

# NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Five Dollars

## Editorial Cartoons: The Impact and Issues of an Evolving Craft



### Words & Reflections:

'Can journalism survive in this era of punditry and attitude? If so, how?' Journalists respond.

“... to promote and elevate the standards of journalism”

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

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# A New Advisory Board for the Nieman Foundation

‘... the staff and I needed the wise counsel that a group of advisors could provide.’

By Bob Giles

Some things are better done late than never. The advisory board to the Nieman Foundation is an example.

Down through the years, Nieman Fellows, news executives, leading journalists, and members of the Harvard faculty have served the interests of the Nieman program effectively in a variety of ways. When I arrived at Lippmann House in August 2000, the advisory board had been dormant for some time. I wrote to thank its members for their service, intending to reconstitute a new board to help me think about the direction of the program and offer sound advice on the foundation's goals.

As things happen, as Curator of the Nieman Foundation I quickly became engrossed in adding a new wing on Lippmann House, developing a program in narrative journalism, building a Web site for watchdog journalism, introducing a series of conferences for journalists, and attending to the many details of guiding the fellows through an enriching year at Harvard. Months became years and the good intent to organize an advisory board was never acted on.

Earlier this year, it was clear that we now had a purpose and a mission for an advisory board; organizing one became an urgent reality. With some changes in place, and others being considered, and with funds to raise for Nieman Fellowships and to pay off the cost of constructing the new wing, it was evident the staff and I needed the wise counsel that a group of advisors could provide.

On a crisp, sunny morning in early November, 16 members of the 26 advisory board members gathered around a table in the Knight Center conference room to begin their work. [See Nieman Notes, on page 72, for a list of advisory board members.] It was a lively session with pointed questions and thoughtful comments reacting to the vision I outlined for the Nieman Foundation and remarks by Barry Sussman, editor of *niemanwatchdog.org*, Mark Kramer, director of the Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism, and Melissa Ludtke, editor of Nieman Reports.

Brandt Ayers of the Anniston Star said to Mark, at “our little paper,” we can afford narrative journalism articles “about once a year.” But it’s “just stunning” when we can break someone away to “do it your [Mark’s] way.”

“There are lots of short-form narratives,” Mark explained. “It’s a way of thinking” rather than a matter of time.

He told the story of a reporter at The Oregonian who had been asked to write a routine piece about graduation at a local college. The reporter had the imagination to contact the human resources office of the college to ask if there was an employee graduating. He found a Mexican American who worked as a janitor, elicited his life story of hard times and

determination, and wrote a short narrative.

Narrative at whatever length is a triple win, Mark said, expanding readership, expanding use of reporters’ talents, and expanding coverage.

Following Melissa’s presentation, there was enthusiastic discussion about the high quality of Nieman Reports and the value it holds for the foundation. Several board members volunteered to work on ways to expand the visibility and reach of Nieman Reports.

In response to a report on the foundation’s disappointment in the small number of candidates for Nieman Fellowships among journalists of color, several promising ideas for more effective recruitment emerged, among them, seeking help from Nieman alumni/ae and networking with editors and news directors to reinforce the benefits of the Nieman experience for journalists of color.

Dolores Johnson, our development officer, outlined the Nieman capital campaign and its strategy for raising four million dollars to pay for the cost of the new Nieman wing, which is named the Knight Center. Another speaker, Donella Rapiere, vice president for alumni affairs and development at Harvard, described the university’s fundraising traditions and provided a context for the Nieman capital campaign. At Harvard, she noted, “we worry about reputation and independence.”

In the discussion that followed, the question was raised whether the Nieman Foundation should accept money from nonmedia corporations. Would it be a conflict of interest if there is corporate money given with no strings attached and the money is managed in the appropriate way? Some organizations might be willing to support excellence in journalism, as is the case of corporations that sponsor programming on public radio and public television.

Members of the board acknowledged that such contributions raise a central question that needs to be argued out and thought through: how to reach for support in a way that provides genuine isolation from any commercial interest. Journalism is now an enterprise that involves big corporations, so if the Nieman Foundation plans to expand and needs money, it should consider whether it can receive money from certain organizations and not be contaminated.

So it went throughout the day, a lively discussion among a committed group of advisors who are pleased to be invited to serve and eager to help make a difference for future generations of Nieman Fellows. ■

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## Editorial Cartoons: The Impact and Issues of an Evolving Craft

Many newspapers have decided not to hire a full-time editorial cartoonist, but instead publish the readily available work of syndicated cartoonists. To explore what impact these decisions and other changing circumstances related to editorial cartoons have on journalism, Nieman Reports asked cartoonists, editorial page editors, and close observers of cartooning to write out of their experiences and share their observations about how the long-time role that cartoons have played in journalism and democracy is being affected.

**Matt Davies**, who is staff cartoonist for The Journal News in White Plains, New York, the 2004 Pulitzer Prize-winner for editorial cartooning, and president of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC), contends there is “an inherent shortsightedness to this buy-a-cartoon model” that many newspapers are turning to. There is, he argues, value in “having a good and consistent cartoonist’s voice in the paper,” and this value was well understood by earlier generations of newspaper editors and publishers. Davies writes about the “Cartoons for the Classroom” project created by AAEC to “encourage children to learn about the language of the editorial cartoon and appreciate its historic and contemporary importance in the political dialogue.”

**J.P. Trostle**, a cartoonist and author of “Attack of the Political Cartoonists,” describes the loss of specific editorial cartoonists’ jobs and explains why they aren’t being filled. In an era of consolidation and cost cutting, Trostle writes, “. . . who’s more expendable than the ink-stained wretch hunched over in the corner drawing silly pictures?” Another reason, Trostle says, is the controversy that strong editorial cartoons can inspire in readers and the fear editors and publishers have of this, especially in times of decreasing circulation. **Bruce Plante**, editorial cartoonist for the Chattanooga Times Free Press, corresponded with several publishers to ask them about the value of having an editorial cartoonist on staff, and he reports on their replies. As one publisher wrote of his paper’s two editorial cartoonists (one in news, one in sports), “They help create an atmosphere of questioning, of laughter, of serious criticism.” **Ted Rall**, a syndicated cartoonist, chronicles his interviews for staff cartoonists’ jobs at three newspapers. His experiences illuminate some newsroom and management issues that make such hires difficult these days.

**John Zakarian**, who recently retired as editorial page editor of The Hartford Courant, shares a series of questions editors should ask when editing cartoons and writes about his long-time working relationship with his paper’s editorial cartoonist. What he’s learned in this 24 years is that “if an editor is the type of person who abhors volcanic eruptions from a cartoonist over the editing of his or her work, don’t hire one. Instead, rely on syndicated cartoonists over whom you have far more effective control through the process of choosing one from many purchased inexpensively.” What is lost, however, in doing this is “the local flavor that they must have in fully engaging audiences.”

**Chris Lamb**, author of “Drawn to Extremes: The Use and Abuse of Editorial Cartoons in the United States,” asserts that cartoonists “should not be government propagandists,” as happened with some in the wake of 9/11, when any criticism was labeled unpatriotic, and he explains why newspapers need independent-minded cartoonists. **Doug Marlette**, editorial cartoonist for the Tallahassee Democrat, writes that “cartoons are the acid test of the First Amendment” and claims that “the insidious unconsciousness of self-censorship can be discerned in the quality of editorial cartoons today.” Political cartoonist **Patrick Oliphant** examines how this “once-potent galvanizer of opinion, the kick-starter of conversation and discussion, has been allowed to atrophy from disuse and is, after several centuries of successful use as a castigator and common scold of the body politic, in great jeopardy of fading away altogether.” Syndicated editorial cartoonist **Ann Telnaes** notes that “as a whole, American editorial cartoonists were slow to break free of flag-waving images” after 9/11, and she writes that “if in our roles as cartoonists we don’t challenge and poke the pompous and the powerful, then all we do is illustrate propaganda.”

**Signe Wilkinson**, editorial cartoonist for the Philadelphia Daily News, explores reasons why so few women do this kind of work. “Who would like receiving a daily dose of hate mail—besides puerile little boys who love picking fights,” she writes. “In other words, who besides editorial cartoonists?” **Joel Pett**, editorial cartoonist for the Lexington Herald-Leader, lines up the usual suspects considered responsible for cartoonists’ job losses, then sets about debunking the validity of each. **Steve Kelley**, the Times-Picayune editorial cartoonist, brings us inside the debate editorial cartoonists have among themselves about the role humor should play and reveals that “our increasingly conspicuous failing is that we make obvious attempts at humor only to come up short.”

**Mary Ann Lindley**, editorial page editor of the Tallahassee Democrat, describes why her small paper hired a prize-winning editorial cartoonist (Doug Marlette) and how his jabs at local leaders, events and issues “get the phones ringing, the e-mail popping up, and put a signature on our paper.” **Scott Stantis**, editorial cartoonist for The Birmingham News, constantly looks for local angles and contends that “if the role of the cartoonist is viewed as being like that of a columnist—someone whose work truly engages readers—then local cartoons are essential.” **Ed Stein**, editorial cartoonist for the Rocky Mountain News, sees the rise of “a depressingly homogenous American style” of cartooning, and “not just of drawing but of the way we conceive ideas,” and tells how he transformed his cartooning to create a distinct local connection with readers. **Mark Fiore** left a newspaper job as a political cartoonist to devote his energy to creating animated cartoons that are read on various Internet news sites. “Message comes first, humor second, and ideally both arrive at the viewer’s eye together,” he writes.

**Jeff Danziger**, a syndicated cartoonist, reminds us how cartoonist Bill Mauldin “proved, time and again, that when the times demand, a drawing can pierce the emotional heart of a story deeper than the most gifted verbal lapidaries.” **Harry Katz**, former head curator of prints and photographs at the Library of Congress, explores cartoons’ past to discover important lessons to guide editorial cartoons’ future. ■

# Are We Witnessing the Dusk of a Cartooning Era?

What will newspapers do 'when the last salaried cartoonist drops dead and suddenly there's nothing to publish in that box on all these editorial pages'?

By Matt Davies

Unexpectedly, I've found myself—as current president of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC)—becoming a public advocate for our profession. In past years, being AAEC president has meant 10 months spent trying to get a terrific speaker or two to come to our annual convention at no charge. But now, as I put our issues before the public in media interviews, I'm invariably asked about the demise of the editorial cartoonist. This new interest in our fate is a bit unusual, not because we haven't lamented the lack of jobs for as long as I remember, but because people other than cartoonists now seem to be noticing our thinning ranks and wondering why it's happening and what it means.

From our vantage point, the issue isn't that people—or even editors—don't like editorial cartoons; it's just that they don't want to pay for them when they don't have to. Brilliant and pithy cartoons seem so simple and easy to produce that people approach me all the time with their ideas for a cartoon or two: "I can't draw, but I have tons of ideas for cartoons," they tell me. Why pay good money for something that everybody seems to think they can do? In some ways, this dynamic is not unlike humankind's quest for flight, when for centuries people watched birds drifting effortlessly, strapped on some wings, gathered townsfolk, found a high place, and jumped. Every day, editorial cartoonists troll the news in search of social and political ironies, then create images that encapsulate those metaphorical 1,000 words and pour them painstakingly into a single picture. For most professional cartoonists, drawing is the easy part. Like flying, the whole process is a lot harder to do



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than it looks.

In fairness, editorial cartoonists can be quite disruptive to an editorial page editor's work. An editor with the intestinal fortitude to oversee a staff cartoonist will inevitably have to deal with angry readers, many of whom can be notoriously time-consuming. This is especially problematic in today's marketplace where newspapers are sometimes referred to as "the product" and readers are affectionately called "customers." Into this corporate environment arrives the editorial cartoonist. Imagine if a Ronald McDonald character wandered around McDonald's restaurants harassing customers by pointing out their faults and berating them for the SUV in which they arrived, and you have a sense

of how a lot of cartoonists are perceived in many media boardrooms. They are regarded as anathema to the culture that exists to provide a "service."

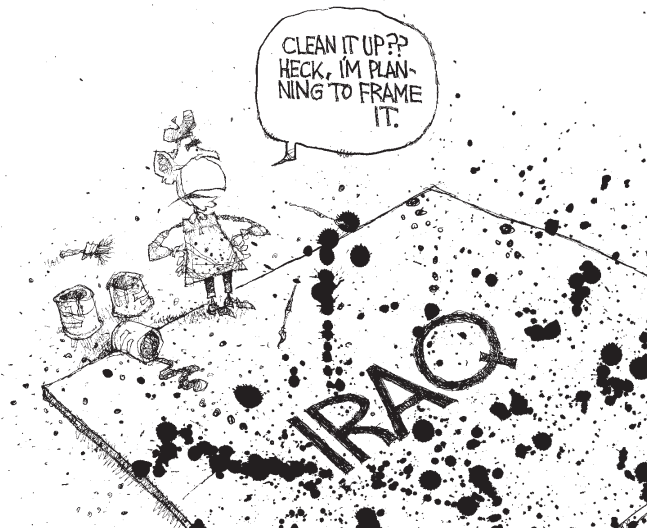
No matter how hard marketing specialists try, newspapers will never be only products. When newspapers report the news and provide a decent editorial page, they will—by their mission and definition—engender controversy and, consequently, be purchased and read by people in their community.

## Looking Back, Looking Forward

Most American editorial pages still have the problem of what to put in the pesky space—a decent-sized box at the top of



the page—traditionally given the staff editorial cartoonist. For the time being, many have hit on the idea of buying syndicated creators—generally ones who are also earning a salary at another newspaper—for a very small sum. If they are adventurous with their budget, editors can buy images done by several cartoonists, then perform a sort of editorial triage and publish only the least offensive material. Doing this allows them to avoid the irritation of having to depend on what a staff cartoonist might have produced that day. This is particularly useful when it comes to some of the stickier local issues that can really get readers in a huff. Staff cartoonists might weigh in on a local story and cause reams of letters to be written and phones to ring incessantly—in short, to get readers engaged with the newspaper.



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Even though there's an inherent shortsightedness to this buy-a-cartoon model, these days when a cartoonist leaves his/her newspaper—generally due to editorial disagreement and/or death—it's commonplace for the bereaved newspaper to use syndicated

material “until a replacement is found.” Over time, this temporary strategy can get to feel very comfortable, and it is cheap. I can't help wondering what these newspapers are going to do when the last salaried cartoonist drops dead and suddenly there's nothing to publish in that box on all these editorial pages. I can imagine hearing words like these being spoken: “Will someone please hire a cartoonist so we can start buying her cartoons through the syndicate?”

The value of having a good and consistent cartoonist's voice in the paper was evident to those who edited and published earlier American newspapers. There's a proud tradition of biting editorial cartooning, from Thomas Nast (who brought us the elephant, the donkey and my personal favorite, Uncle Sam) in the 19th century, through Herblock,

## Cartoonists Reach Out to Educators

*Using a curriculum overseen by AAEC, teachers can give students “a clearer understanding of the enduring value of this daily newspaper art form.”*

Short of a diabolical plan to have members of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC) operate clandestinely as editors and publishers so newspapers will start hiring more editorial cartoonists, there is a limit to what we can do to expand our ranks of employment. But that doesn't mean we aren't trying.

Apart from making lots of noise in as many news organizations as possible and publishing a book, “Attack of the Political Cartoonists,” by J.P. Trostle [see Trostle's article on page 8], AAEC has undertaken a long-term comprehensive project designed to raise the profile of editorial cartooning with some help from a grant from the Herb Block Foundation (endowed by the estate of

the late Washington Post cartoonist, Herblock).

Our main focus will be to encourage children to learn about the language of the editorial cartoon and appreciate its historic and contemporary importance in the political dialogue. We want to reinforce for them the role of the First Amendment in protecting free speech, with a particular emphasis, of course, on its protection of parody. For more intrepid students, we'll provide steps on how to become an editorial cartoonist.

To do this, we've started to create a series of “Cartoons in the Classroom” lesson plans that teachers will be able to download—with no charge—from the nonprofit Newspapers in Education Web site ([www.nieonline.com](http://www.nieonline.com)). In lesson plans there will be grade-specific cartooning history lessons and discussion of current events as seen through cartoons. Eventually, this curriculum

will extend from kindergarten through high school. A large component of the material will call for studying cartoons drawn by the school's “local cartoonist.” (Because of the importance of the Newspapers in Education program to editors nationwide, we anticipate a few red faces in newspaper offices when children and their teachers start asking why there is no local cartoonist.) We will also encourage our cartoonist members to be available to speak to the classes that are using this material as a part of the lesson.

In doing this, we want to make it possible for teachers to imbue a new generation—now wedded to television and the Internet—with a clearer understanding of the enduring value of this daily newspaper art form. And speaking of our art form, as cartoonists, we vow to continue giving these children—and their parents—a reason to give newspapers another chance. ■ —M.D.

Bill Mauldin, Pat Oliphant, and Jeff MacNelly, who respectively defined and encapsulated the political landscape of the 20th century. [See Harry Katz's article on page 44 for a more detailed history of editorial cartoons in U.S. newspapers.]

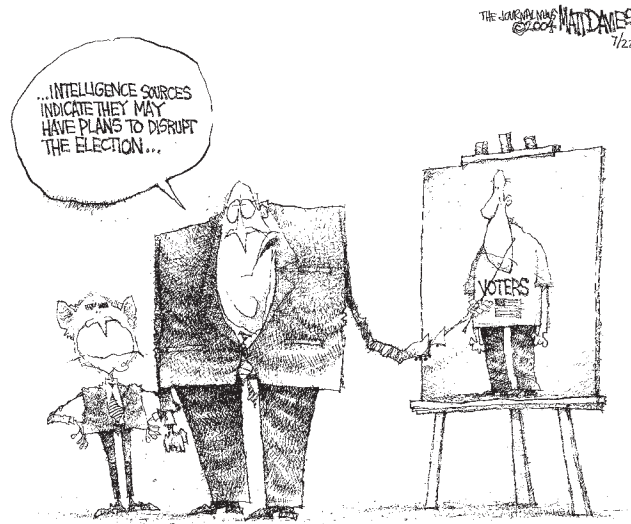
Now we sit at the beginning of the 21st century, already a time of volatile global political change that begs for the type of commentary only a cartoonist can wield. Yet the soil that grows and nurtures cartoonists whose work can define our time is less fertile than ever.

Ten years ago there were 150 or so salaried editorial cartoonists working at daily newspapers. There are now about 85 of us left, and the business and media environment in which newspapers exist has changed enormously. Newspapers are fighting for media share with broadcast TV, cable, radio and the Web, and are increasingly excluding us from their marketing plans. The Chicago Tribune, one of the nation's biggest and

best-known newspapers, still hasn't filled its coveted cartooning position since the untimely death in 2000 of staffer MacNelly, who was one of cartooning's biggest and best. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch hasn't filled a long open vacancy. The San Jose Mercury News and the St. Paul Pioneer Press have both dispensed with their high-profile cartooning positions. The New York Times hasn't had its own cartoonist for decades, and chances are

good that your local daily paper probably doesn't have its own cartoonist either.

That's the barrel that this president of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists is reluctantly staring down. When contemplating which media commentator working today is closest—in terms of influence and reach—to our 19th century cartooning hero Nast, the name that surfaces is Jon Stewart, the crown prince of political satire, whose words are broadcast, not drawn and published. Which leaves me to ponder: Can Jon Stewart draw? ■



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*Matt Davies is staff cartoonist for The Journal News in White Plains, New York, and also serves as the president of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists. In 2004, he won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning.*

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## The Evaporating Editorial Cartoonist

‘... editorial cartoon jobs are increasingly left unfilled or are eliminated entirely after a cartoonist leaves a paper.’

By J.P. Trostle

When Jeff MacNelly, the popular and influential editorial cartoonist at the Chicago Tribune, died in June of 2000, cartoonists on a listserv debated how long a period would be considered respectful before sending in their resumes. A week? A month? Five minutes?

Turns out it wouldn't have mattered. Nearly five years after the three-time Pulitzer Prize-winner's death, the Tribune has yet to hire a full-time cartoonist to the staff position MacNelly left behind. Editorial page editor Bruce Dold has

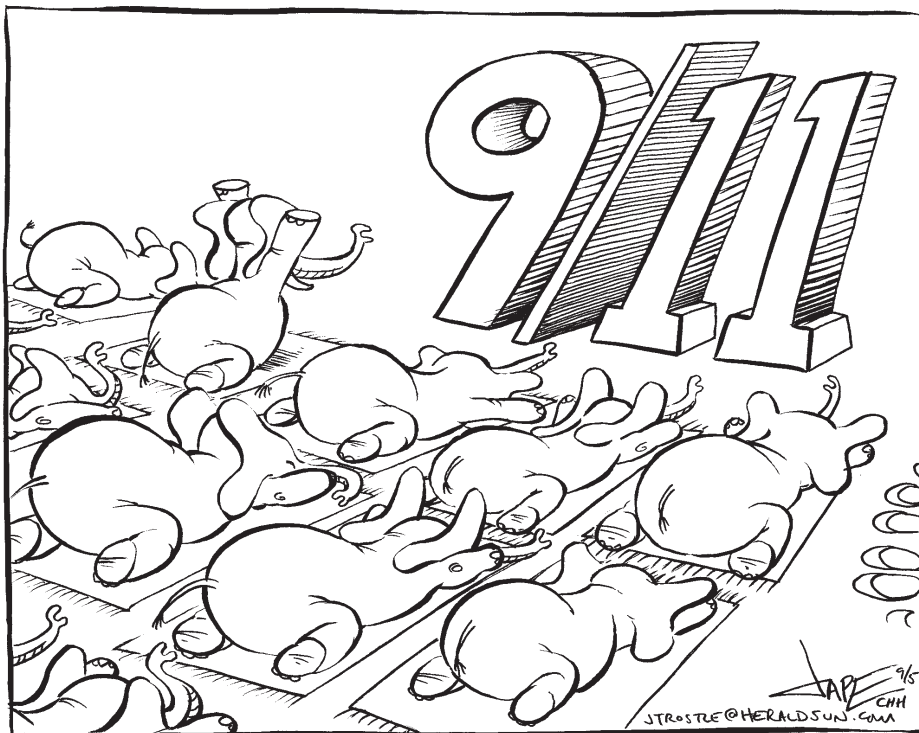
said—repeatedly—the Tribune would like to hire a suitable permanent replacement. And while a number have interviewed with the newspaper during the past half decade and rumors of an impending hiring surface regularly, among cartoonists it has reached a point where the offer of staff job from the Tribune has become akin to that of buying a certain bridge.

How is it that one of the largest newspapers in America can't—or won't—fill such a prominent position? It is a question editorial cartoonists discuss among

themselves repeatedly: They see it not simply as an open job slot, but a symptom of a larger, more serious problem. If wide syndication is considered the gauge of success in this business, the full-time staff job is the baseline from where the measurement has traditionally been made—and one in increasing danger of being erased.

### Vanishing Jobs

Earlier this year I edited “Attack of the Political Cartoonists,” a compendium of



© J.P. Trostle. Reproduced by permission.

artists working today. Between the time the book went to press and appeared in bookstores, four of the cartoonists mentioned in its pages had been forced out of their staff positions.

Frequent shakeups are not unusual in the news industry but, unlike reporters, photographers and editors, editorial cartoon jobs are increasingly left un-

filled or are eliminated entirely after a cartoonist leaves a paper. Today there are fewer than 90 cartoonists working full time for American newspapers, down from a peak of nearly 200 in the early 1980's, when the craft benefited from the same influx and interest the post-Watergate years brought to journalism.

Media consolidation, newspapers folding, tightening budgets—all have contributed to the erosion of viable outlets. The pressure for double-digit profits at chain-owned papers has publishers looking around for expendable personnel, and who's more expendable than the ink-stained wretch hunched over in the corner drawing silly pictures?

When Kirk Anderson was laid off from the St. Paul Pioneer Press in April 2003, he pointed out in a farewell e-mail to coworkers that were the choice his, he'd cut the private service that tends the plants in the publisher's office "before I'd cut a local cartoonist." Anderson added, "Is the position of local cartoonist really valued less than office plants?" (Anderson's letter, which also included a blistering condemnation of corporate ownership of newspapers, and Knight Ridder CEO Tony Ridder in particular, ended up on the popular Romenesko Web site. Soon after, the Pioneer Press publisher killed Anderson's final cartoon, and Ridder himself tried to quash a story about the layoff on Editor & Publisher's Web site.)

Of course, payroll streamlining isn't the only reason jobs are disappearing. Bottom-line mentality and a concern for slipping circulation can drive publishers and editors to fear controversy of any sort (and if there's one thing editorial cartoons excel at attracting...). Given today's environment of cultural sensitivity and technology that allows swift and coordinated responses from angry readers around the planet, many editors would rather not rock the boat to begin with and quickly fold when uproar somehow manages to land on their desk.

"Editors want us to be 'fair,' not opinionated," says Steve Benson, cartoonist for The Arizona Republic. They say they want hard-hitting work, but "when cartoonists do hand in strong cartoons, an editor is just as likely to kill it to avoid offending readers and losing advertisers."

Far worse, at least to some cartoonists, is the editor who insists on watering down the commentary in order to be equal and balanced, altering content to



St. Paul Pioneer Press cartoonist Kirk Anderson drew a farewell cartoon when he was laid off in 2003, which the publisher killed. © Kirk Anderson. Reproduced by permission.

such a degree the point of the cartoon is lost. John Sherffius surprised everyone a year ago when he resigned suddenly from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch over what he saw as an unacceptable amount of interference from his editor. According to a report in The New York Times (which, by the way, hasn't had a staff cartoonist since 1958), Sherffius quit over a "culmination of disagreements with Ellen Soeteber, the editor of the newspaper, over what she viewed as excessive criticism of President Bush and Republicans."

The proverbial final straw came when Sherffius did a cartoon about the GOP-controlled House celebrating after passing a pork barrel-laden appropriations bill that benefited Republicans. He was told to alter it by changing the pig pictured in the piece into a donkey so both parties were represented. Even after Sherffius acquiesced and redrew the cartoon, Soeteber was heard to complain it was still "too one-sided." (Apparently the donkey wasn't happy enough.) By now, the original intent was completely gutted. He redrew the cartoon a third time, handed it in and resigned the next day.

"Editors ask for changes all the time," Sherffius told The New York Times. "That's fine. It's part of the process .... I felt this was a little different."

Given the job market, it is the rare cartoonist indeed who resigns on principle. More often they are pushed out.

One bright spot over the years has been family-owned papers that, whatever their circulation, often had a local cartoonist on staff as a matter of civic pride. Yet even among independent papers with a long tradition of editorial cartooning, the squeeze is on, resulting in something like musical chairs with cartoonists forced to fight over dwindling seats. In May, The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch unceremoniously shoved aside 22-year veteran Jim Larrick so they could make room to hire Jeff Stahler away from The Cincinnati



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Post. Stahler only took the offer after it was apparent that the Post (and his job) wouldn't be around after a Joint Operating Agreement with The Cincinnati Enquirer expires in 2007.

Whether or not they can find a full-time gig, most cartoonists still continue to draw. The majority of people getting published today have cobbled together

a career of sorts, freelancing, doing 'toons on the side, or working for a newspaper or magazine in other capacities with the opportunity to get in an occasional cartoon. Even if they have been cut loose by a paper, many scrape by with freelance work while continuing to provide material for their syndicate. A few, like Ted Rall or Pulitzer Prize-winner Ann Telnaes, have never worked for a newspaper, instead laboriously building up a full-time job through syndication.

But among cartoonists, syndication itself is a thorny issue. What is a solution for some, others see as a problem: Why should any paper hire a full-time staffer, especially given the decreasing costs of syndicated material and increasingly easy access to it?

The story goes that in the late 1990's, The Village Voice fired their long-time cartoonist Jules Feiffer because they said they could no longer afford to pay his salary—but they still wanted to run his cartoons and just planned to buy them from his syndicate (albeit without benefits, pension or support structure of a full-time employee).



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## Future Directions

If it often sounds like we are fighting a rear-guard action, well, the sentiment is part of our collective DNA. The Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC), the group to which the majority of politically oriented cartoonists belong, formed in 1957 in reaction to an article in *The Saturday Review* stating political cartooning was dead. "The Rise and Fall of the Political Cartoon" so offended John Stampone of the *Army Times*, he and a small band of fellow cartoonists set out to prove the article wrong and set up the AAEC to stimulate more public interest about editorial cartoons and closer contacts among cartoonists.

We've been battling that sense of doom and gloom ever since. In a panel discussion at the 2002 AAEC convention, Steve Hess, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution and coauthor of "Drawn & Quartered: The History of American Political Cartoons," said one has to try to keep things in perspective. "For as long as I've been going to [newspaper industry] conventions, they reminded me of Buggy Whip conventions."

With the rise of the Internet over the

past decade, cartoonists have begun to ask if their fate must be tied to that of newsprint. So far, only one cartoonist—Mark Fiore—has left print entirely behind and is the first person to make a living creating weekly animated political cartoons for the Web. [See Fiore's article on page 41.] As for the rest, while the Internet provides easier distribution of their work and a much wider audience, they are still—just like everyone else—figuring out how to make it pay. Until that happens, we must depend on newspapers, even as they treat the majority of us as temporary workers.

Not all openings gather dust. After *Washington Post* legend Herbert Block, a.k.a. Herblock, died in October 2001, the *Post* thought his position too important to lie vacant and set out almost immediately to find his successor, eventually wooing Pulitzer Prize-winner Tom Toles from his hometown paper, *The Buffalo News*. Many thought the *News* would let Toles's old position languish, and while it took them over two years to make a decision, in an encouraging move this past August they hired an enthusiastic grad after his internship with the paper.

As for the *Chicago Tribune*, it continues to fill their op-ed page with

syndicated material and occasionally requests cartoons on specific issues from freelancers. In January 2004, they opened a permanent exhibit of Jeff MacNelly's work on the 24th floor of the Tribune Tower. A Tribune Media Services vice president told Editor & Publisher Online, "It's a reflection of the esteem in which Jeff was held here."

Mike Ritter, then the president of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists, responded in an interview in the *Chicago Reader*: "Putting up a cartoon show as a permanent exhibit but not hiring a new cartoonist comes off as a tombstone more than anything else." ■

*J.P. Trostle is the editor of the Notebook, the quarterly magazine of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists and the book "Attack of the Political Cartoonists: Insights & Assaults from Today's Editorial Pages." He also draws an occasional cartoon for The Chapel Hill Herald in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.*

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# What Publishers Think About Editorial Cartoons

Unexpected benefits are found by some publishers, while others don't even bother to ask readers about the cartoon's impact.

By Bruce Plante

Let me draw a picture. It's not a pretty picture. The number of editorial cartoonist staff positions has dwindled from a high of almost 200 in the mid-1980's to about 85 now. The future seems dim. At many newspapers, cartoonist positions left opened by death, layoffs, retirements and resignations remain unfilled.

The discouraging news about the growing number of unemployed car-

toonists seemed so bad during my year (September 2002-September 2003) as the president of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC) that I received more than a few calls from reporters who started by saying something like this, "I would like to ask you a few questions for an article I am doing on the demise of editorial cartooning in American newspapers." I heard the statement so many times even

I began to wonder why any newspaper publisher would ever invest in a full-time staff editorial cartoonist when it would be cheaper to buy syndicated cartoons.

## Cartoonists' Value

To arrive at an answer, I recently asked several publishers two questions: How valuable has having an editorial cartoon-

ist on staff been for your newspaper? And are there any unexpected benefits? These questions inspired many publishers to air their views about the current state of cartooning at American newspapers.

What follows are e-mail responses from publishers, in their own words.

**Gary Sherlock**, publisher and president of The Journal News (168,668 Sundays) in White Plains, New York writes: "Without a doubt, having an editorial cartoonist of the quality of Matt Davies on our editorial staff has been a significant competitive advantage in the marketplace. Each day we compete with the much larger New York City dailies. And having his work in our paper provides our readers with a real different reason for buying our newspaper. Whether the topic is local, regional or national, his work is just that much better than the competition. Matt Davies' willingness to go out into the community and talk about his work has been an unexpected benefit to The Journal News. In particular, he really connects with young kids in a way that cannot be duplicated by other staffers. He is building future readers at every turn." [See Matt Davies' story on page 6.]

**Tim Kelly**, publisher of the Lexington Herald-Leader in Lexington, Kentucky (144,528 Sundays) writes: "Clearly, the greatest value of having an editorial cartoonist on the staff of a paper our size is the added dimension Joel Pett gives us in terms of local commentary. We all know that we can purchase the work of the best cartoonists in the country (Joel included) on national and world topics for a fraction of the cost of a staff cartoonist. But we and our readers can't get the local angle anyplace else. That is why it is essential that local cartoonists draw locally. Not all the time, but a considerable percentage of the time.

"Are there any unexpected benefits? You mean aside from the bleating that one can hear whenever a particularly ripe ox is gored? I've always felt that cartoonists have a special place when it comes to reader reaction. It's a varia-

PLANTE WITH RESPECT TO MIKEY ANGELO  
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tion on the picture-tells-a-thousand-words theme. People can respond to our editorial words in kind, but it really challenges them to respond to a masterfully executed editorial cartoon. They certainly can't do it in kind, but it's clear that they want to respond in some way. The best cartoonists function as do the best columnists: They elicit a reaction—a chuckle, a groan, a gasp, a fit of anger. And the good ones cause people to come back to the paper on a regular basis looking to see what (fill in the blank) drew today.

"Aside from that, the fact that Joel's national and world cartoons appear in papers from The New York Times to the Los Angeles Times to USA Today gives the Lexington Herald-Leader a visibility—certainly at least in the industry—that we would not otherwise have. I figure that can't be bad for our recruiting. And when he does things like win a Pulitzer Prize, be a Pulitzer finalist, or win the Robert F. Kennedy Award, among others, he brings honor to the newspaper." [See Joel Pett's story on page 32.]

**John Temple**, publisher, president and editor of the Rocky Mountain News in Denver, Colorado (275,135 Mon.-Fri.), adds: "We have two editorial cartoonists: Ed Stein in news/commentary

and Drew Litton in sports.

"Having an editorial cartoonist is very valuable. I think readers love the impact of an editorial cartoon, when they're as pointed and hard-hitting as Ed's. People don't cut out columns and post them on their fridge or computer. But they do cartoons. There's something about a cartoon that distills so much into a small space. Opinion is a critical part of a good newspaper, and a good editorial cartoon is at the extreme end of opinion. Good editorial cartoons have to be very uncompromising. This makes them difficult, challenging. I think that engages people, even when it enrages them.

"The unexpected benefit in our case has been the creation of Denver Square, a locally oriented comic strip. Ed's strip lets him explore subjects with much more ambiguity and complexity. Readers see themselves, their lives, in that strip. So that's been a big hit for us. Another unexpected benefit is that editorial cartoons can be so sharp that they help everyone figure out where they stand, including the editorial board. Also, newspapers thrive by having creative people feed off each other. There's no question that cartoonists are among the most creative people in the room. They help create an atmosphere of questioning, of laughter, of serious

criticism. And they put editors on the spot, by forcing them to consider where they draw the line. Ed gets a kick out of that, and so do I. [See the story by Ed Stein on page 38.]

**Walter E. Hussman**, publisher of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette (283,538 Sundays) in Little Rock, Arkansas, who has a long tradition of employing editorial cartoonists such as John Deering (not to mention the author of this article, who has worked for Hussman twice—first at the Democrat-Gazette and now at the Chattanooga Times Free Press) shares: “An editorial cartoonist is very valuable. Readership studies consistently show that editorial cartoons enjoy higher readership than editorials. A good local cartoonist is an immense sense of pride to readers (‘our cartoonist’). It communicates to readers that the newspaper is a quality product, especially in this day and age where more and more papers have eliminated their cartoonist. This builds ‘brand loyalty’ to the newspaper and reduces subscriber churn.”

**Burgett H. Mooney III**, publisher of the Rome (Georgia) News-Tribune (19,216 Sunday) responded: “Having an editorial cartoonist is both a luxury and a necessity for small newspapers. I believe newspapers have given up a huge part of the ‘franchise’ by letting the editorial page become generic. We have a full-time editorial page editor (Pierre Noth) and assistant (Kathy Davis) along with an editorial cartoonist (Mike Lester) on staff. I believe the editorial page is more important for the 20,000-circulation newspaper than the larger ones. If we pay attention to the editorial page and drive it towards local issues we can be more in touch with the reader, and that puts us more in touch with the community. A local editorial cartoonist is an integral part of our overall strategy to push and pull the community through as many topics as possible.

“Mike has reached out to all constituents. He may be speaking to a third grade class today, to Rotary club another

day, and to a senior citizen group another. This is a great opportunity to push the newspaper deeper into the community.”

### What Publishers Don’t See

These publishers’ comments demonstrate that there is good news for editorial cartoonists.

But the news should be better. As

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**‘The best cartoonists function as do the best columnists: They elicit a reaction—a chuckle, a groan, a gasp, a fit of anger.’**

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cartoonists, we have never enjoyed more readership. More of us are widely syndicated. Because of the Internet, millions of readers worldwide see a cartoon drawn in Chattanooga. Sites devoted to editorial cartoons are among the most popular cartoon Web sites. Many cartoons often are reprinted in major magazines, newspapers and television networks around the world. Our work is fun, popular and accessible to all ages. We’re the Jon Stewarts of the newspaper industry.

All of this makes it difficult to understand why the majority of newspaper managers can’t see that these qualities can easily be translated into a way of attracting, engaging and retaining readers for their newspapers. I’m beginning to think some newspaper managers don’t want to know.

During my tenure as president of the AAEC, I contacted the Readership Institute at Northwestern University’s Media Management Center to find out how editorial cartoonists fared in their comprehensive 100-newspaper readership study. I was surprised to learn that none of the 100 newspapers had requested one specific question to be asked about editorial cartoons. That fact is curious, considering that virtually every newspaper in the study publishes at least a syndicated editorial cartoon every day.

I asked the members of the AAEC if

their newspaper had done any readership surveys and if they had received any results. Only one cartoonist had received feedback from any studies. His editor told him his cartoons had polled better than any other feature. When the cartoonist asked what the editor had learned from that information, the editor said, “It doesn’t mean anything. Everybody reads the cartoons.”

According to the Readership Institute, surveys consistently point to the fact that readers of all ages, especially the younger reader, want more visual elements, local content, and local commentary. Stories published in the Winter 2003 issue of Nieman Reports tell us that young readers especially want commentary with an edge and an attitude—exactly what cartoonists offer.

But judging by the diminishing number of staff cartoonists and the lack of interest most publishers seem to have in learning about their readers’ perspective on this part of the newspaper, I’d have to conclude that most publishers do not appreciate the benefit an editorial cartoonist would bring to their newspapers.

Perhaps, someday, someone will draw them a picture. ■

*Bruce Plante is the editorial cartoonist for the Chattanooga Times Free Press, a former president of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC), and current chairman of the AAEC/Herb Block Committee. The committee recently received a grant from The Herb Block Foundation for a three-year “Cartoons for the Classroom” effort to encourage editorial cartooning by educating students of all ages, including journalism students and professors as well as newspaper publishers and editors. (See page 7 for more information on this project.)*

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# Interviewing for a Job Illuminates Some Critical Issues

'Take a job under impossible conditions and you invariably get fired.'

By Ted Rall

I am fortunate. The only job I've ever wanted was to draw political cartoons for a living and, though it took me a lot of hard work and good luck to break into the profession, that's what I do.

Today, I still follow a routine that began when I was 12. Every week I rough out dozens of ideas for cartoons based on news stories, conversations and overheard nonsense, all with a view towards commenting on current events and trends. Unlike my earlier efforts, now my favorite three go out to client newspapers via the Universal Press Syndicate.

Given how many talented cartoonists have been fired from newspapers—most of them without hope of landing a new job—I don't have cause to complain about my lot. I am that rare creature, the editorial cartoonist who can make a full-time living solely from syndication. Because most syndicated artists only have a few clients, their revenue is only a small supplement to a full-time position on staff. But unlike a staff cartoonist, no single editor can fire me and, by doing so, deprive me of 90 percent or more of my income. So I enjoy a rare degree of job security.

Nonetheless, I don't have what I really want: a job at a newspaper, where I'd work with editors and journalists on cartoons, not just about the big national news stories, but on the state and local issues that resonate so strongly with readers. As a teenager, I watched Mike Peters, staff cartoonist at my hometown paper in Dayton, Ohio, draw in his ink-stained office, and since then I have craved what I consider a real editorial cartooning job. Syndication is great for the national exposure it offers, but the chance to get that newsroom buzz easily trumps the benefits of inking in my

underwear while watching Ricki Lake on the TV at home.

## Auditioning for a Staff Job

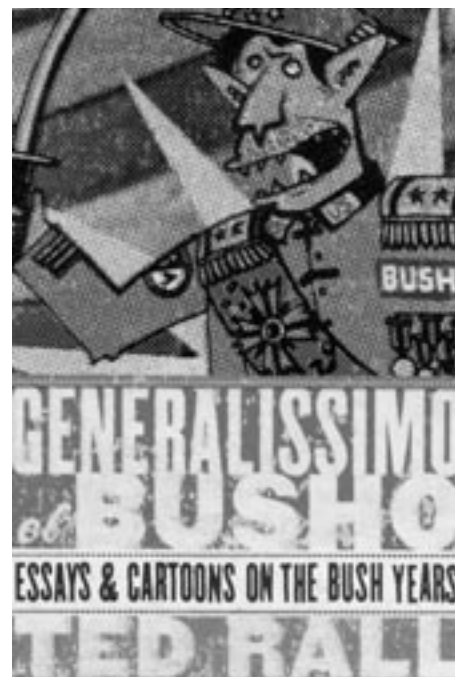
My cartoons are fairly well known since they are published in more than a hundred papers. I've won two Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Awards, was a Pulitzer Prize finalist, have published more than a dozen books—a few of them successful—and attracted notoriety from Fox News and other Republican-slanted media outlets because of my work during the Bush administration. As a result, I've been interviewed three times for positions at major U.S. newspapers.

Those close hiring calls serve as parables for the state of the industry.

In 1995, The (Harrisburg) Patriot-News, one of my clients through syndication, flew me to the Pennsylvania capital to meet for lunch with the paper's features editor, editor in chief, and publisher. The paper didn't have a staffer, nor had one been fired or laid off, so it would have been a "clean hire"—no resentment from the dearly departed's friends in the photo section. I liked the town, the people I'd be working for and—most of all—the chance to wage war with my pen and ink on the reliably corrupt politicians of the Pennsylvania State Legislature.

Though it's possible that the decision that followed was caused by my salary request, personality or some other unknown factor, I left the meeting feeling positive about my chances at Harrisburg. Then I checked in with the features editor every few days; she told me to hang tight while they came to a conclusion.

"Rather than hire an editorial cartoonist," she ultimately informed me,



"we've decided to go with a sportswriter."

I was dense. "A sportswriter is going to draw the cartoons?"

"No, we're hiring a sportswriter *in lieu of* a cartoonist. It's a budget thing."

The Patriot-News, in the midst of a multimillion-dollar upgrade of its presses at the time, already had six sportswriters on staff. They've never hired a cartoonist from the dozens of brilliant unemployed artists making the rounds, leading to a simple conclusion: It wasn't me. One might ask why Harrisburg—not exactly a big sports town, given its lack of professional teams, colleges or universities—needs so many sportswriters. Or how a newspaper in the capital of one of the nation's most populous and politically influential states can do without a political cartoonist. But such are the mysterious priorities of editors and publishers.



Around the same time an opening occurred at the Asbury Park Press, a central New Jersey daily whose circulation was jumping thanks to increased ad revenue from the dot-com boom. The previous cartoonist was in his mid-80's; he retired. The editorial page editor commissioned a weekly New Jersey-based cartoon from me as a way of "trying me out" on the editorial page. Pleased with my work, he recommended to the executive editor that the paper bring me aboard full time.

Naturally, I was thrilled. New Jersey politics, not to mention the fact that so many of the state's cities are little more than bedroom communities for New York City workers, would be great inspiration. The executive editor worked his way down a list of boilerplate questions: "What was I hoping to accomplish?" "How much did I expect to earn?" "Did I need my own office?"

Everything went satisfactorily until his final query: "Will I ever look out there"—he gestured over his shoulder down to the parking lot below—"and see protesters yelling about a cartoon that you drew?"

I told him the truth. "It's not my intention to offend readers," I answered, "but if an idea is worth expressing, I don't think I should self-censor because of that possibility. Of course, I would respect your judgment if you decided not to run one of my cartoons. Anyway, I find it nearly impossible to predict what will make people angry."

His face clouded. I knew I'd blown what should have been a neat, simple, lying-through-my-teeth "no." But what difference did it make? Take a job under impossible conditions and you invariably get fired. Actually, I appreciated his honesty. Many cartoonists discover their paper's editorial cowardice after it's too late.

Most recently, I was one of four cartoonists named as interviewees for an opening, again created by retirement, at The Sacramento Bee. Sacramento is distinctly Midwestern in tone, not to mention the capital of California. What I wouldn't give to have the new governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, to kick around! And the city, while somewhat of a bore itself, is a couple hours from

San Francisco and Reno.

When I arrived from New York, however, I immediately figured out that I was being given a "courtesy" interview. The fix was already in for Rex Babin, then a staffer in Albany, New York, whose cartoons not so subtly graced the walls of two of the editors who were supposedly considering me. Babin is a good cartoonist. He has been a Pulitzer finalist. But two comments made by different editors leapt out at me.

"The perfect cartoon has no words at all," one told me. "They should illustrate the editorial page, give the reader a break from those oceans of text."

"Sounds like you really want an editorial illustrator," I suggested. I also do freelance spot illustrations, which are more of the eye candy this editor seemed interested in. She displayed no understanding whatsoever of what editorial cartoons are, or what they should attempt to achieve: a clear, strident, message or comment about an issue or trend—ideally delivered in a unique, thought-provoking way. Great editorial cartoons can be wordy and poorly drawn; bad ones can't be saved by excellent draughtsmanship.

The editorial page editor, a smart,

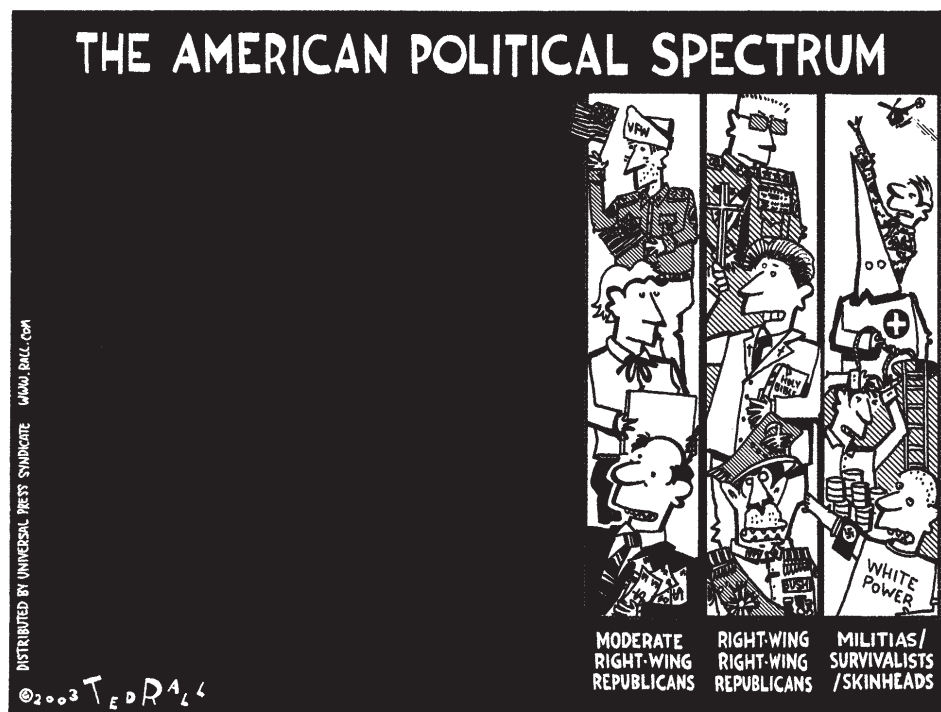
jovial man whom I would love to work alongside, put it the way I prefer: bluntly. "When making this decision," he said, maintaining the fiction that I was being seriously considered for the staff job, "I had to ask myself a question. Would the good burghers of Sacramento"—the city's political and business elite—"prefer to read Rex Babin or Ted Rall in the pages of their morning paper?"

His primary implication that Babin isn't as "hard hitting" as I was dubious at best. His secondary assertion—that a newspaper should cater to the delicate sensibilities of the very personalities it should treat most harshly—sums up everything that's wrong with the media today.

But I still dream and wait for the phone to ring with the news that a paper wants to talk to me—and, maybe this time, actually hire me. ■

*Ted Rall is a syndicated cartoonist with the Universal Press Syndicate. His most recent book is "Generalissimo El Busbo: Essays & Cartoons on the Bush Years."*

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# Editorial Page Editors and Cartoonists: A Difficult Alliance

'A cartoonist's world is black and white, while an editor's universe is imbued with shades of gray.'

By John Zakarian

Ever dream you were dancing on a volcano or standing with a stick of dynamite near a crackling campfire? Editors who work with talented editorial cartoonists are known to have those nightmares.

When I hired Bob Englehart as The Hartford Courant's editorial cartoonist 24 years ago, I expected him to light the fuse more often than not. I believed that our state, Connecticut, affectionately known as the land of steady habits, needed stimulation from this art form. Fireworks from newspaper cartoonland would add a kick to the colder medium of editorials. If Bob got out of hand occasionally, I would be able to tame his wilder side, or at least to keep it on a leash. So I thought. After all, I was his editor and had veto power.

Today, much older and a bit wiser, I confess to the sin of overconfidence. Working with a talented cartoonist is much more complicated than giving a simple yes or no answer to his daily offering. Schools teach copyediting and writing, but none to my knowledge instruct would-be editors on editing cartoons. It's not just fixing syntax and correcting spelling in taglines and balloons. In cartoons, the editor deals with ideas expressed starkly, brutally, through an art form for the masses. The opinion is expressed in caricatures, relies on satire, and indulges in exaggeration, sometimes wildly so.

A cartoonist's world is black and white, while an editor's universe is imbued with shades of gray. The best cartoonists are an independent-minded breed. Rebellious is a better description. They are far more likely to question and even denounce their bosses for "censoring" their masterpieces.

Editors ordinarily are comfortable

making changes in copy, but who among the gatekeepers is able to redraw a cartoon? When a suggested cartoon needs more work, it always means asking the creator to rethink, refine, clarify or restart. In other words, an editor doesn't really edit a cartoon, he or she works with its creator in shaping images and messages.

What this means is that if an editor is the type of person who abhors volcanic eruptions from a cartoonist over the editing of his or her work, don't hire one. Instead, rely on syndicated cartoonists over whom you have far more effective control through the process of choosing one from many purchased inexpensively. But syndicated cartoonists do not give newspapers the local flavor that they must have in fully engaging audiences. They never connect directly with their readers as a good local cartoonist does. Bob says his favorite cartoon commentaries are on state and local issues. He gets instant and substantial feedback, positive and negative. His voice mail is never empty.

## Questions Editors Ask

Editing cartoons involves mostly asking questions. Editors must reflect on a series of questions instinctively and do so in a matter of seconds after examining the sketch. On a few occasions, an editor might sit on the proposed idea for an hour or two and even "test" the sketch on a colleague in the office. But it's most fair to let the cartoonist know as soon as possible. Otherwise, the presumption is that the cartoon is a go and the creator proceeds with the final drawing.

Here are some of the questions I ask:

1. Would the proposed cartoon be easily understood by most readers?
2. Does it deal with a big subject that's very much in the limelight instead of a footnote in one of the news-roundup pages that tickles the cartoonist's fancy?

Answers to these questions should not strain the editor. If I don't get the point, I will not run it.

3. Does it state the obvious in ho-hum fashion or introduce a provocative thought and use a powerful and instantly recognizable metaphor or allegory?
4. Is it intended merely to draw a laugh, as in comics, without necessarily making a point?

These questions are a bit more problematic. A ho-hum idea? Funny just for the sake of getting a laugh? What cartoonist who labored on the sketch would cede those points without an argument?

5. Does the cartoon indulge in offensive racial and ethnic stereotyping?
6. Is it within the boundary (albeit porous) of fairness?
7. Is it in reasonably good taste or does it go over the edge?

These are more subjective questions since they relate far more to the editor's core values and familiarity with community mores. Taking into account the sensibilities of loyal editorial page readers, who generally are better informed and more sophisticated than other newspaper readers, would be wise. Put another way, going for the jugular is fine, but hitting below the belt is not.

8. Would I be able to easily explain and defend the cartoon the next day?

The editorial page editor's judgment isn't impeccable, of course. But editors who cannot defend a cartoon on the day after shouldn't have run it in the first place. It's not convincing to argue, "Well, that's not the newspaper's opinion. It's Englehart's opinion. His name is on the cartoon."

Local cartoonists, whose work appears next to the masthead, cannot be totally separated from their newspapers. Many readers regard cartoons as quasi editorials expressing the newspaper's opinions. That's one reason publishers often ask to see the cartoon before its publication.

### The Role Editors Play

Editors must buffer the cartoonists from readers and from the nervous publishers. So it's an editor's job to say no to a cartoon when it must be said and to also leave the keepers of the steel-tipped, poison-dipped pen a wide swath to create great work.

To encourage a healthy working relationship with the house cartoonist, a few ground rules would help. For example, Bob knew from the start of our association that depicting bodily functions and using epithets in cartoons would trigger my nervous twitches. I'm also skittish about cartoons that deal with religious symbols, especially when caricaturing Jesus, Mary, Muhammad or the pope and using the cross, the Star of David, or the Muslim crescent.

But those are not ironclad rules. They're guideposts. Alas, sex scandals involving the clergy require biting cartoon commentary. So do church lobbying and pronouncements on abortion, gay marriage, birth control, and stem cell research.

Predicting how readers will react to a tough cartoon is a hopeless exercise, although editors try anyway. There were days when I came prepared to deal with a deluge of denunciations and nothing happened. There were also red-letter days when hordes of readers challenged my decency, common sense,

and patriotism for approving the "outrageous," "beyond the pale," "racist," "sexist," "incompetent," and you name it, cartoon. Day in, day out, nothing else in the newspaper draws as many threats of litigation and bodily harm than a cartoon on a touchy topic.

The editor's biggest cartoon challenge is to encourage edgy work without the cartoonist and his boss falling off the cliff. A successful cartoonist challenges conventional thinking, stimulates thought, skewers misbehaving figures, deflates self-righteous, pompous characters, and flushes out hypocrites. A successful editor coaches, indeed cheers, the cartoonist—up to a point.

What follows are examples of cartoons that caused fireworks:

- At a meeting with the editorial board, Hartford's police chief complained that fighting crime in the city is all the more difficult because of a lack of cooperation between law enforcers and citizens. Bob's caricature was that of an uncooperative black couple telling a black officer that they would be "acting white" if they gave up the names of known criminals in their neighborhoods. I asked Bob to soften the racial caricatures in his images, but otherwise thought the cartoon was within bounds. Not so with many readers, especially African Americans, who let us know.
- One of Bob's most celebrated/denounced cartoons targeted Connecticut's biggest electric power provider Northeast Utilities (N.U.) after it asked state regulators for a substantial rate hike. Responding to the request, Bob drew N.U.'s logo with the image of a screw next to the U. Screw you? Hundreds of readers demanded that the editor and the cartoonist be fired for tolerating such "crude" and "vulgar" work in the oldest newspaper (1764) in the nation.
- Bob went after state bureaucrats following the death of a 3-year-old boy from a broken family who was choked by his prospective adoptive father. Stories described sloppy supervision of the boy by the Connecticut Department of Children and Families

(DCF). Bob drew the boy standing before an angel at the gates of heaven saying, "Connecticut DCF sent me." Social workers were furious. So was former Governor John G. Rowland, a regular critic as well as target of the cartoonist, who accused Bob of sinking to "new depths" because the cartoon "made fun of the death of the boy."

Tough cartoons? Yes. Borderline on taste? Maybe. Defensible under the circumstances? Yes.

There are editing misfires, of course. Early in the presidential campaign, Bob proposed a cartoon showing a low-IQ type who says, "Kerry Doesn't Have a Chance!" Bob attached a button on the man's shirt that read, "Morons for Bush." I thought the button wasn't needed because it's obvious from the caricature that the man is a moron. Bob agreed, although reluctantly. The next day, many readers called to ask for a translation of the cartoon. Keeping the "morons" button would have made the cartoon clearer, although the message that only morons are for Bush would be harsh and fundamentally untrue.

### Cultural Misunderstandings

Some of the most hurtful misfires are rooted in cultural misunderstandings. Responding to the climatic churn associated with the warming of the Pacific Ocean, Bob drew a cartoon with a character shouting, "Curse you, El Niño!" Many Hartford Latinos (at least one-third of the city) were shocked and angry because El Niño in Spanish refers to the infant Jesus.

Years ago, when Hartford's first-ever black mayor announced his intention to seek reelection, Bob drew him as a janitor sitting in city hall's broom closet. The cartoonist used the metaphor to show the ineffectiveness of Hartford's weak-mayor/strong city council government system. The intended message: Why does anyone want to be mayor in this city? But African Americans didn't see it that way. Picturing the mayor as a janitor, they told us, reinforced stereotypes of blacks capable only of menial work.

Muslims were enraged in 2002 when a cartoon linked Islam to 9/11, the murder of Daniel Pearl, and the incineration of a trainload of Hindus. Catholics were similarly outraged when a cartoon told Pope John Paul II that he is all wrong on stem cell research.

Bob doesn't believe in special dispensation to any group or individual. His targets have included Native Americans,

Israeli leaders, gun control opponents, people with physical handicaps, labor union bosses, and corporate leaders. When asked by the Courant's reader advocate if he is "an equal-opportunity hater," Bob didn't mince words: "Yes. I don't like anybody. I think everyone is prone to corruption and foul play ...."

There is no such thing as safe danc-

ing between editorial page editors and good cartoonists. ■

*John Zakarian, a 1969 Nieman Fellow, recently retired as editorial page editor and vice president of The Hartford Courant.*

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## The Fixable Decline of Editorial Cartooning

Editorial page editors and business decisions combine to weaken what is the strength of editorial cartoons.

By Chris Lamb

The terrorism attacks of September 11, 2001 profoundly changed the rules of engagement for America's editorial cartoonists, who directed their sense of outrage at a world that was shifting uneasily under their drawing boards, leaving them struggling to convey their reactions in a single image. In the days and weeks that followed, editorial pages were strewn with images of fiery twin towers, weeping Statues of Liberty, snarling bald eagles, and resolute Uncle Sams rolling up their sleeves to march into hell for a heavenly cause.

Amid the chaos of the first great crisis of the 21st century, most Americans, including cartoonists, believed it was inappropriate, even unpatriotic, to criticize President George W. Bush. Garry Trudeau, who draws "Doonesbury," canceled a series of strips critical of the President. Syndicated cartoonist Pat Oliphant, who has a well-deserved reputation for merciless satire, said cartoonists had to support the administration—at least for the time being.

Soon after the terrorist attacks, however, a few cartoonists returned to social satire, believing—contrary to many of their colleagues and readers—that giving our leaders a free pass during times of crisis undermines our democracy. Trudeau ended his armistice

with a strip pointing out that President Bush and his administration were using the tragedy to move their conservative agenda forward. One drawing shows Bush's chief political aide Karl Rove telling the President that several of the controversial items on his political agenda were "justified by the war against terrorism!" Bush replies: "Wow ... what a coincidence ... thanks evildoers!"

The Bush administration insisted it needed to increase its authority to win the war on terrorism. Congress quickly passed the USA Patriot Act, which provided the Justice Department and other agencies wide latitude to disregard the Bill of Rights for purposes of surveillance and law enforcement.

Still, most editorial cartoonists condemned America's enemies but refrained from questioning the Bush administration, either willingly supporting the President or fearful of incurring the wrath of their editors or readers. Editorial cartoonist Ann Telnaes scolded those in her profession for being government cheerleaders. [See Telnaes' article on page 28.] She's right. Cartoonists should not be government propagandists. As social critics, cartoonists should keep a vigilant eye on the democracy and those threatening it, whether the threats come from outside or inside the country.



### Cartoonists and Patriotism

But what happens when First Amendment theory clashes with more than 3,000 people dying in acts of atrocious inhumanity followed by the reality of a war against an unseen enemy? In this fog of war, those cartoonists who criticized the administration had their patriotism questioned, their lives threatened, and

their livelihoods jeopardized.

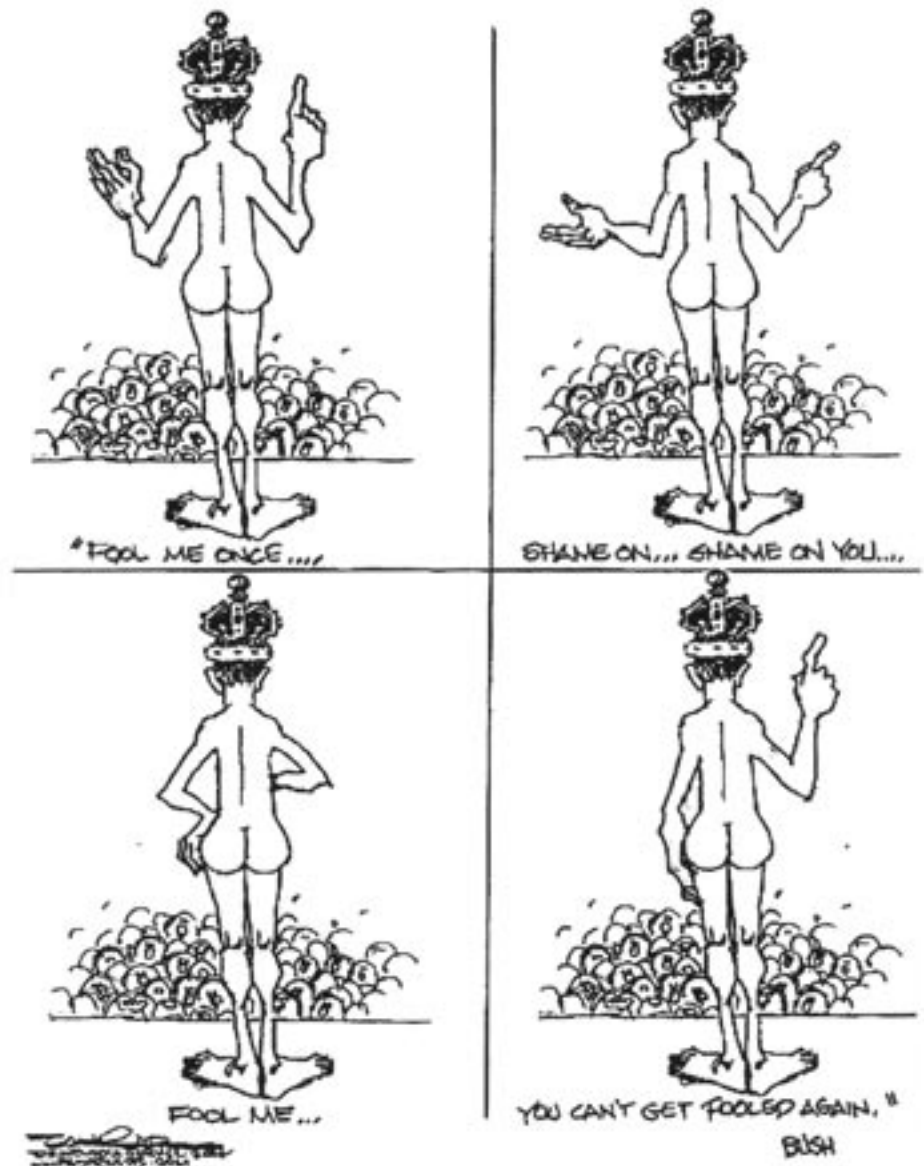
Using shameless nationalistic blather, then White House spokesman Ari Fleischer condemned a cartoon critical of Bush that appeared in a small New Hampshire newspaper, resulting in the firing of the newspaper's editor and the vilification of the cartoonist. The New York Times dropped Ted Rall from its Web site because of his harsh criticism of the Bush administration. Scott Stantis, then the president of the American Association of Editorial Cartoonists, said that cartoonists found themselves "under particular scrutiny" after September 11th. "A number of cartoonists have heard 'You're a traitor' anytime they question the President," Stantis said. [See the article by Stantis on page 37.]

But nothing is more patriotic than social criticism. Editorial cartoons are as irreverent as the Boston Tea Party and as American as the U.S. Constitution. The First Amendment doesn't exist so we can praise our public officials; it exists so we can criticize them. Newspapers who give their cartoonists the freedom to express their views, as free as possible from editorial restraint, reinforce the message that an uninhibited exchange of opinions not only strengthens but also maintains our democracy; in fact, it is necessary for a democracy.

The sad state of editorial cartooning is a result of the current economics of the newspaper industry and of editors who have little appreciation for political satire. As the newspaper industry has declined in both readership and influence so, too, has journalistic decision-making by editors, many of whom opt for publishing generic syndicated cartoons over provocative, staff-drawn cartoons. They do this because the cartoons are cheaper, and they generate fewer phone calls and e-mails from readers. Too many editors want editorial cartoons to be objective, like news stories. But that's not what editorial cartoons are supposed to do.

### The Value of Editorial Cartoons

When editorial cartoons are at their best, they're like switchblades—simple



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and to the point. They cut deeply and leave a scar. No editorial on President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration is as memorable as David Levine's drawing of LBJ lifting up his shirt to reveal his gall bladder scar in the shape of Vietnam. Herbert Block, or Herblock as he signed his cartoons, captured the anti-Communist hysteria of the Red Scare by creating the word "McCarthyism." Later, Herblock's portrayal of Richard Nixon climbing out of a sewer made such an impression on Nixon that he later told an adviser, "I have to erase the Herblock image." Robert Minor's searing World War I cartoon of a medical examiner salivating over a giant headless soldier

and gushing, "At last a perfect soldier!" is a timeless indictment of war. And Thomas Nast's drawing of "Boss" Tweed as a bag of money remains an enduring symbol of political corruption. [See cartoon on page 20.]

Newspapers must believe that editorial cartoons have some value, or else why would they run them every day on their editorial and op-ed pages? Their readership studies tell them that editorial cartoons bring readers to the editorial page. Bruce Dold, the editorial page editor of the Chicago Tribune, says that the "cartoon is the best read thing on the editorial page. People think it's quick, it's funny, and often it's insight-



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*Los Angeles Times*.

ful. It's often the only laugh on a page of very serious public policy."

Dold makes a strong case for a newspaper having an editorial cartoonist. Yet the Tribune has not had a cartoonist since the death of Jeff MacNelly in 2000. Dold blames economics. But after four years, this is a tired explanation. Other explanations for why newspapers don't have cartoonists are weaker still. Cartoonist Doug Marlette remembers a conversation he had with former New York Times editor Max Frankel, when Marlette asked why the newspaper didn't have a staff cartoonist. "The problem with editorial cartoonists," he was told, "is that you can't edit them." To which Marlette responded: "Why would you want to?" [See article by Marlette on page 21.]

Editorial cartoonists are given the Rodney Dangerfield treatment, which suggests that newspapers, unlike their readers, underestimate—and certainly underappreciate—the value of humor, satire and visual commentary. "The world likes humor but treats it patronizingly," E.B. White wrote several decades ago. "It decorates its serious artists with laurels and its wags with Brussels sprouts. It feels that if a thing is funny it can be presumed to be something less than great because if it were great it would be wholly serious."



Thomas Nast's "Boss" Tweed drawing endures as a symbol of political corruption.

Even those newspapers with staff cartoonists treat them as illustrators of their editorial line. In fact, newspaper editors generally give writers of letters to the editor more freedom than their editorial cartoonists. Unlike letters to the editor, editorial cartoons generally are not allowed to contradict the newspaper's editorial policy. Rare is the editor who sees his cartoonist as an independent contractor. The Los Angeles Times respected Paul Conrad enough to do that; not coincidentally, Conrad, at his best, represented the best of editorial cartooning. He took on the high and mighty without fear or favor and was not afraid to turn a mirror on us and reveal us not as we want to be but as we are. On the contrary, Michael Ramirez, Conrad's successor at the Times, often acts as an apologist of the Bush administration.

Editorial cartoonists today are less watchdogs of the public trust than lapdogs of the newspaper industry's corporate establishment. This has been particularly true during the Bush administration's war on terrorism when newspapers have abandoned their responsibilities to question the government. Much of the most provocative criticism of the Bush administration has been drawn by a relatively small number of syndicated cartoonists—such as



A World War I cartoon by Robert Minor shows a medical examiner delighting over what he calls "a perfect soldier."

Trudeau, Oliphant, Rall, Telnaes, and Jeff Danziger—who are less affected by newsroom pressures.

But syndication produces its own problems. One measure of success in cartooning is to be syndicated. If a cartoonist yearns to have his drawings appear in more and more newspapers, which translates into more money and more visibility, he or she tries to appeal to as many readers as possible. For too many cartoonists, this produces work that is long on punch line but short on punch; as a result, we get too many drawings about Martha Stewart and not enough about U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft.

Cartoonists are right to blame editors and publishers for not taking their art seriously. But why should editors do this when cartoonists don't take themselves seriously? Too much of editorial cartooning today is instantly forgettable. Too many cartoonists rely on their first drafts, which explains why so many cartoons are superficial or look like one another. They've abandoned the sense of righteous indignation that inspires the profession's best instincts, or its "killer angels," as Marlette put it. Marlette was once asked what makes a good cartoon, and he answered, "Can you remember it? Did it tattoo your soul?"

Between 80 and 90 editorial cartoonists presently work in full-time staff positions for daily newspapers. Twenty-five years ago, that number was perhaps twice that size. And cartoonists with jobs feel pressured to obey their editors or risk losing their job. Earlier this year, John Sherffius of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch quit rather than work within the onerous dictates of an editor who insisted that he include criticism of Democrats in cartoons that criticized the Bush administration.

Newspaper editors need to quit acting like government bureaucrats and corporate accountants. If they begin acting like guardians of the public

trust, as they're intended to do, they might find that their editorial pages give readers something to look forward to in the morning. They can do this by hiring editorial cartoonists and letting them do what editorial cartoonists are supposed to do: afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.

By preserving editorial cartooning, newspapers perhaps can save themselves. The newspaper industry, with its best days behind it, can learn from the past and do what newspapers did 100 years ago when, as one historian put it, every self-respecting editor had a cartoonist on staff and often put his work on Page One. This increased not

just the newspaper's circulation, but it also increased political activism. This could happen and, in doing so, it would serve as a daily remainder to its readers of the importance of social criticism in a democracy. ■

*Chris Lamb is an associate professor of communication at the College of Charleston in South Carolina and author of "Drawn to Extremes: The Use and Abuse of Editorial Cartoons in the United States," published by Columbia University Press in 2004.*

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## Freedom of Speech and the Editorial Cartoon

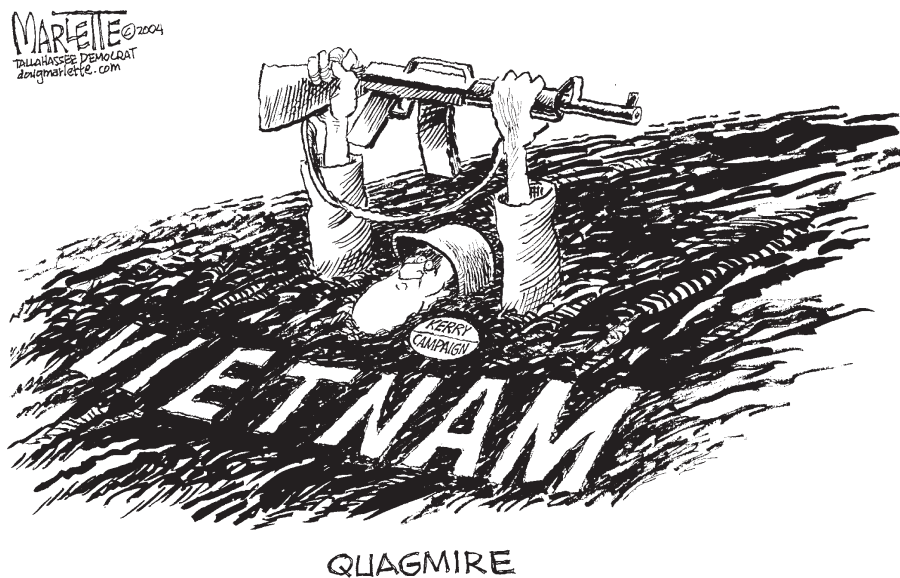
'Cartoons are the acid test of the First Amendment.'

By Doug Marlette

**K**urt Vonnegut once compared the artist to the canary in the coal mine, a hypersensitive creature who alerts harder life forms to toxic gases by kindly dropping dead. Given the steady demise of editorial cartoonists during the past several years, newspapers might begin to wonder about the quality of the air.

Cartoonists have been keeling over in startling numbers—down from almost 200 just 20 years ago to fewer than 90 today. The poisonous fumes laying us low are the byproduct of the corporate culture that has engulfed newspapering during the past two decades. It is a bottom-line cult of efficiency that threatens not just my own profession but the integrity of journalism and hence the unruly spirit of democracy.

That is old news, and we've all heard reasons for the disappearance of the editorial cartoon. Circulation is down and budgets are tight. Newsprint costs soar. Editors forced to cut budgets look around and find the expendable employee, or the person least like them: the guy or gal who just draws pictures. Newspapers have survived challenges



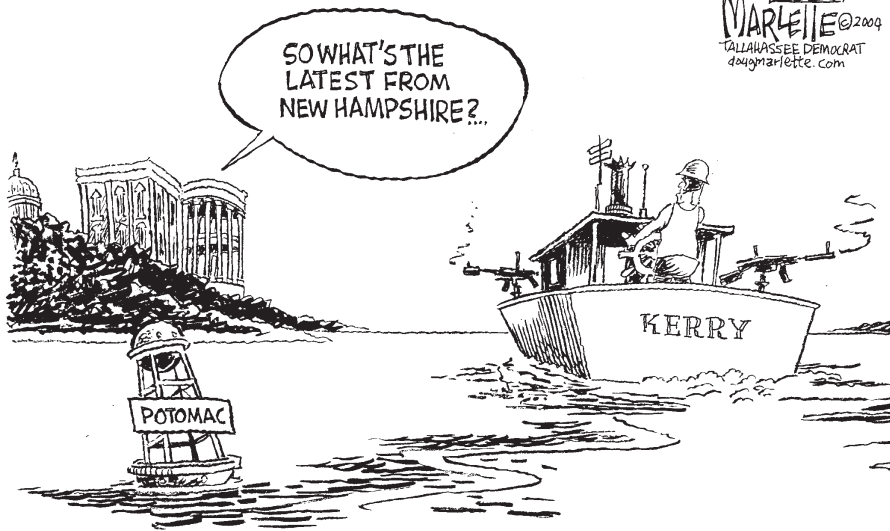
QUAGMIRE

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for 200 years, from the rise of the telegraph to radio and television and now 24/7 cable news programming. That is because the newspaper's indispensable function has been to shape its community's very identity through the distinctive voices and personalities on its pages. (Could one imagine Chicago

without Royko?) Cartoons are the most accessible window into the character of the paper and its town. Yet more and more publishers are convincing themselves that they don't need a local pen or brush representing them on the editorial page. Instead of having an artist who will continue to shape and reflect

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the soul of their community, they get by cherry-picking canned (and cheap) cartoons from syndicates.

### Cartoons and the Bottom Line

When I started drawing editorial cartoons in the 1970's, the profit margins on which newspapers operated were 12 to 14 percent. Today, it's upwards of 25 percent. Most businesses—even Halliburton and Enron—have been content with five percent. We are told that newspaper operating capital in the low-to-mid-20's—which, by the way, is on a par with that of pharmaceutical companies—is necessary because so much is required for production. By defining solvency up, the newspaper industry has switched its priorities from the public trust to the wealth of an increasingly centralized community of shareholders.

The fate of the editorial cartoonists demonstrates how this not only disserves society but also undermines the future the bottom-line watchers are trying to safeguard. Newspapers are playing not to lose when they should be playing to win.

Consider how the managers are pursuing the central mandate of their business model: to constantly expand readership. Their position is: "How can we expand readership if we make people mad? Anything that makes people think risks offending them and loses readership." That the editorial cartoonists' very reason for being is to provoke helps explain why they are the first to go. (From the same impulse, the old traditions of flirting, horseplay, razzing, smoking and drinking, have been filtered from the newsroom by means of human resources reeducation camps.)

We cartoonists represent the untidy, untamable forces that corporate suits have always waged war on. We represent instinct, and we work in the most powerful, primitive and unsettling of vocabularies: images. Cave painting is not the same as hunting and gathering. And cartoonists reach the reading public in a place where words just cannot go.



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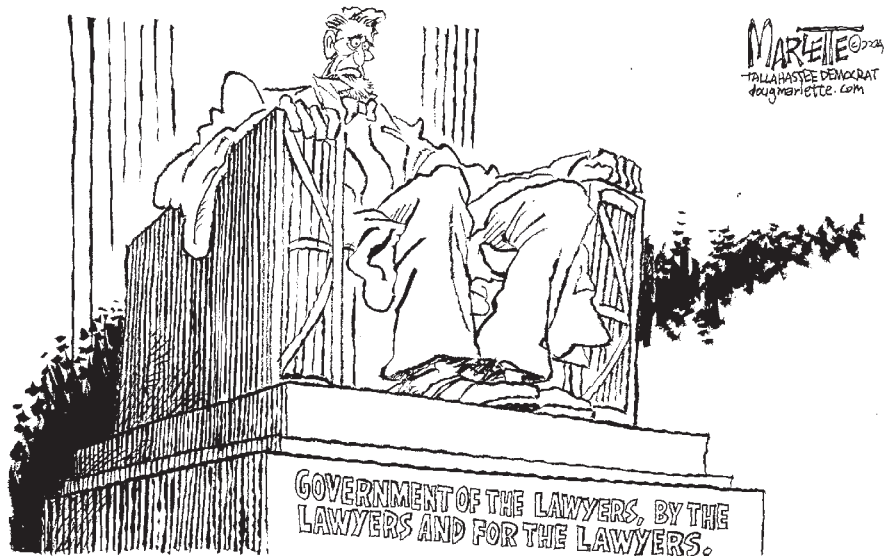
## Cartoons and the First Amendment

But what does the obsolescence of the editorial cartoonist have to do with the health of the democracy? Cartoons are the acid test of the First Amendment. They push the boundaries of free speech by the very qualities that have endangered them: Cartoons are hard to defend. They strain reason and logic. They can't say "on the other hand." And for as long as cartoons exist, Americans can be assured that we still have the right and privilege to express controversial opinions and offend powerful interests. The rise of a passive generation of parent-pleasing perfection monkeys makes preserving that prerogative seem more urgent than ever. "Minding" is an over-rated virtue.

When we don't exercise our freedom of expression in troublesome ways, we may atrophy our best impulses. The First Amendment, the miracle of our system, is not just a passive shield of protection. In order to maintain our true, nationally defining diversity of ideas, it obligates journalists to be bold, writers to be full-throated and uninhibited, and those blunt instruments of the free press, cartoonists like me, not to self-censor. In order not to lose it, we must use it, swaggering and unapologetic.

The insidious unconsciousness of self-censorship can be discerned in the quality of editorial cartoons today. Increasingly in my profession, careerism seems to have replaced risk-taking. Proficiency stands in for talent. Too many cartoons look like art by committee. Emotional distancing has replaced the raw torque of yesterday's best. Nobody feels; nobody cares. Nothing is brought up. And the controversies that are generated seem to result as much from the cartoon's ineptness as its challenging content. Cartoonists have become victims of our cultural irony, delivering postmodern sneers rather than true passion or outrage. Where do they stand? Nobody ever wondered that about Herblock or Conrad.

When I got into the business, American political cartooning was in the midst of a renaissance. The sixties, in all their cultural and political agitation, had



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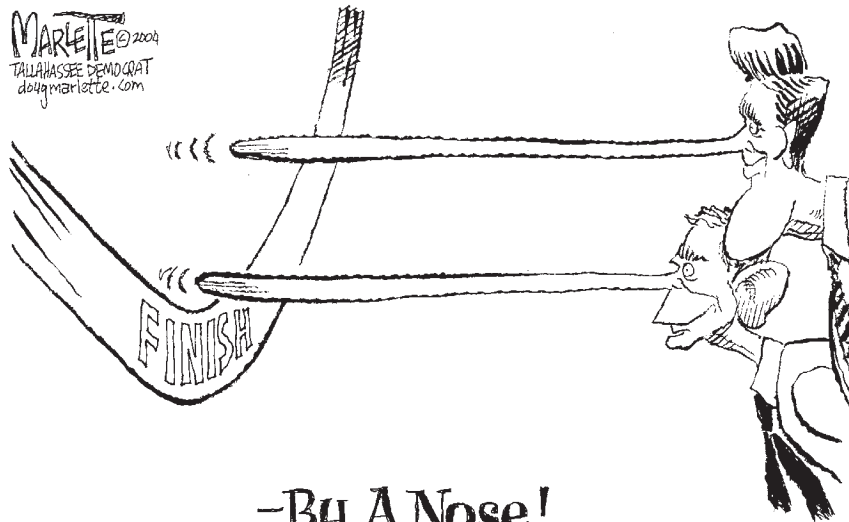
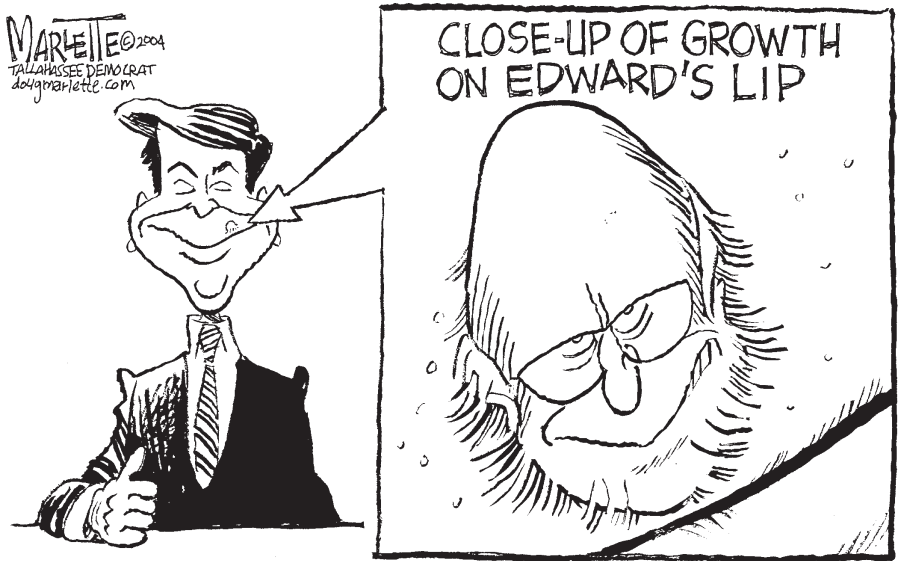
reinvigorated the form. A generation of artists raised on television and Mad magazine was further egged on and taunted by Australian Pat Oliphant's juicy draftsmanship and incendiary content. Bob Dylan said recently that if he were starting out in today's sterile pop music world, he wouldn't go into music. I know just how he feels.

I'm not sure that spirit can be revived, but I'd like to think so. My immodest proposal as I peek out of the slits in my bunker is that newspapers should save themselves by following not the business model but that model of survival, Mother Nature. A newspaper is an ecosystem, the health of which depends on the fitness of its symbiotic parts. When you eliminate one species, you threaten the vitality of the whole. If only cartoonists were valued as much as snail darters.

But we are only canaries. ■

*Doug Marlette, a 1981 Nieman Fellow, is the editorial cartoonist for the Tallahassee (Florida) Democrat and the author of "The Bridge." He won the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning.*

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-By A Nose!

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# Why Political Cartoons are Losing Their Influence

‘How did it happen that such a confrontational art form . . . could be allowed to fall into disregard, disuse and ultimate dismissal?’

By Patrick Oliphant

If one compares, in this time of national crisis, the years of the Bush presidency with those of the Nixon presidency, and if we make this comparison from the perspective of the political cartoon, one thing becomes apparent: the influence is missing.

It is only 30 years since the glory times of Bob Haldeman and John Ehrlichman and all the other stars of the supporting Watergate cast. There was drama, detective work, skullduggery, secret files, paranoia and (bless them both for humorous relief), Martha Mitchell and Al Haig. Cartoonists need villains and, in those happy times, there were villains galore. The political cartoon responded to this wonderful circumstance by producing satire of exceptional quality—as Bill Mauldin remarked soon after, “Even the bad cartoonists were drawing good cartoons.” It is no stretch to claim that the political cartoon had a distinct influence on the termination of the Nixon presidency. The Nixon years were, all things considered, bloody good fun.

Goodbye to all that. In retrospect it all seems like comic opera, for what we thought of as a national emergency in those days pales to an almost ghostly insignificance when compared with what we now face. The villains are all in place again, different villains, of course, but this time both foreign and homegrown, with the latter as scary and menacing as the former.

And where is the political cartoon when we need it? That once-potent galvanizer of opinion, the kick-starter of conversation and discussion, has been allowed to atrophy from disuse, and is, after several centuries of successful use as a castigator and common scold of the body politic, in great jeopardy of fading away altogether. How did it happen that such a confrontational art



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form (and that is what political cartooning is, when properly done) could be allowed to fall into disregard, disuse and ultimate dismissal?

There are manifold causes. Thirty years ago, the idea of a country full of one-newspaper towns was nothing more than a rumor; papers collapsed here and there, certainly, but these seemed to be isolated cases and were not cause for alarm. The idea of newspapers becoming corporate entities that existed to serve the stockholders rather than the public, while not an unheard-of possibility, was not seriously considered.

## Demise of Cartoon Controversy

When the competition was removed and the once-proud and principled newspaper fell into the hands of greedy

chains, or clueless cereal manufacturers and the like, bottom-line journalism was born. This heralded the beginning of the death of Controversy. Controversy, that life force behind the political cartoon, is of course completely anathema to those nursing the books: when you are making 20 to 30 percent on your investment annually, there's no point in making waves.

Those whom we could refer to, with proper political correctness, as the graphically challenged, are firmly entrenched in newspapers now. A better term for them would be visual illiterates. Whatever, today they occupy the roles of editors and political cartoonists in too many papers. To see how little attention these worthies give these days to the actual structure of a cartoon, and the disregard they display for at least some semblance of accurate caricature and the fundamentals of design and draw-

ing—the vital elements in this form of expression—one can simply turn to the weekend editorial pages of, for instance, The New York Times, and study the egregious collection of space-stuffers displayed there.

A cartoon graveyard, it illustrates how the true use and purpose of a political cartoon passes out of editorial memory in time and eventually disappears altogether, to be replaced by a frozen assemblage of sausage-fingered, big-nosed giggle panels that apparently pass for legitimate comment in the view of the editor who marshals this compilation of dreck. In my imagination, this person, a sandwich in one hand listlessly sifts through a pile of cartoons with the other, dripping mayonnaise and tossing aside anything that might give offense or distress, or threaten the world order with An Opinion. Parenthetically, this particular newspaper, long regarded by itself and others as “the

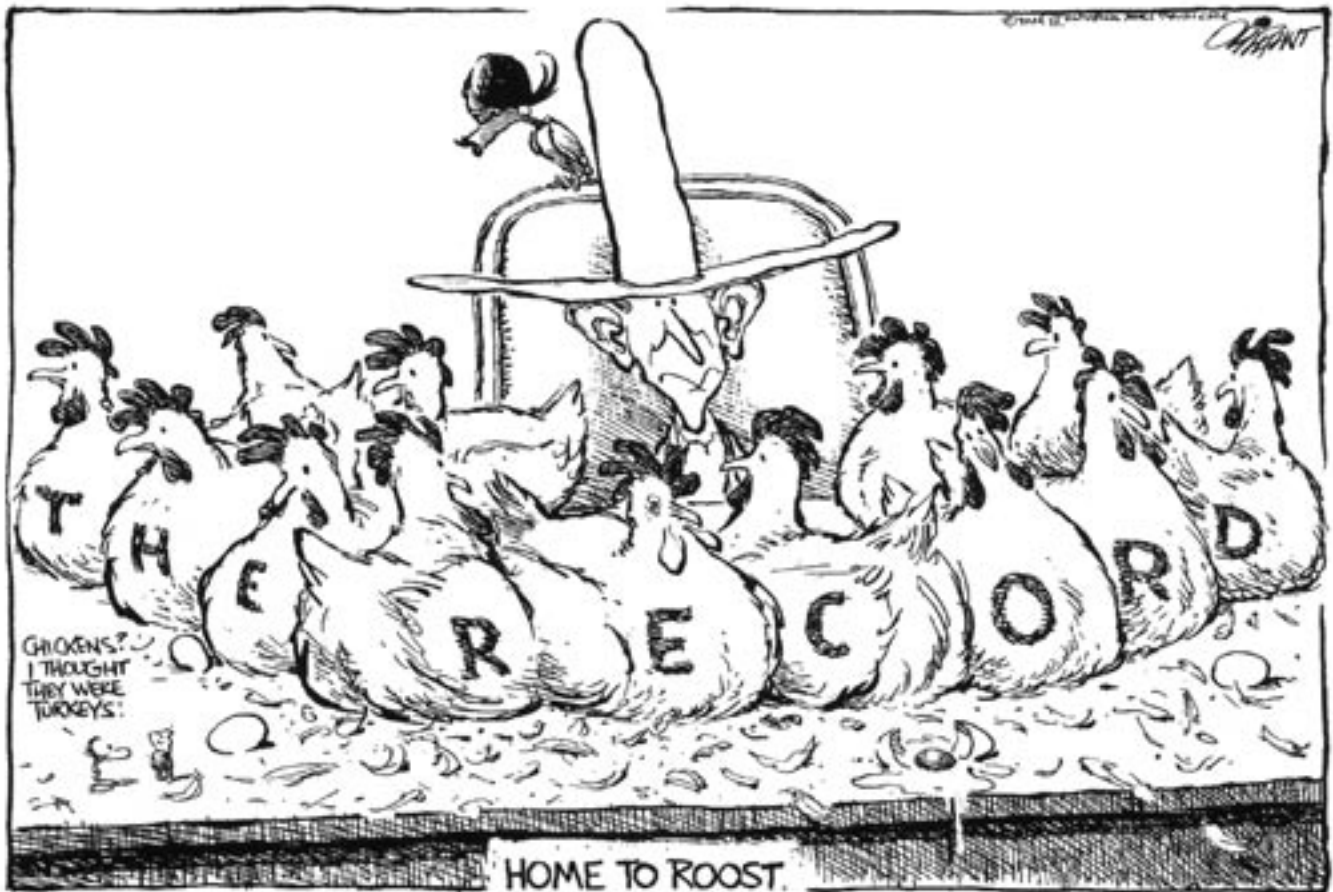
newspaper of record,” and that has for long ages avoided having a cartoonist of its own, sees nothing odd in turning loose a Maureen Dowd to delightfully lacerate the world with what can be accurately described as written political cartoons.

So one could say that The New York Times *does*, in fact, have a political cartoonist, but the dullards that be haven't realized it yet.

So is this the future? Will political cartoons be replaced by invective crafted from words that, however brilliantly done, will always lack the extra thousand-word perspective a picture offers? Surely not. But I am a traditionalist who has always wanted to believe in newspapers, and believe still, despite the Internet and other diversions, that political cartoons belong in newspapers. But as long as newspapers themselves continue to lose influence (does anyone really care any more whom they endorse

for President?) and through their loss of focus continue chasing after such illusions as youth readership, whatever that is, and continue to pander to the sinister influences of political correctness—another nail in Controversy's coffin—or run a contentious cartoon one day and offer abject apologies for it the next, their influence and the influence of the political cartoon will commensurately decrease, and we cartoonists and the ship we sail in will all slowly sink giggling into the sea. ■

*Patrick Oliphant has caricatured eight U.S. presidents beginning with Lyndon Johnson. His cartoons have been distributed by Universal Press Syndicate since 1980. He won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning in 1967 and has not entered his work since then.*



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# The Red, White and Blue Palette

What happens when cartoonists let fear and pressure soften their vigilant voices?

*In October, cartoonist Ann Telnaes spoke at the 2004 Festival of Cartoon Art at Ohio State University. The title of her talk was "The Red, White and Blue Scare," and edited excerpts from her remarks are printed below. As her talk began, Telnaes had the following words projected onto the screen behind her:*

*"Disgusting and lacking patriotism."*

*"Anti-American ..." —Written comments in guest book for Humor's Edge exhibition, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.*

Shortly after 9/11 the political satirist Bill Maher made a comment on his television show that the terrorists were not cowards. There was an immediate public outcry, politicians denounced him, and the White House press secretary warned, "... they're reminders to all Americans that they need to watch what they say and watch what they do."

In an appearance before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Attorney General John Ashcroft accused critics of the administration's domestic antiterrorism measures of aiding the terrorists. And conservative activist and columnist Phyllis Schlafly wrote, "Let's bring back the House Committee on Un-American Activities. We need congressional watchdogs to close the cracks in our internal security."

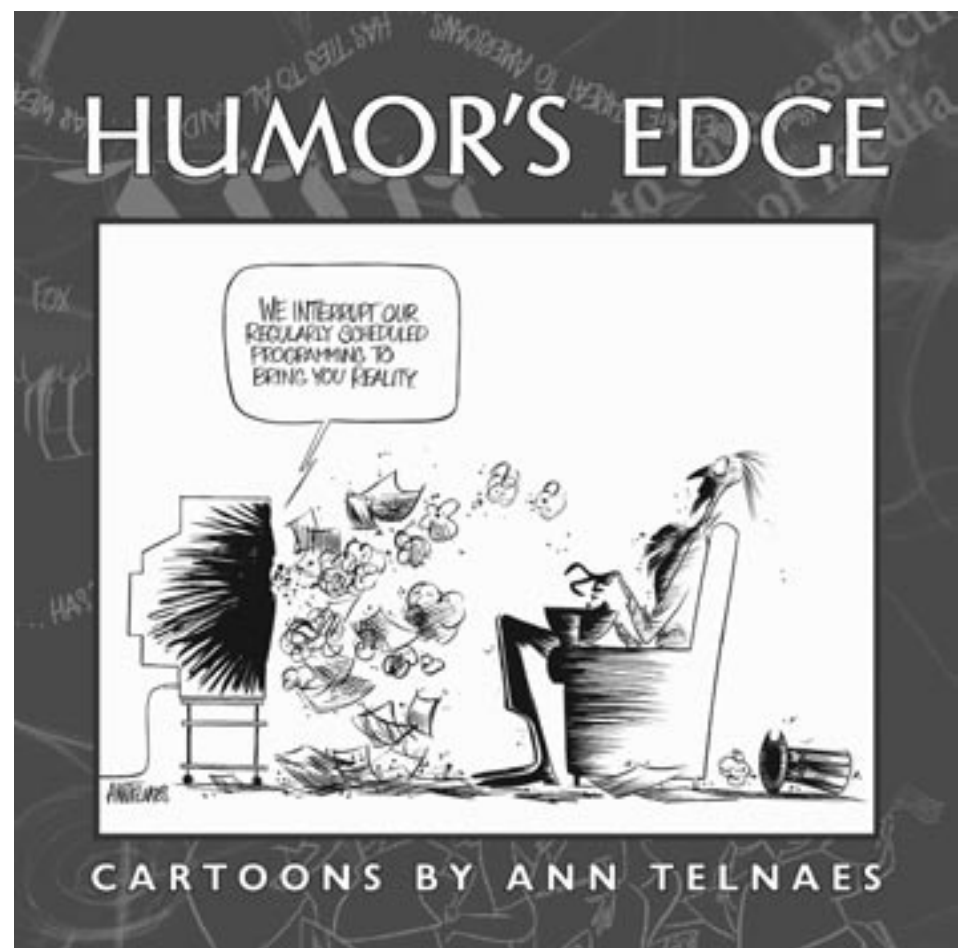
Even now, three years after 9/11, accusations of anti-Americanism and calls for limitations on free speech continue. During the Democratic convention, a wire-link and barbed wire fence pen was constructed for antiwar protestors. The Bush campaign held invitation only "Ask President Bush" rallies where several attendees who wore anti-Bush T-shirts were forced to leave. In one instance, a mother whose son had died in Iraq was arrested after interrupting a speech by Laura Bush.

How did the news media react after 9/11 to this spreading cloud of patriotic intimidation? The overall performance of the television news was dismal. After the terrorist attacks, then leading up to and during the Iraq War, many journalists turned into flag-waving cheerleaders. Publications like The Washington Post and The New York Times recently ran stories questioning their own pre-war coverage. CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour, when asked by CNBC commentator Tina Brown if "we in the media, as much as in the administration, drank the Kool-Aid when it came to the war" answered that she thought the press was muzzled and that they'd muzzled themselves.

What about the editorial cartoonists?

How did they react after 9/11 and the Iraq War? Did they drink the Kool-Aid, too? Or were cartoonists among the first in the press to question the actions and justifications of the administration? Some cartoonists did question, even under pressure from editors and intense criticism from readers—but most didn't.

Being human, it was natural that cartoonists had feelings of wanting to band together with their fellow citizens in times of crisis. But as a whole, American editorial cartoonists were slow to break free of flag-waving images, what I call "the red/white/blue cartoons." Jingoism colored many cartoons and self-censorship, whether voluntary or a reaction to editorial pressure, was



very evident in the work of cartoonists after 9/11.

Recently a colleague of mine, whose earlier work had supported the administration's justifications for invading Iraq, admitted to me that the reason he did was because he *wanted* to trust our leaders and not question them in times of war. Once I also heard a cartoonist during a panel discussion at a cartoon convention contend that we shouldn't criticize the government in times of war. But I believe our role as editorial cartoonists is precisely that—to question authority and not blindly follow it.

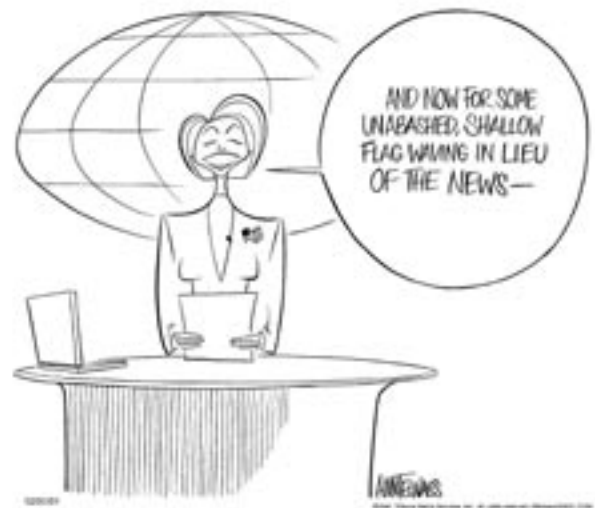
Each of us brings to our job an ideological slant. But if in our roles as

cartoonists we don't challenge and poke the pompous and the powerful, then all we do is illustrate propaganda. Defending the right of free speech is our first responsibility; it's that constitutional right that enables us to do our job. It is our protection to express whichever opinion we choose without the threat of beatings and arrests that face our colleagues in other countries who lack this protection. We do our profession a disservice if we turn a blind eye to our leaders' intimidation of dissent and disregard for the constitutional rights of all Americans. Legendary cartoonists like Thomas Nast, Herblock, and Paul Conrad each played an important—I'd

say essential—role in this nation's political dialogue during pivotal times in our history. Instead of following the status quo, they spoke out against the political and social majority. And that was because their palette's colors weren't limited to red, white and blue. ■

*Ann Telnaes won the 2001 Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning. In 2004, an exhibit at the Library of Congress featured 81 of her cartoons, as does her recent book, "Humor's Edge: Cartoons by Ann Telnaes," published by Pomegranate in July 2004.*

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© Ann Telnaes cartoons courtesy of Tribune Media Services.

# Where the Girls Aren't

## Why editorial cartooning is still a boy's sport.

By Signe Wilkinson

While there is an acute national shortage of female editorial cartoonists, there is no shortage of people asking why. Academics and journalists who wonder why there are so few women cartoonists outnumber the women who actually draw cartoons. There are some simple answers. It is my experience that most women don't like opening their e-mail to find greetings like, "You liberal cocksucker."

Who would like receiving a daily dose of hate mail—besides puerile little boys who love picking fights? In other words, who besides editorial cartoonists?

Women spend a good portion of their child-rearing careers breaking up fights. Cartoonists spend their entire careers starting them. When they aren't separating small combatants, women are saying, "Be nice." Cartoonists are never nice. As my daughter so kindly points out, "Mom! How can you look at yourself in the mirror when all you do is make fun of people?"

A real woman would say, "You're right, dear. I am quitting right now to treat AIDS victims in Africa, to teach in the inner city, or to fight for women's rights in Afghanistan." Obviously, I'm not a real woman. I am a cartoonist woman. My only excuse is that my job allows me to occasionally draw in defense of AIDS victims, for better schools in the inner city, and against attacks on women's rights around the globe.

And I'm not alone. Plenty of my male counterparts draw great cartoons on "women's" issues. Much as I admire their work, however, true liberation is not having a man draw cartoons defending your rights, but being able to draw your own cartoons. Fortunately, there is a small flock of women who choose to express their politics through their art. It's hard to tell whether it's a growing flock or not. It's still so small that, like a flock of sandhill cranes, it could be

wiped out by a good hurricane.

There would be more women in the field if there were more jobs for cartoonists generally and more jobs with editors who didn't look at the prospective applicant and see a woman rather than a cartoonist. Whereas an editor might hire a woman editorial writer with the assurance that any possible urges to write feminist screeds would be mitigated within the "editorial we," these same editors understand that there is no "cartoonist we." Since I was hired at the San Jose Mercury News in 1982, only one other woman has been hired as a full-time cartoonist at a major daily newspaper, and that was in 1995 when I was hired at the Philadelphia Daily News. If sex *weren't* a factor, Ann Telnaes, the 2001 Pulitzer Prize-winner, would have a staff cartooning job by now.

And there is the ideology. If conservative commentator Ann Coulter drew her opinions as cartoons, she'd have a job tomorrow. Possibly two jobs.

Lastly, insofar as my first editor at the San Jose Mercury News was looking for "diversity," being a woman was a great career move for me. I don't feel guilty. Having a wife has been a great career move for many of my male colleagues, particularly those with children. My husband continues to be a profound source of strength through the roughest career patches, and I am deeply grateful to him. Still, he doesn't do laundry, wait for plumbers, or arrange carpooling, all of which can fracture the precious time one needs to think up a cartoon. Getting in touch with your muse is harder when you have to be getting in touch with the pediatrician, pharmacist and babysitter at the same time. A female writer once quoted in The New York Times Book Review said that raising children meant (and I quote from memory), "My sentences got shorter." As my children

get older and their day-to-day demands fade, I find the time I can spend on my drawings is getting longer.

But I could still use a wife. In addition to the cooking and cleaning, she could appear on cartooning panels that need a woman, go to conferences about women in the arts and/or journalism, and write articles about why there are so few women cartoonists.

Ultimately, writing or talking on the "why are there so few women" question just doesn't matter. This article will change nothing. Women of humor will continue to emerge, and the really smart ones won't bother going into newspaper cartooning if there continue to be so few jobs. They will go directly to the Internet or cable or wherever creative satirists are now going.

Still, I have to be grateful to the staff at the Nieman Foundation for asking me to write on this subject. After all, they gave me my punch line:

*Nieman Foundation  
at Harvard University*

*Dear Mr. Wilkinson,  
Melissa Ludtke has asked me to send  
you this packet of the recent issues of  
Nieman Reports.*

*Thank you.  
Best regards,*

*Nieman Reports*

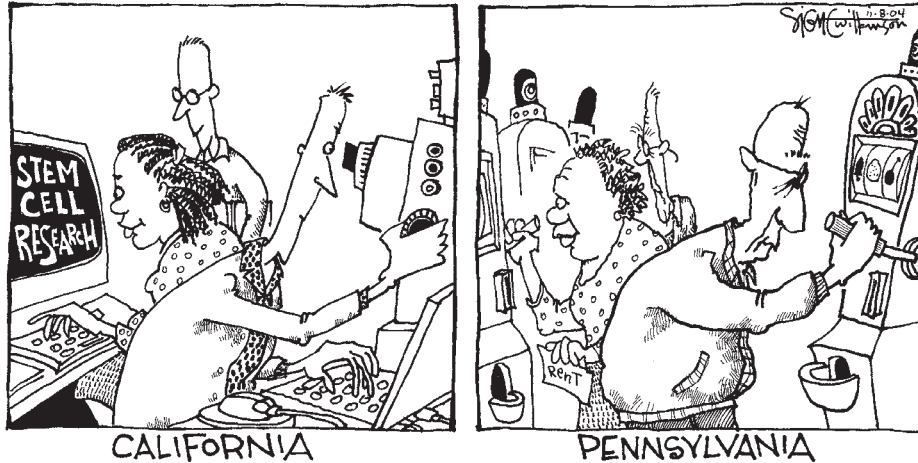
Of course, being addressed as Mr. Wilkinson is the biggest complement I could receive. I'm finally a cartoonist. ■

*Signe Wilkinson is the editorial  
cartoonist for the Philadelphia Daily  
News.*

✉ wilkins@phillynews.com

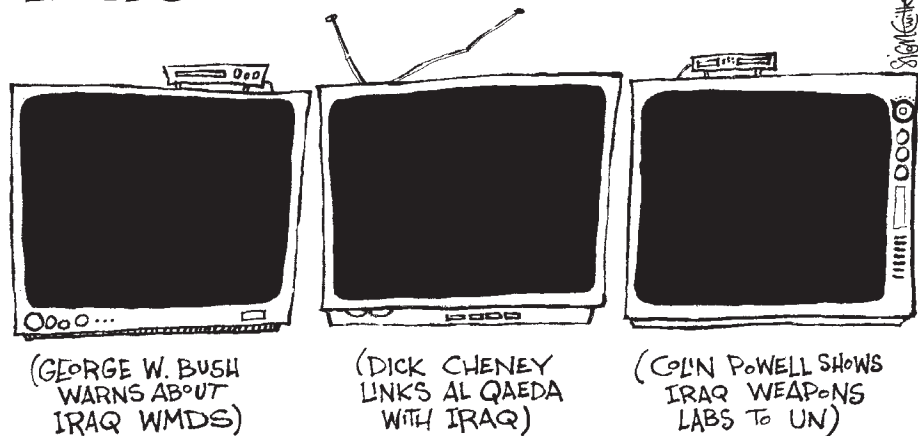


### FARSIGHTED STATES PLAN for the FUTURE!...

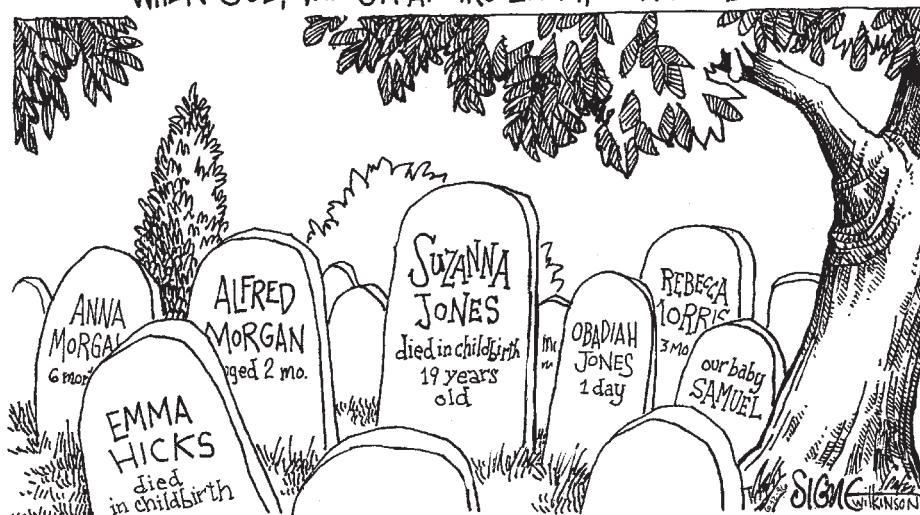


This cartoon is an example of the many Signe Wilkinson does on local issues, in this case gambling, which is just beginning in Pennsylvania.

### IF CBS NEVER TELEVISED FAKES...



### WHEN GOD, THE GREAT PRO-LIFER, WORKS ALONE



© Signe Wilkinson, Philadelphia Daily News. Reproduced by permission.

# Debunking the Explanations Given for Lost Jobs

A cartoonist offers reasons why editorial page cartoons need to survive.

By Joel Pett

Most people who work in journalism have gotten wind that there is trouble in toontown. Newspaper jobs continue to dwindle. The industry behemoths who have long done without cartoonists, like The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times, are part of a long list, including the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, the Chicago Tribune, and The Dallas Morning News. The Knight Ridder corporate brass in San Jose might well wonder why any of their papers employs a cartoonist, since the hometown Mercury News gets along fine using syndicated stuff. And word of a job loss within the ranks is hardly news in the online chatroom of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists. No cartoonist I know encourages young people who inquire to pursue this as a career.

So, what's happening? Here are the usual suspects:

1. **Money.** Papers are losing readers and ad revenue is tougher to come by. Why pay someone full time when for a few dollars a week you can buy syndicated cartoons?
2. **Fear.** A good editorial cartoon probably annoys, and might even anger, at least half your audience on any day. "Hey, these are our customers—why make them mad?"
3. **Laziness.** Good cartooning, like all aspects of journalism, takes work. Finding a cartoonist is work. Working with a cartoonist is work. Arguing with a cartoonist about their approach is work. Taking the phone calls that go along with having a cartoonist is work. Why bother?
4. **Ignorance.** Thanks in no small part to the editors at Newsweek, an entire generation of journalists has grown into their careers blissfully unaware that editorial cartoons aren't just jokes about the news,



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but visual columns, strong opinion pieces. When relegated to sideshow status, cartoons become basic filler, not the type of stuff you pay someone a full-time salary to produce.

5. **The One-Paper Town.** In the old days it was fine to be opinionated and one-sided. But today a lot of editors are uneasy about bludgeoning their readers with the inherently unbalanced work of cartoonists.
6. **The Might of the Right.** Although dozens of conservative cartoonists work at papers today, most of the big-circulation names are liberals. (Few good satirists are interested in protecting the status quo.) In today's political climate, there's a lot of pressure to be "fair and balanced," and some of this pressure comes from the publisher's office.

None of these explanations for our demise stand up to reason. Yes, papers are losing readers, primarily to televi-

sion, an easy-to-absorb visual media where opinions fly fast and furious. But what mirrors that in a newspaper better than an editorial cartoon? And while it might make short-term sense to let a cartoonist go, in the long run a newspaper cuts its own throat by making the paper less interesting by robbing it of personality. Sacking the cartoonist also deprives a paper of local cartoons, which can get a community talking about your pages. Besides, it's widely known that the news industry isn't going broke; newspapers could well afford to hire cartoonists, if it was a priority.

Do we anger readers? Sure we do, and Rush Limbaugh infuriates me, which is why I listen to him. Same with Bill O'Reilly or, for that matter, President Bush. If you want everyone to like you, you're in the wrong business. The charge of laziness is, I think, true. I've seen plenty of word-weary editors and op-ed editors who just can't be both-

ered when it comes to thinking about the editorial page cartoon, given the crush of their deadlines. One cartoon is as good as the next, as long as it fits the space and doesn't cause them to take phone calls.

The disservice done by the dumbing down of the craft is almost immeasurable. Though I named *Newsweek*, that magazine has plenty of allies including, all too often, the Week in Review editors at *The New York Times*. My sense is that they substitute their issue-fatigue, which sets in after years of poring over serious and often-grim news reports, for journalistic judgment. When they see something that brightens their day by giving them a chuckle, they publish it. Trouble is, the readers have plenty of entertainment-chuckle options. They turn to the editorial pages specifically for the opposite. But try telling a big-city editor they've got it all wrong. Believe me, they've earned their reputations for arrogance.

Editors in one-paper markets have a responsibility to be fair. Applied to cartooning, this means publishing a lot from many viewpoints. It's not hard; it just takes a little effort. Since I've been involved with selecting cartoons for the Sunday *Los Angeles Times* for the past few months, I've been truly impressed at the range of imagination, creativity



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and originality displayed by my peers, even when I don't agree with them.

As for handling pressure, here's a novel idea for editors about dealing with conservative critics, politically correct liberals, single-issue interest groups, and even publishers: Stand up to them, and show a little courage of your convictions. Journalism isn't just another business, it's critical to the conduct of democracy, remember? ■

*Joel Pett is the Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist for the Lexington Herald-Leader. He also draws for USA Today, and his cartoons are distributed by Cartoonists and Writers Syndicate.*

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## Martha Stewart or Genocide: The Cartoonists' Conundrum

The role of humor in editorial cartoons is being debated.

By Steve Kelley

“It's not funny.” With those words, my first editor would kill my cartoon. The hours I'd spent digesting news and constructing the cartoon's elaborate and penetrating metaphor would evaporate. Nothing I could say, no logic I might invoke—“The tree is the Middle East and the beehive is the PLO...”—could hope to reclaim the idea. It had been deemed “not funny.”

It was emblematic, perhaps, of the landscape nearly 25 years ago when I started my editorial cartooning career. The idea was at last taking hold among editors that the cartoons on their editorial pages, at least to some degree, ought to amuse readers. The dark, heavy-stroke style of Bill Mauldin and Herblock was being eclipsed by the fine-lined whimsy of Pat Oliphant and

Jeff MacNelly. One media writer might have put it best when he described MacNelly as “a stand-up comedian who sat down in ink.”

Fast-forward to September 19th of this year. In a *Los Angeles Times* column entitled “Cream of the Crop, or Mush?” Lexington Herald-Leader cartoonist Joel Pett argues that too many of the political cartoons reprinted in prominent,

national news venues might be amusing, but seem to lack any redeeming editorial value. Pett, whose savagely incisive cartoons won him a Pulitzer Prize, decries what he sees as the willful backsliding of our profession. [See Pett's article on page 32.]

### Debating Humor's Place

Pett's column represents the spilling over of a debate that has heretofore boiled mostly among cartoonists ourselves, a dispute on which we are as divided as the national electorate was on the presidential race. Many of my colleagues contend, as Pett does, that we often dilute our message, if not overpower it altogether, by our compulsion to be funny. The more humor a cartoon has, the argument goes, the more philosophically anorexic it is apt to be. Further, they insist that commentary about pop culture and celebrities violates the sanctity of our location in the paper—that seeing a cartoon about Michael Jackson on the editorial page is like seeing a ceiling fan in the Sistine Chapel.

Others, just as vehemently, disagree.

This much is indisputable: Humor is a powerful means by which to attract people's attention and sell an idea. It's why people enjoy being around someone who is funny, why public speakers are taught to begin their remarks with a joke, and why so many television commercials promoting products as hysterical as, say, nasal spray, make their pitch in a way that is, at least ostensibly, funny.

Humor is like the "free gift" my bank is forever offering new customers. It helps create a relationship in a world competing for consumers' attention. Humor encourages readers to add the cartoonist to their subconscious list of must-reads. In that way, the humor in a cartoon on Tuesday actually increases the impact of Wednesday's cartoon by inducing readers to return to their source of amusement.

Despite the internal fisticuffs, the infusion of humor has proven profoundly beneficial to us collectively. Newspaper surveys routinely reveal that editorial



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cartoons are a favorite staple for readers. They require little time to ingest, which is an advantage, but that could be said of department store ads, and everyone isn't flocking to them. What the cartoon offers, that so little else in the paper does, is a measure of levity. To borrow somewhat from Bill Clinton (and oh, how that pains me), "It's the humor, stupid."

Quite simply, humor is a narcotic for readers and, whether we admit it or not, to some degree we're all dealers. Even cartoonists who believe funny cartoons somehow blaspheme our profession routinely exaggerate politicians' features for effect. If caricature is not meant to amuse, then why do it?

The problem really isn't that cartoonists are trying to produce work that is funny. Our increasingly conspicuous failing is that we make obvious attempts at humor only to come up short. Some of these cartoons are painfully predictable, some are poorly written, and many, many employ tired, hackneyed ideas that we merely reread with updated news. How many incarnations of the CBS "black eye" have we produced? How many times have we depicted the three wise men bringing this year's

must-have toy to the baby Jesus? How often have we drawn a television set spewing garbage on the living room floor? When these cartoons fall flat, we blame what is most obvious: the lame attempt at humor or irony on which the cartoon is built.

Pett's lament seems to be less with the cartoonists for being funny at times than with the editors at the Big Three—Newsweek, USA Today, and The New York Times—for their predilections toward kinder, gentler cartoons. He is not alone.

At our convention each year, we spend more time jawing about the Big Three's cartoon selections than any other topic. I suspect most of our grouching is motivated more by pettiness than any exalted journalistic principle. At least mine is.

We surrender to the impulse to produce "lite" cartoons occasionally, in part because it's good to vary our pitches, but also because we periodically weaken and give the people what they want. Every day we walk into a cafeteria of possible cartoon subjects, and somewhere in the course of looking around, we put a topic on our tray. Are we all expected to make the same

selection each day? Is it not possible that a story foregone today can be selected tomorrow?

What matters most is that over time each of us addresses a variety of subjects and remains true to our individual principles and ideals. Some of us will instinctively highlight the clownishness of human events, while others will feel obliged to remind readers of the gravity of the situation. And the national media can and will republish whatever they see fit.

## The Content of Cartoons

Are there subjects simply too frivolous to warrant an editorial cartoonist's attention? Most editors and cartoonists would agree there are, although as with matters of taste, it's difficult to determine where to draw the line. Yes, Michael Jackson is just a pop star, but child abuse matters, right? Cartoons about how fat kids have become seem beside the point at first, but obesity is an epidemic of sorts.

I published two collections of cartoons and divided each into sections entitled "Politics" and "Stuff People Actually Care About." Maybe that sums up our collective conundrum and explains why national newspapers and magazines, intent on attracting readers rather than challenging them, so often

republish cartoons about fad diets and Martha Stewart instead of famine and genocide.

While many cartoonists note that job opportunities at newspapers are shrinking, and indeed they are, we can hardly lay the blame on humor. Our numbers increased considerably in the 1970's and 1980's because of humor, during a metamorphosis from blunt and serious cartoons to sharp and witty ones. Call it our "humor-boom generation." As political cartoons became less dour and ominous, they became more popular, and papers created positions for more of us.

The contractions we are enduring now are in part the consequence of our (borrowing from Bush this time) "catastrophic success." With the influx of so many talented cartoonists came the ready availability of their work through syndication. In a sense, we offer newspapers the means by which to outsource each other for a few dollars a week. Does it really surprise any of us that in thin economic times newspaper bean counters would do the math?

In the face of disappearing jobs, cartoonists are understandably looking for ways to improve what we produce. Still, second-guessing the work of our colleagues or the judgment of editors seems contrary to our nature. It is at least ironic that members of a group as

doggedly independent as political cartoonists, who seethe at nothing as much as being told by an editor what to draw or not to draw, would labor so intently to impose constraints on one another. Certainly it is not productive.

The thought that there is a right and a wrong way to approach what we do overlooks that there are infinite means by which to assail a blowhard politician or to deconstruct a boneheaded piece of legislation. If William Safire can share space on the page with Dave Barry, then why not Ted Rall and Mike Peters? Can't we all just get along?

What separates us from reporters and editors is the range we're given to exceed propriety. That's the beauty of our job. We're handed a huge bag of implements—from scalpel to chain saw, Louisville Slugger to cream pie—and each of us gets to choose what's appropriate on any given day. Instead of pointing fingers at each other, maybe we should be thanking our lucky stars that we don't have to sit at the adult table with the rest of the journalists. ■

*Steve Kelley is editorial cartoonist with The Times-Picayune in New Orleans. His work has won numerous awards, including the National Headliner Award in 2001.*

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# Local Cartoons Can Convey Universal Significance

Our cartoonist called Florida the place where 'America is working out its fate.'

By Mary Ann Lindley

When in the summer of 2003 the Tallahassee Democrat hired Doug Marlette, a Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist, to be our editorial page cartoonist, the decision drew much attention within and outside of our newsroom. I call us "The Little Editorial Department That Can" because while we're a small paper—with circulation around 65,000 on Sundays—we publish in the capital of the fourth largest state, a lively academic and po-

litical place where President George W. Bush's brother, Jeb, presides as governor. When criticism comes our way it's usually because people don't think we provide the firepower of papers much, much larger than ours, a complaint that I hear as a variation on a compliment. Hiring Marlette was a kind of antidote to that complaint.

Though we don't pay him enough, or even keep Doug's art-supply cabinets as full as we should, our newspaper does

seem to supply him with a stimulating outlet for his work. [See Marlette's article on page 21.] When he took the job, Doug called Florida the nation's "petri dish," where America is working out its fate. From hanging chads and voting machine fraud to Jeb Bush, from the conservative Hispanic culture in the southern part of the state to the more traditionally black culture in the northern part—with the hurricanes, sharks, alligators and Disney sprinkled

in—our unpredictable state clearly does have a certain cachet. Nearly everyone in the country has either visited Florida or intends to, or knows a retiree living somewhere near our coasts. For an editorial cartoonist with a national syndication audience (as Marlette has), his principal location means that when he lampoons issues and people at the local level, he is working from a recognizable touchstone.

Not many newspapers are hiring editorial cartoonists these days. The exceptionally good artists are syndicated and cheaply available to papers whose editorial page editors appear to be content to let their op-ed and editorial pages reflect primarily national or international issues. Perhaps they assume, not inaccurately, that letters to the editor about these cartoons will provide the local comic relief. But while many newspaper editors realize they need to move aggressively to bring more and better local reporting and images to news coverage, they consider hiring an artist for editorial cartoons about hometown topics to be a luxury for all but the largest papers. Even some of the larger papers are now opting out of this tradition.

Cartoonists bear some blame for this decline. As an editor, I get tired of seeing a homogenized stream of cartoons pour in from syndicated cartoonists whose work we also purchase and publish (in addition to Doug's featured cartoon). I can't fully appreciate the creative and competitive pressures that must be on them to produce these quick visual hits. Yet with an editor's eyes, what I see on a given day is a desktop full of cartoons about Christopher Reeve's death, or Martha Stewart going to jail, or John Kerry's flip-flops, and this singularity of focus is not helpful to producing an unexpected and compelling editorial product.

Just as editorial page editors work hard to have op-ed pages reflect not just predictable public policy debates but other aspects of our culture and

lives, I want editorial cartoons to catch for us—in some unexpected way—important slices from our daily lives and circumstances. That's why there is such joy in receiving a Marlette cartoon that is tailor-made for our audience—a sharp putdown of a state attorney's silly decision, or the outrage of liberal academics over the invitation to Dick Cheney to give a commencement address, or some faux pas by football coach Bobby

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**But while many newspaper editors realize they need to move aggressively to bring more and better local reporting and images to news coverage, they consider hiring an artist for editorial cartoons about hometown topics to be a luxury for all but the largest papers. Even some of the larger papers are now opting out of this tradition.**

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Bowden at Florida State University. These cartoons get the phones ringing, the e-mail popping up, and put a signature on our paper.

Responding to the irate reader is all in a day's work for an editorial page editor, and I handle most of the calls we receive. It is undeniably more complicated, however, to explain how a drawing is another form of opinion, too, and why an unflattering nose and goofy look isn't just a form of rudeness but, in fact, a potent, deliberate putdown. It would be easier to help critics over the hurdle of unkind cartoons, or past the fact that they don't see their position represented often, if we had more points of view in cartooning. In fact, as editors we don't enjoy a wide range of artistic philosophies to choose from, as we do in our selection of columnists. The cartooning industry is low on conservative editorial cartoonists and on minority cartoonists; the female editorial cartoonist might be described as an endangered species, except that historically there never have been very many.

As with most of the editorial cartoon-

ists I've been privileged to meet, Doug Marlette is a brilliant and perceptive man. But as with any writer, the artist benefits from appropriate care and feeding. Though I don't do this nearly as well as I should, I know he appreciates it when I take time to brainstorm and offer up some mental images from the local parade of horrors or remind him of what is the talk at the local coffee shop. A well-placed word to the artist is sufficient.

As with the best essayists and columnists, an editorial cartoonist can often make a universal point with a local angle and give readers an original perspective. I'd encourage more newspapers to take a leap and hire an editorial cartoonist. Especially in this time-short world where younger readers and ultra-busy readers tend to look for a quick "read" and fast "got it" bit

of information, there is nothing better than the laconic editorial cartoon to juice up an editorial page. ■

*Mary Ann Lindley has been editorial page editor of the Tallahassee Democrat for six years. She was previously a columnist with the Democrat and Knight Ridder newspapers and worked as a political writer and editor for The New York Times Affiliated Newspaper Group in Florida and for The Miami Herald.*

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# Understanding the Value of the Local Connection

‘... my cartoons provide another opportunity to carry on a conversation with the people who live here.’

By Scott Stantis

Look back 23 years to the day when President Ronald Reagan was shot to find out why there are so many fewer staff editorial cartoonists today. When word reached cartoonists, they got to drawing so they could share the shock and outrage with readers in the next day’s newspaper. Back then, I was freelancing with the Daily Breeze, a suburban daily in the Los Angeles area, so I called to ask if they wanted a cartoon. And, of course, they did. Had they waited to use a syndicated cartoon, it wouldn’t have been published for at least two days, assuming they paid the Federal Express overnight rate.

Leap many years forward to the day when terrorists flew planes into the World Trade Center, Pentagon and a field in Pennsylvania. Newspaper editors didn’t need a freelancer; they didn’t even need a staff cartoonist. A stream of editorial cartoons arrived via the Internet almost before the cartoonists’ ink was dry. And the editor had a large number of images to select from since newspapers often “subscribe” to receive the syndicated work of many cartoonists. One thing was certain: Whatever image was selected, the same cartoon would appear the same day in the cartoonist’s own newspaper and potentially in other papers in which editors also decided to “buy” the right to publish it.

Today, with the syndication market in editorial cartoons becoming saturated with cheaper products, cartoonists are still pining for national exposure and going the route of syndication to achieve it. This is understandable; they grew up seeing their role models published in the pages of their local newspapers as well as in the weekly round-ups. So the lure of syndication holds strong sway with cartoonists, even though their potential base salary as a newspaper’s



Scott Stantis dubbed Alabama’s former governor Fob James “Tinker Fob,” dressed him in a tutu, and gave him a wand. This cartoon is the first appearance of “Tinker Fob.” © Scott Stantis. Reproduced by permission.

staff cartoonist would far outstrip income they can make with syndication and reprints.

## The Local Connection

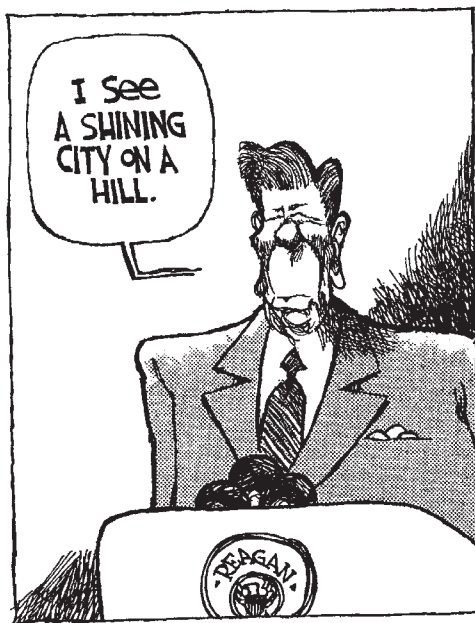
Given these market-driving dynamics, editors of newspapers don’t have much motivation to keep an editorial cartoonist on staff. Yet the argument can—and should—be made that it is the newspaper’s best interest—editorially and commercially—to provide its readers with a connection to local issues, not only with reporting but also with the cartoons it carries. No syndicated cartoonist has the ability to tap into local issues or a community’s mindset.

If the role of a cartoonist is viewed as being like that of a columnist—someone whose work truly engages readers—then local cartoons are essential. As a staff cartoonist with The Birmingham

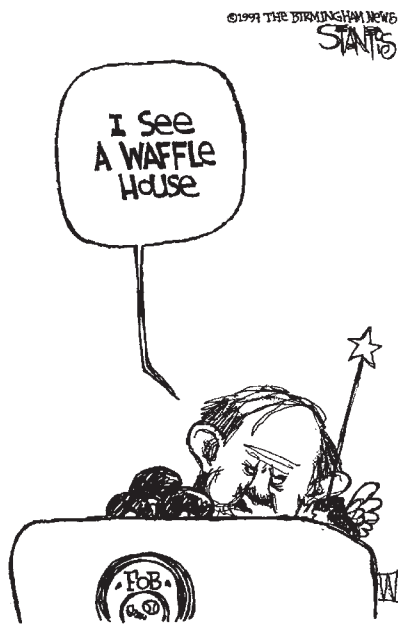
(Alabama) News, my cartoons provide another opportunity to carry on a conversation with the people who live here. And if I don’t cartoon about the foibles and squabbles over local and state issues, who will?

The late Pulitzer Prize-winning editor of the editorial pages of The Birmingham News, Ron Casey, used to half-joke, “Cartoonists are expensive, and they’re a lot of trouble.” Thank goodness Ron and the rest of the management of this newspaper believe the expense is worth the trouble.

Each morning I read the newspaper to see if there is a local story that warrants a cartoon. Only when I decide there isn’t do I move on to national and international issues. This is not to argue that local news always trumps the use of national or international events. On September 12, 2001, it would have looked darn stupid if the cartoon on



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The Birmingham News editorial page was about a sewer bond issue.

At the end of each year I make two stacks of my cartoons: one contains national issues, the other holds the local ones. With the exception of 2001, every year I have worked for The Birmingham News the local stack is at least 20 per-

cent higher.

When our former governor, Fob James, became more and more silly I dressed him in a tutu, gave him a wand, and dubbed him "Tinker Fob." The image resonated with readers around the state, and he lost his bid for reelection. The next governor's chief of staff told

me the "Tinker Fob" series had much to do with James's defeat. That is the highest praise for any editorial cartoonist to receive.

As with so many things, there's a middle road on which cartoonists can travel. Through the Copley News Service, my cartoons are syndicated to more than 400 newspapers, and I also do one cartoon a week for USA Today. I like to think I have something of a national reputation as an editorial cartoonist. I cherish this. But even more important to me is the reputation I have among my newspaper's readers in Alabama. ■

*Scott Stantis is editorial cartoonist for The Birmingham News, a weekly contributor to USA Today, and a syndicated cartoonist with the Copley News Service. His new political comic strip Prickly City was recently launched by Universal Press Syndicate. He is a past president of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists.*

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## Squeezing Originality Out of Editorial Cartoons

'The resulting sameness of so much of our work has left us vulnerable.'

By Ed Stein

The Denver Post used to run a daily teaser for Pat Oliphant's cartoon, with a small cut from the drawing, on the front page. I was still drawing for my campus paper and just beginning to dream of a career as an editorial cartoonist. I would try to envision Oliphant's whole drawing from that tiny detail before opening the paper, but my imagination was never as grand as the real opus. Oliphant was reinventing editorial cartooning before my very eyes, creating a whole new graphic language, painting a breathtak-

ing cinematic landscape, which would completely transform the medium.

Because I lived in Denver, I got to see it first.

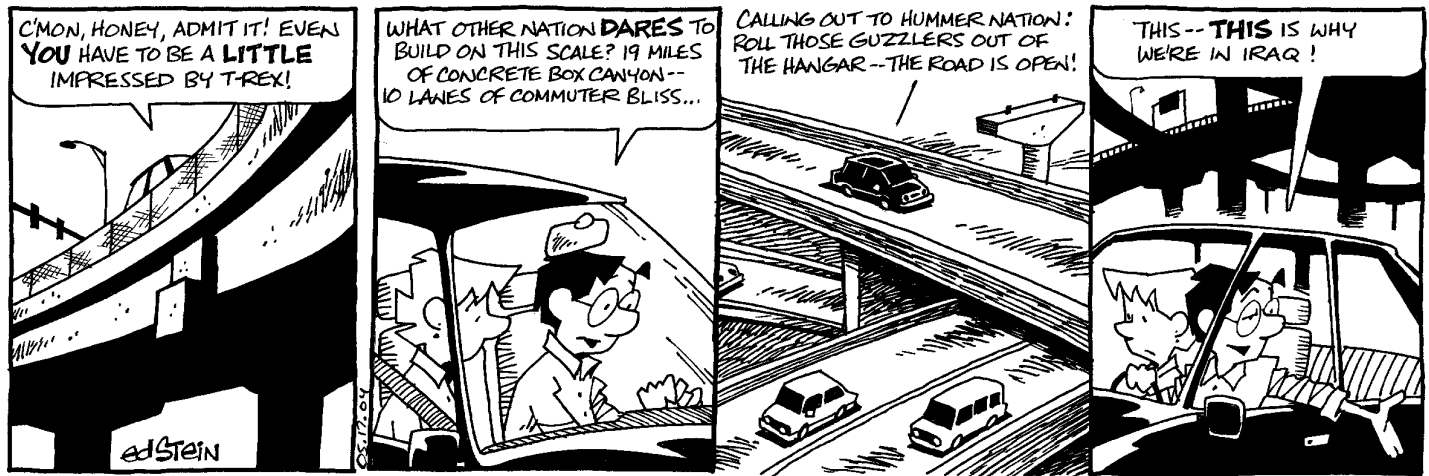
Not too many years later, when I was looking for work, carrying my hopeful little portfolio from paper to paper, I spent a month in Richmond, Virginia. I couldn't wait to open the Richmond News Leader every morning to see what new marvel Jeff MacNelly had produced. With his seemingly inexhaustible supply of new visual metaphors and his hilarious use of the Southern scenery,

complete with weathered bait shops, rusty pickup trucks, and run-down railroad whistle stops, he was creating strikingly innovative cartoons.

About that time I began to notice Mike Peters, who was adding a unique new comic sensibility to his work, somehow successfully combining the high purpose of journalism with the slapstick of The Three Stooges.

I mention these three editorial cartoonists because they were such originals. Looking at their work, one never had the sense that they spent a lot of





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time pouring over the drawings of other cartoonists. Yes, Oliphant borrowed from Sir David Low, and MacNelly and Peters from Oliphant, but mostly they seem to have invented themselves out of whole cloth. We cartoonists work—or, at least, we used to—in isolation; we were essentially alone with our drawing boards, our pens, and that daunting blank sheet of paper every day. It might have been frustrating to be the only person on a newspaper staff who did what you did, but this isolation also led artists to develop highly original styles.

But unless someone lived in the city where these cartoonists worked or was lucky enough to have a hometown paper that carried their syndicated work (or haunted the newsstands for out-of-town newspapers), it was hard to follow the work of favorite cartoon-

ists. Even if, like Oliphant, they were nationally syndicated cartoonists who drew little local work, they were still local phenomena—they belonged to the communities whose newspapers they worked for. Hometown readers saw them first and saw all of their work; the rest of us only got to see whatever our local paper printed from syndication days or weeks later.

To travel around the country in the late 1960's and early 1970's meant being able to pick up local newspapers and find the work of wonderful but relatively unknown cartoonists. They drew cartoons about national politics, but their bread and butter was local cartooning, and their drawings evoked the landscape and architecture of the region. My files hold hundreds of yellowing newsprint copies of their work,

clipped from many newspapers and saved for future reference.

### Cartoon Look-Alikes

I don't collect clips any more. Any time I want to, I can see everybody's work on the Internet.

This wonderful accessibility has a serious downside. It has given rise to a depressingly homogenous American style, not just of drawing but of the way we conceive ideas. Anyone who logged on to Daryl Cagle's Professional Cartoonists Index ([cagle.slate.msn.com](http://cagle.slate.msn.com)) the day after actor Christopher Reeve died would have found no fewer than 11 drawings of Superman flying from his wheelchair. On any given day there will be a numbingly repetitive series of cartoons, all on the same subject and



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using the same metaphors and visual images. This is not a case of group plagiarism, but it is a suspicious case of groupthink. With the exception of a handful of artists who have made a conscious effort to develop a distinctive graphic style, our drawings, with minor stylistic differences, look pretty much alike, as well.

We've become like a huge family of identical siblings; we can tell each other apart at a glance, but nobody else can.

When I came into the field, it was understood that syndication and the Pulitzer Prize belonged to a handful of nationally known cartoonists. They were cartooning royalty; the rest of us need not bother. Each of us had to be content with being our community's cartoonist, a local institution, perhaps, but largely invisible outside of our paper's distribution area.

Today nobody is a local cartoonist. I don't mean this just in the sense that we don't draw local cartoons. We don't belong to our local communities, either. Editors at newspapers throughout the country can decide to publish our work the same day our own newspapers print it. All of us are syndicated and, as a consequence, all of us draw cartoons primarily about national and international issues.

The Pulitzer Prize—a career-making and life-changing award (as arbitrary and capricious as its bestowal might be)—is now within reach of us all, or at least that's what we have come to believe. Why not? We all draw alike and we all think alike; we are all equals, except at Pulitzer time, when one of us gets to be more equal than the others.

The resulting sameness of so much of our work has left us vulnerable. Our editors and publishers might actually be some of the nasty things we say about them, but they are not stupid. So if my editor can buy from a syndicate the same work I'm doing for a tiny fraction of my salary, why should he keep me employed? This worry led me to

rethink my career. When my paper became embroiled in a costly newspaper war, and its budget woes were great, I began to fear for my job. I asked myself what I was doing for my newspaper that couldn't be duplicated for \$25 a week. And I started to draw more cartoons about local subjects, but I couldn't build a strong enough local presence and feed the syndicate at the same time. After several false starts, I began drawing a daily comic strip about a fictional

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**Our editors and publishers might actually be some of the nasty things we say about them, but they are not stupid. So if my editor can buy from a syndicate the same work I'm doing for a tiny fraction of my salary, why should he keep me employed?**

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Denver family and, at the same time, I cut back on the number of editorial cartoons I did.

### **Finding a New Local Connection**

What did this accomplish? It ended the possibility that I'd ever be more widely syndicated than I am now and made it virtually impossible that I'd ever have the time to develop a nationally syndicated comic strip. And it saved my job. More than that, it rejuvenated my career while completely changing—for the better—my relationship with readers. Because my cartoons are intensely local and deal with how people live in my city, my comic strip became a Denver institution in a way my editorial cartoons never were.

I don't pretend that I've accomplished anything all that special. I would like to claim that, like Oliphant and MacNelly, I've reinvented the medium, but I haven't. I've just reinvented my job. Cartoonists complain that their editors don't treat them with the same respect they give their local columnists. Now I've become a local columnist—one who fills the space more with drawings than with words.

There are other cartoonists who have accomplished the same thing in somewhat different ways. Rob Rogers' Sunday feature, "Brewed on Grant," does for Pittsburgh what my "Denver Square" strip does in Denver. Dwane Powell, Bruce Plante, Scott Stantis, Matt Davies, and a few others make a concerted effort to draw local landscapes and politics. Jim Borgman's cartoons have always had an intimate connection with Cincinnati, to an extent that he did what very few

of us can do—he published a book of cartoons about his city.

I'm not suggesting that if editorial cartoonists just start doing more local work, all of our problems will be solved. The economic and technological forces

threatening our craft are real and are not going away. I am arguing that cartoonists should seriously think about how to build a distinctive local identity in their work—the kind of presence that used to make a newspaper's own editorial cartoonist indispensable to its readers.

When Jeff MacNelly went from the Richmond News Leader to the Chicago Tribune, he didn't actually move to Chicago. He never really drew the most architecturally distinctive city in America; his cartoons continued to feature those marvelous graphic references to the rural South. What might have happened, I wonder, if he had made the Loop and the Sears Tower and the harbor lighthouse and the water tower landmarks in his later work? Would the Tribune have been in more of a hurry to replace him when he died? ■

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# Animation and the Political Cartoon

These cartoons ‘can reach inside someone’s brain and grab just the right spot.’

By Mark Fiore

When I finally got my job as a staff political cartoonist—the job I had been working towards for more than 15 years—I was miserable. The brass ring was nothing more than a rusty old pop-top. Granted, my timing for landing the job at the San Jose Mercury News was terrible. The dot-com bubble burst, the paper’s parent company, Knight Ridder, began making cuts, the publisher resigned in protest, and my editor took early retirement. I was suddenly naked, under the watchful eye of a large media chain and a new publisher who arrived from Florida wanting to see less criticism of President Bush on the editorial page. Naturally, I saw that as my chance to go out in a glorious blazing fireball of ink, paper and word balloons. Though it wasn’t quite as dramatic as that, let’s just say we parted ways, and I was never happier working for myself.

Cartoonists talk about the demise of editorial cartooning at newspapers but, for me, having a terrible experience as a staff cartoonist was the best thing that ever happened to my career. I suddenly knew there was no more brass ring to grab hold of. I didn’t have to apply for those mythical staff cartoonist job openings in places I didn’t want to live! If I was going to be a “successful” political cartoonist, I was going to have to do it myself.

Before the Mercury News episode, I had built up a fairly large client list of newspapers, mostly in California, that would run my political cartoons. I had also started selling a weekly, animated political cartoon to a few news Web sites. After the episode at the Mercury News, I focused my energy on the animated work, largely because I was so disillusioned with the old-style print

newspaper world.

The list of news sites that ran my animated work grew, as did my enthusiasm for this new cartooning medium. It wasn’t long before I stopped doing traditional print cartoons altogether.

While I had always looked at a staff job as a successful, stable point in my career, I soon realized that my job was in fact more stable when I worked for myself. Instead of having one editor in control of my work and my income, I now had multiple editors and outlets that published my work. If one editor thought a particular animation was too hot to handle, that cartoon would still

“What did you do in the battle to keep political cartoons alive, Daddy?”

“Why, I drew some swell cartoons of Michael Jackson and Britney Spears that were hilarious!”

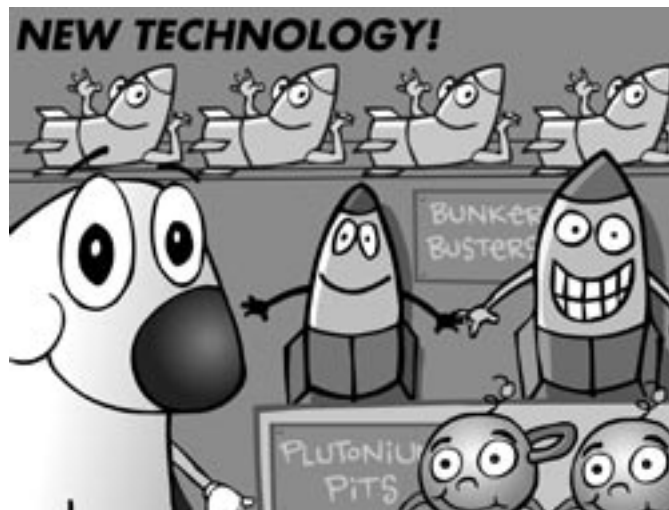
Ugh.

While there are still some great editorial cartoons appearing across the country, the newspaper business does not look promising for the political cartoonist, to say the least. The old days of opinionated cartoons that grab the reader by the collar are quickly being replaced with watered-down cartoons that give the declining readership a slight chuckle. I consider myself very

fortunate to have found an escape hatch from the print world and to have emerged into the animated world.

The business of newspapers and cartoons aside, animated political cartoons provide so many more tools with which to work. While I still begin each cartoon by following the news, taking notes and sketching cartoon ideas, I now have color, motion, music and sound effects all at my disposal. Done correctly, an animated political cartoon can reach inside someone’s brain and grab just the right spot.

My goal is to get a message across in an engaging, entertaining way, drawing people in with animation so they don’t feel like they’re getting hit with a message-laden sledgehammer. This is the strength of all political cartoons, and I’ve found it even more effective in animation. For example, rather than write a long editorial or column decrying the insanity of capital punishment, I created an animated political cartoon featuring a cute needle character, happily killing a variety of inmates. The animation contained many of the same facts and figures I would have included in a col-



“Buster the Friendly Nuke!” A frame from “Fissionary.”  
© Mark Fiore. Reproduced by permission.

run in other outlets. The result: more freedom to create better work.

I believe a political cartoon should always *say* something. Message comes first, humor second, and ideally both arrive at the viewer’s eye together. So many political cartoonists waste their time on pointless celebrity gags. They’re simply illustrating current events and pop culture. They are as much a risk to the future of political cartoons as newspapers that eliminate the position of editorial cartoonist.

umn, but the meat was surrounded by a layer of fun and dark humor. The same message was conveyed, but it was made more accessible with cartoons.

Would Americans rather watch cartoons or read a long column of text?

While the Web might attract a younger audience, that continues to change. I have received e-mails from 6-year-olds and from 80-year-olds. I don't skew my work to any demographic target and try to follow the model of the old Warner Brothers' creators by doing work that makes me laugh and is important to me. Selfish, I know, but I have an aversion to focus groups.

I generally arrive at my ideas through anger or, more recently, rage. Starting from the point of reading the newspaper and online news sites, I then take notes on stories that jump out at me as particularly good cartoon fodder. It seems that the most troubling times as a citizen can be the best times for a cartoonist. I'm an ambulance chaser, a hyena. I soak it all in—terrorism, wars, famine, hypocrisy, genocide—then get angry, have something to say, add some dark humor, and spit out a cartoon idea. It's a strange combination of dark and light, sadness and humor that seems to make the best cartoon.

I've received letters from people who tear into me as a crazy blankety-blank pinko who should move to France, or another apparently God-awful place, then say "but I really like your work." That is what I love about animated political cartoons—people can't help but watch them, even if they disagree. ■

*Mark Fiore creates his cartoons in San Francisco. His work can be seen at [MarkFiore.com](http://MarkFiore.com), [VillageVoice.com](http://VillageVoice.com), AOL, [MotherJones.com](http://MotherJones.com), [SFGate.com](http://SFGate.com) and many other Web sites.*

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## Drawing the Country's Mood

'... a drawing can pierce the emotional heart of a story deeper than the most gifted verbal lapidaries.'

By Jeff Danziger

I'll take advantage of this forum to put an instructive, but slightly sad story, into the annals of journalism and cartoondom.

There is in a newspaper life very little memorabilia, things one can frame for the wall or make into lamps later on. I knew a man at The Denver Post who retired after 30 years of daily copychopping, and he said all he had was a linotype slug of his first byline that one of the compositors had given him. A friend at The Washington Post told me he had nicked one of Herblock's India ink bottles, and he could get me one, too. I passed but now I wish I had said yes. In the end everything goes into the paper, and the paper goes out the door.

But there is one thing I wish I could have gotten ahold of. The great cartoonist Bill Mauldin was an early hero of mine, even before I knew I wanted to do this for a living. His was a special sense of humor, one that crept up on you and took residence in your memory. It was the kind of wit that's traded by regular people, in an audience somewhere, in lowered voices, while the more im-

portant and self-important are making loud speeches. He had guts and wasn't much impressed with editors. He was, as most know well, a cartoonist for The

Stars and Stripes during the Second World War. He did this as an enlisted man and he had stood up, in person, to General George Patton, who wanted him fired. After that, your average cringing windbag editor didn't seem like much to worry about.

My story takes place on the day in 1963 that John Kennedy was shot. Mauldin was working at the Chicago Sun Times. As the reporters and editors stood in stunned silence, watching the initial reports from Dallas, Mauldin, as shocked as any one of them, turned away from the broadcast and headed for his office and drawing table. A staff member, Kay Fanning, who later hired me at The Christian Science Monitor, told me this.

Mauldin was in the mold of cartoonists of his day in that he was first an artist. He had studied anatomy, physiognomy, light and shadow, architecture and perspective. He had had what is now called formal art training. He had never developed a distinctive stylistic cartoon shorthand. He was simply good at drawing.

But like most artists he needed a



© 1963 by Bill Mauldin. Reprinted/Displayed courtesy of the Mauldin Estate.

model. He often used himself, with the recently developed Polaroid instant cameras. The cartoon he planned to draw on that black day has since become famous for its evocation of the national mood of shock and grief. He planned to draw Lincoln, seated in the throne at the Lincoln Memorial, slumped in loss, his head bent forward into his hand. Mauldin moved his office chair in front of his Land camera and tripod, set the self-timer, and posed himself in the somber mood he felt.

A while later Kay Fanning asked him if there was any way she might buy the original drawing. Mauldin had by then become a good friend of Kay's. He said he was sorry, but the cartoon had been given to someone else for a collection. He thought for a minute and then said

that he might still have the Polaroid. If she wanted that ...

Now that would be worth having.

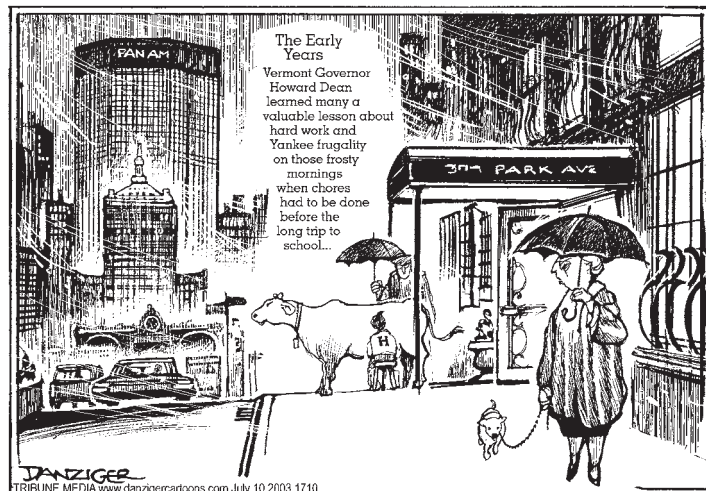
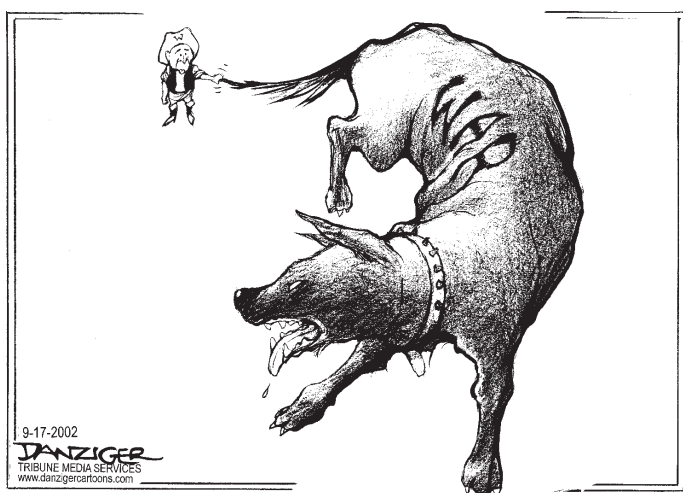
I am including this story because it reminds us of two things. First, that you can often do more without words than with. And second that an artist can usually find the emotion he wants or needs within himself. Of course Mauldin proved, time and again, that when the times demand, a drawing can pierce the emotional heart of a story deeper than the most gifted verbal lapidaries. And even though the assassination of a President is far too wrenching and rare to serve as a daily example, the image of Bill sitting in front of the camera, acting out his shock and sorrow, should keep this example in cartoonists' minds as long as the drawing that came from

it will remind the nation of how it felt on that day.

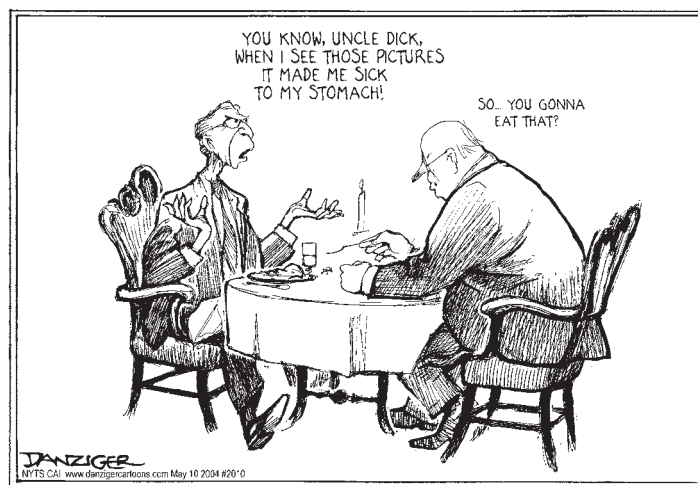
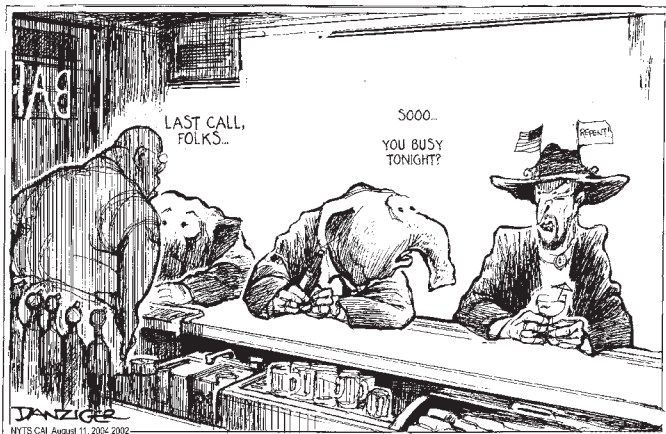
I'm no one to talk, being as great a fan of the dumb joke and irrelevant silliness as anyone. Even so, I deeply believe that the heart of political art is the kind of drawing that kicks words aside and takes over the reader's ability to see the truth any other way. A drawing can do this, when it is a nexus of skill, practice and a long study of the world. But most of all it must come from within. ■

*Jeff Danziger is a cartoonist with The New York Times Syndicate. His book, "Wreckage Begins with 'W': Cartoons of the Bush Administration," was published in 2004.*

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Many Wonder How Illinois Republicans Picked Alan Keyes to Run for Senate



# An Historic Look at Political Cartoons

'The future of editorial cartooning in America is uncertain, but the past holds lessons for us all.'

By Harry Katz

In 1754, Benjamin Franklin created the first American political cartoon, urging the British colonies to "Join, or Die" in defense against France and her Indian allies. Following ratification of the United States Constitution and the First Amendment, political cartoonists in the new republic enjoyed unprecedented freedom to express their views protected by the nation's courts from charges of libel or governmental persecution.

Two hundred and fifty years later editorial cartoons remain a vital component of political discourse and a cornerstone of American democracy. Yet today editorial cartoonists face unprecedented challenges: Commercial attrition of newspapers and journals has reduced their numbers, advertisers and publishers exert more influence, while the advent of television and the Internet diffuse their influence amid an overwhelming welter of images, text and information. Furthermore, the profession is in transition. Young cartoonists no longer work with crayon and paper in offices near the newsroom, rather they often work at home in isolation, scanning computer-generated drawings for reproduction. The old guard, too, is passing; in recent years we have lost Herbert Block and Bill Mauldin, among others. The future of editorial cartooning in America is uncertain, but the past holds lessons for us all.

## The Historic Timeline

Franklin's early efforts to rouse his countrymen inspired the Revolutionary War generation, led by patriot and propagandist Paul Revere, who used sensational text and vivid imagery to inflame public sentiment against British rule. Revere's depiction of the Boston Massacre, for

example, shamelessly copied from his brother-in-law's sketch, portrayed British soldiers as cold-hearted killers when in fact they had been provoked into violence by an unruly crowd. Widely distributed throughout the colonies, Revere's bloody Massacre print dramatically displayed the power, immediacy and effectiveness of political graphics. Ironically, Revere and his colleagues modeled their crude yet potent style from the work of English satirists then flourishing in London.

After the Revolution, American cartoonists produced precious few images satirizing George Washington and John Adams, reflecting collective national goodwill toward the heroes of the Revolution. Thomas Jefferson, however, was not immune from controversy. He bore the brunt of numerous graphic invectives, signaling the vulnerability of American politicians from the top down to personal attacks and the vigorous good health of a democratic system founded on the principles of free speech and a free press.

Cartoons at the time, however, were relatively scarce, laboriously and expensively engraved on sheets of copper or more crudely and cheaply on wood blocks. Printers and publishers reached only a small audience of literate and enfranchised citizens, mostly in urban areas. Change came quickly, however, during the 1820's, when rapidly increasing immigration and the invention of lithography greatly enhanced the ability of publishers to expand their market and print cartoons quickly, cheaply and in greater numbers, just in time to meet the ferocious demand for satire created by Andrew Jackson's polarizing administration.

The Civil War brought conflict and controversy and a golden age in Ameri-



Frank Beard's cartoon of Grover Cleveland during the 1884 presidential campaign.

*Reproduced by permission of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.*

can political cartooning. The Southern press, what little there was, and Democratic editors in the North, published cartoons excoriating President Abraham Lincoln, a Republican, for his views on slavery and callous disregard of civil liberties. By contrast, the North drew from an apparently endless supply of paper, ink and journalistic talent. Newly established illustrated weeklies, including Harper's and Frank Leslie's, produced thousands of cartoons during the war years. Supported by a national thirst for news and a more literate readership, these weeklies reached new heights of circulation, in excess of 200,000 readers. Thomas Nast became a household name during the war through his weekly diatribes against Confederate perfidy, establishing his credentials as America's

foremost cartoonist and foreshadowing his epic crusade against New York City politico, “Boss” William Marcy Tweed, in the 1870’s.

The persuasive power of political cartooning was now unmistakable even to casual observers. Cartoonists achieved unprecedented visibility and influence. President Lincoln called Nast his “best recruiting sergeant,” while “Boss” Tweed soon railed from jail against “them damn pictures.” Publishers quickly recognized the potential influence and attraction of political cartoons. Beginning in 1872, the *New York Daily Graphic* featured front-page large-format cartoons and, in 1884, Joseph Pulitzer’s *The New York World* became the first daily American newspaper to include cartoons. The suffrage movement gained momentum, and women got into the act. Rose O’Neill and Edwina Dumm were among these pioneers who broke the gender barrier and challenged typecasting that labeled them only fit to illustrate fashion plates and children’s stories. By 1900, political cartoons were an indelible feature of American newspaper and magazine publishing. The first generation of daily newspaper cartoonists, including Homer Davenport and John McCutcheon, became national celebrities.

Effective and compelling as their work undoubtedly was, both Davenport and McCutcheon often seemed spokesmen for the views of their powerful publishers rather than independent-minded journalistic commentators. In fact, most editorial cartoonists at the time steered clear of controversy over foreign or domestic affairs, choosing instead to promote American progress and prosperity. Their large numbers—for in those years most large American cities and towns supported multiple daily newspapers—were offset by a small minority of more radical cartoonists who took the side of labor against management, socialism versus democracy, pacifism over militarism.

Just prior to World War I these radicals, including Robert Minor, Boardman Robinson, and John Sloan, reached the height of their influence, producing highly charged drawings for socialist journals as well as watered down versions for the mainstream press. Their

antiwar work, in particular, hit home, precipitating a legal crisis unique in American history. Cartoonist Art Young and his colleagues at *The Masses*, an urbane and influential socialist journal, were indicted for sedition by the U.S. government. Young and the others were ultimately acquitted, a clear victory for freedom of the press, although the U.S. Postal Service did manage to shut down *The Masses*, silencing a loud though limited voice for peace and progressive reform.

During the Depression, dominated politically by the Democrats and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, cartoonists divided largely along party lines and economic issues. World War II united the country and cartoonists against the Axis threat. American cartoonists joined the fight as Arthur Szyk, Herbert Block, and Rollin Kirby, among many others, stirred the nation to support the Allies and fight their common enemies. Bill Mauldin became a war hero bringing humor to the front lines, enraging officers while entertaining the troops with his humorous and human portrayals of Willie and Joe, two foot soldiers in the war against fascism. Mauldin’s humor became serious after the war when shortages of jobs and housing left returning veterans in the lurch. For him, and many of his countrymen, the good fight continued. In times of war and crisis, it seems, cartoonists reach their full potential.

The cold war, however, a time of conflict over ideologies, did not spur American cartoonists to produce their best work. Most remained mired in partisan politics, unable or unwilling to challenge the status quo and address the larger issues facing the world and



Cartoon by John Sloan, “After the war a medal and maybe a job,” *The Masses*, 1914. *Reproduced by permission of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.*

the American people. Senator Joseph McCarthy’s anti-Communist assaults on American institutions and individuals provoked few angry protests from newspaper cartoonists, with the notable exceptions of Herbert Block and Walt Kelly. They openly challenged McCarthy with satire and caricature, complementing the journalistic efforts of Edward R. Murrow; in fact, the term “McCarthyism” appeared for the first time in a Herblock cartoon satirizing the Republican Party



“Didn’t we meet at Cassino?” © 1944 by Bill Mauldin. *Reprinted/displayed courtesy of the Mauldin Estate.*

platform. By 1952, too, Herblock had identified House member Richard Nixon as a person of interest.

With the 1960's came President Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ), Vietnam, and the generation gap. A new breed of young cartoonists came onto the scene. Paul Conrad, Pat Oliphant, Tony Auth, Paul Szep, and many others helped turn the tide of popular sentiment against the Vietnam War. Their passionate, pointed commentary combined with televised images of death and destruction to discourage LBJ from running for reelection and, ultimately, bring an end to the war. President Nixon, preaching peace with honor in Vietnam, soon dishonored the White House. As the Watergate scandal unfolded, Paul Conrad achieved immortality on Nixon's "enemies list" with his searing series of satires portraying the President as a tragic figure in the Shakespearean mold.

Herbert Block, unbelievably productive with five decades behind him and three more to go, won a fourth Pulitzer Prize for his contributions to *The Washington Post's* investigation of Nixon's Watergate role. Collectively, American cartoonists enjoyed another golden age.

Change came with the 1980's when President Ronald Reagan transformed the American political landscape. The Reagan years are memorable for the work of Garry Trudeau who, like Walt Kelly before him, introduced politics into the comics page; Pat Oliphant, one of history's finest comic artists, and Jeff MacNelly, whose prodigious talent and conservative outlook defied the notion



From Herblock Special Report  
(W.W. Norton & Company, 1974)

"National Security Blanket." *From Herblock Special Report (W.W. Norton & Company, 1974).*

that the best political artists have always been liberals devoted to reform. George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton suffered grievously at the hands of cartoonists. Oliphant added immeasurably to the elder Bush's image as a wimp, unforgettably accessorizing him with a lady's purse, while Clinton's doughy features and scandalous activities were a boon to cartoonists everywhere.

Recently, George W. Bush's efforts to remake America and fight a global war against terrorism have divided the nation and its cartoonists. Like the cartoons themselves, the issues have become black and white, no shades of gray. In 2001, just as President Bush began implementing his platform and cartoon-

ists honed their portrayals, the 9/11 attacks shattered the world as Americans knew it and overwhelmed most commentator's abilities to make sense of the madness. Few cartoonists responded with courage and conviction, seemingly stunned into silence with the rest of us. Ann Telnaes, the 2001 Pulitzer Prize-winner, was a notable exception, as her stylish and strong cartoons shed light on critical issues including the separation of church and state and threats to civil liberties emerging from the war on terrorism. [See Telnaes' article on page 28.] Trudeau took *Doonesbury* to Ground Zero and the war in Iraq, while relative newcomer Aaron McGruder's edgy comic strip *The Boondocks* broke new political ground in the funnies. Only as the nation has emerged from the shadow of 9/11 have the majority of American editorial cartoonists regained their critical voice.

In an age when reality is defined by sound bites and spin doctors, pandering pundits and partisan politics, political cartoonists must remain relevant and above the fray, talking truth to power in

all its forms and clarifying with insight, intelligence and accuracy the difficult, complex issues and events shaping our daily lives. ■

*Harry Katz is former head curator of prints and photographs at the Library of Congress and current curator of the Herb Block Foundation Collection. He is the coauthor of "Humor's Edge: Cartoons by Ann Telnaes," published by Pomegranate Press in 2004.*

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## Can journalism survive in this era of punditry and attitude? If so, how?

Nieman Reports posed this question about journalism's future to 15 journalists who work in radio and television, at newspapers or with Weblogs, or who teach the next generation of reporters, editors, producers and bloggers. The assignment: Reflect on the question and write an 800-word essay that emerges out of relevant experiences lived or observed.

Surveys of journalists—such as one conducted in May by Pew Research Center and the Project for Excellence in Journalism—are finding echoes of the increasingly critical assessments that members of the public have been giving about news reporting for many years. A large majority of the 547 national and local journalists interviewed believe that profit pressures are seriously hurting news coverage. Nearly half of national journalists say the press is too timid in its reporting, and nearly two-thirds of all the journalists think there are too many cable talk shows on TV. The report cites a “crisis of confidence,” and Pew’s director, Andrew Kohut, said of the survey’s findings: “The press is an unhappy lot. They don’t feel good about our profession in many ways.”

News coverage is becoming increasingly fragmented. At the same time, journalists find themselves confronting the pressures of economic constraints (with fewer resources being devoted to reporting) and the push toward entertainment (with stories of dubious news value trumping those of arguably more importance). In this climate, Nieman Reports decided to depart from its customary examination of coverage of a specific topic and widen our scope to look at the prospects for journalism’s future given where things stand today.

## Books

**Doug Struck**, who since 1990 has reported often from Iraq and the Middle East for The Washington Post, uses the book, “Al-Jazeera: The Story of the Network That is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism,” as a point of departure as he writes about what it is like for Arab and U.S. journalists to report on the war in Iraq—and how the content of what they report and broadcast often intersect. “The squeamish secret among Western journalists in Baghdad is that these [Arab] stations are now an important part of their establishment news operations,” he writes.

**Susana Barciela**, a member of The Miami Herald’s editorial board, describes “American Gulag: Inside U.S. Immigration Prisons,” as an “exposé of institutional cruelty” that “is a must-read for journalists covering immigration or living in immigrant-rich communities.” She observes how the author, Mark Dow, has “meticulously researched” this topic, and his “abundance of facts,” she writes, proves “that the lack of transparency and oversight has resulted in the systemic abuse of immigrants locked up from Seattle to Key West.”

**Mauricio Lloreda**, an op-ed columnist for El Tiempo in Colombia, finds in June Carolyn Erlick’s book, “Disappeared: A Journalist Silenced: The Irma Flaquer Story,” that events from the past “can offer us much to contemplate about our present.” As Lloreda writes, “Erlick’s portrayal of this Latin American journalist’s life and death speaks to what has happened—and continues to happen—under similar circumstances in countries throughout the world and particularly in this region.” ■

# Journalism Mirrors the Public Mood

By Tom Ashbrook

**W**hat if we are leaving the Age of Reason far behind? What if the basic cultural settings that have undergirded the best of American journalism—a scientific mindset and respect for the pursuit of fact-based truth—are giving way to an era of faith and belief?

Pundits do not need to report a story to its factual roots. They begin with belief. With an ideological mission. Even religious faith. Conclusion precedes reporting. Reporting is ammunition, not illumination.

In a culture that prizes reason, punditry is a marginal journalistic player, a side dish to the facts. In a culture that prizes belief, punditry rules.

The economics of pundit journalism are, of course, seductive. Maybe irresistible. I host a radio show. News, interviews and listener call-in. Two hours a night, five nights a week. To produce the show with the values of traditional journalism requires a significant staff. To research issues. To marshal facts. To find and book informed voices and newsmakers around the world.

To fill those same two hours every night with the values of punditry requires, essentially, only the pundit. Maybe a few newspapers to rattle emphatically in the background. And an Internet connection to get the daily pundit feed from the ideological source of choice. Rant radio is cheap. And it is very popular. There has always been a good appetite for punditry. Thomas Paine and all the fiery pamphleteers knew that. But the appetite is clearly growing.

Why should that be? Maybe the popularity of punditry grows as America's fundamental confidence or economic prospects are clouded. An expanding economic pie encourages expansive, open thinking. A shrinking pie encourages selfish thinking and an attitude of fact avoidance. Pundits feed both.

The long glow of the Age of Reason and a growing economy made traditional journalism relatively easy—a kind of natural outgrowth. An Age of Faith and uncertain economic prospects will make it hard. Reasoning, optimistic people needed the facts to act on abundant opportunity. Frightened people with a sense that the world is not going their way might, for a time, seek not facts but bucking up. Comfort. The solace of shared anger or denial. Pundits are good at those.

If we know all this, or suspect it might be true, why not simply resist it? Of course, many serious news outlets do and will. But the press does not operate in a vacuum. Its cultural

environment matters.

I have come to think that the correct metaphor for the news media—not our ideal, or our best hours, but as it really is, over time—might have only intermittently to do with illumination. Day in and day out, it might have more to do with reflection. It is very often not a searchlight or headlight or torch, lighting the way ahead. It is instead a mirror. A mirror of society's hopes and fears, of its obsessions and conceits and, even, its illusions.

For decades this worked, more or less. The public's impulses were decent enough, and the press's transcendent, illuminating moments were just frequent enough, that we got along. The rise of the pervasive punditocracy short-circuits this balance. Pundits relentlessly pump irate, intemperate, ideological opinion to their audiences. A vulnerable audience becomes colored with this poison. And the press—the

media mirror—reflects the corruption.

My hometown radio station in the rural Midwest used to run endless local news reports, from zoning issues and school board votes right down to the news of whose cat was lost and who needed a used pressure cooker

for canning. Now it is owned by a national chain, and Rush Limbaugh is its premier show. Rush's billboard looms over the town's main thoroughfare. When I go home, I can feel the tenor of the town changing. It is angrier and is developing a taste for more anger. For punditry.

I can imagine this changing. If serious news operations continue to show the way with serious journalism. If the political culture shifts to support real inquiry over partisan assertion. If long-term economic fundamentals are again seen to turn our way, or if tough reality smacks Americans awake to the need to be honestly informed rather than cosseted and jollied and affirmed in fierce belief.

But there is no guarantee of any of these things.

So I do my show and thank my lucky stars to work on one of the serious islands in the stream. Good journalism is its own breakwater against a rising tide of blind faith over reason. But the water is still rising. ■

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**Pundits relentlessly pump irate, intemperate, ideological opinion to their audiences. A vulnerable audience becomes colored with this poison. And the press—the media mirror—reflects the corruption.**

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# Subversive Activities

By Gilbert Cranberg

I would rephrase the question to be “Can *democracy* survive journalism as it has come to be practiced?” After all, accurate, trustworthy information, lots of it, is the bedrock of democracy.

Propagandists who pose as journalists, and corporate bosses who encourage them, not only breach a public trust; they are, to put it bluntly, subversive. Whether by blatant lie, partial truth, or opinion masquerading as fact in news reports, modern-day subversion undermines the premise of democracy—an informed electorate. Car bombs are vivid; twisted facts are insidious, therefore more dangerous, even lethal.

Ordinarily I am a stranger to talk radio. Recently I made its acquaintance during a long car trip. I anticipated over-the-top commentary; I did not expect the stunning amount of factual misrepresentation spewing forth equally from callers and the provocateurs who orchestrate the programs. Subversion broadcast across the radio dial in the form of myth, distortion and hearsay-as-fact. I hope fervently it is an exaggeration that a reported 22 percent of Americans get most of their news from talk radio.

My predecessor at The Des Moines Register believed firmly, and rightly, that our mission was to appeal to reason. That meant relying heavily on facts to buttress our positions, and we had the staff to do a great deal of legwork. Opinion was confined rigorously to the opinion pages. Generalizations are tricky, but I'm aware that appeals to emotion are now encouraged through more forceful commentary to boost readership, even as opinion leaches from editorial pages to news columns. Slimmer staffs make fact-finding more difficult. The lead that reports what a candidate says *and* the motive for saying it are so routine, even at respected papers, that opinionated news seems no longer an oxymoron.

Several years ago I was asked to critique the editorial pages of a major Midwest newspaper. In reading the entire paper for weeks, I found news pages saturated with opinion and front-page stories running side-by-side with a columnist's hard-hitting take on events. The local columnists outshouted the more measured voice of the institution. My report's conclusion: The editorial page had lost its franchise to the news side, by a wide margin. Locally written opinion columns are fine in their place—the opinion section. If the op-ed page cannot accommodate them all, nowhere is it written that op-ed material has to be squeezed on a single page. More space might give loudmouths an edge, but readers at least would be spared misplaced opinion.

The wall separating news and opinion needs to be rebuilt and made impermeable and news reports scrubbed clean of attitude. News analysis is valuable when properly labeled and not allowed to edge into opinion. To put it another way, the

print press has to go in the opposite direction of electronic journalism to distinguish itself. By doing so, it shows that it plays by its own rules that are good for journalism and representative government that operates by consent of an informed public. But in their quest for ever-harder-to-find readers, print seems to opt for the edgy.

Some 60 years ago, Henry R. Luce, concerned about press freedom in a post-war world, put some \$200,000 of Time's money at the disposal of a Commission on Freedom of the Press, headed by Robert M. Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago. Its 1947 report, “A Free and Responsible Press,” stressed society's need for a “*truthful*, (italics added) comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning” with “the identification of fact as fact and opinion as opinion, and their separation as far as possible.” Such accounts were available then, as they are now. They are not, however, what nourishes many Americans.

The Hutchins Commission examined a press vastly different from today's. Television, in its infancy, had no cable. It took 20 more years until the first newspaper company to go public, Dow Jones & Co., listed its stock. Consolidation and public ownership have left the press in fewer and more ratings-driven, profit-hungry hands. If trends continue, the subversion of democracy will be rewarded with more lavish compensation and higher stock prices as the political system journalism is supposed to serve is diminished. That is a tragic trade-off.

The report of the Hutchins Commission—which had no journalists as members—was generally derided when not ignored. Needed now is not an examination of freedom of the press but a willingness to address society's need “for a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning.” That quest is more elusive than ever. Journalism groups and foundations need to join forces to pick up where the Hutchins Commission left off. ■

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# Journalism Reflects Our Culture

By Melvin Mencher

Journalism is no more in a survival mode today than it was 52 years ago when Louis Lyons and my Nieman classmates worried about how a compliant and objective press was helping Joe McCarthy savage the body politic.

Attitude? Anyone recall Westbrook Pegler excoriating Eleanor Roosevelt and her husband? Or Colonel Robert McCormick's Chicago Tribune and the Hearst newspapers on the New Deal? A colleague at Columbia University who worked for the Journal-American in New York told me that the Chief, as William Randolph Hearst was known, instructed his staffers that Roosevelt's New Deal was to be called the Raw Deal.

Journalism survived them, as it did the partisan press, yellow journalism, and fiction-writing journalists to whom the reporter's notebook was incentive to invention. (Leaf through Ben Hecht's tribute to Chicago-style journalism in his novel, "Gaily, Gaily.") I just learned that St. Clair McKelway's lead I'd acclaimed in edition after edition of "News Reporting and Writing," my journalism textbook—"What price Glory? Two eyes, two legs an arm—\$12 a month."—about a disabled World War I veteran's pension from an ungrateful nation began a story that is well-written hokum.

If you take time to look at what journalists are doing these days—as I've done to gather material for my book's 10th edition—you'd be encouraged. Here is a small sampling of what I found:

- A nine-month investigation by Miles Moffeit and Amy Herdy of The Denver Post into how the military handles domestic violence found "sexual and domestic violence to be widespread in the armed services" and that the "military's unique justice system protects abusers while punishing the victims ...."
- Ronnie Greene's investigation for The Miami Herald of labor contractors documented the exploitation of Mexican and black laborers.
- The digging of Anna Werner and David Raziq for KHOU in Houston exposed flawed lab tests in Harris County, which sends more men and women to death row than any county in the nation.
- Eric Newhouse of the Great Falls (Montana) Tribune followed his Pulitzer Prize series on the problems alcoholism causes in the community with a series on the lack of care for troubled youths. He told me, "My job is to amplify the voices of those who often go unheard."
- UPI reporter Mark Benjamin, now the investigations editor, examined the medical treatment of soldiers returning from Iraq and uncovered delays—some months long—in treatment as well as problems involving mental health, including suicide linked to malaria medications.

New York Times' reporter David Cay Johnston traveled to farm country to check President Bush's assertion that "to keep farms in the family we are going to get rid of the death tax." He found fearful farmers, evidence that Bush's warning had taken root. But how many farms had been lost? "It's a myth," he quoted an Iowa State University farm economist. "He had searched far and wide but had never found a case in which a farm was lost because of estate taxes," Johnston wrote.

Juxtapose this with Jack Wilson's frustration when he covered Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign for The Des Moines Register and Tribune. "We could not give an accurate picture of the campaign within the limits of what you might call straight news reporting," Wilson told me. "We could not, without editorializing, tell the readers that Goldwater was not getting a strong reaction from the crowds, that he was in some cases boring them. We couldn't say that some of what he said didn't make sense in terms of being bad logic expressed in sentences that didn't say anything."

Are there problems? Obviously: We have a failing educational system in which college freshmen work at the level of yesteryear's high-school juniors. (The ACT Assessment, which tests high school seniors, reports 22 percent are ready for college-level English, mathematics and science.) Cash-hungry media owners find that paranoid journalism sells well. The stream of well-prepared young men and women from journalism programs—about three-fourths of new hires are journalism graduates—is thinning, as are the ranks of newsroom veterans who had been hired to mentor journalism students but now cannot meet the PhD requirement.

Those experienced journalists are being replaced by communications-schooled men and women who have a hard time understanding why journalism students are obligated to find kinship with the prophets, as Abraham Heschel, the Old Testament historian, described them. They were, he wrote, "intent on intensifying responsibility" and "impatient of excuse, contemptuous of pretense and self-pity." They were people who "felt fiercely" and were "attuned to a cry imperceptible to others."

The media reflect our culture. We change; it will change.

■  
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# Journalism's Proper Bottom Line

By Bonnie M. Anderson

In recent years, punditry, opinion and so-called infotainment have permeated newscasts and newspapers to such a degree that it is now difficult for the average news consumer to distill the news from what they read and watch. Can responsible journalism survive in this environment? Yes. And it is our duty to ensure it does. The First Amendment provides special protection for freedom of the press, but along with that comes the responsibility to safeguard the people's right to know.

First, though, we must acknowledge the root of the problem. Punditry and bias are mere symptoms of a far more insidious malady affecting journalism: the profit motive. While all news media have become victims of the bottom line, television news organizations have capitulated most to the pressures of their corporate owners, who have proven willing to sacrifice standards, ethics, professionalism and the public trust in order to make more money.

These news outlets care little about journalists' critical role in a democracy, about their responsibility to provide fair, balanced, broad and in-depth news coverage. The mega-corporations that devoured the major news organizations care only about doing whatever it takes to increase readership and viewership. The infusion of bias and entertainment into news has been one result of this business strategy.

For one cable network, Fox, this strategy has resulted in a massive ratings hike and increased revenues. But for most others, any short-term gains experienced have long since dissipated. While logic would dictate a reversal of course, instead they are resorting to even more entertainment and opinion programming in a futile attempt to lure viewers. In mid-October, for example, CNN launched a current events game to be played in 3,200 restaurants and sports bars. Called "Anderson Cooper 360° Challenge," the network's prime-time news anchor Cooper will host the competition. The winner will appear on CNN with Cooper and take home a 50-inch plasma television set. Can anyone truly believe informing the public is the motive behind this degrading charade?

We *can* improve the state of journalism in this country while still recognizing the business needs of news organizations. News *can* make money without reducing standards, resorting to punditry instead of reporting, and threatening the integrity of journalism. But news will never make as much money as a popular sit-com or a reality show. It shouldn't have to. The most precious dividend of responsible journalism is its indispensable role in supporting a free and open society.

Profit-hungry corporations can be made to see this if the public, especially the shareholders of these companies, get involved in a very vocal manner by writing, calling or e-mailing news organizations to demand a return to quality news coverage.

Conscientious journalists must also boldly voice their concerns and help create a national discussion about the critical need to salvage a responsible free press. Reporters must honestly assess and report about issues in their own industry, informing the public in a transparent manner about the problems being faced.

In addition, journalists need to examine their personal motives for choosing to be in the news profession. News executives need to identify, keep or hire people who are driven by a sincere sense of public service and respect for the First Amendment. These same news executives must be role models who respect news ethics, traditions and responsibilities. Those who are motivated, instead, by their high salaries, stock options, bonuses and car allowances should be confronted by their superiors or by newsroom ombudsmen with the authority to discipline or fire them.

Executives and newsroom journalists together must openly discuss programming imperatives. Instead of only providing the public with what news managers believe people want to know, put more emphasis on coverage about events and news the public needs to know about. This doesn't mean there's no room for pundits and opinion programming. Talk shows and debate programs where hosts stake out and defend positions are natural arenas for opinion brokers, but no place for journalists. News anchors and reporters, by the same token, must never stray from the news arena or offer their opinions. The line between news and opinion, between journalists and pundits, must be clear and unmistakable in the mind of the public.

Finally, it is up to those of us who care deeply about journalism's honorable role in our society to try to renew the idealism of colleagues and news consumers alike who have grown complacent or cynical. We must share our abiding faith in this institution and show, by our actions and words, that we mean to protect it at all cost. We must. ■

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# Symptoms of Underlying Stress in Journalism

By John McManus

**P**unditry and attitude are more symptoms than causes of changes in American journalism. Think of them as signs of stress, foreshocks, as more powerful forces interact under the surface due to transformations in the technology of news distribution and, with this, the economics of journalism.

Technological innovations that began 150 years ago are what shaped today's relatively impartial mainstream journalism. The steam-powered press and the telegraph ended the era of the partisan political press—a period when news was largely punditry, enabling a truly mass media by lowering production costs. From the mid-1800's until the 1980's, technology and economics combined to apply a centripetal force on news to create a more uniform product designed to appeal to mass tastes.

But as business—with the capital to purchase and operate the press—became the primary producer of news, its purpose changed from political persuasion to selling. Partisanship fell from favor because it limited the customer base. The telegraph also fostered neutral “bare facts” reporting. Many newspapers could use the same wire story if it were written from no obvious point of view. In the 20th century, mass advertising enforced an editorial environment that offended no potential customers. Once newspapers discovered Wall Street in the 1960's, chain ownership spread like a sniffle in a daycare center. The product of one MBA-managed newsroom became hard to distinguish from another.

Now cable and satellite television transmission and the Internet are shifting the ground again and fracturing the mass audience into interest groups. As bloggers demonstrate, one can reach a million households today without working for a media corporation. Now technology and economics are beginning to exert a centrifugal force on news, this time pulling it apart into niche markets.

As a result, the best days of the leading news providers of the centripetal era—metro newspapers and televised news—are probably either passing or past. But that doesn't necessarily mean the best journalism is behind us, only that we are entering a bumpy transition period.

Network newscasts have lost almost two-thirds of the audience share they drew 30 years ago. Newspaper penetration continues to fall. Their most profitable pages, the classified ads, are moving to the Web. Big-box retailers like Costco don't advertise like traditional department stores. At the same time the Faustian bargain news corporations made with Wall Street is coming due. To stoke their stock prices, many news firms are hollowing out newsrooms. The most recent survey of American journalists finds a majority for the first time complaining that profit demands are hurting news quality.

Punditry and attitude flourish as resources for reporting grow scarcer and news providers aim at niche audiences. Without enough reporters to consistently turn up interesting stories, push the columnists out front. Writing colorfully or with edge adds entertainment value. Today, Fox draws a larger audience by abandoning impartiality to pander to conservative tastes than it would by upholding the norms of mainstream journalism and competing for the shrinking middle with other networks.

Ethnic and alternative media are the expanding areas of journalism. Both cater to niche audiences and are understaffed relative to mainstream newsrooms. Least staffed and, not surprisingly, most extreme in attitude is the burgeoning blogosphere. Most bloggers can't afford reporting. Commentary is cheap—and the more pungent, the more likely to attract a following.

There are advantages to greater diversity of news and views. But right now disadvantages seem greater. Opinion can't substitute for the information that solid reporting turns up. And the more extreme the 'tude, the less likely it is to be consumed by—much less inform or persuade—anyone who doesn't already hold the author's worldview.

In our economically interdependent world, reliable news ought to be more valued than ever, since the consequences of being uninformed are more grave. So the market for such information should remain strong, even as it continues to fractionate. And how we receive it will continue to migrate from paper and scheduled newscasts to increasingly mobile laptops and cell phones. Some system of micro-payments for information, now provided for free, will have to arise as a younger generation gives up the paper on the stoop for the report on the Web.

The “bundling” strategy of the newspaper, with its smorgasbord of news, might be going the way of the general practitioner in medicine. Journalism is finally entering the age of specialists. Using Web search tools already available, consumers can scan the Internet for news from specialists they choose. The most successful Web sites are likely to be those that establish trust, but to do this will require a lot more than attitude and punditry. ■

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# The Inadequacy of Objectivity as a Touchstone

By Geneva Overholser

Certainly journalism will survive. Indeed, it could even *thrive* as a result of today's very real challenges. Journalists need neither fear nor denounce the proliferation of punditry and attitude. Rather, as the media landscape teems ever more vigorously with partisanship and shout shows, infotainment, 24-hour-a-day repetitiousness and the near-anarchy of the Web world, journalism has a fine opportunity: To define itself in opposition to others. In the process, journalism could gain much-needed courage and clarity.

The evolutionary step made necessary by the growing dominance of viewpoints—along with the blending of entertainment and news and the ravages wrought by time pressure and profit pressure—is that some institutions and individuals must purposefully differentiate themselves according to a stated intention: Public service to citizens of this democracy. Through this principled differentiation, some will become known—and sought out—for their fairness and comprehensiveness, substantiality and proportionality, transparency and accountability.

Our increasingly attitude-driven media world is not all to the bad. The fastest-growing media sectors—alternative, ethnic and online media—are known for having a viewpoint. Clearly, they meet a hunger—even a public need. So do more partisan “mainstream” media, exemplified by Fox News. Ideological leanings are not themselves harmful. It is deceit that is wrong—the false presentation of one's intentions. No one should be allowed to get away with hoodwinking the news consumer. Those who try should be called out—something clannish journalists have been disappointingly timid about doing.

But forthrightly partisan media have been important in our history—and remain so today elsewhere. In both cases, political engagement has been (or is) higher than here in the era of “objective journalism.” That same desirable result might well be repeating itself here today.

Accepting this reality doesn't imply rejecting balanced and fair journalism; that is more needed than ever. But “objectivity” as a touchstone has grown worse than useless. For one thing, it is inadequate: Journalism has for decades been characterized in substantial part by interpretative and investigative and analytical reporting. To the extent that objectivity still holds sway, it often produces a report bound in rigid orthodoxy, a deplorably narrow product of conventional thinking. The cowardly, credulous and provincial coverage leading up to the Iraq War was a spectacular example. This orthodoxy also leaves out huge sectors of the population. Whatever the poverty of thinking of those in power, their views and actions are seen as legitimate, while thoughts and experiences of others are ignored. But if objectivity has become an ineffective and

even harmful guide, it remains an extremely effective cudgel for those who wish to discredit the messenger on any story they disagree with. And the anticipation of these bludgeonings has produced a yet more craven media.

A forthright jettisoning of the “objectivity” credo, and a welcoming of the diverse media landscape springing up around us, could have freeing effects. Those who wish to get their news only from media sharing their viewpoint are welcome to it. Irreverent bloggers and alternative publications will increasingly make clear the true nature of those outlets. Meanwhile, the news sources seeking to serve the public interest with as much fairness and balance as possible will become differentiated from the others—thereby appealing to a growing hunger for guidance through an ever more bewildering media forest. Objectivity bludgeonings will lose their power. These media will contribute their varied strengths—from the net's innovation and interactivity to cable news's breaking-news preeminence. And the mainstream media wise enough to let the fresh air in, rather than fearfully shutting it out, will gain in clarity, strength and purposefulness from the democratization and the questioning and critiques that accompany the transition.

One more thought: With objectivity no longer the byword, transparency and accountability become ever more important—transparency of intent and also of procedure. And accountability of every kind, from ombudsmen to reader advisory groups, from state news councils to online chats. And amid the uncertainty, the best ethical guidance might be found in time-tested credos like this one written by Walter Williams at the beginning of the last century:

“I believe that the public journal is a public trust; that all connected with it are, to the full measure of responsibility, trustees for the public; that acceptance of lesser service than the public service is a betrayal of this trust.

“I believe that clear thinking, clear statement, accuracy and fairness are fundamental to good journalism.

“I believe that a journalist should write only what he holds in his heart to be true. I believe that suppression of the news, for any consideration other than the welfare of society, is indefensible.”

Nary a mention, you'll notice, of objectivity. ■

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# The Next Journalism's Objective Reporting

By Philip Meyer

**L**isten up, young journalists. Here's some bad news from an old-timer: The economic basis for the detached, aloof-observer model of journalism that my generation built is crumbling fast.

The good news: You get to invent the next journalism.

The old system worked because print and broadcast journalism were naturally monopolistic. Broadcasting had a limited number of channels, and printing required expensive machines that broke easily. It wasn't efficient to have more than a very limited number of them per market. That constraint produced a system geared to sending a few messages to lots of people.

Now, because of technology, the massiveness of the mass media is disappearing. We're moving toward a system of many messages, each directed to a comparatively few people, and the new system is experimenting with different ways to do that. As markets will, it is trying the cheap ways first. Taking obvious facts and fitting them into a preconceived theory favored by the target segment is one way. It's all the explanation we need for the success of right-wing talk radio.

Competition and entrepreneurial spirit will lead to other ways to profit from media specialization. Out of experimentation will come a new journalism that is at the same time better and worse than the old. One benefit is that the motivations of senders will become more transparent as each seeks to woo and win a viable segment of the audience.

There will still be an economic need for objective reporting, but it will have to be based on true objectivity, not the fake kind that the old mass media system supported. In that system, the appearance of objectivity was maintained by a sprinkling policy. Ink and airtime were scarce goods and so owners put a little here, a little there, trying to give all sides at least a chance for exposure to the mass audience. Journalists had viewpoints, but they kept them well concealed so as not to undermine the perception of neutrality.

But it was always a false perception. Journalists have opinions. The old media economics compelled their concealment so their messages could be sold to a broader range of end users. However, the end of pseudo-objectivity does not undermine the need for true objectivity. If anything, it enhances it. As the venues for spin and advocacy multiply, there ought to be a market for a trusted, objective source in the original, scientific sense.

True objectivity is based on method, not result. Instead

of implying that there is an equal amount of weight to be accorded every side, the objective investigator makes an effort to evaluate the competing viewpoints. The methods of investigation keep the reporter from being misled by his or her own desires and prejudices.

When I was a member of the 1967 Nieman class, I studied social science research methods. And I saw clearly, for the first time, how science and journalism have the same goals and could use the same tools. Six years later, I got that notion into print with the first edition of "Precision Journalism." In the opening chapter, I laid out the theory. To report on our complicated world, journalism requires interpretation as well as the straightforward reporting of facts. But the leap from observation to interpretation needs to be subject to the same kind of discipline as science.

Two aspects of what I advocated then caught on quickly: news media took responsibility for their own polling instead of relying on national syndicates or the polls of politicians. And journalists started discovering the power of computers to

manage and interpret large quantities of data. But the discipline of scientific method with its rules for analysis and hypothesis testing never fully caught on, although there are some brilliant exceptions. Bill Bishop of the Austin American-Statesman and Steve Suo of The Orego-

nian in Portland are setting fine examples, and their editors deserve credit for giving them the resources to do it.

The trouble with this kind of journalism is that it is expensive, time consuming, and requires a level of skill not much in demand from a system that conceives of news media as mere platforms for attracting eyeballs to ads. That model puts a premium on low-cost attractants.

But, sooner or later, publishers will learn that to stand out in the noisy buzz of the information marketplace, they will need more trustworthy products. Journalism that yields reproducible results, reviewable by peers, open about its sources and methods, stands to find a privileged place in this new marketplace. You can be its creators. ■

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# We Define Journalism By Doing It

By Melanie Sill

There's a whiff of nostalgia to this question, an implied belief that journalism in the past was noble and pure and that recent trends might ruin it. That bias faces us squarely in the wrong direction—backward—in thinking about what journalism and journalists can accomplish.

One might also ask how journalism could survive in an age of widespread poverty and displacement (the Great Depression) or in an age when Americans accepted the government's word on so many things, including censorship of war reporting (World War II and the cold war). The Hutchins Commission in the late 1940's asked how journalism could and should survive in an age of media consolidation.

The best journalists answered those challenges with memorable work that helped inform and define a nation in transition. The best journalists today do the same, not just here but also all over the globe. We need to continue defining journalism by doing it—but we also need to claim the high ground and tell people what distinguishes journalism from opinions, advocacy and pseudonews.

People want truth. Journalism thus has an audience and a calling that exist wherever people gather. The craft and the ideals aren't in danger, but the same can't be said for journalistic institutions or the public's view of the news business. Look no further than your TV screen. Check "Law & Order," the ubiquitous cop show. That's us, the faceless mob on the courthouse steps.

As a kid I lived in a world in which most people read the newspaper and reporters were usually the good guys in movies and on television. Even the glamorized version in "All the President's Men" gave a sense of how investigative reporting worked. A teenager paying attention today might instead watch the movie about liar and cheat Stephen Glass, hardly a call to the pursuit of truth. Blair and Kelly, not Woodward and Bernstein, are the reporters who've been in the news.

Turn to CNN or MSNBC and you will find Jon Stewart, the fake news guy, being interviewed by a journalist about real issues. "The media aren't biased, they're just lazy," Stewart opines. Listen to talk radio, spend time in Internet forums or Web sites, and you'll see how much hostility rages toward this undefined power called "the media."

I'm an American, so I get to blame Washington for everything. Who hasn't thought that some of those talking heads on Sunday morning seemed to forget years ago which seat they were supposed to occupy? I also occupy a cohost's seat

on a weekly television show called "Headline Saturday," produced with our local CBS affiliate, so I'm not throwing rocks at journalists who appear on TV. If some reporters lose their moorings on TV or radio talk appearances, after all, they don't get in the way of others doing great work.

What's missing in many of these public appearances, however, is a focus on the work and substance of reporting. Interviews with Anthony Shadid of The Washington Post after he won his Pulitzer Prize for reporting in Iraq helped the public understand war coverage, its dangers and its benefits.

Good journalism should speak for itself, but that only works if people are reading or listening. In the meantime, others are speaking about journalists, describing our motives and practices and largely going unchallenged.

I share some words from a recent e-mail exchange I had with a local fellow who had been invited to a forum by our marketing department and declined with a scathing e-mail describing why he and his conservative friends boycott The News & Observer. It turned out the man had rarely read our

paper. Instead, he formed his opinions from local reputation among his conservative friends. In our exchange, it became clear we read many of the same publications and shared a belief in independent reporting.

"I admire your desire to pursue the truth and wish you continued success—who knows, maybe I'll subscribe to The N&O someday," he wrote in closing.

This exchange and others have convinced me that we can't assume people know what makes journalism different from other kinds of information, including punditry, or how reporting works. We can't assume people know that editorial opinion is separate from news in my newspaper and many others. We can't expect them to know that we report independently.

More and more, my newspaper aims to tell people what we're trying to do. We're putting more effort into delivering on those promises in small ways and big ones.

People want what journalism can deliver—reporting, facts, depth, context, independence. Looking forward, there's plenty of that work yet to be done. ■

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**We can't assume people know that editorial opinion is separate from news .... We can't expect them to know that we report independently.**

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# Punditry Flowers in the Absence of Reporting

By Mary Claude Foster

While we were getting down to the wire on the John Kerry Silver Star medal story at ABC News's "Nightline," the recent painful "60 Minutes" debacle over the President's war record story gave fresh meaning to an old rule, "Thou shalt make no mistake."

A freelance producer had brought us an official map from the Vietnamese government, which when paired with coordinates in the official U.S. "After-Action Report," provided a line across 35 years to the hamlet where then First Lieutenant Kerry received a citation saying he had charged into a numerically superior force under intense fire. The Swift Boat Veterans for Truth had claimed there'd been no firefight there and that the Vietcong killed by Kerry was a boy.

A football field could be carpeted with words written and broadcast debating the merit of this medal. Political ads from the swift boat veterans group had unleashed a maelstrom of punditry. Everyone had an opinion; no one seemed to have any real information. For each soldier who claimed that Kerry was a hero, another charged he'd dishonored the Navy.

High-volume punditry was flowering—as it always does—in the absence of clear facts. When "Nightline" was offered the opportunity to do primary reporting to advance this story, we leapt at the chance. Once there, we found eyewitnesses to the event who had vivid memories of that day in February 1969 when swift boats beached on their shore, though none had heard of John Kerry by name.

The two biggest stories of our time—Iraq and the presidential election—have their own challenges in reporting, and the lack of agreed-upon facts offers fertile ground for punditry to fill this vacuum. In Iraq the reality of lethal danger means that reporters languish in the Green Zone, unable to report the conflict firsthand or speak with people whom it affects. On the campaign trail reporters had little direct access to the candidates who preferred to be interviewed by TV celebrities such as Dr. Phil and Regis and Kelly. In this void, campaign advisors became frighteningly adept at managing news. Reporters might be in the field, but they essentially were embedded with the campaigns. At a political convention, reporters observed a staged event as protesters were to be penned a few blocks away. Debates were covered from holding rooms where reporters watched on closed-circuit TV and did not see—as many viewers at home did—the colorful reaction shots of the candidates that networks aired, though doing so violated the rules of coverage set by the campaigns.

Technology makes possible the "publishing" of opinion

from kitchen tables without ever leaving the house. It also means that skilled TV journalists can write words to pictures shipped in from the field. Little in today's journalism milieu seems to require being there. It is easy to back away from the tough job of reporting, especially when bosses seem as content with punditry as with original reporting.

Consider the protesters. "Nightline" met a couple in Charleston, West Virginia who were arrested at a July 4th event with President Bush for wearing Kerry T-shirts. Campaign reporters heard such news, but being part of the ever-moving motorcade makes it hard to stay behind and follow-up. One highly respected political reporter wrote a powerful commentary piece about this couple. When we contacted the reporter, we learned she hadn't covered the campaign in the field and had not spoken with the arrested couple.

Our silver medal story aired, relaying eyewitness accounts of Vietnamese peasants who said that the man Kerry killed was a veteran Vietcong operative sent into battle by those at

headquarters. They remembered a heated firefight. The taped pieces were followed by an interview with the head of the swift boat veterans, who repeatedly held up copies of his book and *The Boston Globe* as proof of his assertions. After

the report aired, "Nightline's" anchor, Ted Koppel, offered his commentary. Punditry followed, and complemented, the story's primary reporting.

Koppel let viewers know that "Nightline" didn't know what would be found when our reporting team was dispatched to Vietnam. There they would ask questions of those who witnessed this event, and answers they received would provide a first-hand account that would speak to the debate about Kerry's character. As Koppel noted, "Nightline" would have reported whatever was learned. "Because not reporting something you know can be just as much of a political statement as reporting it," he said. "Finally, once we've checked things as thoroughly as we can, we're in the business of reporting what we learn, not concealing it."

Now if you'll excuse me from this reflection on the role of punditry, I have to run. There is reporting to do. ■

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**It is easy to back away from the tough job of reporting, especially when bosses seem as content with punditry as with original reporting.**

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# Infotainment Shrinks the News

By Clarence Page

People often ask me what it is like backstage at “The McLaughlin Group” or Chris Matthew’s “Hardball” or Fox’s “The O’Reilly Factor.” “Do you and your fellow panelists go out for a beer?” they ask. “Do you pal around together?” I sense what they really want to know is whether the disagreements they see are nothing more than a show. We don’t really mean it, they suspect. It’s just infotainment.

Well, on every show on which I happen to argue, I mean it. I mean what I say on the air as sincerely as I mean what I write in my newspaper column. I did not go to journalism school to become the sort of dweeb who likes to argue. I came by it quite naturally. This characteristic, obnoxious in a roommate, can be pure gold on the talk show circuit. Helped along by my rapier wit, keen-eyed knowledge and rat-like cunning, it has gained for me a perch, however modest it might be, in today’s pantheon of punditry, a perch that is becoming increasingly crowded, not nearly as special as it used to be.

Once, I am told, there was actually a time when you could swing a dead cat in Washington without hitting a pundit, which is a Hindi word for “learned man.” Two or three imperial figures in Washington like Walter Lippmann, Joseph Kraft, or Stewart Alsop defined and dominated this profession, offering perspectives with lyrical language, seamless logic, and insiders’ eyes.

Modern media, particularly the Internet, have democratized the game. The writing might not be nearly as good, but there’s way more of it. I do not fear for the survival of journalism in this era of punditry and attitude. I think there will be a hunger for accurate and reliable reporting as long as there is something newsworthy happening. There is also a need for the analytical and investigative role that holds the powerful accountable and keeps the rascals on notice. But what troubles me is that the prognosis is less bright for the sort of punditry that tries to explain the complexities of the world in a way that makes sense without leading a rah-rah squad for one partisan side or another. Goodbye to all that. Hello to infotainment.

I sensed trouble when my local column of social and political thought was picked up for national syndication in the late 1980’s. The first question the marketing executives asked me was, “By the way, Clarence, what are you?”

Excuse me? Patiently they explained that op-ed page editors want to know, first and foremost, whether I am a liberal or a conservative.

Ah, having never confined my broad mind to such narrow parameters, I confessed that I was “not sure.” That would not do. We talked. We settled on an appropriate pitch line that went something like, “A liberal who sometimes will surprise you.” I still like that.

While some of us pundits still pride ourselves on being unpredictable, the marketplace increasingly seeks the predictable. Just as FM radio has fragmented since the “Top 40” days into music formats targeted to the narrowest of tastes (“hard rock,” “soft rock,” “classic rock,” “Christian rock,” “urban contemporary,” “hip-hop ...”) so has political talk, except it has fragmented into two Manichaean choices: liberal and conservative. Listen and believe? No, believe and then choose to what you want to listen.

Quite often the result, as Jon Stewart of “The Daily Show” famously bellyached on CNN’s “Crossfire,” is pseudo-intellectual cheerleading, a battle of heat-seeking interests masquerading as serious discourse. One tunes into such programs

to have one’s beliefs, notions and prejudices reinforced. If thorough consideration of an opposing view is the beginning of intellectual growth, much of today’s infotainment sounds brain dead.

Ah, well. Infotainment is not all bad, or I would not

participate in it. Ideally I still cling to the hope that its heat-seeking arguments will tantalize wider audiences, particularly the ever-elusive youth audience, and lure them more deeply into traditional serious journalism, like that offered by the newspapers that run my column. A revival of literacy sparked by television? Ah, I can dream, can I not?

My nightmare, by contrast, is a nation growing apart into two nations, red-state America and blue-state America, polarized by the wedge of a political culture that honors the art of compromise and consensus less than the brute sport of digging in one’s heels.

The daily newspaper has its limits but, bless its ink-stained heart, it still tries mightily to offer all things to all people. When you pick one up and open it, brace yourself, dear reader, for an opinion that just might not agree with yours. What a concept. I wonder if it has a future. ■

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**If thorough consideration of an opposing view is the beginning of intellectual growth, much of today’s infotainment sounds brain dead.**

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# Experiencing the Meaning of Journalism

By Maria Henson

**W**ant a newspaper reprint with your barbecue sandwich? How's that for a message near the capitol in Frankfort, Kentucky, at Scotty's Pink Pig restaurant?

I know the grim news about what we do, but I'm going to throw my lot with the optimists in large part because of my experience in Kentucky and a woman named Clayton Bradley. She read a series of investigative editorials I wrote for the Lexington Herald-Leader about how certain judges, prosecutors and police officers had failed to protect battered women and their children. Turns out that one of the women I featured—by name and ghastly emergency-room photo—was the daughter of Clayton's friends from church. Until she saw the editorials, Clayton thought this young woman had been in an accident. When she learned that a boyfriend pummeled the young woman and that the law didn't offer the same relief to girlfriends as it did married women, Clayton got angry, and she got active.

She asked for a stack of series' reprints, put them on the front counter at her restaurant, and distributed them with barbecue. She posted a sign instructing diners to tell legislators to support domestic violence legislation; she even included the number for the Capitol switchboard. Across partisan lines, she and others around the state were relentless in

their advocacy. As a result, the legislature—among the last in the country to define marital rape as a crime and with a member who publicly worried about such legislation causing “vengeful women” to come out of the woodwork—experienced a curious conversion and passed every domestic violence reform proposed with hardly a whisper of dissent.

Witness the privilege of practicing journalism and the power of citizens to push for change.

Can journalism survive in this age of punditry and attitude? Of course it can. Here I'm speaking of journalism: Its business model is another matter entirely and, at the moment, lends little cause for optimism. Our roots lie in unruly partisan newspapering, from the nasty jousting of the Republican vs. Federalist press in our country's earliest days. Surely, the anarchic, chaotic fireworks of talk show shouting, Internet blogging, and 24/7 “news you can choose,” as a National Journal writer put it, are our modern-day version of rowdy pamphleteering.

What concerns me more is the state of the citizenry. Before

I left the Austin American-Statesman last summer, I was editing an ongoing project called “The Great Divide,” in which reporter Bill Bishop and statistician Robert Cushing analyzed voting and demographic patterns since World War II. They found that during the past 30 years, we have sorted ourselves into politically homogenized, no-compromise clusters, where we talk to like-minded people and limit our intake of dissenting views. By 2000 about half of the nation's voters lived in counties where one party won the presidential election by 20 percentage points or more.

This worries me. If citizens are looking only for news that affirms their point of view and don't live in places where there is an exchange of ideas, democracy is weakened and people get angrier about politics and institutions. Compromise becomes a sign of defeat. The individual is extreme and supreme, and the common good seems passé. Our work as journalists is based on a particular view of citizens: that they care about their rights, the conduct of their government, their role in governing—that they care about the country as a whole. No matter the period in history, journalism in a democratic society has

a continuous duty to offer information that is accurate, rich in context and history, balanced and able to withstand peer review.

The question for us is whether citizens will want it.

There will always be a *need* for “real news,” which Bill Moyers observed has been defined by Richard Reeves as “the news you and I need to keep our freedoms.” I'm counting on people like Clayton to have an appetite for that kind of news and the ability to distinguish between punditry and journalism and on a country where the common good again counts for something. The top-down method of deciding and delivering news is distasteful to many today, but it's also true that in a world where information bombards us a journalist can be a useful guide in making sense of this world, exposing abuses and injustices that might rile a citizen to act. I'm counting as well on individual journalists to see journalism as a calling that requires one to report with depth and rigor, not just to rant. ■

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# The Messy Transition Ahead

By Dan Gillmor

When the dust started settling on the 2004 presidential election, journalists were doing our usual post-mortems about our coverage and influence (or lack thereof) on the election. For the first time, the word “blogger” was prominent, but not for entirely positive reasons.

On Election Day, exit-poll results were widely available on the Internet. People with access to the numbers—probably inside journalism organizations—leaked the numbers to bloggers, who promptly posted the data for all to see. The results were dramatic, in more ways than one. John Kerry seemed to be winning, and his supporters became cautiously euphoric. Stock markets reacted badly, as some traders began selling certain industries in anticipation of a Kerry administration's likely policies. But as we've learned, the exit polls—which ran counter to just about every pre-election survey showing George W. Bush in the lead—were wrong.

In this emerging era of grassroots journalism, things are getting messy. Or, more accurately, messier. And the election polling uproar is just one more piece of evidence.

As I observed on these pages several years ago, the 20th century model of centralized newsgathering and distribution is being augmented (and in some cases will be replaced) by an emergent phenomenon of increasingly ubiquitous and interwoven networks. Technology has collided squarely with journalism, giving people at the edges of those networks low-cost and easy-to-use tools to create their own media, and the data networks are giving them global reach.

Meanwhile, our business model is under attack as never before, by people using the same technologies to carve away our revenues. Think of eBay as the largest classified advertising site on the planet, and you get the idea.

My focus here, however, is on the messiness factor. It will be a growing source of discomfort among journalists. Our gatekeeping role is under challenge, along with our credibility. And as we saw in the exit-poll debacle, the messiness will have serious consequences while we sort it out, assuming we *can*. I believe we can, but it will take a fair bit of time.

The core of the issue is in fragmentation. The news audience seems to be going its own way. Certainly there's some retreat to quality—to sources of information we learn to trust in online searching—not just surfing to random “news” sites that turn out to give false information. But there's equally a hunt for better information than we're getting from main-

stream media. It is not an accident that The Guardian's Web site saw an enormous surge in traffic before the Iraq War began. The visitors were, in large part, Americans who knew they weren't getting anything like the full story from newspapers and broadcasters that seemed to become little more than propaganda arms of the Bush administration after the September 11th attacks.

Now contemplate The Guardian times ten thousand, or a million. No, most of those other alternative sources won't attract many readers, but collectively they contribute to the audience fragmentation. Readers—and viewers and listeners to the increasingly sophisticated online media being offered by the grassroots—are learning, perhaps too slowly, to find trusted sources but also to exercise caution. I can't emphasize enough the need for reader caution, because I don't expect the grassroots journalists to exercise much restraint. I wish bloggers were more responsible, but I value their First Amendment rights as much as anyone else's.

Some help might be coming from Silicon Valley, where I live and work. Technology helped create this messiness.

It might help solve it. The tools of media creation and distribution are more powerful and ubiquitous. Now we need tools to better manage the flood of what results. Early entrants in this field are promising. A new file format called “Really Simple Syndication,” or RSS, lets software parse many different Web sites and aggregate them into one col-

lection of news and other kinds of information. News people who don't know what RSS is should learn. Yesterday.

Specialized search tools, such as Technorati and Feedster, are emerging to help us gather and sort good material from bad. They're still fairly crude in many ways, but they are improving quickly and help point to more useful systems. Reputation systems, where we can easily learn what people we trust consider trustworthy themselves, are on the way.

This is not going to be a smooth transition. But I still believe, in an era where so much is so centralized, that more voices are ultimately better than fewer. We have to sort it out. It will be messy and worth the trouble. ■

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**Technology has collided squarely with journalism, giving people at the edges of those networks low-cost and easy-to-use tools to create their own media ....**

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# Pressures Force the Emergence of a New Journalism

By Edward Wasserman

Journalism often appears to thrill to the sense of being in crisis, but pressures on it now truly seem to fit the bill. On one side, it's screwed down tighter than ever; on the other, the lid has blown off. The mainstream end is squeezed to the point of strangulation, while the New Media end revels in an almost explosive decompression.

How these antithetical forces will play out is uncertain, but the stakes are high. Will journalism—as a careful, independent-minded effort at socially significant truth-telling—survive, and in what form?

For the mainstream, compression. Industrial reconfiguration and regulatory retrenchment are essentially destroying local broadcast news, while the steady creep of market-driven forms that supposedly appeal to a melting readership base sap shrunken newspaper resources. Reporters risk drawing a harsh ideological barrage if they displease the roving Web-based cadre of truth cops.

Plus newsrooms are in the midst of a managerial counter-revolution, prompted by the recent highly publicized cases of reporters run wild. We should be asking why seasoned journalists were so disenfranchised that their skepticism about a Jayson Blair or a Jack Kelley went unspoken or unheeded. We might question newsroom incentives that reward the overproducing reporter whose work should have aroused suspicion. But we hear little of that.

Instead, reporter independence is tagged as the culprit. The response is a crackdown—checking phone logs and travel records and spot-checking sources—that smacks of a revocation of operational autonomy that reporters need to do their job.

But that job has changed. The work these reforms impair is street-level, enterprise reporting, which thrives on curiosity and independence. And that is the work that the cost-conscious news managers of the 21st century are least convinced they still need in a time when so many “editorial” jobs in converged news operations are clerical in everything but name, and the audience for news is fragmenting.

The opposing push from Internet bloggers and other heavily opinionated, hands-free style news analysts on cable presents itself as an alternative. It promises a reanimated journalism of insurgency, free of corporate control and the smug biases of metropolitan liberalism. Fox News embodies this spirit in its cynical claim to being fair and balanced—a powerful claim because it gives voice to a fervent wish for a place where thought and speech might truly be free.

Sadly, the history of technological innovation in the mass media is a breathless parade of new gadgets touted as a new pathway to social betterment and enlightenment—from AM broadcasting to cable proliferation, from satellite TV to TiVo.

Invariably, new technology is deformed, reformed, regulated and deregulated until it fits perfectly well with what was there before. The Internet, too, might be in the early stages of colonization. For now, though, the ideology of the blog is powerful, with its promise of emancipation from the constraints of an increasingly timid, defensive and underfunded mainstream.

What does this, and the ratings success of Fox News in using ideology to define a narrow commercial market, have to do with the beleaguered practice of journalism? How might journalism survive?

Any answer must recognize that times have indeed changed. Today, the most dynamic areas of news and public affairs respond to vastly different economic realities than those of the mid-to-late-20th century. No longer must news media realize a profit by their ability to aggregate ideologically diverse publics with broadly acceptable messages. The success of news reporting—whether sustained by advertising, subsidy or subscription, whether via blog or cable TV—increasingly depends on gathering a stable, vigorously committed public of communicants.

Must journalism then give way to polemic? I hope not. Instead, the successor to the dying regime of mass market-driven pseudo-objectivity might lie in the tradition of principled advocacy journalism. This can be an expression of conviction and commitment, but to be journalism it must submit to the test of truthfulness. The painstaking process of gathering facts must be the beating heart of the practice. Suppressing or omitting material facts or contrary thinking must be prohibited. Whatever the journalist's preferences, she must be willing to yield to the weight of stronger evidence and modify conclusions as new facts emerge. No matter how right the cause seems, for this work to be journalism—not mere rumor, clamor or propaganda—such are the rules.

A new tradition of committed journalism can emerge to marry the burgeoning multiplicity of perspectives to a canon rededicated to a veneration of fact. The tottering traditions of one kind of journalism are dying. Is a renewed tradition of journalism ready to be born? ■

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# The Tasks in Creating a New Journalism

By Michael X. Delli Carpini

Journalism is not going to disappear. As author Michael Schudson observed, if there were not journalists, we'd have to invent them. The real issue is what journalism will look like and if it—and the larger media environment of which it is a part—will ably serve our democracy.

Journalism's core mission is to provide citizens with useful information about public affairs. While this is not an easy task under the best of circumstances, right now this mission is being challenged by some well-documented economic and technological changes in the media. As a result, traditional news organizations seem to face a Hobson's choice: Either stay true to the tenets of journalism and risk becoming irrelevant or compete by being more entertaining and/or opinionated.

But there is a viable middle option. It begins with reasoned reflection and a willingness to act on what we know and believe. For example, many of the conditions that created the practice of modern journalism, such as the scarcity of outlets, no longer exist. This is a potentially positive development, though the increasingly centralized ownership of news organizations must be addressed. Having a handful of news outlets operate under the noble but impossible norm of objectivity was never the optimal way to inform citizens. By reducing reporting to the accurate quoting of "both sides" of an issue, journalists often end up stripping what they convey of valuable context and making it dry, boring and confusing. Yet we know that an information environment that abandons commitment to accuracy or fairness is not helpful in guiding citizens to greater understanding—or increasing their ability to make informed decisions—about the critical issues of our time.

What might a new journalism look like? As a starting point, let me suggest the following:

1. Journalism gets its house in order. Too often journalists fail to live up to their professed standards, as seen in recent mea culpas from CBS News, The New York Times, and The Washington Post. There is confusion, too, between the practice of only reporting what is said and the fundamental goal of uncovering the truth. Add to this the cynical and strategic ways in which elections and politics are covered. Market-driven tensions also seem to influence journalists in setting aside reporting on what people ought to know and substituting what they (often wrongly) think people are interested in knowing about. For journalism to claim its role in democracy, it must walk the talk.

2. Journalism remains true to its core mission, while acknowledging that it can be accomplished in many ways. Straight reporting of facts is essential, but coverage can also

include insightful commentary, debate, humor and opinion. The test should be journalists' effective communication of some sense of the truth about important topics. The difficulty is not too much "talk," or ideologically based arguments, or attempts to entertain audiences. Rather it is in the extent to which these presentations do or do not provide useful and useable information.

3. Journalism expands its watchdog function to include monitoring alternate sources of public information. Citizens need help in sorting through the complexities of civic life, but also in navigating the new media environment. Regular assessments are needed, not only of one's own news organization's performance, but also of others, including cable talk shows, Web sites, blogs, even books and politically relevant entertainment genres. Journalism needs to accept that people draw on multiple sources of information, but it also must hold these sources (collectively as well as individually) to standards by which it judges itself. It is not enough for Jon Stewart to claim he isn't a journalist (but then act like one) or for the Fox News Channel to declare itself "fair and balanced." Those who provide information must be held accountable to the standards of journalism, and journalists are well positioned to serve this broader ombudsman role.

We are witnessing the blurring of lines between news and entertainment, fact and opinion, even fact and fiction. Today, neither journalists nor the public seem capable of giving clear answers to questions such as, "What is a journalist?" or "What are the rules of journalism?" The solution: Don't circle the wagons around increasingly outmoded definitions and rules, but take what is best about journalism's recent past and adapt it to what appears most promising about the new information environment in which we live. It's only a bit of an exaggeration to suggest that tomorrow's journalist will need to be a blend of Ted Koppel, Chris Matthews, and Jon Stewart. ■

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# Reversing the Trend Away From Journalism

By Ellen Hume

Journalism will survive. It will appear in the form of Web sites designed for people checking on the news because they are trying to figure out the jokes on Jon Stewart's "The Daily Show."

All joking aside, there is nothing to guarantee a continuing audience for independent, unbiased news. For years we've been warned that journalism is being tainted by all the ersatz stuff. It is tragic that we've come to this. Too many reporters are chasing too few stories and conveying them with more hype than meaning. People are suffering from news fatigue, along with compassion *and* political fatigue.

Audiences flee to the blogosphere and talk shows, where the chatterati seem more candid and, therefore, honest, seducing audiences by confirming their prejudices. The passion for "attitude" plays well in our attention economy, but it's bad for news. Journalists become no different than salesmen and jesters, except they're usually less amusing.

Real journalism will recover, but only if its supporters take action. First, they should get out the plastic sheeting and duct tape and wall off everything about celebrities, movies, Laci Peterson, rumor, prediction and a lot of other popular stuff. Take a page out of FactCheck.org—the most admired Web site of this campaign year. Stay with the basics. Don't just repeat someone else's story. Do original reporting. Help us understand what's a lie and what's the truth, and why this matters.

Journalism that still tries to do this is better now than ever. It is found in the detailed take-outs in *The New York Times* and other newspapers that separate myths from realities, about aluminum tubes in Iraq, John Kerry and George Bush during the Vietnam era, and other hotly debated issues. But these days this kind of careful, researched journalism has more enemies than friends. "You're either for us or against us," President Bush declared after 9/11, in a message that was absorbed too well by the U.S. media.

To win back people who want to know what's really going on, journalists need to return to what they do best: providing verified information that is, in Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel's phrase, "comprehensive and proportionate." News outlets also need to get more credit when they do this; even their best work is often taken for granted by those who pay close attention or dismissed by those who do not.

It's time to launch a public education campaign and take back the phrases "fair and balanced" and "no spin" from those who claim them but do just the opposite. Journalism doesn't need to give up and join the overtly biased. Instead, it needs:

- A lot more lawyers
- An effective consumer movement

- New business models
- An educational effort

It's way overdue to use these tools to reverse the 35-year cultural war against the mainstream media, led by folks like Roger Ailes on the right and Noam Chomsky on the left. These critics, who never appreciated the honest efforts of good journalists, exaggerate and exploit high-profile mistakes by major news organizations. When the federal government, which rarely finds scrutiny convenient, subpoenas reporters to hand over telephone records that go far beyond the scope of the Valerie Plame inquiry, a lot more lawyers are needed. When reporters can't protect sources, they can't hold the powerful accountable.

Fortunately, a long-needed media consumer movement is gaining momentum. Organized through the Internet, people successfully challenged Sinclair Broadcast Group's decision to provide blatantly erroneous, partisan content during the presidential election. Before that they forced the Federal Communications Commission to roll back its loosening of cross-ownership rules. Journalism companies should get on the right side of this issue, even though the business model for independent journalism is under severe stress.

The rise of FactCheck.org is evidence that journalism can morph into new formats and succeed at its core task of holding the powerful accountable and providing access for citizens to information they need. But it's a nonprofit operation. Most journalism cannot enjoy that protection. Mainstream journalists often confront market-driven executives who demand cross-promotion of entertainment products by their news divisions. Niche markets might be journalism's best hope, as National Public Radio illustrates, even if news balkanization is not good for democracy. Better business models must be found, fast.

Finally, a return to a civic education curriculum would help. Those who teach media literacy should move beyond deconstructing messages to helping students find reliable information. They need to show how to value real journalism—by looking for transparency, verification, independence, context and proportionality. Let's be sure that when the audience comes back to look for this, they'll be able to find it. ■

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Westview Press. 240 Pages. \$16 pb.

By Doug Struck

One of the early acts of the new Iraqi government after receiving formal power from the United States last summer was to close the offices of Al-Jazeera Television. So much for a free press. The outgoing American authorities could hardly profess to be shocked. They and the U.S. military had been chafing at the Arabic language news network for months. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld led the charge, blustering ironically about propaganda.

For sure, Al-Jazeera's sensational drumbeat is pretty hard to take for those caught in the harsh glare of its lenses. That includes the United States, other Western powers, and Israel, who usually play the role on Al-Jazeera as invaders and occupiers. But it also often includes Arab regimes, many of which have reacted angrily to finding themselves in the unaccustomed spot of being the subject of critical news on an Arabic channel.

"Al-Jazeera: The Story of the Network That is Rattling Governments and Redefining Modern Journalism" is a useful backgrounder for understanding the origins of this controversial Qatar-based network. First published in April 2002, the book was rereleased in August 2003 in paperback. The new version updates its emphasis on Afghanistan with a hurried epilogue on Iraq by authors Mohammed el-Nawawy and Adel Iskandar, faculty members at Stonehill College in Massachusetts and University of Kentucky, respectively.

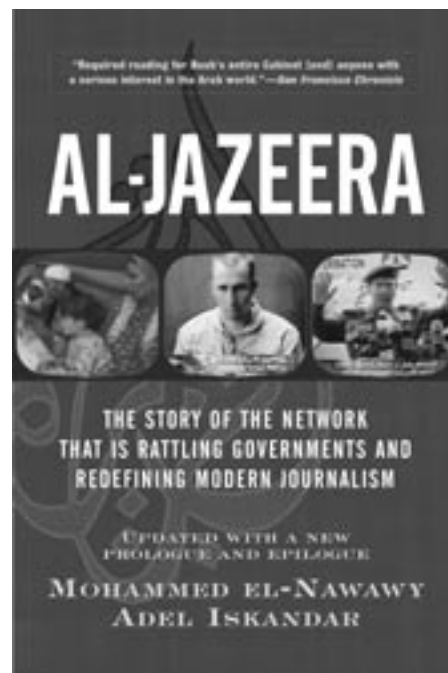
The book offers a fairly apologetic defense of Al-Jazeera—its network is hardly "not biased," as the authors claim at one point, any more than Fox News Channel is unbiased. And they glide too gently over some of its jour-

nalistic excesses. A more current view of Al-Jazeera's news operation and an intriguing comparison with mainstream journalism is the documentary, "Control Room," by Jehane Noujaim.

But the book offers a good corrective lens to view the motives of the Arabic station: Al-Jazeera is less about anti-Americanism and more about scrappy journalism than its critics concede. The authors look to the training of Al-Jazeera's original staffers in 1996—many of them from the BBC Arabic service—for the ethos of the network today. Those staffers, while admittedly critical of U.S. motives in the Middle East, are most animated in their zeal to create controversy by presenting disputing views, by showing the camera in unwelcoming places, by poking at sacred cows, and by presenting an unsoftened view of events. Sounds like what journalists are supposed to do.

That often means presenting raw, bloody video of the violence in the Middle East, pictures of grieving widows and bombed out homes, taunting diatribes from Osama bin Laden, pathetic pleas from hostages in Iraq on their way to being beheaded, and heavy-handed pictorial comparisons between Israeli troops oppressing Palestinians and U.S. troops in Afghanistan or Iraq. Its talk show hosts shout and its guest sometimes say outrageous things. Its reporters call suicide bombers "martyrs."

Is that news or incitement? If we only stop Al-Jazeera, goes the logic of its critics, no one will get excited about these things. They won't even know. Of course, that is patently untrue. It is untrue partly because of Al-Jazeera's success. The network's popularity among Arabic-speaking viewers world-



wide has spawned copycats. Its place on the ground in Iraq has been replaced by Al-Arabiya, another scrappy upstart 24-hour network based in Dubai. Other Arab networks like Abu Dhabi Television, LBC from Lebanon, and MBC, which is Saudi-owned and based in London, have become more aggressive and proactive in their newsgathering to compete. And even though its reporters are banned from working in Iraq, Al-Jazeera still uses the phones, satellite feeds from other channels, and its impressive contacts to present a credible view of what is happening inside the country.

The squeamish secret among Western journalists in Baghdad is that these stations are now an important part of their establishment news operations. As the danger for foreign reporters has increased, their mobility has shrunk, and their ability to put their own eyes on events has diminished. That means they have to rely on other sources: brave Iraqi stringers who do the legwork needed, wire services largely manned by Iraqi

nationals, telephone contacts, and the Arabic television networks.

Those sources are not accepted uncritically. Western reporters strive to crosscheck and confirm. But the cameras of the Arabic stations are often on the scene with pictures of what happened. Their reporters often interview people out of reach of Western reporters. Their studios are the place for debate and interviews with officials to whom the rest of us have less access. So what appears on those channels does make its way into mainstream news reports in increasingly vital doses.

### The Shifting Truth

All the debate about Al-Jazeera's slant on the news misses a larger, and more ominous, truth. For a reporter in Iraq—and elsewhere in the Middle East—one of the most depressing discoveries is the parallel dimensions of reality. Most reporters there really believe in what they are doing, even if it's hidden under a snort of cynicism. They believe that if they just do their job well enough, people will *know*, they will *understand*.

But in the places we report, we are quickly confronted with a reality of conspiracy theories and imagined plots so widely believed that it mocks our pursuit of truth. I have stood at the

crater created by a suicide bomber driving a truck, a wild-eyed Arab man whom witnesses described in chilling detail as he careened toward an Iraqi police station. In the next 30 minutes, I watched as those eyewitness accounts, honest in their freshness and consistency, were twisted by a growing mob. By the time I left, the Arab suicide bomber had been erased and replaced by screaming “witnesses” who “saw” American fighter planes dropping a bomb on the site, a version that would be believed by many from then on, despite the news accounts that followed.

It was no longer shocking to me to hear otherwise thoughtful Iraqis insist that the attacks on Americans and Iraqi citizens are carried out by the United States to give it an excuse to occupy Iraq for the oil. Or that the attacks of September 11, 2001, were orchestrated by Israel, and the 4,000 Jews who worked in the World Trade Center were warned not to come to work. Nor, unfortunately, was I surprised to accompany U.S. Marines, who insisted with genuine sincerity that the Iraqi men they held at gunpoint on the ground truly understood that the Americans are well intentioned, and the Iraqis held no grudge. Or to hear American military officials insist that the great majority of Iraqis want them to stay in the country, a fantasy forged by the failure to really talk with Iraqis

and a total rejection of the reports by the journalists who did so.

Such incredulous beliefs on both sides are stomach-turning stuff for a reporter. They expose the futility of our journalistic faith in the truth. As el-Nawawy and Iskandar point out, Al-Jazeera has a good record—if not a perfect one—of trying to debunk the most absurd of those theories, on both sides. Whether in search of controversy or ethics, no matter: Al-Jazeera's willingness to challenge smug assumptions is admirable enough to have made the network itself the subject of conspiracy rumors that it is secretly controlled by the Mossad or CIA.

It would be a stretch to say Al-Jazeera is seeking to close the gap of misunderstanding between the Middle East and the West. But it is safe to say the Arabic network is backfilling that chasm with information, debate and real news—no matter how uncomfortable or occasionally off mark. That is a good thing and one that all should applaud. ■

*Doug Struck, a 2004 Nieman Fellow, has reported from Iraq and the Middle East often since 1990, most recently this summer. He is Canada bureau chief for The Washington Post.*

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## Making Visible What Is Purposely Hidden

Author Mark Dow writes about what happens, but is usually unseen, in immigration prisons.

### American Gulag: Inside U.S. Immigration Prisons

Mark Dow

University of California Press. 426 Pages. \$27.50.

### By Susana Barciela

Mark Dow's compelling book is a voyage into the heart of darkness that is the United States's immigration prison system. "American Gulag: Inside U.S. Immigration Prisons" reveals everything that the nation's immigration authorities don't want you to know about "a particular American prison system ...

with an astonishing lack of accountability, not only to outside criticism, but to the rest of government as well." While much of what Dow documents happened under the watch of the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), he makes a convincing case that the secrecy and abuses of immigrant

inmates have only worsened since 9/11 and under the new Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which is the Department of Homeland Security agency now in charge of locking up immigrants.

Dow's interest in immigration prisons began at a place I know well. As a

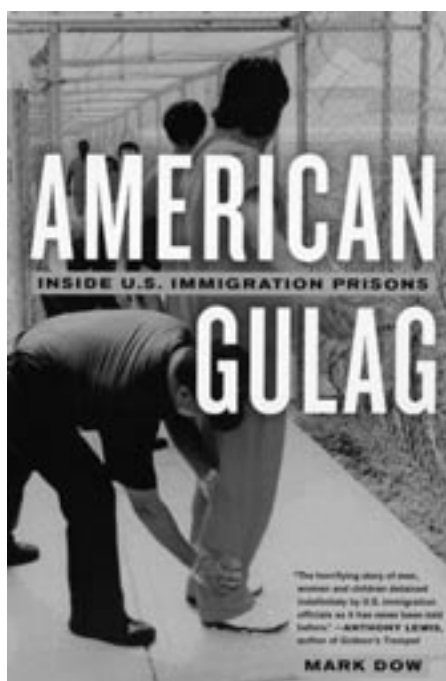
part-timer for Miami's public school system in 1990, he taught a high-school equivalency course at the Krome detention facility, a notorious immigration prison on the edge of the Everglades. At the time, *The Miami Herald* had published stories written by Deborah Sontag (now of *The New York Times*) that exposed rampant sexual abuse of female inmates by Krome officers, among other ill treatment. Though immigration officials had denied Sontag access to Krome, she had gotten information from advocates, including another teacher who was quoted in the paper.

Before long, both that teacher and Dow were fired, but not before—as the book describes in the first chapter—they had to attend a meeting where a Krome officer explained “that the media tend to distort what they are told because their only goal is to sell papers.” So we can directly credit the Krome experience for inspiring this book.

Recently Dow recalled the epiphany he had while being fired by Krome's officer-in-charge. “While she was calmly tossing me out the door, pretending that everything was OK,” he told me, “I realized that these [INS] people felt untouchable. The only choice I had was *not* to go away.” That's when he began writing freelance stories about immigration issues and collecting string for what years later became “American Gulag.”

## Journalists and Immigration Coverage

National in scope, this exposé of institutional cruelty is a must-read for journalists covering immigration or living in immigrant-rich communities. I probably have interviewed about half of the sources and written about numerous cases that he cites. I was reassured that the same immigration officials who have lied to me also lied to him. The book is meticulously researched, with 66 pages of footnotes, and Dow weaves in immigration history and legal explanations. The abundance of facts proves his argument: that the lack of transparency and oversight has resulted in the systemic abuse of immigrants locked up from Seattle to Key West.



Certainly there's plenty of ammunition for advocates who have been pushing for detention reforms for years. Yet it makes the case quietly. Rather than sermons or rants, Dow tells the stories of the systems' victims—immigrants and jailers alike. Thus, he manages to humanize even the bureaucrats who run inhumane jails.

There's outrage material here, too, particularly for those who agree with the Supreme Court's recent decision that even U.S. terror suspects imprisoned on the Guantanamo Naval Base have a right to challenge their indefinite detention in federal court. “American Gulag” introduces dozens of immigrants who have been imprisoned indefinitely and mistreated on U.S. soil.

Some have committed no crimes. Asylum seeker Felix Oviawe from Nigeria, for example, was one of about two-dozen detainees subjected to a “beat and greet” reception upon arrival at the Union City Jail in 1995. What's unusual here is that there was a criminal indictment and three jail officers were actually convicted. From legal documents and testimony, Dow relates how officers kicked, punched and plucked detainees' body hair with pliers; detainees also were forced to put their heads in toilet bowls, to strip naked and stay in degrading positions while being en-

couraged to perform sexual acts upon each other. Sound familiar?

The book explores the big-money business that immigrant detention has become. Spurred by draconian 1996 laws, the boom in immigrant detention has profited local jails and private prison companies, such as Wackenhut Corporation. U.S. immigration authorities now imprison 200,000 people yearly, some 23,000 on any given day. For private contractors, the more and longer that immigrants are locked up, the better the revenue. The less spent on such frills as GED (General Education Development) classes, meals or medical care, the greater the profit.

Dow paints a nuanced tapestry of an “invisible” prison system and its pattern of deliberate abuse—from brutal to petty and capricious—designed to get detainees to leave the country voluntarily rather than fight detention. He details the endless transfers among facilities that distance detainees from their relatives and lawyers and stymie court proceedings; the retaliation against whistleblowers, be they inmates or immigration employees; the stealing of detainees' money and property, and the medical abuses.

How can such institutional cruelty persist in the United States? In part, it's the “legal fiction” that draws distinctions between the rights of U.S. citizens and everyone else. But it's also the secrecy and lack of accountability that this immigration prison bureaucracy cultivates and protects. Whether in the old INS or new Department of Homeland Security, immigration authorities have raised misinformation to an art form. Dow dissects the use of dehumanizing terms such as “alien” and “illegals,” and euphemisms such as “detainees” and “detention center” for prisoners with limited recourse against the immigration jailers who also are judge and jury. “American Gulag” uncovers those lies for what they are. ■

*Susana Barciela is a member of The Miami Herald's editorial board. Portions of this review appeared earlier in The Miami Herald.*

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## Portrait of a Courageous Guatemalan Journalist

‘Though the book features events from the past, it should be read as a story that can offer us much to contemplate about our present.’

### **Disappeared: A Journalist Silenced: The Irma Flaquer Story**

June Carolyn Erlick  
Seal Press. 392 Pages. \$16.95.

By Mauricio Lloreda

In the early cool of an October night in Ciudad de Guatemala 24 years ago, thunder-like noises broke the quiet evening. A playful child explored the sky in search for fireworks, while anonymous bullets murdered his father and his grandmother, Irma Flaquer.

In Guatemala, the 20th century was turbulent, especially during the decades of the 1970’s and 1980’s when it became common for Guatemalans to witness and experience many traumatic events. There were massive and selective murders of people who opposed the regime in power and the disappearance of journalists, union workers, and attorneys also involved with the opposition. It wasn’t uncommon to hear shootings at night or, in this case, to have ignored Irma Flaquer’s cries for help during a time when she wasn’t seeking help for her nation, as she’d done for all her life as a journalist, but for her life.

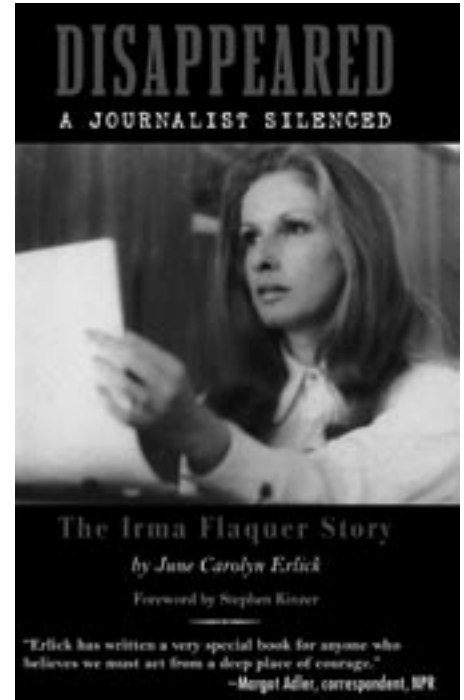
June Carolyn Erlick masterfully rescues Flaquer’s story, which otherwise would have disappeared into the dust of memory, silence and indifference. She presents us with the portrait of a young journalist who matures in the craft to become the voice of the oppressed in Guatemala. At the time Flaquer does this, many in her country wanted a radical social and political change, but few dared to raise their voices as a way of bringing a stop to the atrocities being committed in the name of democracy. As Erlick writes, “The government had no formal censorship system; censorship came in the form of deaths and disappearances, anonymous phone calls, threatening letters, and the mysterious lists published by the secret anti-Communist army.”

To reconstruct Flaquer’s life was not

a simple task. Erlick dug into personal matters, as well as into the country’s recent history, and emerges with not only a realistic portrait of this woman’s passionate life but with a wide perspective of the circumstances of these times in Guatemala’s social, economic and political arenas. In doing so, Erlick’s book goes beyond drawing Flaquer’s own portrait; Erlick’s portrayal of this Latin American journalist’s life and death speaks to what has happened—and continues to happen—under similar circumstances in countries throughout the world and particularly in this region. Though the book features events from the past, it should be read as a story that can offer us much to contemplate about our present.

Erlick’s copious research helps the reader to explore the consequences of U.S. foreign policy and the intricate and entangled paths of those who used ruthless means to remain in power. Her writing speaks to ways in which corrupt political and economic leaders—to protect their interests—constructed mechanisms to create anonymity and impunity for the harmful and sometimes murderous acts they committed. She sketches in some detail the web of alliances between government officials, powerful economic interests and the military apparatus, and writes about the fearful and passive civil society. While a reader might feel as though some sectors of Guatemalan society are ignored and, at times, as though a larger framing of these events is lacking, the facts she presents give readers plenty of information to be able to infer what was happening.

Erlick accomplishes this difficult task by having a clear, omnipresent voice



and tone throughout the book. She clearly faced the enormous journalistic challenge in finding a balance between her in-depth research and the discretion she brought to the telling of this story of someone who cannot defend her own version of events and her reaction to them. Erlick does this in a gentle yet uncompromising style. Hard things are said, but respect and prudence are in evidence throughout the book. Erlick takes us deep into Flaquer’s personality to say that “She was a survivor and a creator and a seeker of the meaning of life ...” and in doing so, she makes us feel, understand and experience many dimensions of Flaquer’s life.

In the context of this book, the meaning of the term “disappeared” reaches well beyond its common understanding to North American audiences. In Erlick’s words: “To disappear is to vanish completely. It is to evaporate into a form that is no more real nor more tangible than a fear of fireworks or a disembodied body on a forest road.” But the word

is also recognized as a form of cruelty and repression that is so sadly common in struggling democracies and totalitarian regimes.

To make somebody disappear is the ultimate form of cruelty. It is also an exercise of power used by those who hold such power to decide when and where someone will disappear. That power radiates in many directions: Disappearance is used to convey the message of who holds the power over life and death and who is able to spread fear into a family and across a community and an entire country. Those who

shared any connection to the “disappeared”—whether they be colleagues, neighbors, relatives or countrymen—wonder, in silence, could I be next? That question is, of course, the triumph of their oppressors; through such atrocities, these dark deeds reach deep into the kingdoms of fear and death.

This book is highly recommended for anyone interested in recent Latin American history. Not only is it an excellent profile of a courageous woman and a solid analysis of the great challenges she encountered—and that contemporary journalists still encounter—but more

broadly the book speaks to the crucial importance journalism has in shaping the future of any nation. ■

*Mauricio Lloreda, a 2004 Nieman Fellow, is an op-ed columnist for El Tiempo in Colombia and is currently studying at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.*

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## Nieman Notes

Compiled by Lois Fiore

# What It Took to Pull Me Through

A journalist discovers what it takes to report fully on adolescents' lives.

By David L. Marcus

There are good story ideas—the ones reporters come up with, and bad story ideas—the ones handed down from editors. I learned that during my 20-year journalism career. So in the summer of 2000, when an editor at US News & World Report asked me to write about boarding schools for “troubled teens,” I did my best to avoid the assignment. I looked for something else—*anything* else—to cover.

And why not? I didn't care about a bunch of spoiled rich kids who drank too much or snorted too many drugs. Nor did I care about their self-involved, absentee parents.

Finally, reluctantly, I ran out of other thousand-word diversions and started the reporting. I found several dozen of these places, called therapeutic schools. All offered intense therapy and hour-

by-hour structure. More important, I learned that many of America's 29 million teenagers struggle with alcoholism, eating disorders, and a host of mental illnesses, from depression to schizophrenia.

Visiting a therapeutic boarding school in western Massachusetts, the Academy at Swift River, I met kids who didn't fit my stereotype. They were funny, bright and—thanks to hours and hours of therapy—very open about what had gone wrong in their lives. Some were wealthy, yes, but others were from middle-class families that took out loans to pay for Swift River's \$5,000-per-month fees.

My US News story ran at just over a page. I felt I had so much more to say—about adolescents, about the failures of public schools, about the strains

on American families, even the way we build communities with no sense of community. Many of my thoughts were remainders from my Nieman year, when I had just finished nearly a decade as a reporter in Latin America. Nieman Curator Bill Kovach and Professor John Stilgoe (in his course on the built landscape) encouraged me to train my foreign correspondent's eyes on my own country, which had been franchised and strip-malled and Wal-Marted during my time abroad.

So I left my job at the newsmagazine and moved my family from the D.C. Beltway suburbs to economically devastated western Massachusetts. (File this decision under “fiscally irresponsible.”) Several of my colleagues in Washington thought I'd lost my sanity. One journalist put it this way: “Why would you want to

devote so much time to profiling teenagers? They've only lived 15 or 16 years, and they're so one-dimensional."

## Getting to Know Them

I followed a group of kids as they went through Swift River's 14-month program. I camped with them, sat in on group therapy sessions, listened to them play guitar, watched them in workshops about dating, sex and time management. Although I volunteered as an English teacher, everyone knew I was an author working on a book and not a faculty member. When the group spent the final five weeks doing community service in Costa Rica's remote Osa Peninsula, I was there. For the first time in my career, I didn't want scoops or exclusive information; I wanted to see things unfold gradually, just as Swift River's counselors did.

I started looking at these students by using the same labels their schools had essentially bestowed on them: Mary Alice the bulimic; D.J. the ADD boy; Bianca the troublemaker; Phil the pill-popper. But found I was surrounded by talented, fascinating kids—kids who concealed horrible truths from their parents, doctors and teachers, the very people who could have helped them. I found out about girls who had been

raped and boys who had been beaten up by bullies. The mothers and fathers, too, defied stereotypes. Most weren't narcissistic and aloof, but quite a few admitted they had been stymied by financial setbacks, divorce, depression or substance abuse.

This winter, Houghton Mifflin will publish the book, "What It Takes to Pull Me Through: Why Teenagers Get in Trouble and How Four of Them Got Out." My book is unusual for narrative nonfiction because it concludes with a 6,000-word "Memo to Parents" that discusses what I learned.

I'm still grappling with ethical issues raised by the project. How can a balding man in his 40's observe teens in therapy without skewing the results? When should a writer withhold an embarrassing anecdote about a kid from readers? How can an author condense 14 months' worth of intense conversations into a book that doesn't overwhelm everyone? I wish I had good answers. I can only say that I did my best to find a balance, to provide important, useful information without exploiting these families. The parents and kids signed release forms, and I tried to make the book as accurate as I could (names and a couple of hometowns have been changed). I often wake up at 3 a.m. wondering if the book is too graphic,

if I've humiliated the parents and kids who trusted me with their stories, their secrets, their lives.

My task was especially complicated because Swift River is owned by a for-profit health provider. While I was impressed by much of the program and grateful for the access I was granted, my loyalty was with readers. And so I describe the constant tug between the school's mission to help kids and its need to meet profit goals.

The experience has made me cynical about newspaper and magazine features. I now distrust drive-by reporting on welfare reform, on education, and especially on teens. You know the drill: Go to a mall or middle school, hang out with kids, then write the definitive story of adolescence. I realize something that many reporters and editors don't want to acknowledge: It takes months to understand people—even those who have lived for only 15 or 16 years. ■

*David L. Marcus, a 1996 Nieman Fellow, lives in Northampton, Massachusetts and is a visiting scholar at Ithaca College's Park School of Communications. For more book information, see [www.DaveMarcus.com](http://www.DaveMarcus.com).*

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## —1955—

**Sam Zagoria**, the class scribe, has sent in updates about three of his classmates:

**Piers Anderton** died of prostate cancer on September 13th, at the age of 85. In 1954—50 years ago—16 young and eager journalists arrived in Cambridge ready to partake of the intellectual riches of Harvard. Over the half century the Nieman class of 1955 has been depleted by the loss of **Tom Karsell**, **Carlton Johnson**, **Al Kraus**, **Fred Flowers**, **Henry Shapiro**, **Henry Tanner**, **Arch Parsons**, and now Piers Anderton. Our little band has been cut in half.

I received a sad note from **Birgitta Anderton** dated November 2:

"Dear Sam,

"Received the Nieman journal yesterday and saw that you had written about Piers. Unfortunately, Piers died on September 13th at Pengan House, a nursing home that cared for him at the end. I moved in with him and was there when he died. His hands were crippled and he couldn't write, but he carried a pen in his pocket till the end.

"He had a 30-year career in journalism—Telegraph editor at the San Francisco Chronicle, then NBC where he wrote for Chet Huntley (but Collier's Magazine until that folded, before then). He was a foreign correspondent in Germany and India and won an Emmy for 'The Tunnel.' His last years were spent in Los Angeles covering 13 states for ABC—then back to NBC—doing

documentaries. I shall miss him—after 43 years. I am now emotionally sore. He was buried in Sweden in my family grave with his four children participating in the funeral.

"My greetings, Sam, and thanks—Birgitta."

If you would like to write Birgitta, her address is Hill Cottage, Tripp Hill, Fittleworth, West Sussex RH20 1ER England.

**Selig Harrison's** sixth book on Asian affairs is "Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement," published by Princeton University. Former President Jimmy Carter called it "the best analysis I have seen of the difficult policy choices facing the United States in Korea."

Harrison has visited North Korea seven times and met the late Kim Il Sung twice. The book combines his personal experiences in Korea as Washington Post bureau chief in Northeast Asia and as a senior associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace for 22 years with policy-focused scholarly analysis.

Harrison is a senior scholar of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and director of the Asia Program at the Center for International Policy in Washington. His op-ed pieces have appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Financial Times*, and *Los Angeles Times* and several additional foreign publications.

**Guy Munger** now resides in a small assisted-living facility called Outlook Point. A few weeks ago my wife, **Sylvia**, and I visited with him during a Chapel Hill-Raleigh weekend. He is heavier than at Harvard (aren't we all?), has a beard, and uses a walker. We learned that he has children in the area, and his wife has Alzheimer's and lives in an institution in a nearby city. Munger worked as a reporter and editor on the Greensboro and Raleigh newspapers for many years. He is up on the news, politics and interested to hear about all of you (421 Van Thomas Drive, Raleigh, North Carolina 27615; his phone number is 919-845-3069—if you call don't give up quickly, since he is likely to be out of his room and there is no answering service).

By a happy coincidence, we have a married granddaughter in Raleigh who has just begun volunteering at Outlook Point, so we hope to keep up with Guy.

—1957—

**Burnell A. Heinecke** has retired from the Illinois State Treasurer's office where he was working as administrative assistant. Heinecke spent 23 years with the *Chicago Sun-Times*, including 10 years as the paper's Chicago bureau chief. He also served as editor of Heinecke News Service. Heinecke is a former president of the Illinois Legisla-

## Nieman Reunion, May 6-8, 2005 in Cambridge

Plans for the Nieman reunion this spring are developing nicely. The reunion team is putting together a program that will evoke memories of your Nieman year as well as enable you to catch up with old friends and experience the new facilities at Walter Lippmann House.

Reunion Weekend begins at 6 p.m. on Friday, May 6th, with a reception at Lippmann House. Saturday will be built around a series of seminars with Harvard professors and Nieman Fellows at the Charles Hotel. A reception and dinner at the Charles will end the day. The reunion will close on Sunday, May 8th with a long, leisurely brunch

at Lippmann House.

This year, for the first time, a registration fee will be required to help offset some of the reunion costs that, as you know, can be considerable. The registration fee will be \$100 per person prior to April 21st, and \$125 after April 21st. The registration process is set to be available on the Nieman Web site by mid-December, including information about hotels in Harvard Square.

If you have any questions, please e-mail us at [reunion05@nieman.harvard.edu](mailto:reunion05@nieman.harvard.edu) or call 617-384-7676.

Thank you. And we look forward to seeing all of you in May. ■

tive Correspondents Association and helped found the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

—1967—

**Philip Meyer**, class scribe, has updates on three of his classmates:

**Bang-Hyun Lim** is the author of "The Korean War and Park Chung Hee's Government," published in 2004 by Sun-In. He was a special assistant and spokesperson for President Hee from 1970-1979 and served as a member of the Republic of Korea congress from 1981-1988. Now retired, he is chair of the policy research committee of the Parliamentarian's Society, which he describes as "a kind of old-boys' club of retired congressmen." His e-mail address is [limbh1203@hanmir.com](mailto:limbh1203@hanmir.com).

**Dana Bullen** is senior advisor to the World Press Freedom Committee (WPFC), which he served as executive director from 1981 to 1996. "I plan to continue to support WPFC as much as I can for as long as I can," he writes. "At 73, I still seem to have a strong ability to get pissed off at those who would restrict news."

**Walter W. (Bill) Meek** is president of the Arizona Utility Investors Associa-

tion. "We have about 6,000 rank-and-file members," he writes, "and our corporate members include virtually all of the major electric, gas, water and telecommunications companies in the state. I work primarily in the regulatory and legislative arenas, sort of as a make-believe lawyer. I interface with the news media quite a bit and do a lot of writing, although much of it is legalistic."

—1969—

**John Zakarian** recently retired as editorial page editor of *The Hartford Courant*. Zakarian began his journalism career as a reporter for *The Associated Press* and has been with the *Courant* since 1977. He is the recipient of the Walker Stone award for editorial writing and an Overseas Press Club award for his 1987 editorial series on the Middle East. Zakarian is a past president and life member of the National Conference of Editorial Writers.

His article about editorial cartoons appears on page 16.

—1970—

**Larry L. King** in October was given the Bookend Award for Lifetime Achievement in Literature by the Texas Book Festival.

Former Congressman Charles Wilson (D-Tex.), a long-time friend, gave

the presentation speech in which he observed that King is the only writer to have been nominated for a National Book Award, a Broadway Tony, and a television Emmy. Wilson noted that King is the author of 13 books, seven stage plays, four TV documentaries, two screenplays, numerous short stories, and more than 300 magazine articles and essays. King's 14th book, a biography, "In Search of Willie Morris"—his late editor at Harper's magazine—will be published in 2005.

The awards event occurred in the House of Representatives chamber in the Texas State capitol in Austin.

—1978—

**Danny Schechter**, executive editor of MediaChannel.org, has a new, independent film, "WMD" (Weapons of

Mass Deception), released in December by Cinema Libre Studio. "WMD," a feature-length documentary based on his book, "Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception," is an exposé of the media coverage of the war in Iraq, challenging the concept of objective reporting on the war and detailing his view of a media cooperating with the government in its presentation of the Iraq War.

In November, a national day of house parties and organizational screenings of the film took place. The film is also available on DVD. For more information, go to the "WMD" Web site: [www.wmdthefilm.com](http://www.wmdthefilm.com).

Along with "Embedded," Schechter has written "Media Wars: News At a Time of Terror," "The More You Watch, The Less You Know," and "News Dissector: Passions, Pieces and Polemics." He was the recipient of the Society of

Professional Journalists' 2001 Award for Excellence in Documentary Journalism, among other journalism honors.

—1980—

**Jan Collins**, class scribe, has news on some classmates and a class reunion:

**Michael Kirk's** documentary "Rumsfeld's War," a PBS "Frontline" collaboration with the Kirk Documentary Group and The Washington Post, was aired often on television and in streaming video in the weeks prior to the November election. The series was coproduced by Kirk and "Frontline's" Jim Gilmore and involved Washington Post executives and five Washington Post reporters. Kirk also wrote and directed the series.

In a [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com) interview, Kirk describes "Rumsfeld's War" as

## Class of 1979's Moveable Feast Reunion

A quarter century being a milestone in marriage, career and who knows how many other things, the Nieman class of 1979 held its own 25th anniversary reunion in Washington, D.C. last spring and chose to mark the occasion with a moveable feast.

Nine members of the class were able to make it to the event, with others sending their regrets from afar. **Michael McDowell** was the chief organizer of the reunion. After a flurry of e-mails, it was decided that the get-together would consist of two consecutive informal dinners for relaxed conversation and reminiscing.

The first dinner, Friday, May 21st, was hosted by **Frank Van Riper** and his wife and work partner, **Judith Goodman**. The next night, **Peggy Simpson** opened her townhouse to all for a dinner that also included a group portrait on Peggy's garden terrace.

In 1979, Jimmy Carter was President, gas cost less (but gas lines were common) and the Red Sox could only dream of a World Series victory.

Times change. In the case of the Red Sox and the class of '79, sometimes for the better. ■



Seated, left to right: **Peggy Simpson**, freelance writer; **Nancy Day**, chair of the journalism department, Columbia College, Chicago; **Michael McDowell**, advisor on international development projects to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Aspen Institute, William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and others.

Standing, left to right: **Frank Van Riper**, author, photographer and photography columnist, Washington Post; **Margaret Engel**, journalist in Bethesda, Maryland; **Bill Gildea**, Washington Post sportswriter; **John Huff**, executive editor, The Post and Courier, Charleston, South Carolina; **Kat Harting**, media specialist, University of Maryland, Eastern Shore and PhD candidate, and **Sid Cassese**, senior staff writer, Newsday.



“a film about the war behind closed doors at the Pentagon and the personalities Rumsfeld, Secretary Powell, Vice President Cheney, the forces of neoconservatism, and the uniformed military—which took place inside the President and Condoleezza Rice’s field of vision, but because of the nature of the conflict, not always with their specific knowledge or direction.”

Kirk was also a producer for the “Frontline” series “The Long Road to War” in 2003, the 2002 PBS series “Misunderstood Minds,” a series on learning differences and disabilities in children, and many others.

**Robert Timberg**, deputy chief of The (Baltimore) Sun’s Washington bureau, has a new book out. “State of Grace: A Memoir of Twilight Time” (Free Press), is Timberg’s account of his early college years spent on a sandlot team in New York City. Wrote one reviewer: “[Timberg] evokes a period before television’s dominance had been fully felt, before John F. Kennedy’s assassination altered the national psyche, and before the trauma of Vietnam rent families and a nation. If the guys in ‘Diner’ lived in New York instead of Baltimore and played football instead of watching it, they might have been Timberg’s teammates on the Lynvets . . . .” Timberg read parts of his book during an interview on National Public Radio that aired October 15. His previous book was the bestseller “The Nightingale’s Song.”

**Paul Lieberman, Jon Larsen, Bill Grant, Jan Collins, and Judy Stoia** had a mini-reunion in New York City last spring. Jan was there to speak at a meeting of the American Society of Journalists and Authors, and arranged a dinner for the five.

—1983—

**Karl Idsvoog** has joined the faculty of Kent State University’s School of Journalism and Mass Communication. As an assistant professor, Idsvoog is teaching computer assisted reporting, advanced TV reporting, video field production, and broadcast documentary.

Idsvoog also did a video on the Cau-

casus School of Journalism in Tbilisi, Georgia. He writes, “Unlike a typical American university where students attend class for an hour or two on a Tuesday and Thursday, at the Caucasus School students focus on specific skills for days or weeks at a time.

“I taught the TV section. For seven weeks, the students focused on nothing but television. That concentration accelerates the learning curve. These are students who had never shot a camera, never edited video. By the end of the first day, everyone was shooting. By the end of the third day, everyone was beginning to edit.”

**Eli Reed** has been appointed as a clinical professor for the School of Journalism at The University of Texas (U.T.) at Austin. Starting in January, he will be teaching advanced projects in photojournalism for their graduate program. Reed recently taught a weeklong workshop at UT called “The Moving Image” for the graduate and undergraduate students in October.

Reed has been a member of Magnum since 1988 and has covered many editorial assignments for National Geographic, Life, Time, Newsweek, The New York Times, and others. Among many awards, Reed’s 1992 video documentary “Get-

ting Out,” about gangs in Detroit, was honored by the 1996 Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame International Film and Video Competition in the documentary category. His books include “Homeless in America,” “Beirut: City of Regrets,” and “Black in America.”

—1992—

**Charles Onyango-Obbo** describes a chance meeting with a Nieman classmate: “Our good man ‘Pacho’ [Francisco Santos] and wife, Maria, are in Nairobi for the international anti-landmines conference. This morning [December 1st] I was working when I noticed burly security guys enter my office, with cameramen in tow. Pacho [who is vice president of Colombia] had asked his embassy to arrange a visit to the main paper in town, which happened to be The Nation. He was being shown around by our managing editor—he didn’t know I now worked for Nation, and I didn’t know he was in town. The group moves into my office for me to be introduced, and you can’t imagine. We screamed like little children, hugged, swung each other around, and the security guys, cameramen and everyone else got startled, and then they looked on perplexed, as we

## Correction of an Article By Author Gilbert Cranberg

I implied in “Getting It Wrong on Whitewater” in the Winter 1997 Nieman Reports that The New York Times had edited a May 3, 1996 A.P. story about Whitewater trial testimony so that it included erroneous information. Further, I wrote that “the story A.P. distributed on its wire differed in significant respects from the edited account that ran in the Times” under the A.P. dateline.

The Times had been shown my Nieman Reports’ piece prior to publication so that it could comment; the Times declined comment.

I have only now been informed that A.P. had distributed two different versions of the trial story, one version—the one that ran in the Times—more flawed

and more unfavorable to the Clintons than the other. The Little Rock A.P. bureau chief, whom I had interviewed at the time, did not advise me that A.P. had sent out differing accounts. I want the record to show that the misrepresentations that I attributed to the Times were by A.P. and were not introduced by the Times, though the Times subsequently repeated the misleading information several times in its own stories. By the same token, the May 3, 1996 A.P. story about the Whitewater trial that the Times published differed significantly from the other A.P. story about the trial not because of editing by the Times but because the A.P. stories themselves were significantly different. ■

became small guys again. It was a great Nieman moment! He had a luncheon in his honor, and he asked me to go. We kept talking, and only the firm direction of Maria ensured that he dropped in on other tables to chat with the Colombians who had been invited.”

—1995—

**Lou Ureneck**, a Boston University (B.U.) professor and director of the Business and Economics Journalism Program, now has the additional title of director of graduate studies for the journalism department. His new responsibilities include overseeing graduate internships, establishing a board of advisors, and recruiting minorities.

Bob Zelnick, the department chairman, said in a news release: “Lou Ureneck is a superb journalist and professor whose appointment reflects the special place of graduate studies in our departmental program.”

Ureneck began his journalism career reporting for the Portland Press Herald where he advanced to vice president before moving on to serve as assistant to the editor and deputy managing editor for The Philadelphia Inquirer.

Ureneck joined the faculty of Boston University in 2003.

—1998—

**Cara DeVito**, a former NBC Television News producer/editor, is now producer/program manager of the Pare Lorentz Film Center at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library in Hyde Park, New York. She produces documentaries on the Roosevelt era for middle and high-school students—focusing on the issues of FDR’s presidency and their relevance to today’s world. This position allows DeVito to combine her interest in media literacy for adolescents with her expertise as a documentary filmmaker. She can be reached at [cara.devito@nara.gov](mailto:cara.devito@nara.gov).

—2003—

**Kathleen Phillips** has been appointed Washington editor of The New York Times. Phillips began working for the Times in 1995 and has held editing positions on the op-ed page, metro desk, and national desk. She has also been the metro weekend editor and night editor. In 1999 Phillips joined the bureau’s day

desk where she helped to coordinate coverage between the Times’ national, foreign and business desks. Later she served as the Times’ political editor, overseeing government and politics on the local and state levels.

Phillips has also held reporting and editing positions at The News-Press in Fort Meyers, Florida, Rochester’s Times-Union, and New York Newsday.

—2004—

**Carol Bradley** has left her position as senior writer for the Great Falls (Mont.) Tribune to become a self-employed writer. Bradley worked as a reporter for 25 years, covering statehouses in Tennessee and New York and also in Washington, D.C., where she worked as a regional congressional correspondent for the Gannett News Service. In her nine years in Montana, she has won more than 40 national, regional and state writing awards.

Bradley lives in Great Falls, Montana with her husband, **Steve L’Heureux**. She has three stepchildren.

**Susan Orlean**’s new book, “My Kind of Place: Travel Stories from a

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tor Institute, NF ’93

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**Nancy Hicks Maynard**: media consul-

tant, New York

**Lindsay Miller**: independent print and broadcast producer, Cambridge, NF ’88

**Gregory Moore**: editor, The Denver Post

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**Norman Pearlstine**: editor in chief, Time, Inc.

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**Charles Shepard**: communication consultant, Menasha Corp., Washington, NF ’91

**William O. Taylor**: chairman emeritus, The Boston Globe

**William Wheatley, Jr.**: vice president/news, NBC, NF ’77 ■

Woman Who's Been Everywhere," was published by Random House in late September. In the book, Orlean records the variety of her journeys in the United States and abroad, documenting her experiences ranging from the 2003 World Taxidermy Championships in Springfield, Illinois to the ceremonies of Kagyupa Buddhism in Bhutan.

Orlean is also the author of "The Bullfighter Checks Her Makeup: My Encounters with Extraordinary People," "Saturday Night," "Red Sox and Bluefish," and "The Orchid Thief," among others. "The Orchid Thief" served as inspiration for the film "Adaptation."

Orlean has been a staff writer for The New Yorker since 1992. She and her husband, **John Gillespie**, live in Boston and are expecting their first child early in 2005.

—2005—

**Cheryl Carpenter**, deputy managing editor/news for The Charlotte Observer, has received the Knight Ridder's Excellence Award for People Development. Carpenter and the other winners of

Knight Ridder's James K. Batten Excellence Awards competition were honored at a dinner held in San Jose, California in October. In a press release by Knight Ridder, the judges said:

"There are a lot of people who nurture reporters, but not so many who nurture editors. The fact that she does is impressive. It is also impressive that people outside the newsroom look to her. She is a masterful teacher of young people, and she seems to have a durable influence on all she comes in contact with. ... She tells people what they need to know while preserving their dignity. That's a major accomplishment."

Carpenter has been with The Charlotte Observer for 21 years and teaches for Poynter Institute in South Africa and Florida. At Harvard, Carpenter is exploring her interests in the nature and practice of leadership and unique strategies for business development.

**Amy Nutt** is one of six winners of the 2004 "Pinnacle of Excellence Awards" in science journalism given by the American Association for the Advancement of Science. (AAAS) Nutt, feature writer for

The Star-Ledger in Newark, New Jersey, wrote a series, "The New Plague," about "how killer germs have defeated our last antibiotic." The way Nutt presented the scientific information, the association noted, advanced the issue in terms of analysis. "I'm thrilled to receive this award," said Nutt. "It's a privilege to work for The Star-Ledger, where important scientific issues are given the space they deserve, and it's an honor to be recognized by AAAS for work on a subject so vital to the future health of society." The award was given in the category of newspapers with a circulation of more than 100,000.

The Science Journalism Awards program, established in 1945, "helps to foster the public's understanding and appreciation of science by promoting best practices in journalism," said Alan I. Leshner, AAAS chief executive officer and executive publisher of its journal, Science. "Further, the winning entries then serve as teaching tools as they are disseminated each year to science writing programs at universities and colleges throughout the country." ■

## Nieman Narrative Digest Coming Online

We're close to launching a new Web site designed to advance the best practices of narrative journalism: the Nieman Narrative Digest. It's a resource for reporters, editors and journalism students, edited by Nell Lake, at our Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism (which also organizes our big, late-fall Nieman Conference on Narrative Journalism). The Web site ([www.narrativedigest.org](http://www.narrativedigest.org)) will gather in one place a growing collection of hard-to-hunt-down fine examples of the genre, with blurbs and classifications and photographs. It will link readers to noteworthy newspaper narratives, to essays about the craft, and to moderated discussions about the craft with leading figures in the field. We expect it to be running by February 2005. Try it out, and also please let Nell know about new pieces: [nell\\_lake@narrativedigest.org](mailto:nell_lake@narrativedigest.org). ■ —**Mark Kramer**, *writer-in-residence and director, Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism*.



This sample home page for the Nieman Narrative Digest shows the types of resources the site will provide.

## Two 1984 Nieman Classmates Win Awards

**Jane Daugherty** and **Derrick Jackson**, from the Nieman class of 1984, were honored by the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association (NLGJA) at an awards ceremony in Los Angeles on October 4th. The awards were designed in 1993 to recognize excellence in journalism on issues facing sexual minorities. Jane Daugherty was named the first-ever winner of the NLGJA Journalist of the Year Award.

“NLGJA chose to honor Jane Daugherty to express our profound respect for a tireless investigator and consummate professional. ... Jane Daugherty also honors us as a dedicated member of NLGJA and a role model for all journalists in pursuit of excellence in our craft,” said President Eric Hegedus.

Daugherty’s project for The Palm Beach Post, “Modern Day Slavery,” also received the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, the James M. Cox Public Service Award, the James K. Batten Award for Public Service, and the Harry Chapin Media Award. While Daugherty conceived the project, reported the economic elements, and edited parts of it for the Cox Wire Service, she also cites large contributions by John Lantigua, Christy Evans, Christine Stapleton and Connie Piloto, and project editors Bill Greer and Bill Rose.

Derrick Jackson won first place in the Excellence in Writing Award for the Opinion/Editorial category. Jackson was a 2001 finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and this year’s winner of commentary awards from the National Education Writers Association and Unity Awards in Media. A three-time Sword of Hope commentary award-winner, he has been with The Boston Globe since 1998. ■

**Correction:** Due to an editing error in Stephen Berry’s bio on page 78 of the Fall 2004 issue of Nieman Reports, he is listed as having won the Pulitzer Prize for spot news reporting. He won the prize for investigative reporting.



Nieman Fellows Derrick Jackson and Jane Daugherty (center and right) at the National Lesbian & Gay Journalists Association awards ceremony in Los Angeles in October 2004.

### The Murrey and Frances Marder Fund

The Murrey and Frances Marder Fund, established in November 1996, has provided the Nieman Foundation with support for four Watchdog Journalism Conferences, the publishing of excerpts of the conferences and articles on watch-

dog journalism in Nieman Reports and on the Nieman Web site, and the Nieman Watchdog Project, which was launched in the spring of 2004. The following is an accounting of expenditures from the fund as of October 31, 2004:

**Balance at 10/31/03: \$331,937.86**

**Income: \$97,659.36**

1,674.46 -- Interest on balance at end of FY 2003-04 (at 6/30/04)

95,984.90 -- Income from endowment for FY 2004-05 (7/1/04-6/30/05)

**Expenses: \$197,019.53**

100,647.96 -- Design/development of Watchdog Project’s Web site

86,833.00 -- Editors of Watchdog Project

6,218.85 -- Travel/lodging/meals

2,158.67 -- Subscriptions/supplies/telephone/miscellaneous

1,161.05 -- Web server fees

**Balance at 10/31/04: \$232,577.69**

# End Note

## A Life's Work Reconsidered

A reporter, kidnapped in Fallujah, reflects in the aftermath of that experience.

By Joshua Hammer

**E**arly last May, I flew into Baghdad from Amman for what I knew would be my last reporting assignment in Iraq for at least one year. Two weeks earlier, Bob Giles had called me at my home in Jerusalem and told me that I had been selected as a Nieman Fellow. The news couldn't have been more welcome: After nearly four years as Newsweek's Jerusalem bureau chief, shuttling across the Middle East, I had lived through an exhausting period of turmoil and bloodshed. I was ready to take a break from the field, to spend some quality time with my family, and to reconnect with life in the United States. But first, I thought, I would take one last plunge into Iraq.

As it turned out, the assignment almost turned into my last one. On May 9, Newsweek photographer Robert King and I were captured in the Sunni Triangle city of Fallujah, where we had gone in an ill-considered attempt to make contact with Iraqi insurgents. For eight hours King and I were interrogated, accused of being CIA agents, held in a series of dark cells, and threatened with death. I spent an hour locked in a room with one teenaged captor who kept pointing at me and drawing his finger across his throat. We learned later that our Iraqi drivers and bodyguards, from whom we'd been separated at the start of the ordeal, had been ordered to take ritual baths to prepare for their execution. All along, the Iraqi guerrillas who held us warned us that if the "hardliners"—men loyal to the al-Qaeda-affiliated terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi—found out that we were there, we would certainly be seized and killed on the spot.

We were released only after a Palestinian journalist who knew King, and who happened to be in Fallujah that day, intervened on our behalf and



Joshua Hammer, in sunglasses, in southern Iraq in February 2004 with friendly local Shiites, who serve as the area's self-appointed security force. *Photo by Patrick Andrade.*

persuaded the insurgents that we were real reporters.

Except for some random gunfire that had crossed my path in Liberia, Rwanda and Macedonia, the experience in Fallujah was the closest I've come to being killed in my dozen years as a foreign correspondent for Newsweek. It had a sobering effect on me: It made me realize that some of the risks I took in the course of doing my job were simply not worth taking. It cured me—or so I thought at the time—of any desire to return to the savagery and chaos of Iraq. And it made my decision earlier that spring to spend a year in the ivory tower seem especially well timed.

Our arrival in Cambridge late last August was indeed a satisfying moment. For the first couple of weeks, as I watched the Harvard campus come alive and threw myself into a dizzying cornucopia of lectures, seminars and

other events, I was grateful to have put distance between me and the tortured part of the world where I'd spent four years. Yet perhaps not surprisingly, adjusting to the academic life hasn't been as smooth as I'd expected.

On the positive side, being on sabbatical at Harvard has offered me a much-needed perspective. I've found it refreshing and stimulating to be in an environment bubbling over with intellectual ferment. On any given day at Harvard, I can segue from an analysis of management shake-ups at The New York Times to an ethical debate over embryonic stem cell research to a discussion of the relevance of the 1965 Italian film "The Battle of Algiers" to 21st century counter-insurgency. Especially worthwhile has been my contact with the other Nieman Fellows, whose range of backgrounds and nationalities has further catapulted me out of the "tun-



Joshua Hammer at Camp Fallujah, the main U.S. Marine base outside Fallujah, two days before being seized by insurgents on May 9, 2004. *Photo by Robert King.*

nel vision” I sometimes experienced in the Middle East. And, of course, there’s the joy of reconnecting with my culture, whether by taking my son trick-or-treating along Oxford Street on Halloween, apple picking in Harvard, Massachusetts, or joining in the wave at the Harvard-Yale football game.

Yet I can’t deny that I feel a certain edginess and a sense of loss as well. I’ve spent a dozen years boarding planes at a moment’s notice, parachuting into crisis zones, observing and writing about societies in tumult. You don’t get that out of your blood so easily. In November I found myself fighting the impulse to fly to Israel to be on hand for the funeral of Yasir Arafat in Ramallah. And despite the nightmarish associations that Fallujah has for me, I can’t say there wasn’t a certain feeling of disappointment that I wasn’t embedded with the U.S. Marines during the dramatic invasion. After investing so much of my life and so much emotion reporting and writing about these places, it has been sometimes difficult to disengage, especially at such critical junctures. But, of course, that’s the fate of the foreign correspondent: The story rarely “ends” when one leaves a place, and one has to find a way of moving on.

My next move remains unclear. At Harvard I’ve spent some of my time

researching my third book, a historical nonfiction narrative related to the great earthquake that destroyed Tokyo and the cosmopolitan port of Yokohama in 1923. I’ve found that burrowing through archives, uncovering obscure primary materials that bring the past to life, can be a highly satisfying endeavor. At the Boston Athenaeum Library I stumbled onto a sheath of wonderfully vivid letters from an American survivor of the disaster that hadn’t been looked at since they came to the collection in 1924.

Yet I can’t imagine writing books full time; for one thing, only a lucky handful make a living at it. For another, I’ve also realized while doing my research that foreign correspondence remains my first calling. So I’m contemplating a move to Cape Town, where I’ve been offered the post of roving correspondent at large for Newsweek. Harvard has allowed me to take a step back, to savor America and the academic world. But it has also reminded me of what I love most: the thrill and challenge of the reporter’s life. ■

*Joshua Hammer, a 2005 Nieman Fellow, is a foreign correspondent for Newsweek. His Web site is [www.joshuahammer.com](http://www.joshuahammer.com).*

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