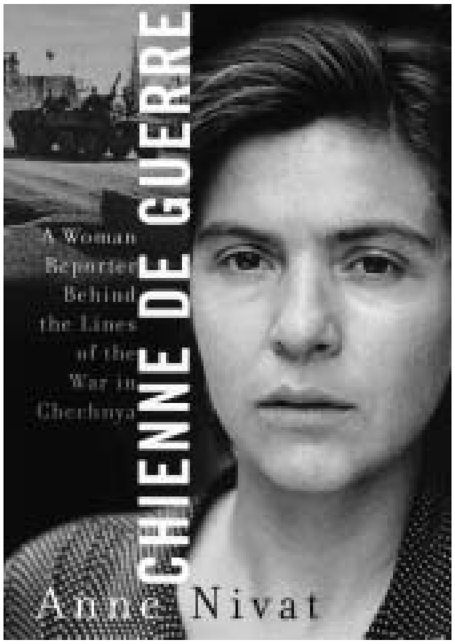
The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—packaged by Western governments and military authorities as critical battles in the worldwide war on terrorism—have drawn to them many journalists who basically made the choice to adhere to the script prepared by those who waged the wars. In turn, the U.S. military has worked to adjust, as best they could, to press requirements in covering it. The Russians have tried to use this same approach in Chechnya, but with less attention to the appearance of accuracy and with less success.

My first book about the war in Chechnya, "Chienne de Guerre," based on my reporting during the mid-1990's about this conflict, was translated into seven languages, including Russian. But after four years of negotiations, not one Russian publishing house has dared to print it. Eventually the book was posted on an Internet site (and allowed to remain there) only because the authorities in Russia know that the Internet doesn't have enough distribution to do political damage in Russia—yet.

In the United States, my book was released before September 11, 2001. At that time, President Bush was working to make alliances with the new Russian president and not focused on overthrowing Saddam Hussein. Only muted criticism from America was heard then about the human rights violations against Chechen citizens and minimal aid for refugees, and there was little, if any, commentary or coverage. Why? It is because of what I call the "no CNN, no war syndrome"—when there are no images of a war on a widely watched TV channel, then Americans are not concerned about it.

## Grasping the War Story

When I ventured back to Chechnya in the fall of 1999, I was not yet a correspondent for the French daily, Libération. I became one when the newspaper asked me to file daily reports on the war. I was then surprised to see that many things had changed since the first Russian campaign in 1994-96, and I blamed myself for not being there to report on these changes before they erupted into the second phase of the fighting. But that's how the press usually work: We are sent into the field when something eventful is happening, and we quickly disappear when the action stops. That's a big mistake, because this second campaign in this ongoing war is a direct result of an evolution that occurred after the end of the first campaign and of the way that one ended.



Chechnya is a particularly difficult war to cover—not that any war is easy—because of all of the minefields, both literal and figurative, that must be crossed. There are many kidnaps, unsanitary conditions, difficulties with language and terrain, and other usual obstacles, but there are also in this war no clear-cut "good guys" or "bad guys." Each different rebel group seems to fight independently, and they are linked only by their common enemy—the Russians—who commit horrific human rights violations against innocent civilians. There is no single or charismatic leader of the opposition, only a series of discredited and disrespected fighters. It's almost impossible to find a sympathetic figure in this tragedy, except the innocent civilians, who say again and again that they just want the fighting to stop so they can build a normal life.

"What's new in Chechnya?" my editors in France would ask me whenever I tried to convince them to let me go back there again. On my last trip there a few months ago, one could indeed have gotten the impression that nothing has changed. There was still the hum of bombers in the distance, the muddy, rusted armored tanks posted along the roads, the bored but arrogant manner of soldiers who stop each vehicle to request papers from the driver and then demand a bribe whether the documents are in order or not. There were innumerable accounts of "zatchistki" (mopping-up operations), when masked Russian soldiers sweep down on the civilian population and kill or drag off men and boys without explanation or justification.

Yet I have concluded that reporting what's not new must also be part of my job. By being in the field, I can tell that the Russians are as militarily weak as when they reinvaded Chechnya after the 1996 negotiated settlement was violated by a renegade rebel group. And the Russians are no closer to a realistic solution to this second phase of the war than they were several years ago, because President Putin stubbornly refuses to negotiate and will accept only an absolute surrender of all independence-minded people and Islamic fundamentalists.

## Changing Perception of the Conflict

Despite the fiasco that is this war, the Kremlin can claim one victory: It has convinced the outside world that this conflict is a part of the global war on terrorism. The Kremlin has understood perfectly the strategic political advantage of making a link between Chechen rebels and international terrorists. Aren't the Russians friends of the West now, allies in the war on terror and fellow victims of terrorist suicide bombers? Some of the Chechen fighters might be Wahhabis and be connected to al-Qaeda, although nothing has ever been proven. But making this current characterization of the war the justification for the original fighting should be considered a major victory for Russia, proving again that in a time of terror, disinformation can work.

The Kremlin tolerates very few independent-minded Russian and foreign reporters who publish the truth about what's going on in Chechnya—and do so only outside of Russia or in a local weekly newspaper with minimal circulation. Whether the Kremlin has been misled by its military leadership about the actual situation in Chechnya is unclear. But it is absolutely obvious that Russian public opinion is being misled about it. Officially, Russians are told that the war is over, and the situation is "normalized." By ignoring the reality of what's happening in Chechnya, the Russian government acts as if the battle has already been won. It has closed refugee camps in neighboring Ingushetia, forcing citizens to return to homes that are still in shambles.

Having understood that the only "politically correct" way out of the Chechen quagmire is through a democratic process, even a fake one, in 2003 the authorities held a referendum on a new constitution, followed by a presidential election. Both were exposed by those who observed them to be fraudulent. But Moscow—through its successful control of its own press and, mostly, through the self-censorship of its journalists—maintained the fiction of normalization for the Russian people through Putin's reelection in March 2004. Meanwhile, the Chechen people struggle to get the outside world to understand (and care about) their cause in a war that becomes each month more complicated by the actions of suicide bombers, Wahhabis (Islamist fundamentalists), collaborators, mafia thugs, and intimidated journalists.

I've tried to report on this war in a way that would connect my newspaper's readers to it—by passing along the personal stories told to me in the setting and context I found them. In the five years I've covered this war, I have visited hell. At times, fear obliterated any other feeling, and terror made my mouth dry. There were also intense connections I've made with dozens of strangers with whom I shared a single moment. Sometimes there was even a sense of calmness, when all of a sudden I felt safe because a man had leaned over to cover me when a bomb was going to fall close by or a woman offered me a cup of steaming tea when she had so little for herself.

I had to meet with as many different kinds of people as possible: civilians, fighters on both sides, men and women and families whose life has been destroyed by this conflict. I wanted to share the daily horrors with the locals and expose how the unimaginable can become the norm. I have described what I've heard from many of the Russian soldiers who doubt that they will ever win this war—unless they kill every Chechen male who is older than 12, which some admit is what they are doing. I also have written how most Chechens, while they are Muslim, want nothing to do with the Wahhabis who have infiltrated their villages and brought with them the wrath of the world.

## Paying an Emotional Price

As journalists—serving as witnesses to this brutality—we pay an emotional price for the work we do. Even if nobody for whom I write this story cares, it is difficult for me to forget Chechnya. It is impossible for me to stop listening to men and women who offer me so much kindness that I become almost a member of their families and am no longer regarded by them as foreign. I can't stop going back while I can still give these people a voice and prevent them from being completely forgotten.

But how do I not become hardened to the misery of others? Or lose interest in this story when a new war comes along that's a bigger story—a story that has captured the world's attention? How do I confront—with my independent reporting—the arrogant Russian authorities and risk losing my visa and consequently everything I've worked for? How do I overcome the blind acceptance of propaganda by the majority of Russians? How do I explain to them why some Chechens believe the terrorist attacks by some of their fellow citizens in Moscow are justified? How can I overcome the need for simplification in news reporting and reliance on emotionally packed imagery? Through reporting, can I debunk the falsely reassuring words of incompetent leaders or the generalized indictment of all Chechens?

These are questions I need to think about as I report from Chechnya. I don't have answers, and that's why I keep on going there and writing. ■

*Anne Nivat is Moscow correspondent for Ouest-France, a regional French newspaper. She is the author of "Chienne de Guerre," which won the Albert Londres prize, France's highest award for journalism. She is currently working on a book about Afghanistan and Iraq.*

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# When a Story Inhabits the Mind

## '. . . I rely on a brave group of Chechen journalists to keep me—and my readers—informed.'

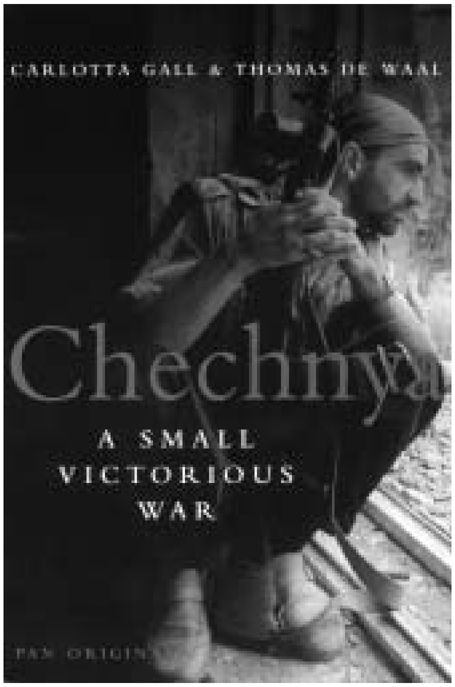
### By Thomas de Waal

I miss Chechnya. That may seem a strange thing to say, given all the associations that the word "Chechnya" has for most people—war, destruction and cruelty. But between the beginning of 1994, 11 months before President Boris Yeltsin sent in the troops and unleashed war there, and the summer of 1998, I visited Chechnya fairly frequently and, in reporting on its tragedy, I became extremely attached to both the place and the people. Partly it was the landscape: A view of the snowy peaks of the Caucasus is rarely more than a bend in the road away. The thick beech woods that frustrated the czar's armies for decades in the 19th century crowd up serpentine valleys towards the mountains.

Mostly it was the people. Nineteenth century Russian officers, struck by the flamboyance and repartee of the Chechens, called them "the French of the Caucasus." A century and a half later, the Chechens somehow emerged as the people who were most unbowed by the experience of Soviet Communism. Eternal outlaws, Alexander Solzhenitsyn had observed that the Chechens were the only nationality in the prison camps of Stalin's Kazakhstan who did not want to play by the rules but cleaved together at all times. So in the 1990's it was an invigorating, if sometimes scary, experience to be among them.

Yes, a lot of the men were gun-mad. At Chechen weddings, there was a tradition of firing weapons in the air in celebration, and all too frequently Chechen weddings would lead to Chechen funerals, as one or two guests died from stray bullets. But the less crazy among the Chechens were also among the most alive, engaging, loyal people to spend time with. Conversations would last into the night. Celebrations would be thought up on the spur of the moment. How often I or one of my colleagues would turn up in a mountain Chechen village in conditions of war and turmoil, and a complete stranger would uncomplainingly offer us a bed for the night, whatever was on the table, and transport on farther the next morning. The memory of such warmth is one reason why I look back fondly on Chechnya and with great heartache at the sufferings those people continue to endure.

Another reason I miss Chechnya is that it can be harder to be distant from a conflict you care about than to be up close. We continue to refer to the "war in Chechnya," but what is happening there now is a low-level insurgency conflict that claims perhaps a dozen lives a week. The menace of violence is still pervasive, but the vast majority of people are managing to live ordinary lives of some sort. The same was true even for much of the first war, and I always found it easier for the mind and the stomach to be down in Chechnya itself than to be trying to follow the war from Moscow through the distorted picture of the Russian media.



My experience of the 1994-96 conflict left me with a profound impression of how war is savagely local. I remember one day in February 1995 sitting on the edge of Grozny, just a few miles from where the battle for the city between Russian forces and Chechen fighters was continuing. There was a regular thump from the artillery pounding the city, and thick black smoke was issuing from the burning oil refineries. Yet by the roadside an enterprising man had set up a barbecue stall, and my driver and I ate delicious hunks of hot meat as we looked out at the burning city. Life, of some sort, went on.

I try to remember that scene when I think of my friends and acquaintances still stuck in Chechnya. They are not living through total war; they are putting together their lives in a society where the vast majority of the violence is elsewhere. Life is very hard, but it is still liveable.

That first Chechen War was an astonishingly open one for journalists. We ran great risks, certainly, but such was the turmoil of the Russian state at the time that it was possible as a journalist to operate with immense freedom. There was no "frontline" as such, and you could cross whatever seemed like one with ease. I remember leaving Russian-controlled Grozny, traveling for an hour to a lazily manned checkpoint, passing through, and half an hour later sitting in a farmhouse doing an interview with the "vice president of Ichkeria," the deputy leader of the warring rebels.

After the rebels won the first round of that war in 1996, the situation slowly became more menacing. A deeply damaged and traumatized society began breeding a new sinister group of young men, and one day one of them decided to use kidnapping to earn money. Hundreds of cases—and dozens of million-dollar ransoms—later, kidnapping remains a real curse for Chechnya, and the threat of it obviously limits the mobility of foreign journalists.

Foreign journalists continue to go to Chechnya, but the other big difference is that the Russian authorities now do everything they can to restrict them. If you are a journalist fully accredited in Moscow, you will be offered a trip complete with official minders and no access to ordinary people. You might be able to go undercover for a few days, but with very little opportunity to move freely. If you are not accredited in Moscow—and I am not these days—then you may as well forget about it. It is simply not worth the risks.

That is why I miss Chechnya.

Instead, in my job as the editor from London of a weekly bulletin on the Caucasus with the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), I rely on a brave group of Chechen journalists to keep me—and my readers—informed. It is gratifying that there are a number of journalists who still possess that irrepressible courage and spirit, which they deploy to the discomfort of all sides in the conflict.

My main writer, Timur Aliev, has won several prizes for his reporting, lately a citation from the Overseas Press Club of America. Sometimes I worry about Timur and tell him it is not worth taking any risks. He usually tells me he knows the risks and does not intend to do anything stupid. Simply being an independent-minded journalist in Chechnya is risk enough, and that is not something I want to deny him. I miss Chechnya, but the longing is eased a little every week when I read his finely observed copy, helping me keep up with a place that is surely one of the most unfortunate on earth and that I have the fortune and misfortune to have known well. ■

*Thomas de Waal is coauthor, with Carlotta Gall, of "Chechnya: A Small Victorious War" (Pan Books, 1997) and is Caucasus editor of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, www.iwpr.net.*

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# The Risks of Independent Reporting in Chechnya

## By not adhering to government regulations, 'these newspapers are vulnerable to attack from all sides.'

### By Timur Aliev

Local journalists in Chechnya face the same problems as journalists do throughout the world—the difficulties of getting and distributing objective information. The only difference is that the risks that journalists confront in Chechnya increase the problems exponentially. It is extremely hard to persuade government officials in Chechnya to disclose facts that might not even discredit them but might just "cast a shadow" on their reputations. Considering that many of these people had to pay a hefty sum to get their jobs, they are simply not willing to risk it.

The same happens with ordinary people. Even the relatives of those who disappeared without a trace or were arrested during "clean-up" operations by Russian or Chechen security forces are not always prepared to talk openly about it. Sometimes they tell the facts but ask not to be named. They are not always afraid for themselves. Sometimes their silence is caused by concern for their missing relatives. What if this information harms instead of helps them, they reason. For instance, the elder brother of Ali Astamirov, a correspondent for Agence France-Presse news agency who was kidnapped in Ingushetia, told me, "It's best not to make a fuss …."

Chechens use strange double standards when talking to journalists. Sometimes people are more willing to speak to correspondents working for foreign media than to local ones. Apparently they believe that if their information is published in the West it will be more effective. Or perhaps they think that it will not be read in Chechnya and Russia and that these interviews are safer for their personal security.

## Reporting in Chechnya

On October 5, 2003, Chechnya held its "presidential elections." Everyone knew the result in advance—the Kremlin's man, Akhmad Kadyrov, would be elected with a vast majority. Looking for independent observers monitoring the republic's polling stations, I walked into the office of Chechnya's official human rights commissioner, Abdul-Khakim Sultygov. Before the elections, people who work there had told me that they would be doing the monitoring. Now several human rights defenders were sitting in the office, including Zura Abdulkhajieva, who chairs a women's public organization. I asked her: "Did you vote, Zura?" "Yes, of course, I voted for Kadyrov—he is doing a lot for our republic, and he promised to sort out the nighttime abductions. For the women of Chechnya he will be the best president," she replied.

About 15 minutes later Zura realized that the story that I was writing was going to be published in the West. She pulled me by the sleeve and said, "Timur, don't write that I voted for Kadyrov. The truth is I didn't go to vote at all."

This double personality is typical of Chechens. If this is how representatives of human rights organizations, who normally try to speak out as often and critically as possible, reply to a journalist's questions, then it's no surprise when state officials shun journalists, usually just repeating what they say in official press releases.

A while ago, even obtaining local official information was very difficult. Local journalists found it extremely hard to get accredited with the government or even get a pass to enter government buildings. A paradoxical situation developed in which correspondents for the republic state news agency, Grozny-Inform, learned about government news and official decrees from reports on ITAR-TASS, the government news agency in Moscow, which they fished off the Internet.

The press situation in Chechnya is even more problematic. There are three categories of media in the republic through which a journalist can reach the Chechen audience—state, separatist and independent publications.

## State-Run and Separatist Press

The most numerous group is state (pro-Moscow) newspapers. Chechnya has three republic-wide publications, and almost every province of the country has its newspapers—presently, there are 10 of them. They have high circulations—from 3,000 to 7,000 copies—and are supported by state funding. Their professional level is very poor. Being directly dependent on the state, these publications naturally have a distinct pro-government orientation. Any attempt to report a fact that discredits the republic's leaders will land the editor in trouble. The very least he or she can expect in this case is a verbal reprimand during a weekly editorial meeting at the local press ministry; at worst, the editor could be sacked or prosecuted.

Naturally, editorial policy is determined by their editors' interest in their own careers and is directed, primarily, at preventing any opposition material from being published. Outside the official context, they see themselves as free-thinking persons who are disturbed by every human rights violation in their republic and shrug their shoulders at me, saying you understand full well that we cannot publish such information. Often they pass on material to independent media.

Though it seems strange to say, most Chechen journalists are not desperate to be objective. This sounds curious, but in a region where human rights are violated on an hourly basis and on which the whole international human rights and journalistic community focuses its attention, local journalists frequently say they see no problems to report on.

The situation has changed dramatically. During the initial wave of enthusiasm over Glasnost and freedom of speech in the late 1980's and early 1990's, journalists in the republic were raising previously forbidden issues including, most prominently, the issue of national self-determination for the Chechen people. And journalists could write and talk openly and broadly. But after war broke out in 1994, journalism became increasingly vague. Since 1995, strong pressure from the authorities (any kind of authorities—pro-Russian as well as pro-independence) and the presence of armed men (again, either Russians or militants) has shaped the journalistic response.

For instance, investigative journalism has effectively disappeared as a genre. Attempts to revive it or, at least, use its elements in reporting, could have sad consequences for an author. Journalists began to use pseudonyms increasingly often, although it is virtually impossible to conceal one's authorship of a story in such a small republic. Articles began to avoid mentioning names of people involved. Even initials were not included, and bylines were vague, such as "a resident of the Gekhi village" or "a student at the oil institute."

The main features of Chechen official journalism today are an anodyne language in articles, a lack of critical issues raised, a tendency to "smooth over" difficult topics and make cautious analysis. This position, naturally, was not arrived at voluntarily.

In many ways there has not been much difference between the way the press was treated when Chechnya was de facto independent between 1997 and 1999 and since 2000, when Russia returned in force to the region. The authorities used administrative and legal methods to keep members of the press in line, and men with guns used threat, intimidation and violence. Now the situation is much the same. The official media of the Kadyrov government continues to hold openly pro-governmental views (which are now pro-Russian), adopt a neutral, though more negative than positive attitude towards the Russian forces, and to treat the political opponent of the new authorities (i.e. pro-independence rebels) extremely negatively.

State media journalists in Chechnya practice a sort of internal self-censorship, which does not allow them to overstep the permitted mark in their publications. This seems paradoxical. Today, at the time of war, there is no conflict between the authorities and press in Chechnya, and cases of violation of journalists' rights are rare. Mind you, all this is 100 percent true only for the state-run press.

Separatist or rebel newspapers are publications that are produced and distributed clandestinely. They are printed with the money provided by the leaders of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Aslan Maskhadov and Shamil Basayev, and distributed privately, from person to person. They are of low professional and technical quality but attract readers by their manifestly anti-Russian orientation and their brave but propagandistic terminology: Federal troops are called "invaders" and "aggressors" and Kadyrov supporters "traitors." Yet this use of propaganda and distortion of facts also alienates readers. At the moment, this is rather academic, since for several months now these pro-independence publications have not been coming out. These newspapers are not serious journalistic publications, since they generally print digests of human rights organizations' press releases that had been reworded using Ichkerian terminology, as well as materials taken from separatist Web sites on the Internet.

## Independent Press in Chechnya

The republic's four independent newspapers are the most active forum for free journalistic expression in Chechnya. Because they are not beholden to any political forces, these four publications are truly independent and not oppositional. However, they do not always have financial support, so the independent press directly depends on readers' demand and tries to keep their audiences interested the best they can, but without practicing "yellow journalism." The independent newspapers are well designed and have professional reporters on staff.

Unfortunately, only two of those newspapers dare to cover political aspects of life in the republic—Chechenskoe Obshchestvo (Chechen Society) and Golos Chechenskoi Respubliki (Voice of the Chechen Republic). As a result of their independent views, which means that they do not support either the Ichkerian side or the Kadyrov government and Moscow federal government, these newspapers are vulnerable to attack from all sides.

As the editor of Chechenskoe Obshchestvo, I've experienced this vulnerability. In late February, a list naming 170 national traitors was distributed in Chechnya. My name is on this list. An introduction to the list alleged that each of us is a traitor of the Ichkerian nation and GRU (military intelligence) agents. Furthermore, it said all the people on the list would be definitely eliminated. The document also included the names of all editors of state media in Chechnya, leaders of the republic, and employees of military and law enforcement bodies as traitors to be destroyed. It was signed "Sword of Ichkeria."

My newspaper has also received complaints from the government. In late April, the territorial administration of the Ministry of Press of the Russian Federation in Chechnya issued a stern warning to our editorial office, accusing us of violating the Russian media law. The warning came after the newspaper published an article titled "Leaflets with Yandarbiev's obituary distributed in Chechnya" in its issue No. six on March 23, 2004 about the former rebel leader Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, who was assassinated in Qatar in February (two Russians are on trial for his murder, allegedly ordered from Moscow).

According to Ismail Munaev, the head of territorial administration of the press ministry in Chechnya, my newspaper had "in effect published a whole series of provocative appeals and extremist declarations under the mask of a news report." By "provocative appeals" the administration meant the quoting of several phrases from the leaflet in the article. Munaev said this could not be justified by editorial qualifications such as "… the leaflet said" or "… it is noted in the obituary."

Of course, a warning is not so dangerous by itself, but three warnings are enough to shut a newspaper down. However, the affair did not end with a mere warning, and the territorial administration filed a request that the Chechnya prosecutor's office open a case against me.

Sometimes when my old friends and also readers of our newspaper run into me in the street they ask me jokingly, "Why are you still alive?" I used to retort with a joke as well: "Kadyrov has no time to deal with us right now—he's got elections to think of. Besides, he needs us to create an illusion of an opposition." But now the elections are over, and perhaps the time has come for the authorities to make their "debtors" pay up. ■

*Timur Aliev is editor of Chechenskoe Obshchestvo newspaper and Chechnya coordinator for the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR). Natasha Chernyshova, who is IWPR's Russian translater in London, translated this article, which was written before President Akhmad Kadyrov was murdered.*

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# A Scholarly Look at War Reporting

## In assessing coverage of war, contributors look for connections to the daily practice of journalism.

### By Barbie Zelizer

As a former journalist, it's difficult for me not to be overtaken in my scholarship about news reporting by the actual events that drive the news. Their beckoning—in ways that are clear, compelling and relentlessly relevant—often leads me to my next research agenda. In recent years, I've been drawn to examine the reporting of war and acts of terror, and my work area is as filled with old newspapers and videotapes of news shows as it is with books.

This interest was accompanied by a certain degree of déjà vu when I contemplated the idea of coediting a book on war reporting presented to me by a colleague. Stuart Allan of the University of the West of England in Bristol, United Kingdom, with whom I had coedited "Journalism After September 11" in 2002, believed the war against terror's move into battlefield engagement between nations signaled a need for a second volume to tackle the issues of reporting war. I wasn't as convinced. While the events of September 11th were finite and thus more amenable to scholarly analysis (even if the ramifications of the events loomed large and without resolution), the wars, first in Afghanistan, then in Iraq, were messy, amorphous and seemingly without end. Even today, I remain unclear about what might actually be the best time for an academic analysis of journalists' coverage of these wars.

Though this book's timing was perhaps not ideal, there were enough troublesome issues in reporting on these wars to push us toward a more immediate analysis. And so we embarked on our project. Our interest was in evaluating changes brought about by the pacing of war and in the technological modes of reporting war, in the presumed responsibilities war reporters have and the dangers they undergo, in wavering degrees of governmental interference with reporting, and in the impact public opinion was having on coverage. Some of these changes have been long in coming—the result of incremental adaptations between journalists and the political, social, cultural and economic institutions they cover. Other changes emerge as unanticipated metamorphoses of issues broader than journalism and are borrowed either from earlier wars or adapted in a piece-by-piece crafting of journalistic practice.

Through our research and writing, we hoped to contribute alternative perspectives to pressing debates. To accomplish this, we brought together leading figures in the field—including practicing and former journalists, as well as academics with longstanding research interest in journalism—to reflect on coverage of the war in Iraq as well as on the reporting of many other conflicts during the past decade and a half. By making the book's scope broad, we wanted to generate wide-ranging questions about reporting on war *and* about its connections with other forms of journalistic practice. By examining problems related to journalists' allegiance, responsibility, truth-seeking and balance, and the difficulties they faced in resolving such issues while reporting on war, we hoped these experiences could be a litmus test for thinking about issues in journalism more broadly.

## Journalism in Wartime

"Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime" turned out to be a litmus test in more ways than we could have imagined. In it, scholars and journalists track problems, issues and dilemmas that reporters confront when they are responsible for covering war. Its dual analysis of issues—local and global, broad and small, amorphous and contained—reveals that reporting on war is inevitably made more complicated by unanticipated challenges.

The book tracks war journalism since 1990, allowing the reader to understand how, in this brief time, the nature of war has changed and how these changes alter the ways in which journalists report on it. Their assignment is looked at in diverse locales across Africa, the Balkans, and the Middle East—especially in Iraq—and Southern Asia. Writers examine how U.S. and British news media, in particular, rely on Western assumptions—political, cultural and moral—in their reporting about how and why war is waged.

The book concludes that reporting on war deserves a special place in the repertoire of practices by which reporters work. But at the same time, the pitfalls and unevenness that characterize war journalism raise serious questions that are pertinent to the practice of journalism more broadly.

"Reporting War" has three major sections:

1. The first section focuses on war in the 21st century. It tracks issues such as the impact of the narrative form on war journalism, tackling censorship and reporting, the topic of deference to official framings of the war, and the rise of terrorists as legitimate news figures.
2. The second section explores the role of journalists in bearing witness to war. It considers how the logic from old wars is recycled into new ones,

the impact of visual images and the reporters' accommodation to military language, and the tensions between objectivity, patriotism and humanitarianism.

3. The last section addresses the Iraq War, examining its coverage in newspapers, wire service reports, TV (including local U.S. stations, the BBC, and Al Jazeera), grass-roots reporting and online journalism, as well as coverage of dissent about the war.

In each of these sections, contributors illuminate how the exigencies of reporting war challenge the practice of journalism. In looking closely at the reporting that resulted and by raising questions about how it took its shape, "Reporting War" offers journalists a variety of ways to think about war reporting. The book also suggests that what happens in this realm can serve as a barometer by which to guage to journalism's future. ■

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# Securing the Right to Be Heard

## A new book explores how a 1960's case about race in Mississippi transformed television news and the Federal Communications Commission.

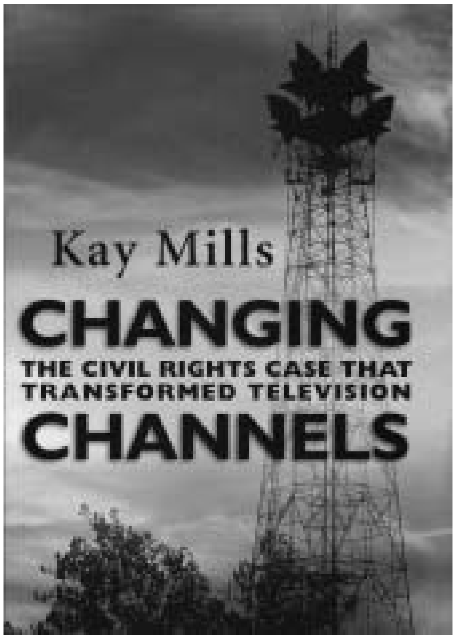
By Kay Mills

When viewers turn on the morning news on WLBT-TV in Jackson, Mississippi, they see an integrated news team. Both evening anchors are African-American. No big deal today. Just a few decades ago in Mississippi—and indeed across the country—that was not the case. Virtually all TV newscasters were white, as were the people behind the cameras. It took a landmark communications law case and a petition to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to bring about this sea change. The case, largely forgotten today, also ushered in an era of public participation in federal regulatory matters that had never been seen before and might not be again anytime soon.

In the 1950's, white Mississippians were resisting the desegregation of their schools after the historic Brown v. Board of Education ruling that separate schools for white and black children were inherently unequal. Medgar Evers, executive secretary for the NAACP in Mississippi, repeatedly tried—unsuccessfully—to get WLBT to give black citizens time to respond to programs he felt presented only the white point of view on the issue. He had the Fairness Doctrine on his side, that is, that stations then had to present programs on public issues and enable broadcast of all sides of those issues that were controversial. Evers complained to the FCC, which took little action. In 1963, he finally did appear on WLBT and responded eloquently to a broadcast by Jackson's mayor, who had refused to meet leaders of the black community or to respond favorably to their rising demands for fair treatment. Only a few weeks later, Evers was ambushed and killed.

### The Legal Challenge Begins

The following year—1964, just before hundreds of students from the North went to Mississippi to help register black voters and teach in Freedom Schools—the Reverend Everett Parker and the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ launched what would be a 16-year legal battle over the Jackson station. Parker trained a group of whites who were willing to get involved—a decision not lightly made in those years—to monitor the programming on WLBT. Then Parker, joined by two Mississippi black leaders, Aaron Henry and the Reverend R.L.T. Smith, filed a challenge against the WLBT license, then up for renewal. They claimed that WLBT failed to serve the interest of the large black audience—some 45 percent of Jackson's population—and did not fairly present controversial issues, especially in the area of race relations.



It's hard to believe today, but until the courts decided this case, the only people who could participate in FCC matters were those with an economic stake in the issue or people who could claim electrical interference from broadcasters' signals. So the FCC said that the church's Office of Communication and its allies had no standing in the case and renewed the license. It did, however, acknowledge that the station, owned then by Lamar Life Broadcasting, was less than zealous in its adherence to the Fairness Doctrine.

The church appealed the FCC ruling, saying that its charges merited a public hearing. The federal appeals court panel that heard the case agreed. Writing for the court, Judge Warren Burger said that "in order to safeguard the public interest in broadcasting … we hold that some 'audience participation' must be allowed in license renewal proceedings." This decision opened the doors to the public interest movement that saw groups challenging licenses, negotiating concessions from broadcasters trying to sell stations, and seeking everything from an end to cigarette advertising to improvements in children's television programming.

The appeals court ordered a hearing, which was held in Jackson in 1967. By this time, WLBT had changed its lawyers, hiring the influential Washington firm of Arnold & Porter, Paul Porter being a former FCC chairman. It had also fired the manager who seemed to be the lightning rod in the case and started hiring black announcers and broadcasting black church services. But it would eventually prove too little, too late, as the case continued through the FCC and the courts.

## The Courts Decide

In 1968, despite a strong dissent by commissioners Kenneth Cox and Nicholas Johnson, the FCC once again renewed the license and once again the challengers appealed and won. It was Burger's last opinion before moving up to be chief justice of the United States. Brimming with indignation, Burger wrote that the court had not intended that the members of the public be treated as interlopers. He found the record beyond repair and ordered the FCC to open proceedings for a new licensee. Lamar Broadcasting could participate, but it was clear to everyone that it would not retain the license.

The two WLBT decisions stunned the industry. In effect, they told stations around the country that if they discriminated against their black audiences and had few black employees, they, too, could be in trouble. At about the same time, the Office of Communication asked the FCC to issue rules requiring equal employment opportunity in broadcasting. The tide was turn-

## Weaving Together Stories Waiting to Be Told

Writing a book is like preparing a long newspaper series, only more so. First, I went to the law books to read the two appeals court decisions and then tracked down the FCC files at the National Archives at College Park, Maryland, to learn that a mere 10-page petition filed in 1964 had generated 25 grocery-sized boxes of documents during the next 16 years. I went through them all, some several times. At first much of what I found could have been in Greek for all I knew, but as I did more interviews and consulted other files, documents that had previously been meaningless took on relevance.

Having learned from inadequate record keeping for an earlier book, I marked files with their source, including archival volume numbers and locations, and set up filing systems, one chronological (for actions before the case began, turning points in the case, and the status today of issues it raised), the other alphabetical (for people involved, from FCC commissioners to WLBT employees).

This case's paper trail was a rich one. In addition to the papers at the National Archives, I went to the Mississippi Department of Archives & History in Jackson, the Library of Congress, the Washingon National Records Center in Suitland, Maryland, and used collections of personal papers at colleges and universities in New York and Mississippi. These records enriched my interviews, helping jog memories of events that occurred 35 years earlier, and corroborating (or not) faulty memories.

Sometimes serendipity takes over. For example, Patricia Derian, a former Mississippi political activist and Clinton administration figure whom I knew had been involved in a latter stage of the case, told me that in 1964 she and another woman I knew had helped monitor WLBT to document its programming. I would never have learned this on my own since the plaintiffs had promised never to reveal the monitors' identities. Another time, when I was wrestling with the complexity of the last stage of the case, I looked back at a document I'd copied and forgotten. Attached to it were several news stories from 1973 detailing the case and quoting key players. Best of all, however, was Bill Greider's Washington Post story in which he wrote that the case was like "a mudball fight in a small room." That phrase had been there all along, just waiting for me to find it. Which, I suppose, could be said about all the stories in the book that were just waiting to be told. ■ —K.M.

ing in that direction anyway in the late 1960's, but the WLBT case made it difficult for the commission to turn its back on this request.

While the FCC was considering who should run the station permanently, it named an interim operator—and that's when change really started to occur. Communications Improvement, Inc. had an integrated board and wanted four things from management: that it hire more blacks; that it create an integrated children's program; that it provide more balanced news coverage, and that it continue to make a profit. After a few months, the board fired the holdover station manager from Lamar's ownership days and hired the first black station manager in the country, William Dilday. He sent reporters on stories that they had never covered before. Ultimately, the station won a prestigious Peabody Award for exposing the conflicts of interest of a leading state legislator.

**At a critical time in U.S. history, federal regulators had to listen to citizens, not just to broadcasters. … People started to think differently about how television affected their lives, and young attorneys established public interest communications law firms to help community groups 'talk back to their television sets ….'**

Meanwhile, five groups vied for the permanent license. Washington Post reporter Bill Greider described their battle in a 1973 article as "a mudball fight in a small room." Throughout this part of the case, each group had tried to turn up whatever harmful information it could find about the others. Often they were successful. The most Republican of the groups was at first awarded the license. Then investigations turned up information about the business dealings of one of its members, and the case was reopened. After years of attempting to reach a settlement—delayed in part because some of the participants weren't willing to commit to majority black ownership—the principal players finally reached an agreement. A merged group with, indeed, majority black ownership received the license. Aaron Henry, once denied the chance to buy airtime on WLBT because of his race, became chairman of the board. WLBT remained majority black owned until 2000, when it merged with a chain of stations now know as Liberty Corp.

## Why This Case Matters

The case is history. The FCC has deregulated much of broadcasting and has put the Fairness Doctrine on the shelf. The courts have made it impossible for the commission to have any equal employment rules with teeth. The public interest movement has waned—although there remain dedicated groups seeking to combat consolidation of media ownership and fight for affirmative action programs. So what difference did this case make?

At a critical time in U.S. history, federal regulators had to listen to citizens, not just to broadcasters. The first WLBT decision gave the public a venue for taking action against broadcasters that were ignoring them and their issues. People started to think differently about how television affected their lives, and young attorneys established public interest communications law firms to help community groups "talk back to their television sets," to use former FCC Commissioner Nicholas Johnson's phrase. The spirit of protest was well under way through the civil rights, antiwar and women's movements, and the legal precedent this case established allowed activists to train their sights on broadcasters.

The case also buttressed the Fairness Doctrine while it still was in effect, reminding stations that they had the obligation to present controversial issues and allow response time for people who disagreed. Even without the doctrine, the standard of fairness today is higher for local TV stations now than it was at the beginning of this case.

As a result of this case and the equal employment rules, the FCC required, for nearly three decades, that broadcasters do more to hire and promote minorities and women. These rules helped lead to the diversity that you now see on your TV newscast. And in Mississippi itself, WLBT intensified its coverage of the black community at a time of vast change in that state. Most of all, perhaps, this case showed once again what one small group of individuals could do to make government responsive if they were willing to stay the course. ■

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WATCHDOG

# Digging Beneath Quotes to Tell the Story

## A reporter decides to 'cover what government does instead of what politicians say.'

### By David Cay Johnston

Nearly a decade ago I set out to show that there was a better way to report on tax. The idea had two parts. The first was to largely ignore what politicians said about the tax system on the theory that this was already well covered. The second was to focus on how the tax system actually works after the laws are enacted, to get at how all of the promises of reform and relief and cuts and targeted favors translate into actual policy.

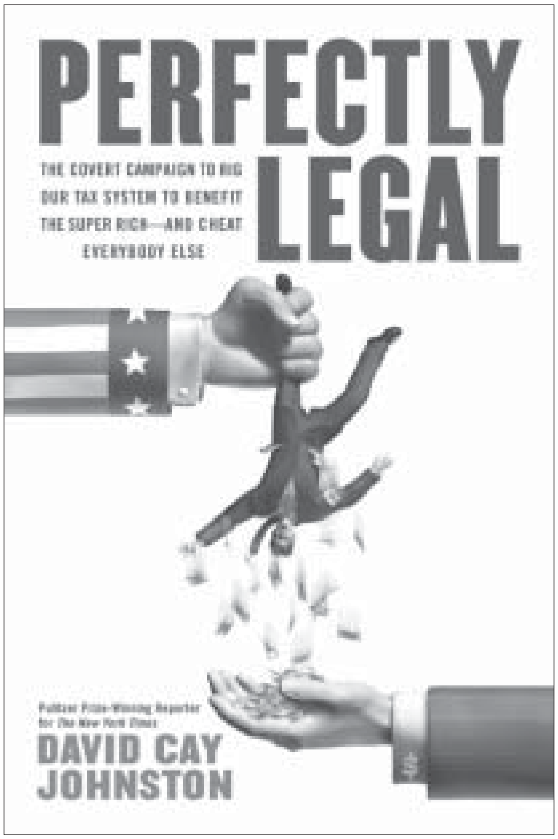
The intent was to examine not what politicians say, but what they have done.

It is an idea that I wish would dominate journalism. I know that is what readers want. In survey after survey, the letters to the editors of the better newspapers and cocktail party chatter all show the same thing. People want news with substance and clarity, they want the hard work of making sense of issues done for them, and they want facts that are rounded and even-handed so they can apply their own lens of perception and draw their own conclusions. Of course readers, viewers and listeners soak up O.J.-Monica-Chandra-Scott Peterson-Michael Jackson, but they want that as dessert, not the main course.

And people are really tired of news they can't use, which explains much of the slide in circulation and viewership. My favorite example of losing sight of basics is a Philadelphia Inquirer story a few years back on the budget of suburban Montgomery County, the most critical market for the Inquirer's future. The story was short. It reported on the three county commissioners speaking ill of one another. It had not a single word on whether property taxes would rise or fall, the budget for road repairs would change, or any of the other issues that actually mattered to me as a homeowner, resident and parent.

### A Different Kind of Coverage

The idea of breaking away from "he said" journalism, of focusing on what Washington does, first came to me when I was at the Los Angeles Times. It was 1980, on the night Ronald Reagan was elected President. Clearly he intended to change Washington. He promised fewer taxes, less regulation, and less spending as well as vowing that Cold War détente would give way to a drive to crush godless Communism.


PERFECTLY
LEGAL
THE COVERT CAMPAIGN TO RIG OUR TAX SYSTEM TO BENEFIT THE SUPER RICH—AND CHEAT EVERYBODY ELSE
Pulitzer Prize-Winning Reporter for The New York Times
DAVID CAY JOHNSTON

The idea began when the music stopped at Simply Blues, a Hollywood restaurant, and someone tuned on a television set just as Reagan delivered his victory speech. My date joined a booing crowd in throwing ice cubes at the television. My mind drifted to thoughts of a new era and how best to craft the first rough draft of the history that would unfold over the next four or eight years.

Soon I approached the national editor with an idea. I asked to be made the paper's second White House correspondent, but subject to one crucial rule: I could not go to the White House. Ever.

Instead of writing about what the President said, I proposed mining executive orders, presidential letters, and anything else to focus entirely on what the President was actually doing. I laid out rich veins of action to be mined for stories. The editor said it was a superb idea and would surely generate lots of news—and that was the problem. He imagined friction with the Washington bureau and the regular White House correspondent, and he said it just would not be worth it. Readers were discounted in his equation.

A decade and a half later I had shown a new way to cover police as bureaucrats with guns, to cover nonprofits as hard news and (at The Philadelphia Inquirer) breaking new ground in covering the burgeoning casino industry. Yet I still hungered to cover Washington without going there, to cover what government does instead of what politicians say.

Fortunately the legendary Gene Roberts, who had brought me to Philadelphia, had come out of retirement to rejoin The New York Times. Roberts shared my view that taxes were badly covered, that there was too much of what politicians promised and not enough on what they had delivered. He brought me into the Times.

At first my immediate editors thought I should work from Washington. I protested.

Washington beguiles, and perhaps forces, reporters to cover sayings instead of doings. Doubters should look at the career of Jim Warren, a great and insightful reporter who came to Washington as the Chicago Tribune bureau chief vowing to be apart from the system. Today he is so thoroughly a Washington journalist that he has become one of its televised stars.

In New York, I sent myself to tax school at my desk. Soon various Times's editors, and a few reporters, asked what I was doing. They would see me at my desk, piled high with thick books of statistical tables or standing at the printer as pages and pages of court decisions came out. Now and then they spotted me doing algebra. Some of them told me they thought I must be nuts.

It did not help that my first few stories had all the clarity of mud. But I broke a few good stories here and there and after a few years began to get notice outside the paper for the substance of my reports.

There is nothing magic about what I do. There are others who do the same sort of work. There should be many others. Many others.

## Taking Reporting Seriously

The journalistic problems that drove me to try and find a better way to report on taxes are not confined to this subject. They are a growing cancer on serious journalism.

Ask the person next to you on the airplane or at the school play or in the supermarket checkout line about the news, and you will get back all sorts of responses. Many people will quickly turn to how much of what is in newspapers, magazines and on television and radio is fluff or is controversy devoid of substance.

Senator Christopher Dodd of Connecticut complained to me recently about the degradation in the quality of news since he first came to Washington in 1975. He said he actually longed for many of the reporters who he said used to grill him about issues because they asked questions about matters of substance.

"Now it's 'give me a quote,'" he said, thrusting his wine glass at me like it was a microphone. "You've got all these reporters who don't know anything …," he complained before waxing nostalgically about reporters who understood Pentagon procurement and other issues that informed their work.

I knew exactly what he meant. Earlier that day a young woman stopped me on the street, announced that she was a reporter for Sinclair Broadcasting, and thrust a microphone in my face. Suddenly a camera appeared. Without so much as asking my name, she declared that female circumcision is illegal in the United States and asked what I thought about "a growing movement" to ban male circumcision.

Ignoring whether her premise was factual, I looked squarely into the camera and said: "In a world overflowing with important issues you think this is news? Shame on you."

Earlier this year a reporter for another newspaper's Washington bureau sought me out to express admiration for my work. I told him that he can do the same thing, just read the government's data and decide for yourself what is significant and then go report out the story.

"Oh no," he said, "legislators would refuse to talk if they really disliked what they read."

"So what?" I said.

Lots of people do not return my calls. I try to dig out of the record what they have said, but in the end they might just get a mention that they declined comment.

The reporter replied that without quotes his editors would not be satisfied. Being cut off by politicians or their flacks could mean reassignment back home.

It was not the first time I had heard such nonsense. I wish it would have been the last.

This idea that reporters depend on politicians or anyone for quotes is a cancer of fearful journalism tinged with favor for those who want to escape accountability. Nobody is required to give us quotes or answer questions. Nobody has to return our telephone calls.

But the funny thing about politicians is that they love to talk. And their offices spew out all sorts of statements that can be mined for comments. And saying a politician declined comment means more space to explicate on the issues.

Here's an idea for a newspaper editor who lacks the budget to open foreign bureaus, but knows readers want international news. Assign a savvy reporter to cover foreign affairs from his or her desk. Tell the reporter not to worry about the official version of events from Washington because other reporters and the state department press office will take care of that. Just build a list of names and contacts at the embassies of other governments, and at their foreign ministries, and report on what they are saying about our government's actions.

In time readers will get a different, and informing, take on world events. ■

*David Cay Johnston is a reporter for The New York Times. His recent book, "Perfectly Legal: The Covert Campaign to Rig Our Tax System to Benefit the Super Rich—and Cheat Everybody Else," was awarded a medal by Investigative Reporters and Editors as book of the year. In 2001, he won the Pulitzer Prize for his beat reporting "that exposed loopholes and inequities in the U.S. tax code."*

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# Measuring the News Media's Effectiveness

## A new annual report locates plenty of contradictory trends and perceptions.

By Dante Chinni

The news media in 2004 are a study in contradiction. Conglomeration has made them bigger and more powerful than ever. But surveys show that most outlets have dwindling audiences. The same four or five stories tend to dominate every 24-hour cable network on any given day. But the Internet offers the public a much broader reach of news outlets and a more comprehensive news diet. The American public is in danger of being force-fed a homogenized news product. But it also faces the possibility of splitting into thousands of tiny publics, with each group getting a different version of reality from a different set of Web sites.

Taken together, this set of incongruities adds up to a time of peril and promise for the news media. And in the decade ahead, we are likely to find out in which of these directions the public and the media will head.

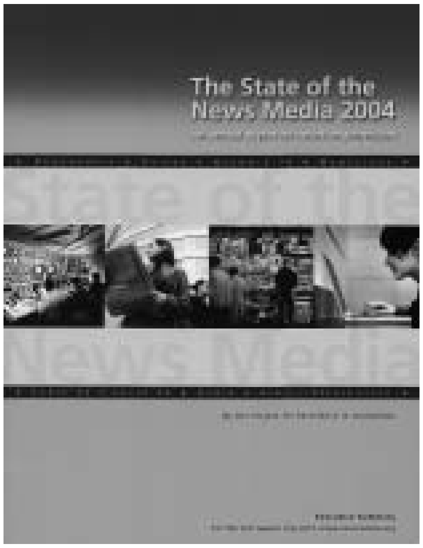
Last year the Project for Excellence in Journalism set out to produce "The State of the News Media 2004," which will become an annual report. As conceptualized by the project and The Pew Charitable Trusts (which funds it), the report was to provide a comprehensive look at the news media from a variety of angles and then provide a glimpse at where they are headed as a whole. To do this, the project gathered data from a variety of sources to use in analyzing eight major media sectors: newspapers, magazines, the Internet, radio, ethnic/alternative media and network, local and cable TV news. For each of these media it considered six areas: content, audience, economics, ownership, news investment, and the public's attitudes.

What the project found is contained in more than 400 printed pages, and its conclusions are murky. The data don't flow like rivers toward definable points in the distance. Instead they act more like oil spills, as they run in several directions at once. Or as the report says, "We are witnessing conflicting trends of fragmentation and convergence simultaneously, and they sometimes lead in opposite directions."

### Where Is Journalism Headed?

Journalism is in the middle of an "epochal change," according to the report, and where it will end up is not yet clear. But in 2004, some clear trends are visible. Eight major ones define where journalism is headed across all the media studied. And the identified trends are converging to reshape the news landscape.

1. A growing number of news outlets are chasing relatively static or even shrinking audiences for news. One result of this is that most sectors of the news media are losing audience. The only sectors seeing general audience growth today are online, ethnic and alternative media.
2. Much of the new investment in journalism today is in disseminating the news, not in collecting it. While there are exceptions, in general journalists face real pressures trying to maintain quality.
3. In many parts of the news media, the raw elements of news are increasingly shown as the end product. This is particularly true in the newer, 24-hour media. In cable and online, there is a tendency toward a jumbled, chaotic, partial quality in some reports, without much synthesis or even ordering of the information.
4. Journalistic standards vary even inside a single news organization. Some companies vary their news agenda, their rules on separating advertising from news, and even their ethical standards.



5. Without investing in building new audiences, the long-term outlook for many traditional news outlets appears problematic. Many traditional media are maintaining their profitability by focusing on cost-cutting, including reducing the resources going to their newsrooms.
6. Convergence seems more inevitable and potentially less threatening to journalists than it might have seemed a few years ago. At least for now, online journalism appears to be leading more to convergence with older media than to replacement of it. This change offers the potential for new audiences, new ways of storytelling, more immediacy, and more citizen involvement.
7. The biggest question might not be technologic but economic. For journalists, online appears to represent opportunity for old media, but the bigger issue may be financial. Can online provide as strong an economic foundation for newsgathering as television and newspapers have done?

8. Those who would manipulate the press and public appear to be gaining leverage over journalists who cover them. As more outlets compete for information, it becomes a seller's market.

Together these eight trends have led to overall thinning of the news product. In nearly every medium news coverage, in general, has gotten lighter. Large national news outlets, such as network news programs and news magazines, have shifted more of their coverage to entertainment and lifestyle in the hopes of holding onto their audience. On the evening network news, government coverage has dropped from 32 percent of stories in 1987 to just 16 percent in 2003. And in news magazines, national affairs coverage made up 35 percent of pages as recently as 1995. In 2001, it was 30 percent. In 2003, it has dropped to 25 percent.

At the same time, the increased news demand created by the 24-hour news-when-you-want-it cable news and the Internet places news organizations in a difficult spot. They are forced to churn out more stories or update news more often, while keeping costs down. Beat reporting has taken a hit across all media, but particularly on television where it has become more important to have on-air jacks-of-all-trades who can cover a trial one day and a bank merger the next.

## The Effects of Media Trends

The effect of such cuts may already be apparent in the stories the media have missed in recent years. For months the 2001 energy "crisis" in California was blamed on a lack of power plants. Only later was it discovered that power companies might have been tampering with the energy supply, arranging for shortages to appear in order to increase electricity prices.

Citizens seem to be paying attention to what they are seeing and hearing. Surveys show that the public regards journalism as just another business, more focused on the bottom line and self-aggrandizement than on being a public service. These attitudes can be found in two numbers:

- Between 1985 and 2002 the number of Americans who think news organizations are highly professional declined from 72 to 49 percent.
- During that same time period, those who think news organizations are moral declined from 54 to 39 percent, and those who think they are immoral rose from 13 to 36 percent.

As the report puts it in describing this divide: "Journalists believe they are working in the public interest and are trying to be fair and independent in that cause. The public thinks these journalists are either lying or deluding themselves. The public believes that news organizations are operating largely to make money and that the journalists who work for these organizations are primarily motivated by professional ambition and self-interest."

In their short-term quest to gain audience, are the news media undermining their franchise of being reliable sources for serious news coverage? From what this report discovered, the answer increasingly looks like yes.

The news media might be able to find a way out of some of these problems through the Internet. While the old-line media has viewed online journalism suspiciously since its inception, the Internet might afford news organizations the opportunity to go deeper in their coverage, particularly as media convergence becomes more commonplace. There are two big "ifs" in this equation: if news organizations are willing to spend what is necessary to support serious reporting and if they recognize and try to reach the audience that exists for serious news.

One interesting finding in the project's report is the rise of what one might call a boutique niche media. The Economist with its more serious text-heavy approach to news coverage had its circulation nearly triple between 1988 and 2002, while Time and Newsweek both lost subscribers. The audience for National Public Radio (NPR) more than doubled in the past 10 years. And The New York Times circulation is increasingly scattered throughout the country in areas based on cultural and income factors. These news outlets charge more than their competitors (NPR does it through donation requests), yet they are finding new audiences.

No one expects the news media to simply do good journalism for the sake of doing it. Conveying news remains a business that is often subject to the will of boardrooms and forced to meet specified profit margins. And when news companies go broke bringing viewers, listeners and readers the news, they can't serve the journalistic mission. But the current audience decline and receding public trust ought to caution news organizations not to make decisions about coverage only on the basis of meeting budget targets.

The years ahead look like they will offer the news media new opportunities to reach out to their audiences. The multimedia capabilities of the Web are likely to grow and give old-line print outlets the chance to enliven their coverage with audio and video. And as broadband connections increase the network news divisions might find new life with a Web platform that allows them to counter to the "always on" reportage of the 24-hour cable networks, which often produces "live" but ultimately empty standup reports.

Technology alone won't save the news media. News organizations have to strengthen the basics of sound journalism—with solid reporting, engaging writing, and tough, thorough editing. But they might need to find new Web-based revenue models to make those things possible. Devoting the necessary resources to bolster the journalism is not easy. It will require a change in the mindset of some news organizations where the focus is on cheaper and faster. But without such integral changes, the news media will continue on a road of decline. ■

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The Bangkok Post managed to avoid Prime Minister Thaksin's wrath "at a time when less august watchdogs within the Thai press were being systematically silenced," says **Philip J. Cunningham**, who writes for the South China Morning Post and other publications in Asia. But in February the Post's editor, Veera Pratheepchaikul, lost his job when government officials applied pressure on the paper's management because of stories deemed too critical of Thaksin. As Veera tells Cunningham, "What is happening now is worse than under the military regimes because now Thailand is democratic, and this isn't supposed to happen."

In China, the role the Internet plays in dissemination of news and opinion is large and controversial. Two individuals who closely follow the interplay between government attempts to limit the Internet's reach within China and its evolving growth as a key communication tool write about these issues. **Xiao Qiang**, director of the Berkeley China Internet Project at the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley, describes how "the transformative effect of the Internet has already set China on an irreversible course toward greater openness and public participation in its social and political life," and **Jonathan Zittrain**, cofounder of Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet & Society, urges Western news organizations to use technology to work "to circumvent Internet filtering from its side, instead of requiring that those trying to get to news figure out ways to reach blocked sites on their own." ■

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# Government Pressure and Thailand's Press

## When a leading newspaper editor is fired, troubling signs point to the interference of business and government interests.

### By Philip J. Cunningham

The Bangkok Post seemed pretty well insulated from the government interference that was dogging the rest of the Thai media during Prime Minister Thaksin's rapid consolidation of power in the past three years. Centrist and pro-business, the Post has survived numerous coups d'etat, authoritarian military rulers, corrupt civilian administrations, and the excesses of mob-led democracy. Indeed, student activists in the 1970's referred to the Post as the "CIA" paper, an unfair and essentially xenophobic accusation based on one part truth (one of the Post's founders was a retired American OSS officer) and two parts rumor (they didn't like the way it reported, or failed to report, the events leading up to the bloody coup of October 6, 1976).

In contrast, the Post's main English-language rival, The Nation, founded by the young, ambitious Suthichai Yoon in the 1970's just as students were getting restive, has enjoyed the advantages and disadvantages of being the new kid on the block: strident but less influential, fewer apparent vested interests but less advertising revenue. If The Nation can be characterized as skinny and undernourished at times, reflecting budget restraint and a lack of advertising support, the Post, in contrast, suffers from journalistic gout, ample ad revenue coupled with an unspoken fear of biting the hand that feeds it.

Thaksin's CEO-style approach to politics showed some early promise in reviving business fortunes battered by the 1997 economic collapse, so things went swimmingly at first. Being a pro-business paper with a middle-of-the-road editorial policy and the self-imposed decorum of being Thailand's leading English-language window to the world, the Post was the bearer of good news. Whether by habit or design, the Post rarely gives its readership the low-down on the shocking, gruesome and tragically endemic violence that is the daily fare of Thai language tabloids. While this is arguably a reflection of discretion and good taste, it also keeps the less savory aspects of Thai society out of sight and out of mind to the "benefit" of diplomacy, tourism and business. The gray lady approach of eschewing stories on rape, domestic violence, suicide and traffic accidents is a legitimate editorial stance. But what about bodies washed up on the shore and bullet-ridden corpses with political implications?

## The Price of Acquiescence

The current upsurge of unrest in the Muslim-dominated provinces of the Thai south, for example, which has since the January 4, 2004 raid on an army base included some 20 school burnings, a hotel bombing, dozens of machete attacks, sniper shootings, torture, abductions and disappearances, and the April 28th separatist attacks that resulted in 108 attackers being gunned down by police does not make for pleasant reading. But it makes an especially shocking leap from the pages of the Post, which had previously downlayed reports of the early stirrings of Mujahadeen-linked violence in that region for reasons of politics, commerce and style.

Prime Minister Thaksin set the tone for coverage (or lack thereof) by repeatedly dismissing the bad news from the south as mere "banditry" and "conflicts of interest among drug dealers." Even after the Bali bombing of 2002, when the Thai language press began to report more aggressively on terror activities in south Thailand, Thaksin openly castigated journalists in Hong Kong and Bangkok who dared to suggest that Thailand might have a homegrown terror problem of its own. And this March, the prime minister cavalierly dismissed the unsolved disappearance and suspected murder of Somchai Neelaphaijit, a renowned lawyer who had been defending five Thai Muslim suspects brutally tortured by the police, as "a domestic spat."

Following the prime minister's lead down the primrose path has again and again proved to be bad journalism. While it would be an exaggeration to say the Post had embraced Thaksin, it nonetheless effectively avoided his wrath at a time when less august watchdogs within the Thai press were being systematically silenced. The absence of alternative views on television was especially deafening, as Thaksin used his position as prime minister to assume the levers of control at state-controlled radio and TV, while as Thailand's number one tycoon he bought ITV, a formerly independent station that had been set up specifically to offer an alternative to state-dominated broadcast media. The print press, being less amenable to centralized control, came increasingly under attack, not so much in the form of draconian censorship but rather through quirky, idiosyncratic attacks voiced by Prime Minister Thaksin himself.

The owner of the small but respected Naew Na, a Thai language daily, was approached by Thaksin during a friendly game of golf and asked to sack his star columnist and commentator, Prasong Soonsiri. The owner balked and went public with the story, and Prasong continues to write withering criticisms of Thaksin, largely couched in fable and metaphor. But another writer on the same paper was pressured to leave. Respected academic Thirayuth Boonmee was roundly criticized for daring to criticize and told to "go back to the library where you belong." The Nation Group, which lost its contract to produce news for ITV, was further yanked around and humiliated with advertising boycotts, spurious assets investigations, and an increasingly unfriendly regulatory environment that nearly decimated its television channel.

Foreign journalists were not immune to Thaksin's fury. Four Far Eastern Economic Review [FEER] journalists were named in a lése majesté case for allegedly impugning the dignity of Thailand's highly respected monarch, while a close reading of the news snippet on the contrary suggests that it was Thaksin himself who had annoyed the king with his intrusive business dealings. Two FEER correspondents who reside in Thailand were subject to xenophobic pressures and only narrowly escaped jail or deportation. The Economist's annual report on Thailand was banned, and International Herald Tribune contributor Philip Bowring was roundly booed by Thaksin for suggesting the prime minister's much-vaunted "Thaksinomics" economic program was not what it seemed.

## The Bangkok Post Controversy

The first sign of trouble for the Bangkok Post came in the form of a news story it reported but never effectively followed up on. The Central Group, a department store and hotel chain, which is the largest single shareholder in the Bangkok Post, was threatened by potentially backbreaking legal action from the Thaksin administration over disputed land rights in Bangkok and Pattaya. Although a quid pro quo has never been proven, the Central Group not only resolved its dispute with the government but also has become an outspoken government supporter and partner in government-sponsored economic schemes such as the Bangkok Fashion City Extravaganza.

Then in late February, Veera Pratheepchaikul, the editor of the Bangkok Post, was unceremoniously sacked. The Post, like the rest of the Thai media, had been suffering from the oppressive atmosphere of Thaksin's nanny state: "Why didn't you give more positive coverage to government accomplishments?" "Stop writing about bird flu!" "What will foreigners think?" "Don't you care about the fate of the nation?" Additionally the Post was hit with specific in-house complaints about certain editorials, critical articles, and even letters to the editor. Sacked editor Veera related to me that the outside meddling that led to his dismissal was gradual but inexorable, making his last months on the job physically exhausting as the tempo of complaints increased.

The tipping point that put the Post at odds with the government and the editorial side of the paper against pro-Thaksin voices in management, seems to have come from a "perfect storm" of three unrelated news stories that cast Prime Minister Thaksin in a negative light: King Bhumibol's December 5th birthday speech, in which Thaksin was chided for his arrogance; the sudden upswing of terror attacks in the south, and the government cover-up of the chicken flu outbreak.

"I know the prime minister doesn't like being criticized," said King Bhumibol in his annual public address. "Read the papers, let them criticize, listen to them." A Post sub-editor headlined the December 5th story containing the above quote to read "King warns P.M. on Arrogance." The judiciousness of using "arrogance" became a subsequent source of contention and tension between Post staffers and supporters of the prime minister.

## Political Meddling in Newsroom Decisions

What might seem trivial on a word-by-word, day-by-day basis adds up to something altogether more threatening in the cumulative. "In 30 years, there has been no political meddling as shocking as this," Veera explained to me on his last day in the editor's office. "What is happening now is worse than under the military regimes because now Thailand is democratic, and this isn't supposed to happen."

Veera told me that Central Group's board representative, Suthikiati Chirathivat, who had the habit of showing up for a "pop-in" visit at the Bangkok Post about once a week, had been unhappy with a number of editorial decisions and had given him three months to "get in line." Then on February 20, 2004, Suthikiati dropped a bombshell, saying that Veera was out of a job.

Post Publishing Plc's Board of Directors denies economic or political interference, saying Veera was moved for the purpose of "business expansion." But accounts leaked to The Nation and other outlets suggest that Central Group politics and ad revenue were decisive factors in the abrupt editorial change. A generous advertising deal from the Central Group and other department stores participating in the Bangkok Fashion City Extravaganza only served to exacerbate rather than heal the rift between the editorial and advertising sides of the Post.

Veera has been quick to point out he was no hero in this free press saga. He willingly walked the tightrope, trying to maintain credibility while juggling mounting political and commercial pressures. In his last few months on the job, he angered fellow staffers for uncharacteristically spiking a number of articles and even a column by Post veteran Kanjana Spindler, Thailand's answer to Maureen Dowd, who poked fun, in a delightfully caustic manner, at the hubris and delusion of a government-sponsored fashion parade that coursed down one of the dirtiest streets in Bangkok. Around the time Kanjana's column was due to run, a full-page color ad sponsored in part by the Central Group ran in the Post expressing "Honorable thanks to H.E. [His Excellency] Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the Government" for the "great success" of "The 1st Fashion Phenomenon."

The crux of the matter at the Post was that the right hand was taking serious money from the pro-government fashionistas, while the left hand insisted on the freedom to criticize the same. And it is to the credit of replacement editor, Kowit Sanandang, that Kanjana's controversial column belatedly got the airing it so thoroughly deserved.

## Wither Thailand's Watchdogs?

Fortunately for readers, Thai print media watchdogs have not lost their bark or their bite, although some have been replaced by lapdogs, others muzzled or chased away. In the past year, nearly a dozen ace reporters or editors have lost their jobs under conditions fairly described as media interference, including the case of Siam Rath Weekly editor, Rungruang Preechakul, who saw copy rewritten, entire issues confiscated, and was pressed to quit for his critical coverage of the government during the bird flu story.

The Thai Post, (not to be confused with Post Today, a Thai language paper launched by the Bangkok Post last year) is currently being sued by Shin Corp. along with courageous NGO media reformer Supinya Klangnarong for alleging that the prime minister's family company had benefited under his political leadership. The Thai Post, which is vulnerable, rallied to Veera's defense, showing its support for the Post with a political cartoon, an especially effective form of political criticism that is in full blossom now. Naew Na ran a front-page article about "dark influences" at the Post and a hard-hitting editorial applauding Veera's distinguished two and a half decades-long journalism career dating back to his fights with dictatorial regimes. "Thaksin is killing the media watchdog," lamented the Naew Na editorial, "closing the eyes and ears of the people."

The Bangkok Post, masthead motto "The Newspaper You Can Trust," is the last in a long line of Thai papers hit with political editorial interference and, in keeping with its establishment pretensions, it has been rather reticent about its own demise. Pichai Chuensuksawadi told a concerned audience at the Foreign Correspondents'' Club that he could understand if some readers were upset and might not elect to buy the Post anymore, but he counseled patience, saying the Post would remain true to its mission. Rather than shed light on the political battles going on within the Post, he urged the audience instead to look for "proof in the pudding."

Thepchai Yong, a Nation Group editor, who himself was pressured out of the editor's chair at Khomchatluk for running a story on alleged cheating by the prime minister's son, has written persistently and perceptively on government media meddling. Thus it was very much in character for The Nation to come to the Post's defense in its struggle for editorial control, though there is both high-mindedness and practical self-interest in doing so, as the forces rattling the Post could one day destroy The Nation. Suriya Jungrungreangkit, a close associate of Thaksin and minister of industry in the current government, has in recent months bought up as much as 30 percent of The Nation group's shares. Fortunately for Nation readers, the 800-pound gorilla in the boardroom has not yet caused The Nation to lose its bold voice.

In the spring, Central Department Store had promotional giveaways of the Bangkok Post and Post Today, even on days when articles critical of the government were run. This is a happy reminder that the success of a newspaper requires a healthy distance from the powers that be. And a certain amount of passive-aggressive compensation for the cave-in to higher powers is evident in recent issues of the Post, which has used the word "regime" to describe the Thaksin administration and has redoubled its efforts to uncover dirt on the badly bungled southern unrest. And fans of Veera's subtly subversive news analysis no doubt welcome the continuation of his weekly column.

But when it comes to offering the public an explanation for axed articles and buried stories, not to mention the removal of a respected editor, the Post has maintained an almost Orwellian silence, as if nothing had happened. Or as I was told by an embattled Post staffer on the day Veera lost his job as editor, "If you want to really know what's happening at the Bangkok Post, you better read The Nation." ■

*Philip J. Cunningham, a 1998 Nieman Fellow, writes for the South China Morning Post and other publications with a focus on politics and culture in Asia. He wrote a version of this story about Veera Pratheepchaikul's case, "Press Under Fire in Thailand," which was published in the February 26, 2004 Asian Wall Street Journal.*

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# The Rising Tide of Internet Opinion in China

## Online discussions 'now actually drive the agenda of official media.'

**By Xiao Qiang**

On March 17, 2003, Sun Zhigang, a 27-year-old college graduate who was working for a graphic design company in Guangzhou, was stopped by police. He was detained for not having proper identity papers and died in custody three days later. After authorities refused to investigate the circumstances of his death, Sun's parents posted information on his case and a petition letter on the Internet. His case was picked up by a reporter from the Southern Metropolis News, one of China's most progressive papers, and then the story hit the Net.

Within two hours after being posted on China's largest news portal, sina.com, this news item generated 4,000 comments from readers. Almost immediately, the case was being discussed throughout Chinese cyberspace, from official sites to personal Weblogs and e-mail groups. Police brutality is not new in China. For many years, international human rights organizations and those advocating legal reforms in China have called for abolishment of the Custody and Repatriation system, an inherently arbitrary form of administrative detention under which Sun was held. But the explosive reaction from Internet users was unprecedented. The official media, including CCTV, soon picked up on the public outrage and reported heated debates over treatment of migrants living in the cities and police corruption.

On May 29th, in an unprecedented appeal to the National People's Congress, four professors, including two from Beijing University Law School, called on the state prosecutor to investigate Sun's death. Three months later, the government abolished the entire system, and the officials responsible for Sun Zhigang's death were convicted in court.

### The Internet's Role in China

This was a stunning result and marked the beginning of the Internet's influential role in China's public life. After eight years of explosive growth, the number of Chinese Internet users is quickly reaching 80 million—surpassing the number of members of the Chinese Communist Party. About one-fifth of Chinese netizens regularly make use of BBS (Bulletin Board Systems), the most politically active place in Chinese cyberspace. These BBS's can be run by individuals, commercial companies such as sina.com, or government agencies.

At any given time, there are literally tens of thousands of users active in these BBS and forums, reading news, searching for information, and debating current affairs. Even on official Web sites such as People's Daily, its popular BBS, Strong Nation Forum, has more than 280,000 registered members and more than 12,000 posts per day. Together with e-mail listservs, chat rooms, instant message services, wireless short text messaging, and an emerging Weblogging community, the BBS's have provided unprecedented opportunities for Chinese netizens to engage in public affairs.

In 2003, there were more than half a dozen of those "online uprising" events. These were mostly cases involving police abuse, corruption, crime and social justice. Not every case had as direct a political result as Sun Zhigang's, but together they resulted in creating a new form of public opinion in China: "Wangluo Yulun" (Internet Opinion) became a formal phenomenon and entered the Chinese public discourse.

This online uprising has had a significant impact on Chinese society because there is still no systematic way for the public to participate in and express themselves about policy and social issues. When the online discussions on current events are within the limits of government political tolerance, then the official media is allowed to discuss and report on them. Since the traditional media remains under tight editorial control of propaganda officials, without the Internet their reports, by themselves, will never be able to generate such debate. Within current political limits, these Internet opinions have also reduced the risk to traditional media of reporting on these issues; at times they even generate commercial pressure for them to do so.

> **Despite authorities' persistent efforts of control, the rising tide of Internet opinion is a fact of life in Chinese society now and will continue to play an influential role in expanding the space for free expression and even in creating social change.**

Journalists are also helping blur the boundaries between traditional and online media by opening their own Weblogs. Likewise, some online writers have built a professional reputation and are now working in official media. In the last year and a half, it has become clear that the power of the Net and its interplay with traditional media are creating the public opinion in China.

It is important to understand the highly distributed, decentralized nature of the online movements; none has a central leader or organizer. This means that when an issue resonates with millions of Chinese netizens, it is expressed not only on BBS's, but also through the "implicit" Internet communication channels and within the growing Weblogging community. Instead of being produced by official media, these online uprising events, powered by the Internet in this distributive and immediate way, now drive the agenda of official media.

Emerging as an important group on the Internet are public intellectuals. The Internet has given a voice to professors, lawyers, journalists and independent writers concerned about social and policy issues. The four university professors who led the petition for Sun Zhigang's case present a clear example of this. Although it can be difficult for them to publish in the traditional media, they write and publish on the Net and become opinion leaders in the virtual public sphere. Some have their own Web sites or Weblogs, while others create professional communities such as China Lawyers Network or Home for Reporters. The Internet has given them a place to gather, debate, communicate, publish and receive information and, finally, to collectively articulate and amplify their voices on public matters.

## Government Response

The government's efforts to control Internet content through legal regulations, an Internet police force, and a powerful national information filtering system have been widely reported in recent years. While the overall censorship is still effective, the line between what is permissible or not is blurred by the Internet. The government is also trying to use official Web sites to propagandize in traditional ways. But many official Web sites, such as People's Daily, do not draw as many readers as unofficial, commercial or personal sites. As Sun Zhigang's case demonstrated, the Net has already created a bottom-up force and is constantly negotiating this new space with the old style, top-down censorship and propaganda regime.

Not every online uprising wins in this ongoing battle. Last winter, hundreds of thousands of netizens reacted against a lenient sentence given to a well-connected woman who hit and killed a peasant and injured 12 others with her BMW. Following an explosion of online protest, the government still upheld the verdict, and major Internet portals continued to report the news but banned users' comments.

Three top editors at Southern Metropolis News are now in prison, apparently in retaliation for their aggressive reporting on Sun Zhigang's case, SARS and other issues. Halfway into 2004, the government again seems to have adapted their strategy to regain control in cyberspace. But that's just another chapter in these unfolding changes in China.

Despite authorities' persistent efforts of control, the rising tide of Internet opinion is a fact of life in Chinese society now and will continue to play an influential role in expanding the space for free expression and even in creating social change. The transformative effect of the Internet has already set China on an irreversible course toward greater openness and public participation in its social and political life. ■

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# China and Internet Filters

## When the reporting of major news organizations is blocked, why not do something about it?

**By Jonathan Zittrain**

The Internet in China is filtered. This fact is found nowhere in Chinese newspapers, because the newspapers they read are filtered, too. Chinese citizens know about filtering only through gossip, or they put two and two together while surfing the Web and discover that certain sensitive Web sites are consistently reported to be unavailable on the otherwise-functioning network. Outside China, of course, anyone curious about the nation's Internet filtering practices can search for and then visit the Web site of a journal, such as this one, and learn the facts in more detail, in large part thanks to journalists who cover China from abroad.

As part of a project documenting Internet filtering worldwide, the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School explored and analyzed the situation in China. (A report is at http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/filtering, offering specifics as of late 2002.) We found a range of sites covering dozens of topical categories to be filtered, including dissident and democracy sites, sites covering public health and HIV, sites about religion, Tibet, Taiwan and the home pages of many institutions of higher learning around the world.

Within this expansive range, what stands out as perhaps the primary target of filtering in China, apart from pornography, are sites involving news. China regularly blocks the online homes of the BBC, CNN, Time, PBS, The Miami Herald, and The Philadelphia Inquirer. In our testing of Google's top 100 results for news in 2002, we found that 42 were blocked. Some sites, like those for The Washington Post and Reuters, were wholly blocked for several days and then consistently available for days at a time, perhaps reflecting the fact that the censors read the early edition of the paper and then choose whether to block the paper's site for awhile. Since 2002, China has experimented with more subtle filtering technologies. Rather than blocking entire sites, pages containing certain sensitive terms might cease loading for a Chinese Internet user midway through the display—followed by a limiting of overall Internet access for that user for minutes or hours.

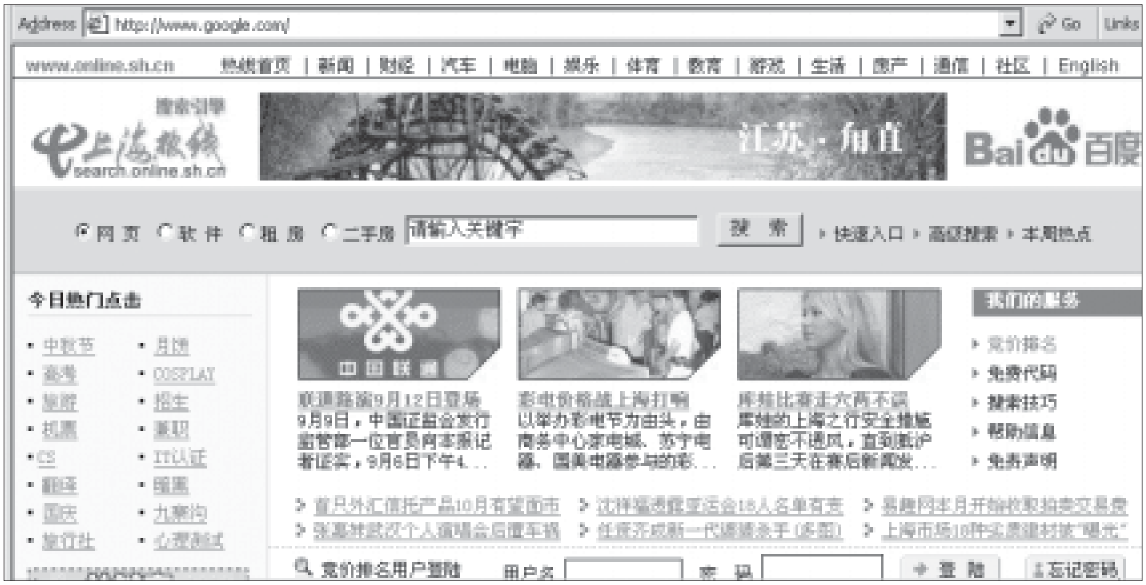
### Accepting Foreign Censorship

It's not a surprise that China's filtering would pay particular attention to news. And it is possible that Western news organizations consider it a badge of honor to be filtered in China and in other countries that censor the Net. But pride in being among the censored shouldn't alone be enough reward for solid news reporting. News organizations should think it fundamental to their mission to ensure that their work reaches all those who wish to see it, despite government meddling.

Such issues confront our academic enterprise in studying filtering. The Berkman Center's report on Chinese filtering was promptly blocked in China. We thought it simply further evidence of the importance the government attaches to alacritous Internet filtering and noted as much when discussing the report. I didn't think further about the issue until we began to expand our filtering research, thanks to separate grants from the MacArthur Foundation and the Open Society Institute. The latter's grant has been used to found the "OpenNet Initiative," a collaboration among the Berkman Center, the Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto, and the Advanced Network Research Group at Cambridge University.

As we gathered with our counterparts at the other universities to begin coordinating our efforts, we realized there were differing views about the aims of the project. In my view, our agenda was to use some technically sophisticated Internet footwork to remotely ferret out information about filtering in places where it would be difficult or even dangerous to do the work on location. In essence, we were to probe other countries' firewalls from the safety of our own offices and then report what was found through a standardized process, such as an interactive digital map of what nations are filtering what content. Then the team could turn to more sophisticated analyses of the data in hand, such as correlating particular instances of filtering with stated shifts in substantive government policies and closely tracking shifts in filtering targets and technologies over time.

Our colleagues had perhaps a more activist view: They'd begun thoroughly documenting the means of faraway users' *circumvention* of Internet filtering and were developing technologies to assist such circumvention. A handful of activist hackers and others had already entered the cat-and-mouse game of helping users bypass government Internet filters through proxy services. For example, a Chinese Internet user unable to reach a given Web site could visit a low-key willing proxy and request that the proxy fetch and retrieve the banned page. A number of such digital intermediaries to those in need



During the Berkman Center's study of Internet filters, the authors simulated access to Google.com as would have been experienced by ordinary users in Beijing at that time. The results, including the screen shot above, showed techniques the Chinese used to prevent access.

have emerged with mixed success and longevity, including the open source Freenet and a brief CIA-funded venture called Triangle Boy. Another ongoing service offered through the U.S. government's Voice of America (VOA) Web is intended for Iranian citizens only. As part of offering a service to Iranians to bypass their ISP's filtering, the VOA *itself* filters sites deemed to be pornographic—including many that are patently not.

Within our newly merged research team, we considered whether if we joined these haphazard circumvention efforts, we would ourselves be crossing a professional line that journalists know all too well. It is one thing to be in the midst of a story, to record it and as faithfully as possible retell it to the readers back home; it is entirely another to affect the story itself.

Our questions about the proper dimensions of our research thus parallel the concerns of journalists who wish to observe and publish without participating. Journalists struggle daily with maintaining neutrality in their reporting and, as a close corollary, noninterference in the subjects studied. Yet reporters have little hesitance in becoming part of the story when their work or sources are imperiled. Journalists have been known to work undercover and have been willing to go to jail to protect the identities of whistleblowers who have trusted them to keep their identities secret.

Although these battles may be rare, news organizations seem far more willing to fight about their right to gather news for a story—and protect the sources who help them gather it—than they are willing to battle for the right to widely publish the results. News organizations forcefully defend their output—the right to *publish*—typically only at those times when a story might be prohibited from being told anywhere.

The court battle by The New York Times to publish the Pentagon Papers is an example of fighting within the court system for the right to publish on the Times's own territory, but it is joined by many more instances of a failure to fight or even appear concerned about censorship.

- Foreign newspapers, for example, respected a Canadian ban on publishing there even the most basic information about the high-profile murder trial of Karla Homolka, the wife and accomplice of serial rapist and murderer, Paul Bernardo.
- In 1986, Malaysia banned the Asian edition of The Wall Street Journal after articles that covered sensitive financial and political matters were found within.
- During the 1980's, Singapore limited Time's circulation after it failed to quickly print a letter to the editor from the prime minister's press secretary claiming errors in the magazine's coverage of the country.
- In 2000, Newsweek hadn't even realized at first that Bangladesh had banned and confiscated its print run because of the magazine's article about women and Islam. ("As far as we are concerned, we have distributed it as per normal," a Newsweek official lamely told Agence France-Presse.)
- And in 2002 The Economist agreed to withhold its weekly print run from Thailand after the government objected to an article about the future of the country's monarchy.

For these actions and reactions, it would seem that each of these publications need consider themselves free only within their countries of origin, or perhaps in the West—leaving distribution elsewhere, even when the topical material in the publications is specifically about faraway regions, to the vicissitudes of local government edicts.

## Is Internet Censorship Worth Fighting?

Censorship of traditional media that happens within the countries who routinely censor seems to be accepted as a fact of life by print publishers and by broadcasters, too. Accepting such censorship might be necessary when delivery trucks, physical broadcast towers, and other in-country support are needed to get physical goods or radio or television programs to willing consumers.

But Internet publishing is different. It offers a much more open field and a staggering opportunity for the distribution of information of importance to the global community. To be sure, such freedom is not automatic—it's an Internet trend that can be fought and largely defeated in the first round by assiduous government filtering or surveillance of citizens' surfing. During the past four years, there has been clever and sustained research into countermeasures against third-party interference in Internet communications. This research has helped users to maintain networked communications even when powerful governments or corporations are overtly hostile to the exchange. It has been conducted and its fruits deployed largely by teenagers who want to share copyrighted music with one another without paying for it. The Western media has covered this peer-to-peer story with great interest, yet they have not appeared to realize that these peer-to-peer technologies can offer the potential to de-censor the news for more than a billion people.

**Major Western news organizations ought to consider joining—indeed, dominating—the Internet cat-and-mouse game against censors, thereby trying to get their news into China without blockage or adulteration.**

Major Western news organizations ought to consider joining—indeed, dominating—the Internet cat-and-mouse game against censors, thereby trying to get their news into China without blockage or adulteration. Of course, news organizations are operated as businesses, and defying powerful governments can be understandably bad for business strategies. This might account for why there has been so little rebellion or even complaint when governments have threatened publishers in the past; publishers have typically bent over backwards to apologize for individual transgressions.

Think about how many more people a news organization could reach if it worked to circumvent Internet filtering from its side, instead of requiring that those trying to get to news figure out ways to reach blocked sites on their own. It might even be that, as a business matter, such illicit digital circulation would help a news organization establish its market in China, in the not-implausible likelihood that the government's repressive policies eventually recede, whether through a gradual liberalization or through a change in regime.

There are millions of people in China who cannot get to a real newsstand and whose secret police have license to vet their mail before delivering it. Many crave the sublime privilege of reading news collected by journalists rather than propagandists. They have Internet access, but they are behind their nation's firewall. Some dare to lose that access—or possibly much more—by circumventing the blocks they encounter. The free news establishment should take it upon itself to meet them halfway or more.

Well before Napster existed, academics such as Lorrie Faith Cranor mapped out the shape of potential networks with lofty names like "Publius," through which unpopular views could be circulated outside of government control. Another team of computer scientists has created a project called "LOCKSS," designing networked systems that can retain mirrored copies of documents and detect corruption or forgery among them, perhaps to preserve the integrity of our written histories for centuries. (Interestingly, two Chinese libraries are participating in the project.)

Though these networks exist in and for the realm of academics, those who are members of the global free press should strive to collectively commission the construction of such places where news reporting can run free and unchanged from its authors' pens, available to anyone with an Internet connection. Building such a network within the Internet could be far cheaper than constructing even one printing plant.

We should consider the front pages of nations' newspapers to be precious documents, to be replicated and shared throughout the world, *especially* in the areas where the paper copy cannot be stocked and the electronic copy is casually blocked.

It's time to greatly expand the paper route—and thanks to the Internet, the risks in doing so are merely business ones, thus calculable and manageable as such. They pale in comparison to the risks taken by genuinely brave reporters who travel war zones around the world to bring *us* the story and to the risks taken by the dissidents and sensitive sources who whisper the secrets we find on the front page. Putting that page on a filtered Web site should be only the beginning; it's time to circulate that page everywhere. ■

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# Nieman Notes

**Compiled by Lois Fiore**

# Newsroom Training at Urban High Schools

## By learning hands-on skills, minority students take the first step to becoming journalists.

**By Lynda McDonnell**

Two and a half years ago, I walked out of a newsroom and onto a college campus to help build a program that could help identify and develop high school students of color who can be part of the next generation of journalists. The need is embarrassingly obvious. According to the latest census by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, the average American newsroom has 12.9 percent minority employees while the nation's population is nearly 32 percent.

Happily, by linking the skills of newsroom professionals and journalism professors with minority teens in urban high schools, we've found we can have a significant and rapid impact. Using journalist volunteers, we've helped revive newspapers at three urban high schools in Minnesota. Already 13 students who have attended our two-week summer camps since 2001 are studying journalism in college. Several more will start this fall.

A young Hmong student who attended our programs just landed a coveted internship at a local TV station. Four alumni of our summer program—a Liberian immigrant, a Somali refugee, and two Hmong women—are studying journalism at the University of St. Thomas, a Catholic liberal arts university in St. Paul, Minnesota in sore need of such diversity.

Equally important, through work in various urban high schools, I've seen what a powerful vehicle journalism can be for young people to express their concerns, share their experiences, and report on the world around them.

They see good stories. They do serious work, particularly when they have good guidance. We underestimate teens when we think we can hook them on newspapers by publishing stories about J-Lo and navel piercing. With few exceptions, the kids we see in journalism classes, weekend seminars, and the two-week summer camp have weightier things in mind.

But scholastic journalism is in serious trouble in many parts of the country. Budget cuts and a back-to-basics approach to education spurred by standardized testing means that more and more schools are doing without. In Minnesota, only 58 percent of the state's high schools have newspapers. Some of those are four pages photocopied in the school office.

The latest issue of Roosevelt Standard, the newspaper of a fortress-like public high school in Minneapolis, exemplifies what a good student newspaper can be. The place was named to honor Teddy Roosevelt. Jesse Ventura is its most famous alumnus. Now 85 percent of students are students of color, 70 percent are poor, and 37 percent speak English as a second language.

In the 1960's, the school produced a weekly paper. Two years ago, there was only one issue for the entire year. Since then, thanks in part to journalists who work with the journalism class twice a week, eight-page papers are produced each quarter. They're lively, timely and real. Along with news articles about the school's new fitness room and a visit by Dr. Peter Agre, who won the Nobel Prize for chemistry, there are thoughtful essays about why kids join gangs and how it feels to be gay when classmates call each other fags and dykes as a passing putdown.

Keeping the Standard alive hasn't been easy. Last year's journalism teacher was laid off in a round of budget cuts, but the principal was committed to preserving a journalism class and a newspaper. He recruited the head of the school's medical program to teach the first semester. When her husband got a job in another state, the school's testing coordinator stepped in. Such heroic efforts are often required to keep scholastic journalism alive in urban schools.

"I think there's something lacking if a school is without a paper," said Roosevelt's principal, Bruce Gilman. "The students' voices are being heard."

This year's Standards show the wisdom of his commitment. Articles dealt with teacher layoffs and the state budget deficit, rising athletic fees, the threatened closing of a neighborhood library, and the inconvenience of bathrooms locked because gang members were writing on the walls. Naturally there was a horoscope, sports news and an advice column, enduring staples of high school life. The bylines reflect the school's population: Somali and Hmong, African American and Hispanic.

By volunteering at Roosevelt, I have seen students' efforts to overcome shyness and uncooperative administrators, crunch numbers and check facts, learn layout skills and produce crisp, clear prose in a language many of them don't speak at home.

The head of the school's PTA asked for extra copies for parents because it told them things their kids might not. In a survey we did, students said that working on the school paper improved their writing and increased their interest in news. They were achingly proud of what they'd done. One student wrote: "This newspaper will live in my scrapbook forever."

In that classroom, I saw the value and power of teaching students the journalistic process. So many young writers know only the formality of academic essays and the looseness of poetry. Journalism is conversational but exact. It requires intellectual rigor and clear expression, fairness and accuracy, separation of fact from opinion, consciousness that the writer serves an audience. You want outcomes-based education? Put out a school newspaper.

Journalists have much to gain from investing time and money in such ventures. Imagine a newsroom where a reporter whose family once lived in shelters reports on social policy. Imagine a Somali immigrant translating the refugee experience for mainstream readers. More selfishly, look at the readership numbers among younger people. Most of them aren't getting newspapers at home. Producing a newspaper at school is one way to help them develop the newspaper habit.

Last year, when the U.S. Supreme Court gave limited approval for college affirmative action programs, it expressed hope that special breaks won't be necessary in another 25 years. Consider that a deadline: It's more necessary than ever to work now to create opportunities, to push kids with the aptitude and interest for journalism to perform, nudge, coach and mentor them.

Journalism is like a video game, one student told me. I asked him to explain. "You get stuck at one level. Then you have to step back and find a new way to move ahead," he said.

It's not a bad metaphor. It works equally well for those who get discouraged that we haven't made more progress in diversifying the newsroom. We're stuck at one level. Stepping back and investing more in high school journalism is exactly what we need to move ahead. ■

*Lynda McDonnell, a 1980 Nieman Fellow, is the executive director of the Minnesota Media Collaborative at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. She was previously the political editor for the St. Paul Pioneer Press, where she worked in a variety of roles for 20 years.*

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## Curator Bob Giles Visits Nieman Fellows in South Africa

The Nieman Fellows of South Africa were honored to have a visit from Curator Bob Giles and his wife, Nancy, on April 2nd. Giles traveled to Johannesburg for a business meeting of Nieman Fellows followed by a dinner at which the fellows were joined by leading journalists, business executives and government representatives, including the U.S. ambassador to South Africa.

In his remarks after dinner, Giles talked about the state of the news media in the United States and the influence on newspapers of three dominant factors:

- The business environment in which the imperative for making money is eroding long-term investments in newsgathering.
- The consequences of journalistic scandals that, however infrequent, are influencing public attitudes about credibility and trust.
- The powerful examples of excellence that provide a refreshing and reassuring sense of the role of newspapers in our society and the core values of our craft.

Giles said that the press in the United States has been struggling through a period in which its essential role and the historic values of free expression are being constrained by a government that intends to manage information and access.

He suggested that the press has now reasserted itself, leading to a series of revealing stories raising serious doubts about the quality of U.S. intelligence before the start of the Iraq War, the competence of the civilian administration in Iraq, the country's worsening relations with allies around the world, and its capacity to create a peaceful, self-governing society in Iraq.

The experience of having the curator here reinforces the long and valued relationship between the Nieman Foundation and the journalists of South Africa and the important influence the fellowships have had in the movement toward majority rule and the creation of a new South Africa.

Today, with South Africa's third election successfully behind us and the media further entrenched as a mainstay of our fledgling democracy, we are harvesting the returns of the investment made in South African journalists over the years.

Nieman Fellows occupy key positions in most South African media organizations. Nearly 70 percent of the 45 South African Nieman Fellows have become editors and media managers.

We wanted Bob and Nancy to be here to get a personal feeling of why it is important for South Africa to retain the opportunity to send a Nieman to Harvard every year. ■ — Tim du Plessis, a 1993 Nieman Fellow, is editor of Rapport in Johannesburg.

## Nieman Reunion Planned for May 2005

From May 6-8, 2005, the Nieman Foundation will host a reunion of Nieman Fellows in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Please mark the dates on your calendar—we hope to see all of you here. There will be more information to follow. ■

### —1953—

**Melvin Mencher** writes, "I am working on the 10th edition of 'News Reporting and Writing,' a college journalism textbook published by McGraw-Hill Higher Education, and I welcome contributions from Nieman Fellows of articles, photographs and comments about journalism. If interested, please contact me at my e-mail address: mm55@columbia.edu."

**Ross C. Sayers** died on March 17, 2004 in Auckland, New Zealand at the age of 85. Sayers, a Royal Air Force bomber pilot and flight lieutenant, flew 2,000 hours of operations between 1940 and 1945. He flew with two squadrons involved in attacks on convoys supplying Erwin Rommel before the battle of El Alamein in the Middle East.

Sayers, whose childhood dream was to become a journalist, began his journalism career as a printer's apprentice at the Waikato Independent because there were no vacancies for writers. When a reporter called in sick, Sayers got his first assignment, the first of many at the Independent and then at the Waikato Times, The Daily Telegraph, Evening News, and the Auckland Star. At the Star, Sayers set about bringing change to the paper by helping transform the design of the editorial floor—making it into the country's first big American-style newsroom—and the atmosphere of the newsroom into a more intimate and team-oriented one. Appointed assistant editor in 1954 and editor in 1965, Sayers initiated further changes at the newspaper. He started New Zealand's first arts page and his became the first paper to update the concept of the women's page. He did the country's first 18-page weekend magazine section, and created the first daily television page.

Sayers was also at various times director of the New Zealand Press Association, NZ Press Association's representative on the Australian Associated Press, director of Reuters in London, chair of the editors' committee of the Commonwealth Press Union (CPU), and a CPU lifetime member.

He is survived by his wife, **Annette,** two children, six grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

### —1954—

**Harold Schmeck** writes: I retired from The New York Times more than 10 years ago because I signed a book contract with a short deadline that I couldn't meet otherwise. The book, about brain research, was published in 1994 by The Rockefeller University Press.

"A few weeks after publication, **Lois** and I moved to Chatham, Massachusetts, on Cape Cod, where we dig clams and I race sunfish in the summers with a group of similarly long-in-the-tooth neighbors. Last year I finished a novel and am still trying to market it."

## The Stark Collection Added to Kovach Library at Walter Lippmann House

The Louis Stark Collection, donated by the descendants of Louis Stark, has been added to the Bill Kovach Collection of Contemporary Journalism at Walter Lippmann House, the headquarters for the Nieman Foundation. Stark was a prominent labor journalist for The New York Times and other publications during the first half of the 1900's, most notably covering the coal and textile unions as well as union strife during World War II. In 1942 Stark won a Pulitzer Prize for telegraphic reporting (national) for distinguished reporting of labor stories. Through the years several journalists have received funding as Louis Stark Memorial Fellows for their coverage of labor, workplace or related issues, including Jodi Rave (NF '04) and Louise Kiernan (NF '05). ■

—1974—

**Shirley Christian** has a new book out, “Before Lewis and Clark: The Story of the Chouteaus, the French Dynasty That Ruled America’s Frontier” (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, April 2004). The publication of the book coincides with the anniversary of the start of the Lewis and Clark expedition, 1804-1806. The Chouteaus were French fur traders who established the first white settlements that became St. Louis and Kansas City, Missouri. In her book Christian writes, “Without the Chouteaus, without their business acumen and deep understanding of the Indians, the Louisiana Purchase territory would have been a different place.”

**Patricia O’Brien’s** new book, “The Glory Cloak: A Novel of Louisa May Alcott and Clara Barton,” was published in May. The book tells a story of women’s friendship during the Civil War based on episodes from the lives of Louisa May Alcott and Clara Barton. Real people—Nathaniel Hawthorne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Alcott’s father, Bronson Alcott—are integrated into the story along with fictional characters. The book is published by Touchstone Books. O’Brien also co-wrote a book with **Ellen Goodman** (NF ’74), “I Know Just What You Mean: The Power of Friendship in Women’s Lives ,” and is the author of three novels, “The Candidate’s Wife,” “The Ladies’ Lunch,” and “Good Intentions.”

—1978—

**Arun Chacko**, former director of media services and communications at the World Wildlife Fund in Gland, Switzerland, has been appointed director of the Press Institute of India (PII) in New Delhi.

The PII, supported by major Indian newspapers, is a professional institute for the training of journalists and those in newspaper production and management. The institute conducts studies on the problems of the press in India and ways to help overcome these problems. PII is affiliated to and seeks cooperation with other similar national or international organizations.

## Nieman Fellows Honor Belarusian Journalist, Zhanna Litvina, With 2004 Louis Lyons Award

Zhanna Litvina, a pioneering radio journalist in Belarus, has been selected by the sitting class of Nieman Fellows to receive the 2004 Louis Lyons Award for Conscience and Integrity in Journalism.

Litvina became head of the youth program of the Belarusian State Radio in 1994 and turned the program into an independent voice, which eventually led to its shutdown in 1995. Litvina and 38 others then founded the Belarusian Association of Journalists. Nominator **Masha Gessen**, a 2004 Nieman Fellow, said: “This is one of the most active journalists’ organizations I have ever seen. They provide training and support; they publish a media magazine, and most importantly they have a legal service that has to deal with a continuous stream of requests from journalists and publishers, who are under continuous attack.”

In 1995 Litvina founded the only independent radio station on the Belarusian FM dial, 101.2, which was shut down a year later. Litvina came up with the idea of moving the radio station to neighboring Poland. The radio station has been broadcasting to Belarus from Polish territory on medium and short waves since 1999.

Gessen received the award on behalf of Litvina, who was unable to attend the May 11th award ceremony at the Nieman Foundation, and said: “Zhanna herself has been shuttling back and forth between offices in Poland and Belarus—which, in addition to how busy she is with the Belarusian Association of Journalists, is why she could not join us tonight.”

Litvina wrote some remarks, which Gessen read: “My colleagues and I are deeply grateful to you for your support and your attention to the problems facing the Belarusian press. Now, with the European Union expansion, we may be physically closer to the civilized world than ever before, but in reality with every passing year we get farther and farther from it. Today Belarus is the only European country that is openly working to impose a state monopoly on mass media. The very existence of an independent press in Belarus is under constant threat. …”

The Lyons Award is named in honor of Louis M. Lyons, known for his journalistic integrity, who was in the first class of Nieman Fellows in 1939 and who served as curator of the Nieman Foundation for 25 years. The award carries a $1,000 honorarium. Twenty-four individuals, groups and organizations have received the Lyons Award since it was established by the 1964 class of Nieman Fellows. ■

**Ken Freed** brings us up to date on his whereabouts: “**Sandra** and I moved to Baltimore last year. If I could never write like H.L. Mencken, at least I could live in his city. Great food, the waterfront, and a bar on every corner were also draws.

“For all intents and purposes I am retired, although every once in a while I rouse myself to some task. As of this writing in late April, I am in Kampala, Uganda, working for a couple of months with a new newsweekly started by a group of young Ugandan journalists. The idea is to publish a modern, independent and progressive news magazine that will take on both the military-dominated government and the staid and compliant opposition. My work is not so exciting as reporting on foreign affairs, and I do miss the Los Angeles Times expense account, but, so far, I am having a good time and even doing some good."

—1980—

**Jan Collins**, class scribe, sends in the following notes about her classmates:

**Judy Havemann** is still at The Washington Post, "currently editing a section devoted to the District of Columbia." Judy has three children in college (all born after her Nieman year). Daughter Theresa Nicol, "the teenage daughter whom some of the Niemans met when we were in Cambridge, is a doctor at Johns Hopkins, and her husband, Edward Herskovits, is a doctor at the University of Pennsylvania. They have two daughters, Evelyn, 3, and Audrey, 1."

**Lynda McDonnell** is running a program at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. She writes that she is "working with high school kids (especially kids of color) who are interested in becoming journalists. We run a summer camp, train teachers, work in inner-city schools, and run weekend seminars. I also spend time raising money, which is necessary to our survival. It's a great job—working with kids who believe they can change the world and are eager to learn how to tell stories. Journalism rocks, they believe." [See McDonnell's article on page 108.]

Lynda says she took the new job two years ago after nearly four years as political editor of the St. Paul Pioneer Press. Husband **Steve Brandt**, who accompanied Lynda to Cambridge during her Nieman year and later had his own fellowship year at the University of Michigan, continues to report for the (Minneapolis) Star Tribune. He recently "started covering the Minneapolis public schools," Lynda writes: "amidst budget cuts, school closing proposals, a superintendent search, and contract negotiations. Never a dull moment. …"

**Judith Stoia** writes: "I spent four years producing a PBS kids show, "Between the Lions," which teaches early reading skills. A departure for me but great fun. While we wait—and wait—to discover whether that series is refunded, I have left my staff position at WGBH and am working on several other projects including a pilot for a program on parole and another kids series. Except for my Nieman year, it's the first time I haven't worked inside an organization. Kind of nice. Nick is in a PhD program in music theory in New York. Vincent (born our Nieman year) is off to teach English as a Second Language in Taiwan!"

**Suthichai Yoon**, writing from Bangkok, says he is "still editor in chief of The Nation Group, which publishes three daily newspapers, runs a TV news station and a radio program." Daughter Kit graduated from Wellesley College and "is married to an American doctor," Suthichai writes. "They live in Santa Cruz near San Francisco, and my daughter just gave birth to twins." Son Prabda graduated from Cooper Union in New York City and is now a professional writer.

—1982—

**Ed Walsh**, who was a general assignment reporter for The Washington Post, accepted an early retirement buyout offer in December 2003. He was one of about 54 newsroom employees with at least 10 years at the paper who

## The Blade Receives the Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Newspaper Coverage

The (Toledo) Blade received the third annual Taylor Family Award for Fairness in Newspapers for its work in uncovering Vietnam-era war crimes kept secret for three and a half decades. An award dinner was held at the Harvard Faculty Club on April 8th.

The Blade investigative team—led by Michael D. Sallah, Mitch Weiss and Joe Mahr, with Andy Morrison as principal photographer—focused on war crime activities of Tiger Force, an elite Army fighting unit, during a seven-month period in 1967.

The Blade reporters found that military authorities were aware of the activities, yet did nothing to stop them. "They recognized this was not just all about evil over there. The reporters went to lengths to keep perspective and balance while doing the hard reporting," the judges commented. "They handled a very sensitive subject with great depth and context."

The judges—a panel of distinguished journalists—also recognized two finalists:

- The Wall Street Journal for stories examining the impact and reasons why people without health insurance are forced to pay more for health care, reported by Lucette Lagnado.
- The Des Moines Register for its coverage of Iowa State University basketball coach Larry Eustachy's partying with students that led to his dismissal, by chief reporters **Tom Witosky**, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, and Randy Peterson.

The purpose of the Taylor Award is to encourage fairness in news coverage by America's daily newspapers. It was established through gifts for an endowment by members of the Taylor family, which published The Boston Globe from 1872 to 1999. The award carries a $10,000 prize and is administered by the Nieman Foundation. ■

agreed to the offer. Walsh says: "As is usually the case in these matters, management was surprised by the number of us who took the money and ran. We have remained in Arlington, Virginia, while **Michelle** completes this school year as a counselor at Wakefield High School, but in early July we will head for Portland, Oregon, to begin the next phase of our lives." Walsh was former Jerusalem correspondent for the paper and was the Post's Chicago bureau chief for almost seven years in the 1990's.

### —1983—

**William Marimow** is now with National Public Radio (NPR) as managing editor for NPR News. In this newly created position, Marimow will oversee NPR's national news staff, round-the-clock newscasts and training, and work with NPR Online. A second managing editor, Barbara Rehm, will oversee NPR's foreign coverage as well as production of NPR's newsmagazine and talk shows.

Marimow had been the editor of The (Baltimore) Sun from April 2000 to January 2004. From 1993 to 2000, he was managing editor, metro editor, and associate managing editor. The Sun received a number of awards under Marimow's leadership, including three Pulitzer Prize finalists in 2003, more than any other newspaper of its size. Also while he was managing editor The Sun was named one of the country's 10 best newspapers by the Columbia Journalism Review. As a reporter for The Philadelphia Inquirer, Marimow and a partner won the 1978 Pulitzer Prize for a series on criminal violence by the Philadelphia Police Department and, in 1985, he won the 1985 Pulitzer for investigative reporting for a series of about 40 stories about a group of police K-9 officers who were ordering their dogs to attack innocent and unarmed men and women.

### —1985—

**Philip Hilts** won a Los Angeles Times Book Prize on April 24th for his book "Protecting America's Health: The FDA, Business and One Hundred Years of Regulation." The judges called the book a "taut, compelling history," and said "In the current anti-government climate, 'Protecting America's Health' reminds us of the need for science-based regulation and serves as an important cautionary tale." The book was also a New York Times Notable Book of the Year for 2003.

Hilts is now working on a book about advances (and setbacks) in global public health, to be published by Penguin in 2005.

### —1989—

**Bill Kovach** will be the John Seigenthaler Chair of Excellence in First Amendment at Middle Tennessee State University for the fall semester. The chair was established in 1986 to honor its namesake, Tennessean Chairman Emeritus **John Seigenthaler** (NF '59), and sponsors lectures and conferences on free speech and journalism-related topics. Kovach will also co-teach a course on journalistic responsibility based on his book, "The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect."

Kovach was curator of the Nieman Foundation from 1989 to 2000 and is the founding director and chairman of the Committee of Concerned Journal-

## The J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project 2004 Awards

David Maraniss, Rebecca Solnit, and John Bowe received the 2004 J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project Awards at a ceremony held on May 4th at the Nieman Foundation. During that event, Nicholas Lemann, dean of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism, moderated a panel discussion with the award recipients.

The prizes acknowledge works of excellence in nonfiction writing that exemplify the "literary grace, commitment to serious research, and social concern that characterized the distinguished work of the awards' Pulitzer Prize-winning namesake, J. Anthony Lukas." The winners were chosen from 286 submissions, the largest in the history of the awards.

Maraniss received the J. Anthony Lukas Book Prize ($10,000) for his book "They Marched Into Sunlight: War and Peace, Vietnam and America, October 1967" (Simon & Schuster 2003). He is associate editor at The Washington Post and also the author of "When Pride Still Mattered: A Life of Vince Lombardi" and "First in His Class: A Biography of Bill Clinton."

Solnit, writer and activist whose work focuses on issues of time, place, politics and process, won the Mark Lynton History Prize ($10,000) for her book "River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West" (Viking 2003). Her recent books also include "Wanderlust: A History of Walking" and "As Eve Said to the Serpent: On Landscape, Gender and Art."

Bowe, a freelance journalist, co-editor of the book "Gig: Americans Talk About Their Jobs" and co-writer of the screenplay for the film "Basquiat," is the recipient of the J. Anthony Lukas Work-in-Progress Award ($45,000) for "Slavery Inc." to be published by Random House.

The J. Anthony Lukas Prize Project Awards, established in 1998, honor and continue the work that distinguished the career of journalist and author **J. Anthony Lukas**, a 1969 Nieman Fellow. The awards are administered by the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and the Nieman Foundation and are sponsored by the family of the late Mark Lynton. ■

ists. The committee, based in Washington, D.C., focuses on promoting quality and ethical decision-making in journalism.

—1990—

**Kazutami Yamazaki** reports from Washington, D.C. that he was awarded in March the Japanese Foreign Minister's Award for his long-term contribution to the friendship and goodwill between Japan and the United States on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of their relationship. The award recognizes Yamazaki's professional work in the last quarter century as a journalist devoted to reporting, editing and analyzing Japan-U.S. relations as well as U.S. politico-economy; his stint at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo as senior economic adviser during the era of Ambassador Walter Mondale, and his current newsletter ("Washington Watch") that he started as editor and publisher in 1997 in Washington. Yamazaki resides in the outskirts of Washington, D.C. with his family. His e-mail address is yamazaki@erols.com.

—1991—

**Kevin Noblet** is now business editor for The Associated Press (AP). He had been deputy business editor since 2000, and before that he spent six years

## Nieman Foundation Announces U.S. and International Fellows for 2005

Thirteen U.S. journalists and 12 international journalists were appointed to the 67th class of Nieman Fellows. The new U.S. fellows and their areas of interest are:

**Mary (Molly) Bingham**, photographer, WorldPicture News Agency: To enhance textual storytelling capabilities to pair them with existing photography skills through the study of writing, journalism and history.

**Cheryl Carpenter**, deputy managing editor, The Charlotte Observer: The nature and practice of leadership and unique strategies for business development.

**Richard Chaçon**, deputy foreign editor, The Boston Globe: Religion, poverty and public health and their impact on the development of U.S. foreign policy.

**James Daly**, editor in chief, The George Lucas Educational Foundation: How nontechnical forces, including cultural and economic factors, shape the use and evolution of modern technologies.

**Edward Gargan**, Asia bureau chief based in Beijing, Newsday: The intersection of race, religion and politics in Latin America along with the state of Latin American popular culture.

**Amy Goldstein**, White House domestic policy reporter, The Washington Post: The roots and implications of civil liberties-restricting policies that have been imposed as part of the effort to curb terrorism since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

**Joshua Hammer**, Jerusalem bureau chief, Newsweek: The business operations of terror organizations: How they move money internationally; which governments aid radical groups; how charities, banks and money-transfer agencies deliver money to terror organizations, and how effectively "coalition" governments have been at hindering the cash flow.

**Louise Kiernan**, projects reporter, Chicago Tribune: The role of women in the United States work force and its impact on social and labor reform movements in the 20th century. She will hold the Louis Stark Memorial Fellowship for journalists who specialize in labor, workplace or related issues. Funding is provided by the Stark Fellowship Fund in honor of Louis Stark, a pioneer in the field of labor reporting.

**Maggie Mulvihill**, investigative editor, the Boston Herald: The role of federal and state courts in barring access to public information and restrictions of press freedom since the September 11, 2001, attacks.

**Amy Ellis Nutt**, feature writer, The Star-Ledger of Newark, N.J.: The social, legal and ethical implications of advances in neuroscience on the treatment, enhancement and manipulation of the human brain.

**H. Joseph O'Connor, Jr**., producer, ABC News Nightline: The nature of mental illness and treatments for mental disorders. Also Irish literature and history as they relate to personal heritage and storytelling.

**Elizabeth Rubin**, contributing writer, The New York Times Magazine: Comparative religion, religious history and their impact on society; Arabic language; the concept of "American interests" and filmmaking.

Twelve U.S. journalists were selected by a five-person committee: **Charles A. Ferguson**, a 1966 Nieman Fellow, retired editor of The Times-Picayune of New Orleans; **Maria Henson**, a 1994 Nieman Fellow, assistant managing editor for enterprise of the Austin American-Statesman; Juliette Kayyem, senior fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard; **Lester Sloan**, a 1976 Nieman Fellow, freelance photographer, and Web magazine publisher, and **Bob Giles,** a 1966 Nieman Fellow, committee chair, and Nieman Foundation Curator.

In addition to the 12 U.S. journalists selected by the committee, another fellow will join the class:

**Chris Waddle,** vice president/

as deputy international editor. Noblet reported from Latin America and the Caribbean for nearly 10 years for the AP, based in Buenos Aires, Argentina; Santiago, Chile, where he was bureau chief, and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

### —1993—

**Yevgenia Albats** successfully defended her dissertation titled "Bureaucrats and Russian Transition: The Politics of Accommodation" and received her PhD in political science from Harvard University in June 2004. Albats, who also received an A.M. from Harvard in 1996, writes: "… in fact, it was [my] Nieman Fellowship that prompted me to go for a real education in political science."

Albats is now back in Moscow, hosting a primetime political talk show on Ekho Moskvy, the Russian version of National Public Radio, and hopes to teach at a university in Moscow. In a Moscow Times column titled "I Am Back Where I Belong," Albats writes: "I like to believe that in Russia I can make a difference, whereas in the United States I was a spectator of the democratic process. I trust that if I get the chance to teach here I will have something to offer my students—and reading thousands of pages every week for the seminar on comparative politics that I took at Harvard will not have

news, The Anniston (Ala.) Star, and president, the Ayers Family Institute for Community Journalism: The reporting of globalism in the heartland. The study will prepare for the start of an original master's program he will lead for community journalism fellows with the University of Alabama inside the Star, a teaching newspaper.

The new international fellows and their areas of interest are:

**Abssar Alam** (Islamabad, Pakistan), special correspondent, The Nation: Explore the links between economic development and democracy along with politics and public policy. He is the Chiba-Nieman Fellow. The fellowship is supported by the Atsuko Chiba Foundation, established in memory of Atsuko Chiba, a Nieman Fellow in 1968.

**Laurence Bagot** (Paris, France), economics reporter, Enjeux les Echos: Examine the increasing political and cultural divide between the United States and France by looking into American contemporary society and the nature of globalization.

**Patricia Danaher** (Dublin, Ireland), bureau chief, Republic of Ireland, Ulster Television: Explore the major changes in Irish society, in politics and in relation to institutional religion, and the implication of those changes on the nation and its people.

**Roza Eftekhari** (Tehran, Iran), senior editor, Zanan Magazine: Gender issues and their impact on religious scholarship and practice, and the impact of religion on women's issues in the various interpretations of Islam as well as how other religions have faced feminism.

**Ana Cristina Enriquez** (Monterrey, Mexico), co-editor, Vida! Periodico El Norte/Editora El Sol: The nature of economic and social stratification in Mexico and its impact on the nation and its people. She will be a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Latin American Nieman Fellow.

**Henry J.J. Jeffreys** (Auckland Park, South Africa), deputy editor, Beeld: The impact of African journalism in responding to the emerging new democratic African society as envisioned by the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the challenges facing news reporting because of the globalization of news media institutions. Funding for his fellowship is provided by the Nieman Society of Southern Africa.

**Sergio Kalili** (Sao Paulo, Brazil), reporter, Caros Amigos Magazine: The impact of journalism reporting on human rights abuses and the use of human rights to justify violence and war. He will be a John S. and James L. Knight Foundation Latin American Nieman Fellow.

**Young Jin Kang** (Seoul, South Korea), team editor, JoongAng Ilbo: How nations, particularly South Korea, deal with sustaining growth in the face of mounting security challenges. His fellowship is supported by The Asia Foundation and the Sungkok Journalism Foundation.

**Ines Pohl** (Kassel, Germany), international news editor, HNA (Hessiche/Niedersachsische Allgemeine): The relationship among politics, religion and violence and how its impact is different in different societies.

**Ceri Thomas** (London, England), head of news, BBC Radio Five: The social impact of declining audiences for news and participation in civic life, and the relationship between technology and news.

**Rusudan Tsereteli** (Rustavi, Georgia), editor in chief, Rustavi-Info: American journalism as reflected in its history, politics, literature and art.

**Thepchai Yong** (Bangkok, Thailand), group editor, The Nation Multimedia: Chinese economy, society and politics, and the impact of China's rise as the dominant economic power in Southeast Asia. His fellowship is supported by The Asia Foundation. ■

been a wasted effort.

"I am home, and I don't plan to give up just because some people in Moscow—the subjects of my research on the KGB most of all—believe I should have stayed in the United States. This is where I belong."

**Rick Bragg**, a former reporter with The New York Times, received the seventh annual Clarence Cason Award for Nonfiction Writing from the University of Alabama's Department of Journalism. Bragg's most recent book, "I Am a Soldier, Too: The Jessica Lynch Story" (Alfred A. Knopf 2003) was released last November.

### —1998—

**Uri Berliner** joins the management ranks at National Public Radio (NPR) with a promotion to supervising editor on the National Desk. Uri will still focus on the business and sports beats but will take on management responsibilities as well. He'll manage coverage of the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens, which will also include the reporting of NPR correspondent and Nieman classmate **Howard Berkes**.

**Philip Cunningham**, who has been teaching media studies at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok and writing for South China Morning Post, Asian Wall Street Journal, and The Japan Times, has been awarded a Fulbright fellowship to pursue research in visual media and politics in Kyoto, Japan next September.

**Marcelo Leite** writes that he and his wife, **Claudia**, "are busily working on our PhD dissertations, both at Unicamp (Universidade Estadual de Campinas). Our daughter Ana has just started studying at Santa Casa Medical School in Sao Paulo. You might wonder how can an 18-year-old girl be in a medical school, but this is the Brazilian way—no previous college study, straight into medical school. Paula, 19, is doing well, too. A junior at the School of Communications and Arts at Sao Paulo University, she just started an internship at a financial daily here in Sao Paulo, DCI (Diario de Comercio e Industria), and quit being an English teacher."

**Phillip Martin** has been named senior supervising editor for NPR's "The Tavis Smiley Show." Martin was described as having "… more energy and ideas than we can fit into a one-hour show" in the announcement of his appointment. "The Tavis Smiley Show" is a daily news and talk program aimed at African-American listeners. It is broadcast from NPR's Los Angeles studios to about 80 public radio stations coast to coast. Martin previously served as NPR's race relations correspondent.

### —1999—

**Martin Holguin**, former editor in chief of the Latin American edition of Reader's Digest, has joined a communications company for Spanish written publications.

### —2000—

**Benjamin Fernandez Bogado** has been appointed rector of the Universidad Americana, the most prestigious private university in Paraguay. Prior to his appointment, he was director of Radio Libre and president of Instituto Prensa y Libertad.

### —2001—

**Peter Turnley** writes, "I am excited to announce the launch of my new Web site, www.peterturnley.com/. This is a very comprehensive site of my career's work in photography and also contains an in-depth 'Peter's Journal' of writing on my life and experiences in the world of photography. There is also a separate section presenting a group of my photographs for purchase as fine art prints. I see this site as an opportunity to use the world of digital technology as a way to reach out and share my visual expression and response to the world. I would be happy if the viewer chooses to come back to the site many times and not feel obliged to take it all in with one hit." The site was designed by Anne Ghory-Goodman and Eric Mehlenbeck.

### —2002—

**Jabulani Sikhakhane**, former deputy editor of the Financial Mail, is now editor at City Press Business in Johannesburg, South Africa.

**James Trengrove** won the Joan Shorenstein Barone Prize for distinguished Washington reporting at the annual Radio and Television Correspondents' Association dinner. Trengrove, who is senior producer of the Capital Hill unit of "The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer," has won this award three times in the past 15 years.

### —2003—

**Ronnie Ramos**, former editor of The Times in Shreveport, Louisiana, has been appointed sports editor at The Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

### —2004—

**Pekka Mykkanen**, reporter for the Finnish-language Helsingin Sanomat, received a Bonnier Grand Journalism Prize for story of the year. The prize was for his coverage of the SARS epidemic—specifically his tracking of the route of infection that killed a Finnish International Labor Organization official—in China last spring. The prize, the most prestigious journalism award in Finland, is worth $9,000 and is given in three different categories. The award ceremony is televised nationally on primetime television.

A journalist since 1993, Mykkanen has covered conflicts from the war in Bosnia to the war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Mykkanen, Helsingin Sanomat's Asia correspondent since 1998, has also reported on stories about the AIDS disaster in the Henan province, Beijing's successful Olympics' bid, and the crackdown on Falun Gong.

Mykkanen has spent part of his Nieman year writing a book on China's strategies and difficulties to modernize itself and to become a major global player. The book is due to be published in the Finnish language in August 2004. ■

# 'Fields of Despair'

## Words and images tell stories of forgotten workers.

### By Nuri Vallbona

"Anybody wanna go work in North Carolina?"

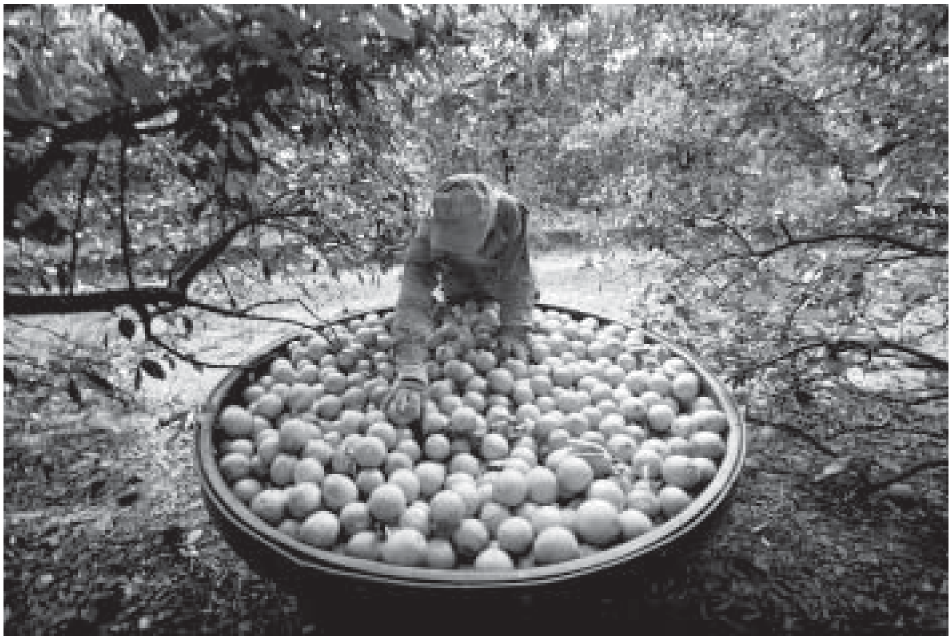
I was on my knees photographing homeless men lining up outside a Jacksonville soup kitchen when I heard the hearty voice. "Did I hear that right?" I thought.

"Anybody wanna go work in North Carolina?" I turned quickly to see a stocky young man on a bicycle trying to entice the men in line to pick crops in North Carolina.

I had been trying for weeks to get a picture of one of these recruiters, who play a pivotal but shadowy role in Florida's farming industry. I had staked out positions behind tinted car windows, hoping my lens would be long enough to catch them in the act. "Word must be out on the street you're out here," a homeless man once said after I drove 350 miles without snapping one picture.

Now two weeks later this man brazenly rode up behind me on his bike. He was trying to entice men to board a nearby van that would take them to what the laborers in line casually referred to as "the slave camps." The U.S. government calls it "servitude." Either way, those who entered the vehicles with promises of warm meals, a steady roof, and all the crack they need, sometimes found themselves in hellholes.

This was one part of the problem Miami Herald reporter Ronnie Greene uncovered as he investigated the rising number of farmworker slavery cases brought in Florida. This series, called "Fields of Despair," was published in the Herald in 2003. He found that Florida leads the country in the number of contractors who have had licenses revoked because of labor violations against the men and women they lured into the work vans. The wealthy growers who hired these laborers, however, often went unpunished.



**Antonio Martinez tops off a bucket full of oranges in a new job in Florida. He had once been forced to live in deplorable conditions and to work off smuggler's fees. When Martinez saw money exchange hands between the smuggler and crew leader, he realized he had been sold. Martinez is only required to fill the bins to the bottom of the screws a few inches from the top. However, he must top it off for the crew leader to get his cut. May 2003.** ***Photo by Nuri Vallbona/The Miami Herald.***

Some of the worst abuses were in North Florida, where primarily African-American men were enticed into working the fields only to find themselves sinking slowly into a debt they could never repay. Some of their labor bosses advanced them money for meals and rent, while making drugs and alcohol plentiful. The men had to pay the boss back with 100 percent interest. When payday arrived, they received little or no pay for their 14-16-hour days. Fear of being beaten kept most in the camps. A few escaped by hiking for miles through the woods. They were afraid that if they walked by the highway, they would be found.

As we worked on our series, we'd often ride back from the fields in silence, unable to speak. For me, this story was especially difficult. I grew up in the 1960's in Texas watching my Costa Rican mother deliberately push her supermarket cart past the bins of purple and green grapes in support of Cesar Chavez's boycotts. "Hay que apoyar los pobres campesinos" (we have to support the poor farmworkers), she would say after hearing our selfish pleadings, "Just a few little grapes, por favor?"

Now, 38 years later, these issues haven't gone away. It is painful. But working on this story was also inspiring. I met Lucas Benitez, of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, who recently won a Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award for his coalition's fight against farmworker abuse. Benitez and his colleagues helped free laborers who paid more than $1,000 to be smuggled from Mexico, then saw little or nothing for their sweat and labor plucking tomatoes and oranges—until their smuggling "debt" was retired. Antonio Martinez was housed in a squalid green trailer filled with desperate men. "I realized I had been sold," he said.

Benitez displayed the bloodied shirt of one beaten farmworker, a vivid memento he had kept for seven years. "When we say that the tomatoes that leave Immokalee have sweat, have blood, we are not exaggerating," he told us.

The result was also rewarding. Our stories prompted Florida Governor Jeb Bush and state lawmakers to pass legislation that increases penalties for farmworker abuse. The governor vowed to create a commission to monitor working conditions. State Senator J.D. Alexander, a citrus grower, said the reforms were prompted by the "Fields of Despair" series.

While these changes are an improvement, I wonder if all the reporting we and others have done will put a stop to slavery in the fields. "How long has this been going on?" I once asked attorney Lisa Butler, who does outreach in farm labor camps. "I don't know," she answered. "Years? Decades?" I pressed. "Possibly," she answered. ■

*Nuri Vallbona, a 2001 Nieman Fellow, is a photojournalist for The Miami Herald. She focuses her work on documentary essays and has won many awards. She was one of 35 Hispanic photographers to work on the book, "Americanos," which celebrates Hispanic life in America.*

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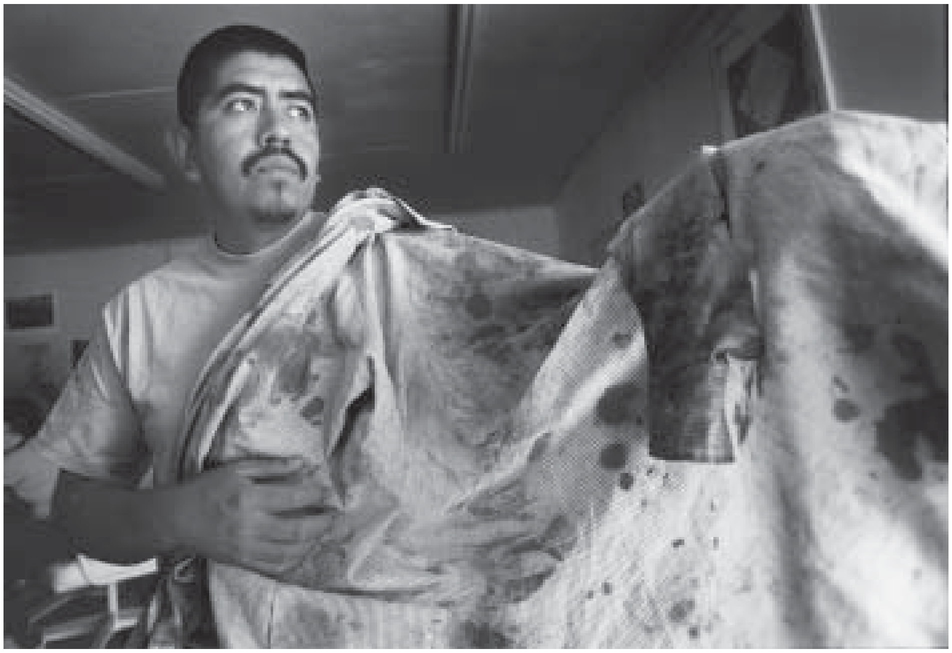
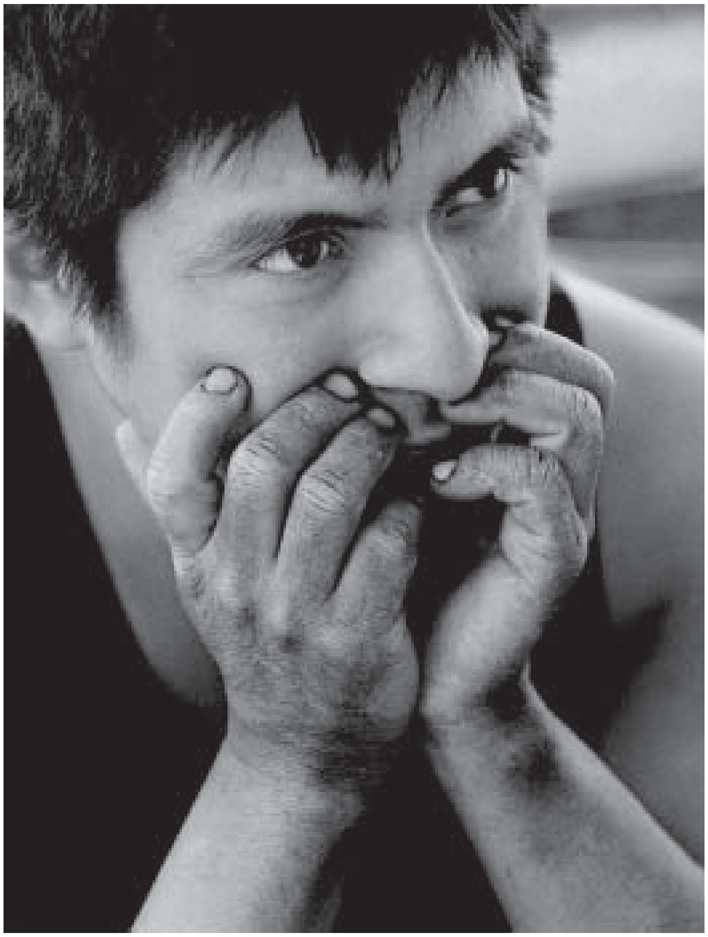
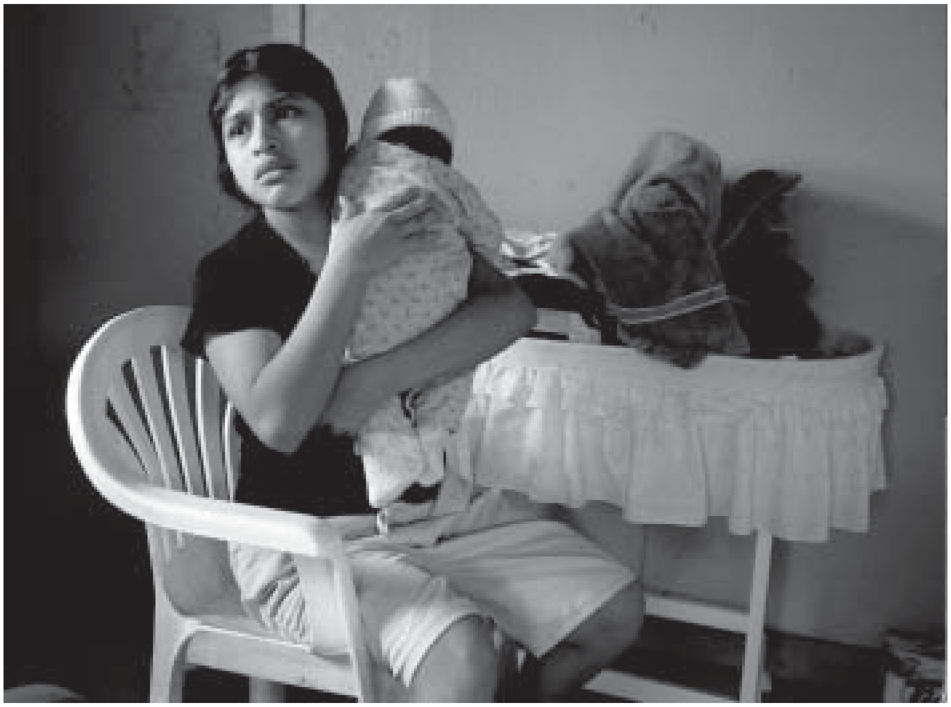


Lucas Benitez, a staff member of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, saved the bloodied shirt of a farmworker who was beaten in 1996. April 2003.

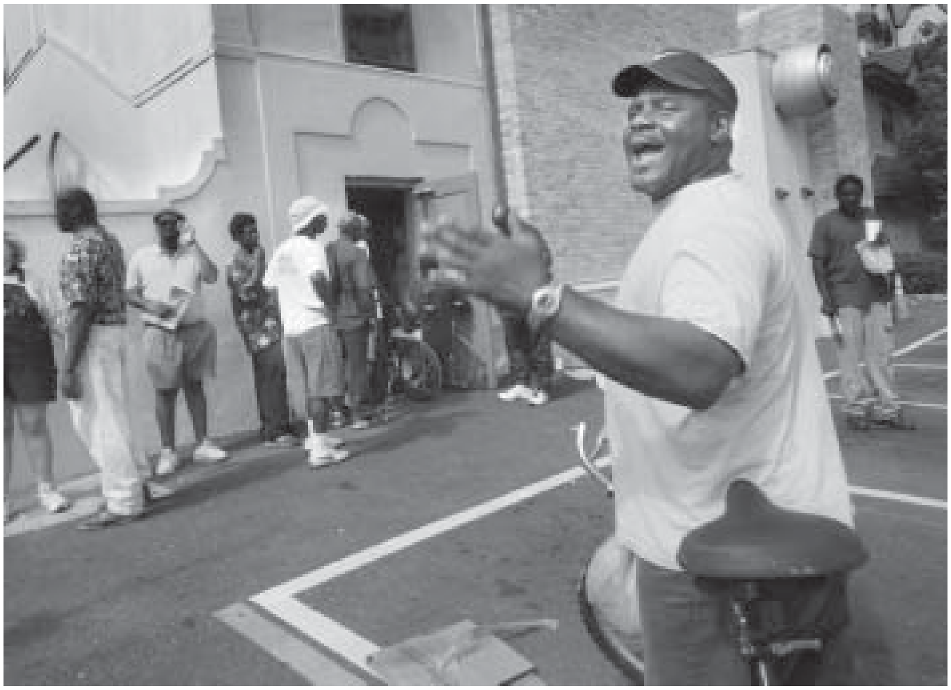


Jose Solano asks for advice from a paralegal with the Migrant Farmworker Justice Project.

*Photos by Nuri Vallbona/The Miami Herald.*

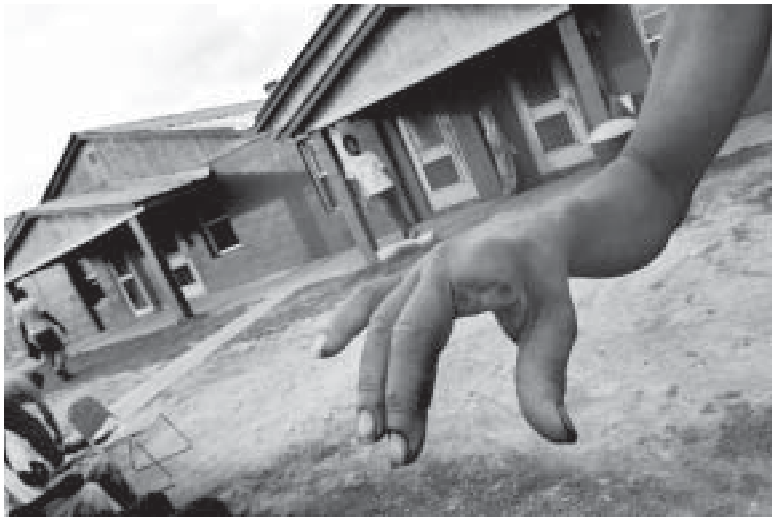


Scared and afraid that she and her husband are running out of money, Rufina de Jesus Santos, 15, asks Raul Barrera of the Migrant Farmworker Justice Project where she can find food in a migrant camp. She had to stop picking tomatoes to take care of her baby. She and her husband still had to pay off the $1600 they each incurred from smuggler's fees. Barrera referred her to the local church, where she was able to get food on a regular basis. March 2003.

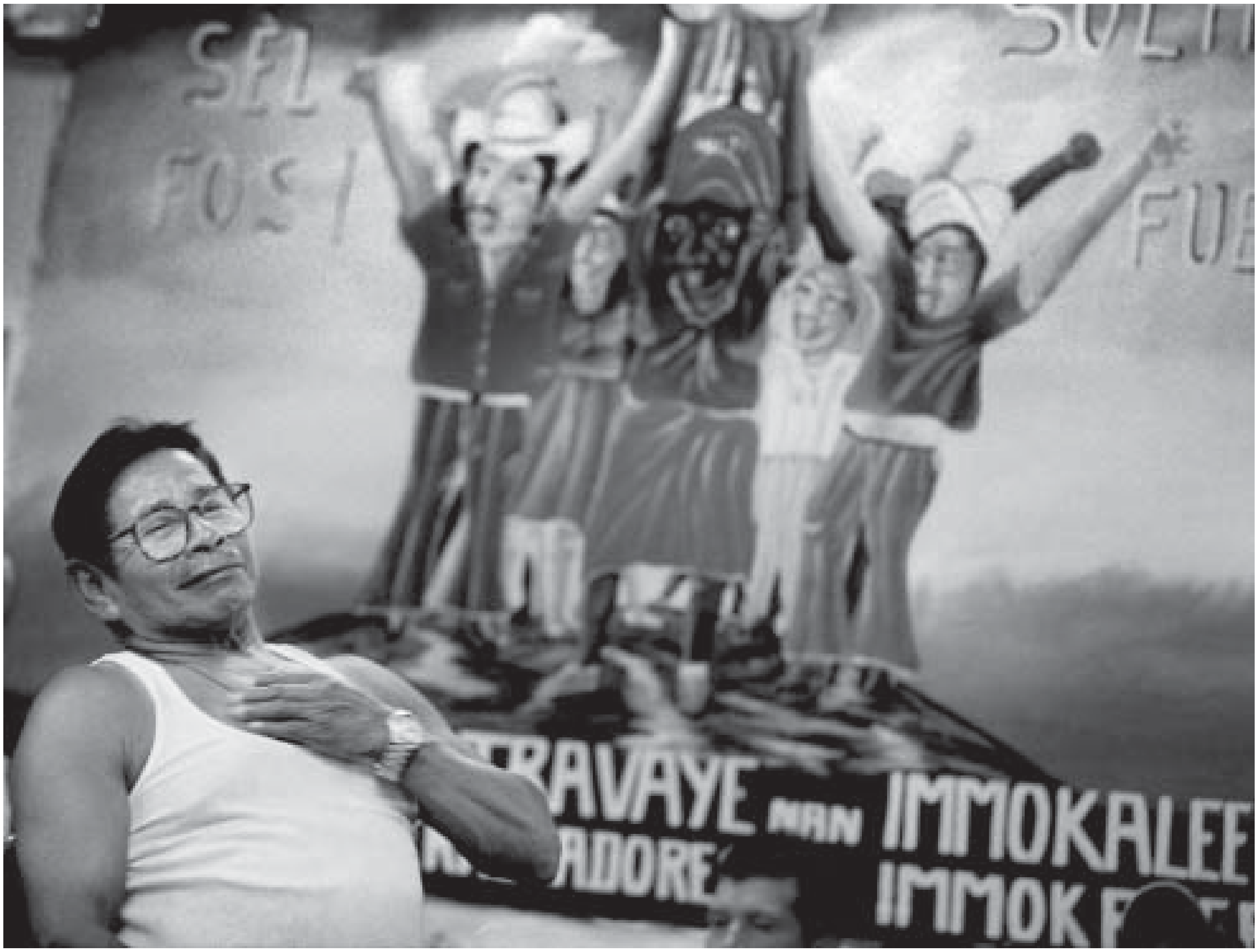


A man identified by former migrant workers as "Jerome" tried to recruit homeless men outside the Saint Francis Soup Kitchen in Jacksonville, Florida, one of several spots that crew leaders use to find workers for their camps. When another man asked him about some workers ending up working for crack, he said, "if they want to work for crack, let 'em work for crack." July 2003.

*Photos by Nuri Vallbona/The Miami Herald.*



Abuse and neglect compound the problems faced by migrant workers as they try to make a living doing farm work. This farmworker had to have his finger amputated because he did not get proper medical care while he was doing migrant work in North Carolina. April 2003.



Migrant worker Alberto Hernandez listens to activists at a meeting of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers where farmworkers were informed of their rights and told about coalition activities attempting to improve conditions. May 2003.

*Photos by Nuri Vallbona/The Miami Herald.*