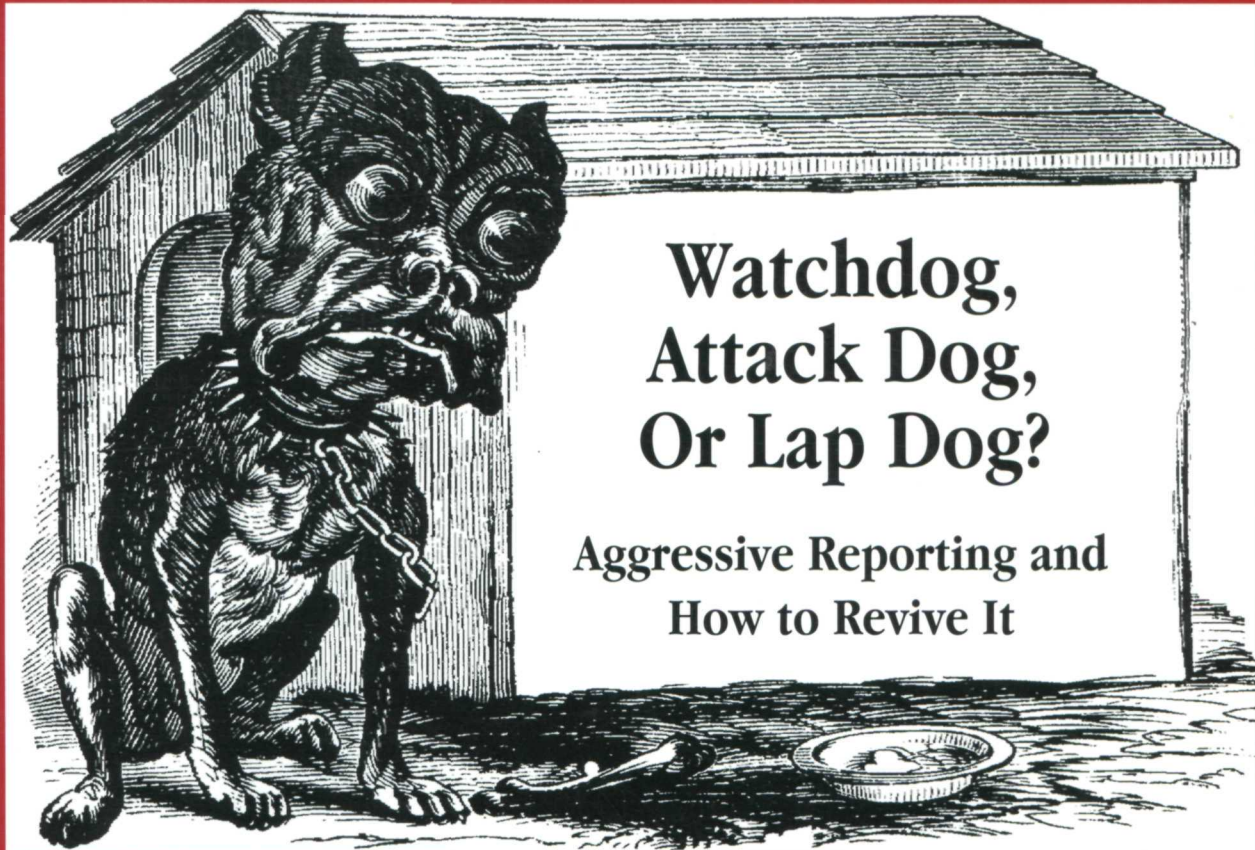


NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Vol. 52 No. 1 Spring 1998

Five Dollars



Watchdog, Attack Dog, Or Lap Dog?

Aggressive Reporting and
How to Revive It

**John Herbers &
James Doyle on
Clinton-Lewinsky**

**Two Stories
Seymour Hersh
Never Wrote**

The ACLU and the Tobacco Companies / Morton Mintz

The Need for Expert Education Reporters / Neil Rudenstine

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

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

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The Clinton-Lewinsky Story

Editors Without Backbone	John Herbers	5
Where Are the Stories Behind the Leaks?	James S. Doyle	7

Two Stories Seymour Hersh Never Wrote	Seymour Hersh ..	10
---	------------------	----

The Status of Economic Reporting	Richard Parker ...	16
Response: Demystify the Subject	Paul Solman	27
Response: What About Corporate Crime?	Morton Mintz	28
Response: Help Is Available	Eileen Shanahan	30

The Status of State and Local Government Reporting	Joyce Purnick	33
Response: Serious Enterprise Required	Anthony Marro	37
Response: Missing Ingredient Is Desire	Melanie Sill	38
Response: Full-time Eye on Bureaucracy	David Burnham	39

The Status of National Security Reporting	Daniel Schorr	42
Response: An Unbridgeable Divide	Philip Taubman	46
Response: Narration and Analysis	Carla Anne Robbins	47

The Status of Reporting on Nonprofits	George Rodrigue ..	50
Response: Document Abuses	David Hall	58
Response: Check Creative Accounting	John Crewdson	60
Response: Easier To Be Passive	Paul Delaney	61
Response: Avoid Close Relationships	Janet Wilson	63

The ACLU and the Tobacco Companies	Morton Mintz	65
--	-------------------	----

The Need for Expert Education Reporters	Neil Rudenstine ..	73
---	--------------------	----

Falling Into the Fault Line Chasm	Dori J. Maynard ..	77
---	--------------------	----

Letters	2	Technology	81	Books	82	Nieman Notes ..	93
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LETTERS

Alternate Forms of Transportation

BOSTON

To the Editor:

As a journalist and author (of "Asphalt Nation: How the Automobile Took Over America and How We Can Take It Back"), I was pleased to see the last issue of Nieman Reports concentrating on what I consider a central factor in American life: transportation. I was, however, surprised to see the weight given to road or even anti-road issues versus the broader subject—the importance of comprehensive coverage to new transportation needs, new times, and the next step beyond anti-road responses to congestion, pollution and environmental disquietude.

Although the issue offered some solutions to the ills of a road-oriented nation, very little attention went to relieving transportation problems through alternate forms of movement—streetcars taking hold, pedestrian advocates calming streets, bike paths growing, (trains, alas, still in the doldrums), etc.—and, above all, the land use planning and zoning needed to stop the vehicle miles we travel from doubling yet again in the next two decades. It is journalists who can point out the mindset that says "we invest in roads, we subsidize rail." It is reporters who can fill in the specifics and the larger picture.

A few such journalists do exist. Yet compared to the coverage given automobiles and real estate sections week after week, they have a paltry role. Yes, individual articles cover transportation issues from road rage to airbags, SUV's on steroids to welfare recipients without wheels to get to work. We learn of opposition to highway-fed sprawl or superstores. We read the economic consequences of a car-based culture

(we spend twice as much of our GDP on transportation as any other industrial nation) and we know the social effects (55 million school-age kids driven by their weary "soccer moms" and the evermore immobilized elderly). The environmental implications become more obvious as awareness grows that the automobile causes almost half the emissions implicated in global warming. Yet, all the while, we fail to connect these fragments.

The link of such issues to the vast network of transportation concerns would have enriched your pages, as they would enrich the nation, if journalists became more diligent in addressing them.

JANE HOLTZ KAY
jholtzkay@aol.com

Inspecting Road Sites

LOUISVILLE

To the Editor:

No country in the world can match the United States for extravagant use and waste of its resources. And nothing reveals waste more than our pell-mell pursuit of expensive suburban mobility by overdosage of highway expansion. We are paving our way to the poorhouse.

It may be too late for bylines, much less by-the-way comments by journalists, to reshape the next wave of Federal highway expansions. Articles in the winter 1997 Nieman Reports offer too few handles for getting beyond tackling "Roads as News Stories" and especially for exposing the not-so-hidden subsidies enjoyed by highwaymen. As Keith Schneider presciently notes: "We haven't yet paved our way out of congestion."

Yet reshaping must and can be done with persistent journalistic zest. The impervious if not imperious disregard for non-highway-user publics, the shriveling of mass transit to favor highways, the subsidies offered to suburbia, the damage done to city and countryside by ill-located or extravagantly-expanded highways—all this is still scandalously worthy of more intense journalistic investment and disclosure.

I speak from reportorial experience that intensified when the first Federal concrete was being poured under the Highway Acts of 1949-54. For starters, I examined the Kentucky Turnpike—the first pre-Federal road (built to future Fed-Interstate specs) in this part of the United States.

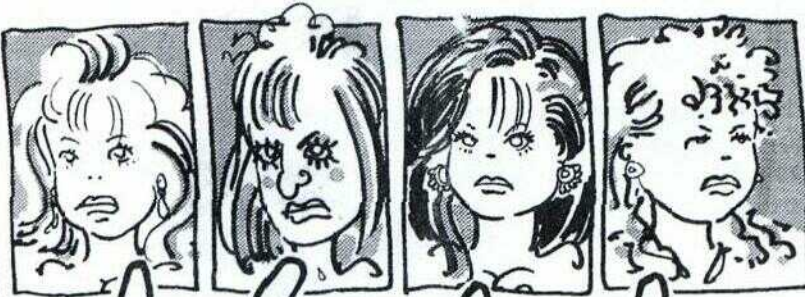
My first report in a regional arts magazine was headlined, "Gouge, Chop And Rut." In 1958 I gave a detailed highway critique to a national convention of landscape architects. It was titled, "The Tiger is Through the Gate."

That same year I wrote—and my newspaper, The Courier-Journal, published—a scathing essay on local highway policies thrusting Interstate 64 through three of Louisville's major parks designed by Frederick Law Olmsted—to wit, "They stink." This got top-of-the-op-ed page position, but with an editor's disclaimer that mine was "not, of course, an editorial expression of this newspaper"—which supported the highway route.

The fact was that our revered, pre-Gannett publisher, Mark F. Ethridge, chaired the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Interstate Highways. This ensured the newspaper's editorial support, overriding minority outcry by me and others.

Aside from the sort of difficulties

100 ANS APRÈS ZOLA



J'ACCUSE
le Président d'avoir
soulevé ma jupe!

Cartoon in *Le Monde*, January 31, 1998, on accusations against President Clinton.

described (in *Nieman Reports*) in Thomas Palmer Jr.'s excellent account of his coverage of Boston's Big Dig, it took a delegation to Washington from Louisville—plus a petition with 23,000 signatures—to persuade highway officials to tunnel through, rather than destructively cut open a prominent hill in the city's Cherokee Park.

The essence of my approach was to inspect, with care (and sometimes with local engineers) the first physical results of policy: How does the thing look—on paper, and on the ground? How does it work? Reporters should get beyond highwaymen who shrug off highway impacts as “minor side effects.”

It is one thing—as Palmer shows—to uncover the oft-concealed cost overruns on major public works. But to get out and personally inspect these huge works, their plans and future sites—and then to anticipate their impacts—that is the next larger dimension that good reporters and their illustrators in all media can and should continue aggressively to explore.

GRADY CLAY

The writer, a Nieman Fellow 1949, is former Urban Affairs Editor, The Courier-Journal.

When Is More Less?

NEW YORK

To the Editor:

I'm delighted that my letter of some months ago asking [Tom Regan, *Nieman Reports* technology columnist] to explain the differences between reporting for the conventional media and reporting for the Internet provided him with column material in the Spring 1997 *Nieman Reports*.

Let me see if I have his explanation straight: In addition to being able to “write a great story,” the digital journalist has to handle a tape recorder, a digital camera and a videocam, edit these elements for his/her story after surfing the Web for relevant sites for the piece and be at the ready to “engage her readers in an ongoing dialogue.”

I gather that the digital journalist provides considerable material for the reader since “the reporter/editor doesn't tell the reader what's important—the reader decides that for herself.”

If this adequately summarizes his response to my letter, I'll be happy to use it in the next edition of one of my textbooks.

Just another question: During my visits to several on-line news providers, I was told that stories have to be much shorter, much more condensed than the traditional piece in print. I have problems reconciling that with your material.

MELVIN MENCHER

The writer, a 1953 Nieman Fellow, is the author of textbooks widely used in journalism schools.

And on Whitewater...

An article in the winter 1997 issue of *Nieman Reports*, “Getting It Wrong on Whitewater,” refuted the widely reported belief that a portion of an illegal 1986 loan to Susan McDougal propped up Whitewater, and therefore benefited Whitewater investors Bill and Hillary Clinton. A major source of press misreporting of the story was a May 4, 1996, rewrite by *The New York Times* of an Associated Press dispatch. In its rewrite *The Times* reported that “money from an allegedly fraudulent loan went to benefit the Whitewater development... Nearly \$50,000 from a \$300,000 loan... was used to cover Whitewater-related expenses.” Thereafter, reference to the tie between Whitewater and the illegal loan cropped up repeatedly in *The Times* and other publications.

“Getting It Wrong on Whitewater” showed how this element of the Whitewater story was “written about carelessly, or incompletely, or just plain falsely.” *Nieman Reports* sent the article to *The Times* prior to publication with a request for comment. *The Times* declined to respond. Nevertheless, on March 9, 1998, in a story by Stephen Labaton on the death of Susan McDougal's former husband, James, *The Times* gave its misleading account new life when it again reported, “Investigators have determined that nearly \$50,000 of that [illegal loan] money wound up paying Whitewater expenses.” *The Associated Press* also repeated the error.—*Gilbert Cranberg.*

Watchdog Journalism



This section on watchdog journalism originated with a call by Murrey Marder, the retired Washington Post Diplomatic Correspondent, for a return to more aggressive, but responsible, reporting. The package begins with two articles on the media's handling of the accusations that President Clinton had an improper sexual relationship with Monica S. Lewinsky, a former White House intern, one by John Herbers, the other by James Doyle. Excerpts from a seminar by Seymour Hersh, the Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter, follow. Then we offer position papers on the status of watchdog journalism in four areas—the economic sector, state and local government, national security and nonprofit organizations. Each of these papers is followed by responses from selected journalists. In its summer edition, Nieman Reports will publish a report on a conference on watchdog journalism to be held in Cambridge May 2.

Editors Without Backbone

*They Are Responsible for Letting Rumors Run Amuck
In Coverage of the Clinton-Lewinsky Story*

BY JOHN HERBERS

In releasing its study on how the press handled the most recent Clinton crisis, the Committee of Concerned Journalists said its findings raise "basic charges about the standards of American journalism and whether the press is in the business of reporting facts or something else."

It is the "something else," yet unnamed, that is of deep concern to many. The explosion of unsourced or poorly sourced stories, opinion pieces, judgmental speculation and dire predictions exceeded any prior incident in the long saga of "feeding frenzy," as coined by University of Virginia Professor Larry J. Sabato. Perhaps the "something else" may be more narrowly defined as first drawing conclusions, then chasing the facts to support them, a sharp departure from the traditional practice of finding the facts before making a judgment.

"Looked at another way," the study said, "the picture that emerges is of a news culture that is increasingly involved with disseminating information rather than gathering it" because of excessive use of stories originated by other news organizations, much of it unverified.

Unfortunately, newspaper editors and broadcast news directors lacked the courage to use the power they have—to insist that reporters adhere strictly to the old-fashioned rules for closing the gate on poorly sourced stories. Instead, they bowed to the false argument that since the rumors were in the public domain—even if put there by unprincipled outlets—they were therefore legitimate news. If events show that Clinton indeed was guilty of

some of the charges, the fact remains that the media ran ahead of the evidence.

The study, conducted for the committee by Princeton Survey Research Associates, comprised a detailed examination of 1,565 statements and allegations contained in the reporting by major television programs, newspapers and magazines over the first six days of the crisis beginning January 21.

"From the earliest moments of the Clinton crisis, the press routinely intermingled reporting with opinion and speculation—even on the front page," the committee statement said. "A large percentage of the reportage had no sourcing," and the usual rule of having two sources for anonymous reports was widely abused.

All this left too complicated and incomplete a maze for the public to follow, even for some of us trained in the devious ways of Washington journalism and politics. What many perceived in the rush for opinion ahead of facts was an unconvincing mass shout of "GOTCHA!"

Perhaps the greatest failure—particularly for the mainline news organizations—in this exceedingly difficult assignment lay in identifying the sources of the stories. While some reports gave no source whatever others said "according to sources" (which says nothing whatever), "sources close to the investigation," "sources who listened to portions of the tapes," or "lawyers who listened to the tapes" and so on.

None of this came close to providing balanced coverage in the quagmire that quickly developed around the grand jury sworn to secrecy. So the sophisti-

cated reader probably figured that "sources close to the investigation" were in the office of the special prosecutor, in which case all of the charges conveyed were one-sided and probably distorted. Likewise "sources who listened to portions of the tapes" were most certainly in league with the prosecutors and those portions of the tapes surreptitiously recorded by Linda Tripp were highly selective. Nor did "lawyers who listened to the tapes" carry much authority in a situation where there is a lawyer of every kind and stripe under every bush anxious to put a partisan spin on every story. But rarely ever, according to my own limited research, was a flag raised to alert the reader to



John Herbers, Nieman Fellow 1961, covered the White House for The New York Times during the Watergate scandal, was Assistant National Editor and was Deputy Bureau Chief in Washington and, before his retirement, was the paper's national correspondent based in Washington.

the inadequacy of the information at hand.

Once given birth, the story based on unnamed sources often took on a life of its own, circulated and repeated by various outlets with no sourcing other than the news organization that originated it, if that. It became almost impossible to stamp out the circulation of such stories and separate them from plain rumors. Even the more responsible call-in shows were drawn into the business of perpetuating unfounded reports. A caller would go on the air and blurt out some questionable assertion picked up from the rumor mill, with neither the guests nor the host of the show able to set the record straight. Of course, this happens all the time on call-in shows, but in the latest Clinton crisis it exceeded all previous bounds of irresponsibility.

Before further discussion of this issue it may be helpful to look at how we got into a situation in which the credibility of the press has been so seriously challenged. Involved is the confluence, currently occurring, of three historic changes in the latter part of the 20th Century:

- The first is the law that authorizes the appointment of special prosecutors with a virtual unlimited hunting license to investigate allegations of illegality by government officials. This law is being seriously challenged, partly because of charges by President Clinton's supporters and others that the present investigation has been politicized to favor the president's enemies.

- The second is the law that permits sexual harassment suits in the federal courts and gives lawyers the right to rummage through the sexual lives of a range of persons involved in the civil suits.

- The third, and of major importance here, is the changing role of the press in disclosing defamatory information about public officials. It is easy to forget that in most of this century the press, protected by the First Amendment, served in varying degrees as an unofficial watchdog of the public interest. It was left to the political parties to screen candidates for public office as to

their character and electability. The press's watchdog role was primarily in the realm of government, not the electoral process.

When the political parties began to decline and candidates could win office without party support the press moved in to fill the vacuum. The Watergate scandal of the early 1970's elevated the importance of character in public officials. The watchdog became the attack dog, with news organizations sending out reporters to search for wrongdoing. Candidates and officials were held to higher standards than the society in general, even as the population became more permissive of private behavior.

Reporting based on exposing wrongdoing developed a culture of its own. When I was Assistant National Editor of *The New York Times* in the mid-70's, a top reporter instructed me on how the system works. The initial attack should be followed by more stories, daily and on page one if possible. This included holding out information for another story if needed to keep up the drum beat. The kill is important. As Clinton became an elusive prey in the 1992 campaigns there were repeated predictions in political-campaign circles that he was about to be brought down. When he was not the attacks continued into and through his term in office, with the help of the special prosecutor and the ideological right wing, which had its own agenda. This is understandable, and perhaps the attack dogs were right. But it helps explain, at least in

Time Marches On

"As for the case at hand, if properly managed by the District Court, it appears to us highly unlikely to occupy any substantial amount of petitioner's time."—The Supreme Court opinion of May 27, 1997, written by Justice John Paul Stevens, in rejecting President Clinton's request to defer until after he leaves office the trial of Paula Corbin Jones's charges of sexual misconduct.

part, the excesses of the recent coverage and the impression of "GOTCHA!" that made a more detached public skeptical of what it was being told.

At the same time there was an explosion of new television and radio outlets, talk shows and web sites, many with tabloid formats. The traditional A.M.-P.M. news cycles gave way to a new cycle every minute of each 24 hours. The mainline press got caught up in following stories of sex and violence dug up by the tabloids and rumor mills. All of this helped lead to a cheapening of public dialogue. The *New Yorker*, once an eminent literary magazine seeped in restraint, recently published a cover showing a bevy of microphones all pointing to Clinton's genitals, a drawing mild by comparison to the flood of cartoons and jokes in the public domain.

The mainline press rightly seized on the story as a possible threat to Clinton's presidency, but the sex angle soon took over as the prominent sector of coverage. And it dominated the armies of journalists in Washington. In a forum at American University three weeks after the Lewinsky story broke, a man in the audience asked a panel of prominent journalists how a public interest agent could persuade their bureaus to consider reporting substantive developments in the environment, health or transportation, for example, when he could not even get through on the telephone. The answer was quick and unanimous: forget it.

One lesson from all of this is that the mainline press should tighten up on its sourcing. Reporters and editors insist that they cannot give up unanimous sources altogether without forfeiting information the public should know. Since the various news organizations are incapable of working in concert to improve their practices, this is probably true. But over the years of "feeding frenzy" it became routine to use vague phrases such as "according to sources close to etc." without any explanation that the information being conveyed could be distorted.

The two-source rule can be useful in many cases to assure a degree of accuracy, but in the quagmire of the Lewinsky

Where Are the Stories Behind the Leaks?

BY JAMES S. DOYLE

case it is less so. Too many lawyers, too much lying and distortions, too many animosities. It would be refreshing to hear of a reporter courageous enough to tell a source, "I want your leak, but I have got to give readers (listeners) some guidance as to what your interests are." If that doesn't work, there should be a paragraph high up in the story pointing out that this is the best we can do but there may be another side of the story. As proof of how fragile leaked information can be in the Lewinsky case, there have been stories quoting lawyers or others by name *publicly disagreeing* as to the facts. Such a story might well have been leaked only as an anonymous source, leaving a distortion no responsible editor would want to claim.

The news organization might also want to consider whether it is wise to continue to hold public officials to higher standards in sexual conduct and *other personal behavior than the society in general*, in view of the fact that the double standard results, as some believe, in worse, not better government. Some of the leading examples of excess in "feeding frenzy" have fallen under this category: for example, Jimmy Carter's "lust in the heart," Gary Hart's extramarital love life, Barney Frank's *homosexuality*, among others. There is some concern, too, as to whether it is wise to continue to allow prosecutors to entrap public officials by enticing them into crime and to treat public officials like the Mafia by giving immunity to small-fry suspects in order to land the big fish, possibly encouraging false testimony and encouraging talented people to shy away from politics.

These are some of the things that have led to controversy run amuck. There was talk among journalists as the Lewinsky story broke about competition for sources. Newsweek was taking kudos for being first and some editors were complaining that their staffs did not have an inkling of what was about to break. In view of the findings by the Committee of Concerned Journalists, it would seem the worry should be about whether the mainline press is becoming too much like the tabloids or "something else." ■

Twenty-five years ago when I was a special assistant to Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, one of my daily tasks was to help him figure out the news. Why were certain Watergate stories on page one or leading the evening broadcasts? Who were the anonymous sources and what might be their motivations? I had been a reporter for The Washington Star covering Watergate and knew most of the players, so I could offer an educated guess as to what was going on and who stood to benefit or lose.

Archie Cox is a wise and sophisticated man, and an old Washington hand, but reading the news from Washington can be an insider's game best left to those who are members of the priesthood. He had more important things to do and so he designated me to decode the news each day. Some days I could only be embarrassed for my profession.

And those were the good old days. In the case of Kenneth Starr versus the Clinton White House we readers and viewers have been cast adrift by some of the best reporters and editors in the business. Often it's not possible for the most discerning reader or listener to sort out the story and to get the reports necessary to do so. Only the reporters and editors know the answers to some questions, such as whether the Office of Independent Counsel is leaking like a sieve, violating the professional standards of federal prosecutors and perhaps the criminal laws as well. The journalists who know aren't telling and the press may pay a steep price for these sins of omission. It's one thing for the reporter-recipients of the leaks to clam up. It's quite another for the best editors in the business to avert their eyes and act like there is no story here.

Leaks from a prosecutor are not the same as leaks from a Congressional committee or your average executive department. This is true especially of

the prosecutors appointed under the Independent Counsel Act. These are law men with unlimited resources, no practical check on their legal powers and no realistic accountability to higher-ups in the criminal justice system. If they decide to flout legal ethics and the federal rules of criminal procedure, to destroy a witness or a target with prejudicial leaks, they can do it if they are protected from exposure. In effect there are no higher-ups, just the court of public opinion.

Archie Cox, in a similar but less powerful role, insisted he must have the authority to report to the public from time to time. He understood that public disclosure of how he was proceeding was necessary to maintain public confidence, though he would not discuss the titillating (and damaging) details of any investigation headed for the grand jury.



Jim Doyle, Nieman Fellow 1965, covered government for The Boston Globe for nine years and was a national reporter for The Washington Star when Archibald Cox named him a Special Assistant to the Watergate Special Prosecution force. After two years in that job he became Deputy Washington Bureau Chief at Newsweek for eight years. For the last 14 years he has been with Army Times Publishing Company, where he is Executive Editor.

He held several press conferences. He met with the reporters assigned to cover the prosecutor's office. He met with groups of columnists and commentators to explain his actions. He met with editorial writers from the great newspapers. And in the end his report to the public at a nationally televised press conference on Saturday, October 20, 1973, set the stage for his firing, the firestorm that followed it and the capitulation of the Nixon White House in delivering the taped evidence that, 10 months later, resulted in the resignation of the President.

In the present case there are once again serious questions about a President, once again suspicions of obstruction of justice. There are profound and fundamental questions about fairness in the administration of justice. Those questions have become two-sided, casting great suspicion not just on "all the President's men," but on all the prosecutor's men and women as well.

Reporters and editors may recognize this, but they are not delivering the goods. The public has formed opinions about the President and the prosecutor—and about the press. It mistrusts all three. In the case of the President, the public seems to be saying that it doesn't affect his job performance. (That could change quickly.) In the case of the prosecutor and the press, public mistrust goes to the heart of job performance. The damage will be hard to repair.

The Committee of Concerned Journalists has made the point that anonymous sourcing—and no sourcing—has bedeviled the Monica Lewinsky story from the outset. Unevaluated leaks and unsubstantiated rumors have been passed along in a manner most news organizations wouldn't tolerate in other situations. Some of the best—The Wall Street Journal news pages for example—have victimized themselves with retracted stories about grand jury testimony. Good judgment—the courage not to publish—has been overtaken by the urge to get out a story. That is understandable even if sometimes unforgivable.

But when it comes to explaining the Independent Counsel's office, the press

has been circumspect because there is a conflict of interest. These prosecutors say little publicly but, apparently, a great deal not for attribution.

For example on February 6 both David Kendall, the President's lawyer, and Rep. John Conyers of Michigan, the ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, issued lengthy compilations of news report excerpts that they contended demonstrated impropriety on the part of Kenneth Starr or his staff. Kendall held a well-covered news conference to make his charges and handed out 12 pages of examples. Conyers handed out 19 pages of similar material. Starr issued a sharply worded rejection of Kendall's accusations.

I searched the networks and the national newspapers for the examples cited. There was plenty of coverage of the charges and countercharges, including assertions by Scott Pelley on the CBS Evening News and John Donovan on ABC Nightline that the White House could well be leaking self-damaging material to help them mount an offensive against Starr for leaking. (Donvan reported March 4 that "there is no solid evidence that Kenneth Starr has leaked illegally to reporters." But none of the detailed examples of leaks attributed to sources close to the prosecutors was reported. On ABC Donovan characterized the detailed allegations as "basically a journey through the headlines of the past two weeks." Donovan told me, "Frankly I don't know who leaked, but the point of my report was to mention several possibilities, including the White House. Kendall's accusations were strong. As I said in the piece they put a criminal cloud over Starr's office. When I looked at his evidence, the criminality wasn't there."

As I worked on this piece I talked with reporters who told me various reasons why the specific examples cited by Kendall and Conyers were not detailed in the press—old news, irrelevance, not persuasive. But when a friend sent me copies, I was persuaded that either tens of reporters were dishonestly attributing information to sources close to the Independent Counsel, or that prosecutors in Starr's office were discussing the case in detail with reporters, improperly and in some cases

recklessly. I think Kendall and Conyers have made a credible case and backed it up with specifics.

There are two big stories here. From the outset the press has reported juicy details about the President and Monica Lewinsky, much of it hearsay. But when evidence of specific news stories pointing to prosecutorial misconduct is laid out by two reputable public figures, the details did not make it into print or onto the air.

You can read and hear lots of accusations that Starr's office is out of control with leaks. Often they come from commentators whose judgment and integrity I would vouch for—Anthony Lewis of The New York Times, Albert R. Hunt of The Wall Street Journal. There has been at least one analytical rebuttal to attorney Kendall's assertions from Richard Harwood in The Washington Post. There have been editorials on both sides of the issue. But I can't find a single news story with facts on the subject, just charges and countercharges. Are news organizations willing participants in a cover-up?

Jackie Judd of ABC News has been the recipient of some sensational stories in the Lewinsky case. When Peter Jennings asked her on camera about whether the prosecutors were leaking improperly, she responded that she didn't know about that; her experience was that everyone in Washington leaked.

But every prosecutor, and every prosecutor's office, doesn't leak. Where were the leaks from Robert Fiske's office when he was the Whitewater Special Counsel? The idea that leaks in the criminal justice system are just the normal way of doing business is a dangerous one for our society. Ask Richard Jewell. That's why editors should be treating the suspicion of prosecutorial misconduct as an important story, worthy of more than suspicious charges and countercharges. I know this is not easy and that news organizations have a strong interest in receiving the leaks. But the serious press ought to wrestle with this problem. Editors need the courage to really cover the story, and give the gory details, even when they threaten to unmask sources. In this case the public has made its judgment without much help from the press, and

it is a damning one. I would not be surprised if we end up with new talk about an American version of the British Official Secrets Act.

I met Archie Cox for the first time on Memorial Day in 1973, when he met with a group of Nieman Fellows who were in Cambridge for a reunion. He was outraged by the stories in that weekend's newspapers that spoke about the "theory of the prosecution" under which the original Watergate prosecutors—Earl Silbert, Seymour Glanzer and Don Campbell—were proceeding. "I promise you there will be no such stories from me or my assistants," he said. Within weeks, Silbert, Glanzer and Campbell were history.

By mid-June I was working for Archie, and from the outset he made it clear to the attorneys he hired that leaks of investigative material would be a betrayal of their honor and that of the office. He didn't threaten anyone. He led by example. He held news conferences and background sessions and discussed legal points. But he didn't leak stuff from the grand jury—and it didn't leak from his office while he was there. Cox's honor and motives were attacked but never seriously questioned by the public because of how he acted.

After he was fired, in the heat of a momentous and fast-breaking story (with lots of leaks from everywhere for a short while), newspapers reported that Nixon had ordered Attorney General Richard Kleindienst to bag the ITT case.* Cox was conscience-stricken because this was an incriminating fact that he had known for months and had recently shared with Senators Edward Kennedy and Philip Hart. Cox believed

**Three antitrust suits were pending against International Telephone and Telegraph Co. in the early 1970's. The Department of Justice under Richard Kleindienst settled the cases. Subsequent Congressional and Watergate prosecutor cases investigated "high level" White House officials for obstruction of justice and perjury for improperly interfering with the cases. Kleindienst's lawyer told the Watergate Special Prosecutor that President Nixon had ordered Kleindienst to settle the case and that Kleindienst had testified falsely about it before Congress. ITT contributed massive amounts to the 1972 Nixon campaign. In the end Kleindienst plea bargained down to a misdemeanor—refusal to answer pertinent questions before Congress. (Three of Jaworski's assistants resigned in protest.)*

that he had violated a confidence from Kleindienst's attorney that resulted in a leak of grand jury material. (It later turned out that Cox had not been the source, even indirectly). He went to the Senate Judiciary Committee, admitted his indiscretion and testified in public that he was guilty of an inexcusable breach of confidence—just as the Nixon White House was charging. This was at a time when he was out of office and a national hero. He risked all of that to clear his conscience. (All of this is in the recent book "Archibald Cox: Conscience of a Nation" by Kenneth Gormley.)

Do you see any conduct of that level of integrity anywhere in the present story? Prosecutors have to accept responsibility for their acts. If cops sometimes lie on the stand to "even the odds," and prosecutors swear affidavits that they didn't leak when they did, how does that square with pursuing a case where the main charge is falsification? What's the rush to get the damning details out? This case isn't going away, and it's not going to be lost because prosecutors were slow to get their facts before the public. The case will unwind, and as it does many will rationalize the lapses on the parts of the press and the prosecutors. But the end won't justify the means. Success won't erase the sins, nor restore credibility.

They can do their jobs without leaking. If it makes it tougher, so be it. Under Cox we erred on the side of caution when it came to the grand juries. You can't keep reporters out of the courthouse and you can't be sure that grand jury witnesses won't be accosted and humiliated. But you can try by making it a point not to divulge when a witness will appear and you can bring them to the building through the garage. There were no instances of secretary Betty Currie running a gauntlet coming from the grand jury, and President Nixon was interviewed by the grand jury in the White House without word getting out.

I remember the day Bob Schieffer of CBS called my office and asked what time Bob Haldeman would be going before the grand jury, and where. I told Schieffer in effect to take a hike, that we weren't going to discuss grand jury stuff period. "What in the hell are they

paying you all that taxpayer money for?" Schieffer responded. But witnesses went before the Watergate grand jury without the feeding frenzy of press out front, and stakeouts at the prosecutors office were deliberately not rewarded with visuals and sound bites. (When the trials started, photographers hit Mrs. Haldeman in the head with a camera in front of the court house. I'm proud I never contributed to that stuff.)

During Watergate I saw misleading reports about sources. A memorable case was Dan Schorr, then with CBS News, who was covering the Congressional committees. He did a "standup" in front of the prosecutor's office one day in what I thought was a clear attempt at "misdirection," implying we'd been the source, perhaps to protect the real sources. (Counsel Sam Dash had warned his staff about leaking to Schorr.) I didn't call Dan on it at the time. When we talked recently we agreed it could have been less than I thought, a producer's attempt to vary the visual images. "It would not have been consistent with my method of operation to stand somewhere in order to deliberately mislead the audience," Schorr said.

Like the leaks, the present reports may not mislead the audience deliberately. But they further the confusion and they raise ethical questions. If editors know what Scott Pelley and John Donvan and others indicate—that the grand jury leaks are coming from the White House and its allies and not the prosecutor's office—they need to nail that story. If it's misdirection on the part of reporters, editors should be taking the unsubstantiated accusations out of the copy. Otherwise the public is right to say it's just charges and countercharges and not to be believed.

As a news consumer I'd like to know if persons from the independent counsel's office have leaked damaging material about the Monica Lewinsky investigation to reporters in violation of their ethical obligations. It's an important question because it may go to the heart of our justice system and the good faith of the prosecutors. It may answer the question, can and will the system work? ■

Two Stories Seymour Hersh Never Wrote

Seymour M. Hersh has won more than a dozen major journalism prizes as an investigative reporter, including the 1970 Pulitzer Prize for *International Reporting* for his disclosure of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam. In the 1970's he worked for *The New York Times* in Washington and New York and has rejoined the paper twice on special assignment. He is the author of six books, including "The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House," which won the National Book Critics Circle Award; "The Target Is Destroyed: What Really Happened to Flight 007 and What America Knew About It," and "The Samson Option: Israel's Nuclear Arsenal and America's Foreign Policy." His latest book, "The Dark Side of Camelot," has been the subject of much controversy. Here is an edited transcript of his remarks at a Nieman Fellows seminar February 6, 1998.

I published a book in 1983 about Kissinger in the Nixon White House and at that time I knew some pretty horrible stuff about Richard Nixon's personal life, and I'll tell you why I didn't write it.

There was a serious empirical basis for believing he was a wife beater, and had done so—at least hospitalized her a number of times. I had access to some records. Okay? I'm talking about trauma, and three distinct cases. And so I really brooded about what to do about this because it's a huge selling point for a book. (By the way, that is much less of a consideration than you think, because you really don't think about what's going to sell when you are in the throes of collecting information.)

My concern was that I couldn't find a time when Richard Nixon went looking for Pat and couldn't find her and bombed Cambodia instead. But if I had I would have written it as an example of why his personal life impinges on policy. You know, he liked to beat up his wife, he couldn't find her, went out and hit Cambodia, right? Okay. I'm joking. But the point I'm making is I couldn't find any connection between what he *did* in his private life, and so I didn't use it.

In the case of Kennedy I'm automatically sort of screwed by the fact that Secret Service guys are talking on the record. They're willing to go on the record, and you get a sense of what violation, or reputed violation, of some inherent wonderful trust that we think exists between the *Secret Service* and the President. I for the life of me don't know why. [A Secret Service man] is a law officer. It doesn't matter what he does for the President. If he sees a crime committed and he goes to a grand jury, it seems clear that he's got to testify about it.

I got to these agents because I started the book on *Kennedy* for a couple of reasons. One, I had a publisher who



was going to give me a lot of money to do it. That's very important, you know, these days.

The other thing about Kennedy—remember this was *five years ago*—there was a sense of incompleteness about him. The same lying—and everybody wrote about that—that went on in Johnson's administration went on in Kennedy's. And the documents, especially the Pentagon Papers, are very clear that the cynicism of that administration was pretty acute.

I had done a lot of reporting for *The New York Times* about the CIA and the abuses in 1974-75. And you had the spectacle of Dick Helms, the head of the CIA, called before Congress, which discovered the assassination attempts against [Fidel] Castro, [Patrice] Lumumba, [Molina] Trujillo. And he's called to testify about those. Of course, particularly with Castro, he says, "I thought I had orders but I'm not going to say who."

It was very clear then that Dick Helms cannot say to Congress in 1975 "the President told me." Because if he does the CIA is out of business. And there's something inherently heinous about the director of an executive agency that *works for the President* who, upon being summoned before Congress and

sworn to tell the truth, cannot tell the truth because he's loyal to another oath he had taken to the President of the United States.

In other words, the President of the United States can write a secret order to the CIA that, "I want so and so offed." He has to do it in very discrete language; it's officially illegal. And the CIA will carry out this action. If Congress investigates it, the CIA has to deny it—it's called "plausible deniability." Keeping the President out of such areas is the [duty] of the CIA.

I knew that the Kennedys had to be more involved. There's no way the CIA is going to spend all those years, according to the committee report, trying to kill Castro and not have the White House know all about it.

So I start work. That was the initial entry point to doing the book. I'm talking to retired agents of the CIA, guys who worked Cuba. I'm getting the stories, as I knew I would because I knew they would all point the finger at the Kennedys, particularly Bobby.

But I'm getting more than that. They're telling me about what happened in '61 and '62. I'm also getting documents from the period that show beyond a doubt that what they were saying to me is what they thought, too; that this was all Kennedy madness, this going after Castro.

Q.—What was the motivation for offing Castro?

A.—I'll be honest. I think there were some quid pro quos they made with organized crime before the election. They did work closely with the [Sam] Giancana family. There's no question about it. And what did they want? Well, you know, everybody thinks that they wanted the FBI to stop pushing them around. The FBI had begun investigating organized crime in the last years of the Eisenhower Administration, and had done a great job. For Bobby Kennedy to suddenly stop that would be impossible. So they had to live with that continued pressure.

Everybody said that's such an interesting conundrum. How could the Kennedys be connected with organized crime while the Kennedys are still investigating them? In fact, two months

after Kennedy became Attorney General the FBI came up with a terrific field report saying the [1960] election was stolen in Chicago. The sources for this include all sorts of FBI officials who are still alive.

So I asked one of the spooks, one of the CIA guys, "Why was he so nutty about this?" He says, "If you want to learn about Jack Kennedy go find his Secret Service agents. Just go do it." So I did.

It was given to Bobby Kennedy, who killed it. Bobby Kennedy could do that. But he couldn't stop the investigations. He could not go ahead with an investigation into his brother's election but he couldn't stop the continuing investigation. It just would have been too overt.

The deal was always for Cuba. Castro had taken over Cuba and shut down the gambling and the casinos. The reason why I don't think organized crime had anything to do with Kennedy's assassination is really simple. Jack Kennedy wanted Castro killed to the day he died. The day he died they were passing a pen that could be filled with poison to a CIA operative in Paris.

So long as Kennedy is trying to kill Castro that means that there's a very good chance that his administration is going to eventually do it with the CIA or organized crime or somebody. And the new government presumably will allow gambling to come back so they can get back an incredible source of income—the casinos, the whorehouses, the hotels. So I think that the notion that the mob had anything to do with killing Kennedy is equivalent to, you know, of why they would want to kill the goose that's going to lay the golden egg.

But all of this led me into this whole play of organized crime. The agency is constantly complaining—not to the President, nobody does that, but internally. "What is this about? We've got no assets there. We've got real problems in Berlin, Vietnam. What are we worrying about these guys for?"

So I asked one of the spooks, one of the CIA guys, "Why was he so nutty

about this?" He says, "If you want to learn about Jack Kennedy go find his Secret Service agents. Just go do it." So I did.

I talked to about 10 of them. Four we actually got to go on record and went *on camera for the ABC documentary*, which [was] an amazing feat in itself.

Others were there ready to talk. If those guys are ready to talk about sex I'm ready to write about it. But the purpose in doing it was, you see, that the whole point of his sexual behavior was that it was a recklessness that fell over into other areas—Castro, Vietnam, the missile crisis. I'm going after all of them. I'm doing revisionist history on all of them.

Of course, it's not going to make a lot of people happy in the journalist business. When I was an AP kid covering the Pentagon in the 60's I learned to hate the war. But if somebody in the L.A. Times got a great story that even hit the war hard, I was the first guy in the next morning to Arthur Sylvester, the Press Secretary, trying to get a knockdown—"Pentagon denied today the report"—because somebody else had something I didn't have. That's our business. It's wrong. You have to understand that's very deep in our system. It's pervasive. Most of the time it's all-out war. I'm glad I'm not a reporter now because the competitive instinct is so strong it dominates everything.

The point is it's inevitable that what I'm saying by indirection is that if I'm right about the Kennedy presidency—if I'm right—two generations of reporters and historians are wrong. I understood I was not going to get prizes for this book.

What's ironic about what's going on now [the special prosecutor's investigation of sexual allegations and subornation of perjury charges against President Clinton] is that the issue for me isn't oral sex. It's what does it say about this guy and what else do we want to look at? If you have looked at the literature it's clearly a pathology. There's been a lot of amazingly detailed psychoanalytical treatises and studies done on this pathology.

If you read the literature about this obsessive need for sex [one thing that

is] interesting is it's almost a daily requirement. If you don't get it you get depressed. Kennedy used to talk about having headaches all the time when he didn't get sex. That was his way of coping with it.

One of the Secret Service guys [told] me [that] on Fridays, if Jackie Kennedy would stick around for the weekend, [the President] was like a rooster that had been sprayed with water. He would get headaches and have a lousy weekend, because he didn't want to mess around when his wife was around.

It also involves a certain denigration of women. It's the need to have this kind of sex that doesn't stem from a sexual desire, I guess. It stems from other sorts of neurotic things in your makeup. It makes you take huge risks, like messing around with a 21-year-old intern. And if you're taking those risks can you stop those risks just there?

What I'm interested in in Clinton—and I guess we're going to have to wait years to figure it out—[is] looking at some of the foreign policy and other decisions. I'd like to see us branch out in this particular story away from the sexual, the physical aspect, into the other elements of his character, and see what other risk-taking he does. I would just guess that there's got to be some things he does in other areas that are just staggering. You know, we never know much about what's going on.

Q.—If you were writing today about Nixon, would you [write about the wife beating]?

A.—Oh, absolutely.

Q.—What has changed in your thinking?

A.—If I didn't write it the sources would tell it anyway. It's a different world now. I'm all for the proliferation of news media and Internet. I think this is a serious bump on the road. The proliferation obviously has very deleterious effects, for the chances of the papers not being right about any given thing are so much higher than they've ever been. I mean, it's really nuts. They've never been quite as high. In Watergate, don't forget, we were dealing with high crimes. We weren't dealing about whether she gave him a blow job in this corner of the room.

Q.—You cited competition as the reason for running this story.

A.—Yeah.

Q.—Absent competition, if you had some exclusive deal. Is that still a newsworthy story?

A.—No.

Q.—You don't think so?

A.—No. It's his business.

Q.—You say you had it cold. Do you have evidence that Richard Nixon—

A.—I'm talking about 1983. Today I

...the clerks on the Supreme Court were very, very upset because one of their fellow clerks was in a gay relationship, a male, with a leading member of the Solicitor General's office, who was arguing a case before the courts. Now, have you got the picture? A clerk for one of the justices is having an affair with a member of the SG's office.

don't think so. We could argue about it. No, I don't think so. I had three instances when he hit her; three different times that he hit her bad enough to hurt her.

Q.—You have three instances of the President of the United States—

A.—No. Twice President, once before.

Q.—Twice while he was President?

A.—Twice while he was President.

Q.—Two times while he was President that he beat his wife.

A.—One was definitely when he was in the White House. One was within days of getting to San Clemente afterwards. And one was in '62. Three times. I presume there were others because that's a pattern.

Q.—Would you need more incidents to run that story?

A.—We're talking about 1983—it was not a story.

Q.—In 1998?

A.—1998 is it a story? You know, [in the early 1980's] the clerks on the Supreme Court were very, very upset because one of their fellow clerks was in a gay relationship, a male, with a leading member of the Solicitor General's office, who was arguing a case before the

courts. Now, have you got the picture? A clerk for one of the justices is having an affair with a member of the SG's office.

His justice was liberal—old liberal. Relied on his clerks a lot because of his age. He didn't have the energy. On at least two cases—it might be three, but I know two cases stick in my mind—there were real problems. This member of the SG staff argued before the court on prisoner rights, search and seizure, *police rights*. If you suspect marijuana how far can you go? What's the search and seizure issue?

The court voted five to four in favor of more rights for police and less rights for the victims. This particular justice, who had always been a pro-victim person, in these two cases came down on the side of the SG, the government. This is obviously in the Reagan White House. And that was their position. They were expanding police search rights. And the court expanded it.

The other clerks were convinced that this was an unholy alliance. In other words, they were convinced that the gay relationship between these two men was forcing the clerk [into] writing briefs that would favor the position of his lover. This [justice] was the swing vote and he was coming the wrong way. I went to The New York Times with the story.

We did not write it. We resolved it by getting a message to the Attorney General. And this fellow went on leave, resigned and went to teach somewhere.

Now that would probably be a story [today]. I don't think we'd hesitate. Things have changed. Now it would be a story, "Oh, my God, a gay relationship on the court." But then I did not think it was a story. I thought it was his business. I always personalize it. Have I ever hit a woman? You know, I mean, you always can do all these things to yourself. How do I know what he really did? You know, et cetera, et cetera. There's a million ways to deal with it.

Q.—I don't want to belabor this, but why do you think it spills over into policy if the President has a compulsive need for sex, but not if he has a pattern of hitting his wife—

Q.—Which is a crime. ~

A.—Because I'm stuck in my own malaise. I'm stuck in my own world. That's all. That's just where I was.

Q.—If a story about the President of the United States hitting a woman stirred one person to perhaps not hit his wife, it had a purpose—

A.—Let's hear this.

Q.—If you have an exposé on the President of the United States and his compulsion to hit his wife—

A.—Hold on. Hold on. Exposé—exposé—hold on a second. Let's talk journalism here for a second. Let's get back to the core. That story would have been denied by Nixon, his wife. The sources would have gone batshit if I'd named them. I talked to a doctor involved. He was in direct violation of the Hippocratic Oath. So I had a million technical problems with that story. I'm still telling you why I don't think I would have written it. But if I had decided on the grounds that it was a crime, I would have had another problem. I can't even tell you now how much I really got down to the nitty gritty of whether that story could be included. In a book you could slide that story in in some way.

In the Kennedy book, there were a lot of things that I and the Secret Service guys talked about [that I] didn't write.

Q.—There was stuff you wrote in that book you wouldn't write in a newspaper?

A.—I couldn't write in the newspaper [but] not because of the sourcing. I just don't think you could write a story about Kennedy and women in a newspaper. You'd have to have some nexus for it. In the big frame of a book, you could do it. Like even the organized crime stuff. I use people on the record mostly. And so, if I've got them on the record, I could theoretically fit them in the mold for a newspaper or certainly a magazine. But without the frame, you lose focus, you know? It's the big frame.

So, getting back to [Nixon], as a story it would have been a real pain in the ass to write. I would have had to walk over the rights of a lot of people who talked to me. Did I know it was true? Yes.

Q.—Would you write it today?

A.—It would be so much easier to write it today.

Q.—It would be easier to write it today, but you've still got the same problem.

A.—Right. If you wrote it, it's going to be almost impossible for any other reporter in any other news organization to match those sources. So the story goes out, everybody denies it, and it dies. What happens next? That's where you get stuck.

There's a lot of mess in all this stuff. All these things are very complicated. Let's just resolve the problem by saying it's very clean. I never thought in '83, unless it really impacted on the policy, and maybe it's naiveté, maybe there I'm missing something, maybe Nixon—maybe the attitude toward women he had was the attitude he had towards the North Vietnamese.

Q.—The Wall Street Journal ran an almost identical column on the head of the SEC, I believe.

A.—Right. But they were in a divorce. It came out in a divorce proceeding. It was on the record. They weren't breaking any ground. It was in sworn documents. It was in documents in a court case. But a story like this that comes out of nowhere, unconnected with anything on either end of a story, how do you get it in the paper? And then how do you take it to the next step?

Q.—What do you mean, how do you get it in?

A.—Well, if it comes out there's no reason to suspect Nixon [of] doing anything to his wife, out of the blue you write a piece and say, "He hits his wife." Then what?

Q.—What if it's another crime that he's committing? What if he went in and robbed a bank?

A.—Wait a second. Hold on a second. I don't know as I saw it as a crime. I don't know if I viewed it in the context of a crime. Is it a crime?

Q.—Yes.

A.—Are you sure?

Q.—Is wife battery? I'm not sure it was a crime then, in 1983.

A.—Anyway, look, I stand corrected.

Q.—Where do you draw the line in terms of looking at public figures like the president, and what's private and what is public knowledge? Having sex

with however many interns isn't—you know, two consenting adults. But beating up your wife is a different kind of thing. Somebody is getting hurt. So would it be part of a way of looking at the press's role in judging public figures?

A.—The problem here is you're talking about something I didn't write because I never thought in terms of writing it. I never thought in terms of investigating it more fully. It was presented to me and I did ask and I found some confirmation of at least, as I say, three incidents. I never pursued it in any significant way. I just automatically didn't think—I didn't see any connection between that act—those acts. I'm just telling you where I was. I was doing my Kissinger book from '79 to '83. And

So, getting back to [Nixon], as a story it would have been a real pain in the ass to write. I would have had to walk over the rights of a lot of people who talked to me. Did I know it was true? Yes.

whenever I learned that—sometime in early '80, I presume, '81 or 2, I didn't see it in terms of a story. So it never got to fruition.

We're now dealing with it as if it was a fact. You know, it was something that I don't think I could have written based on what I had. In a book there's a way you can do things like that. I never came close to it.

Q.—But we're dealing with things now that we don't know are fact either. Yet everybody is writing about them. So the point is 16, 17 years ago, it wouldn't even occur to you to write this.

A.—It wouldn't even occur to me. So I didn't do the work—

Q.—That's what I'm talking about, is the story.

A.—It's certainly a story now.

Q.—I wonder if you could expand in your experience about Jack Kennedy. There's kind of like a steel barrier years later and how protective they are and—

A.—There's a culture there—Arthur Schlesinger and Ted Sorensen still dining out on the Kennedy myth. Why should I believe Arthur Schlesinger or

Ted Sorensen on Jack Kennedy any more than H.R. Haldeman on Richard Nixon? There's no reason. That's a totally revolutionary thought for most Americans—that Bob Haldeman on Nixon would be no more biased than [Pierre] Salinger. Well, of course he would be. It's the same thing.

One of the things I got hit real hard on was this story from a guy named Hy Raskin, who was [Democratic Presidential candidate Adlai] Stevenson's Deputy Campaign Manager. He wrote an unpublished manuscript. Raskin retired in Rancho Mirage, California. I met him twice. He wouldn't let me have the book. He dies and his wife calls me, or I call his wife. I'm not fishing around.

There was no con in this case. But, in general, there's nothing wonderfully virtuous about our profession. I don't think anybody thinks there is. We are basically asking a lot of people to act against their best interests most of the time. That's what we're doing for a living. We're not always very direct about what we want, right? I don't think we have any corner on virtue. No more than a President anyway.

[Mrs. Raskin] said, "Look, my husband has this manuscript. Do you want to see it?" And I did. I busted out there and we went to Kinko's and we copied it. In the manuscript he describes this incredible event during the convention. He's totally a person of great credibility. I did all the research on him. He'd been very active in the '52 and '56 campaign. He's a big insider. Basically a *money man*. He would take cash, move lots of cash around. Millions of dollars. He would take cash to—you know, if they were under the spending limit he would get—he'd get a lot of stuff anyway.

And he describes how Lyndon Johnson blackmailed [Kennedy for] the Vice Presidency. I write that story. And I do a lot of work on it. I appropriately make clear this is yet another account. One of the things that's been a mystery is why did they pick Johnson? It upset a lot of people; it was a great surprise.

The point of all this story is that I then talked to other people about it. I used the word "blackmail." And I described the story [that Johnson and

There's a culture there— Arthur Schlesinger and Ted Sorensen still dining out on the Kennedy myth. Why should I believe Arthur Schlesinger or Ted Sorensen on Jack Kennedy any more than H.R. Haldeman on Richard Nixon? There's no reason. That's a totally revolutionary thought for most Americans—that Bob Haldeman on Nixon would be no more biased than [Pierre] Salinger. Well, of course he would be. It's the same thing.

House Speaker Sam Rayburn had threatened in Kennedy's words "to frame me"—presumably by revealing his private sexual life—if Johnson was not selected as the vice-presidential candidate.] This is the focal point for an enormous amount of criticism.

Yet [historian Michael] Beschloss found the Raskin story years before me and wrote in his book, "The Crisis Years," a paragraph about the same way I did. He used the exact same language. So he has looked at the same data I did and came down the same way.

All I'm saying is there was a double standard at work. This was something I was particularly hit on. As if it was really reckless. It wasn't. It was a perfectly rational way of looking at it.

Q.—We have no corner on virtue, as you said, but we're not seen in public daily using family values, with a wife at our elbow, with Chelsea there. And to me those pictures and that presentation becomes a kind of lie.

A.—Totally.

Q.—And so that, as a journalist, I don't understand the resistance to undercutting that lie. They make their personal lives political, and if those personal public lives that are projected to us are lies, we have every obligation and, I think, duty to point that out. So that the wife beating story does become significant with Mrs. Nixon at every podium.

A.—Yeah. But still I would argue with you that in the case of Clinton, the American voters in 1996 knew what they were getting. They weren't conned. That wasn't Clinton's doing. I still don't think I'd do the beating-Pat story. I just

don't see it. I disagree with you. I'm locked in my own warp. I think he may have hit her, but I don't think she was a terrified person when she was with him. I think she was as tough.

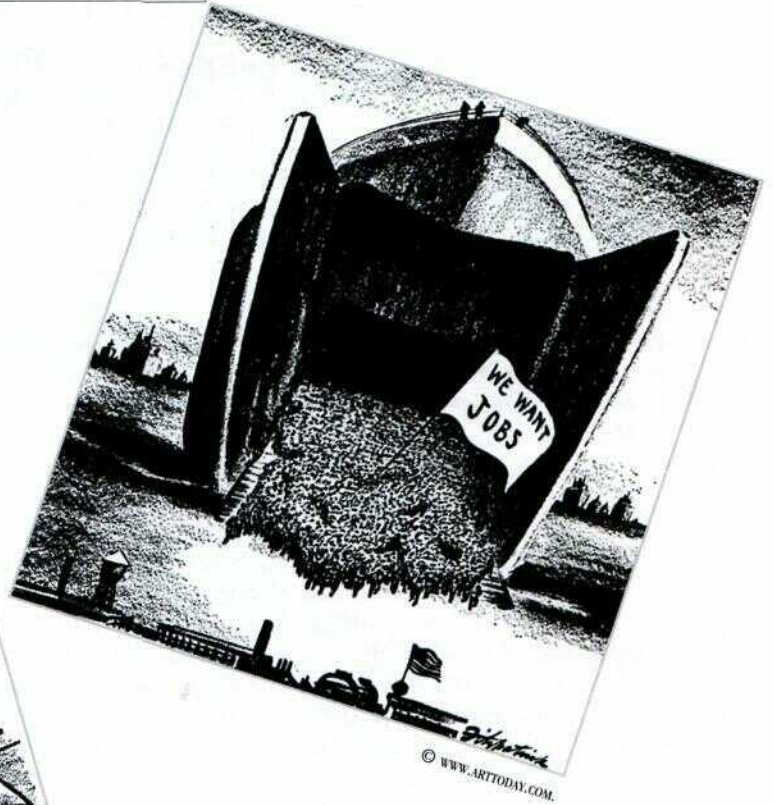
It's a great year to be here, because it's fun to be able to be away from Washington, and not to be in it. I know what I would be doing. I would be out there *scratching to see if I could* get one of those [Independent Prosecutor Kenneth] Starr guys to give me a tip, and I'd be running it in the paper.

I remember the first time when I proffered a story to the [New York Times] newsroom on what went on in the [Watergate] grand jury. It was April 18th, 1973, and was one of these little pieces, moving the story along. Scotty Reston came up to me, red-faced with anger, and said, "Young man, we do not run stories on the grand jury. It's a sacred process."

I remember thinking how stupid he was. I was angry at him. The old fart doesn't know what's going on. But, in his own wisdom, there was a standard there.

I learned a little bit about the CIA's assassination plotting in the Kennedy years while working in the Washington Bureau of *The New York Times* in the early 70's. Later my editors went to a briefing, without me, where President Ford put the story off limits.

I knew there was a murder component and that they had tried to assassinate people. Abe Rosenthal called me up one day and said, "Keep on working on the murder stuff." And I said, "Of course, I am." About a week later Tom Wicker came to me and said, "They've gone to lunch with Gerry Ford." Ford had sworn Abe and Publisher [Arthur O.] Sulzberger to secrecy and told [them] about the assassination [attempts on] Castro. Therefore I couldn't write the story, and they couldn't tell me. We didn't. Somebody else did. So there you go. It was a different world then. Now it would be in print tomorrow, "Ford says this." Secret microphones. We'd have a tape. We'd have a video camera. *Inside Edition* would have it. That's the problem right now. It's all different, and we haven't figured it out, and we're learning. ■



The Economic Sector

The first paper on four areas of watchdog journalism concerns the economic sector. As these cartoons show, some issues that disturb the country have not changed in the last century—fear of inflation, immigration and taxes.



Is Anything Really Wrong?

Some years ago The New York Times editorial page expressed the complacent notion that "great publications magnify the voice of any single writer." The statement is misleading. The instruments of the media multiply or amplify a voice, serving much the same purpose as a loudspeaker in a ballpark or a prison. What magnifies a voice is its character, its compassion, its honesty, or intelligence.—Lewis Lapham

I suppose in the end newspapers cannot be free, absolutely free in the highest and best sense, until the whole social and economic structure of American life is open to the free interplay of democratic process.—William Allen White

Financial stories bore me.—Ted Koppel

BY RICHARD PARKER

Any half-decent American reporter at one point or another has imbibed of a legend about the profession that goes something like this: Once upon a time, back around the dawn of this century, there were journalists called "muckrakers," guardians not just of the public purse, but the public trust, indeed of democracy's Sacred Grail itself—the public good. They ferreted out scandal, corruption and injustice without fear or favor. They exposed the trusts, the slum landlords, the sweatshop owners, the union-busters and the politicians in their pay.

They fought for the Little Guy, for America as Democracy of the Common Man, for our country as a hope open to all equally, for the ultimate triumph of America as Emma Lazarus's "beacon to the world." And in their efforts—despite all manner of frustration and setbacks—they were surprisingly successful, fueling public consciousness and leading to a host of new laws, regulations and court rulings that transformed the once-untouchable reign of the great Robber Barons and their petty cronies in business and politics forever.

The names of the heroes (and heroines) of that legend, for most journalists, still come tripping off the lips: Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens, Upton Sinclair, Ray Stannard Baker. Even the press's owners in those distant times could sound heroic, compared to their modern-day peers: Pulitzer, Scripps—even Hearst for a time—were famous for fulminating against America's economic

and political injustices, and for insisting that the press's purpose was to "afflict the comfortable, and comfort the afflicted."

Now fast forward a century to the present, to The Columbia Journalism Review. Here's Senior Editor Mike Hoyt's take on the state of "watchdog economic journalism" at the end of the same century:

Cheaters are bilking Medicare. It's Your Money! Deadbeats aren't repaying the Small Business Administration. It's Your Money! An expensive courthouse in Hammy, Louisiana, is mostly empty. It's Your Money!

And yadda yadda. Why am I yawning here? Watchdog journalism is good, no? Why then does the attention wander when Peter announces this very regular "Your Money" segment on ABC's World News Tonight or when Tom introduces its first cousin, "The Fleecing of America," over on Nightly News on NBC?

Hoyt explains that he's "yawning" because America's electronic version (at least) of watchdog economic journalism isn't so much absent, but nowadays amounts to little more than "a regular, mantra-like insistence on one skinny focus, wasted tax money." That focus, Hoyt complains, is balefully "combined with TV journalism's general unwillingness to explore the forces and practices and assumptions and fleecings that create my real money problems...."

Nowhere, Hoyt insists, do TV's watchdogs dig past the easy story about one or another wasteful government program to how the much larger private

economy is eroding the American Promise, with its downsizing and reengineering, stagnant wages, overpaid executives and record personal bankruptcies, stories that, he believes, define our present era. Nowhere, Hoyt seems to say (without ever mentioning their names), can we find our own Tarbells, our own Steffens, our own Sinclairs, to match the venerable ancestors.

Assume, just for the moment, that Hoyt is right. Is it proof that watchdog economic journalism has died, the ink-stained Tarbells and Steffens done in by the bouffant-haired, high-priced electronic Toms and Dans and Peters and Connies and Barbaras at the end of the millennium?

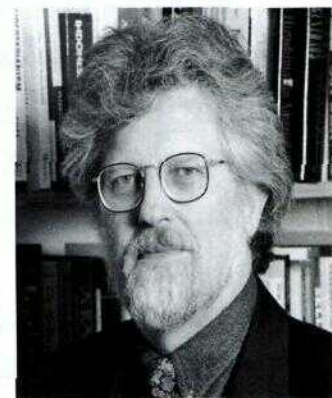


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If so, then how do we explain last year's widely discussed (and, by many, much-praised) New York Times series on "The Downsizing of America"? What about The Los Angeles Times's more recent detailed (and deeply wrenching) series on the causes of global hunger? Did we all miss William Greider's PBS series "Who Will Tell the People?", or the repeated investigations into executive pay or downsizing or growing income inequality that appear with surprising regularity in magazines like *BusinessWeek*, not to mention *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, or *Mother Jones*?

And what about two enterprising reporters, Donald Barlett and James Steele, who in 1991 crafted a nine-part series for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* that detailed what they saw as the myriad injustices of the private economy that CJR editor Hoyt says network TV won't touch? Not only did they win Pulitzer Prizes, but 30,000 requests for reprints poured into the newsroom, prompting a best-selling paperback version—plus two equally lengthy follow-up series since then.

Is the Problem Then Just Television's?

So perhaps then Hoyt is right about television. But surely, given the works just mentioned, we should adapt Twain's adage and conclude that the death of watchdog economics reporting—or at least its print version—has been "greatly exaggerated."

Or should we?

Howard Kurtz, media critic of *The Washington Post*, like most veteran print reporters, rarely rushes to the defense of TV journalism. Consider then for a moment what he says about print and the performance of its own watchdog function:

Within America's newspapers there is a fatal disconnection, a growing gap between editors and reporters on the one hand and consumers of news on the other.... My incestuous profession has become increasingly self-absorbed, even as its practitioners wring their hands about why fewer people seem to be listening. I hear this depressing talk every day, in newsroom meetings, in ca-

sual conversations, in my colleagues' bitter jokes about toiling for a dying business....

Yet we in this business have gone a long way toward squandering our natural advantages.... Where once newspapers were at the very heart of the national conversation, they now seem remote, arrogant, part of the governing elite. Where once newspapers embodied cultural values, they now seem mired in a tabloid culture that gorges itself on sex and sleaze....

Kurtz goes on to cite one failure after another by the print press to grapple with the "big" economic and political issues of our times, then concludes:

The paradox for those of us laboring behind the word processors is this: Newspapers in the '90's are better written and better edited than at any time in history, and yet our efforts have fallen far short of what readers demand in an information-saturated age.... It's not that people aren't reading—magazine circulation has climbed steadily in recent decades—but that they ain't buying what we're selling. The blunt truth is that tinkering and half-measures will no longer do the trick. There is a cancer eating away at the newspaper business—the cancer of boredom, superficiality and irrelevance—and radical surgery is needed.

Kurtz's accusation is a powerful and robust charge, with echoes found in dozens of other forms and voices, and nowadays so extensive that it feels impossible to ignore.

And yet barely a quarter century ago, *The Post*'s own Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein seemed the embodiment of a new generation of "muckrakers," symbols of its renewed energies and inspiration to a generation of younger reporters. What's gone wrong then—if indeed both Hoyt and Kurtz are right? Have we in fact left watchdog economic reporting so far behind that the legacy of the Tarbells, Steffens and Sinclairs is nothing more than that: a distant legacy, honored in memory, and nothing more?

Is It Really Worse Now? What Nieman Once Found

The danger facing this story of downfall—the ever-present danger of belief in a lost Golden Age (for watchdog journalism, as for other fields and faiths)—is that much about such reporting, at least in economics, seems to have grown better in the interim, right up to the present. In 1991, for example, the Nieman Foundation devoted an issue of *Nieman Reports* to asking "What's Right, What's Wrong, About Economic Coverage?"

The consensus of the issue's dozen or so contributors wasn't that the Tarbells and Steffens of legend were forever doomed to lie tormented in their graves. Instead, it was that while much regarding modern economic reporting needed to be done, much in turn had been accomplished. As Paul Solman, economics reporter for PBS's *NewsHour*, observed generally of modern reporting on business, "It's much more sophisticated than it was, of course, even 15 years ago. Given the time and space limitations, I don't know how to do it any better."

Solman, though, more disquietingly then followed his approving observation with the following: "But much of it is extraneous and some arguably insidious...." Insidious, he wrote, "because the core clientele of business journalism are America's investors," not the broader audience of America's citizenry and their leaders.

Another Nieman contributor, the former chairman of public relations giant Hill & Knowlton, however, demurred from Solman. To Richard Cheney, journalism's service to investors was far from ideal because even *they* weren't being well served. Reporters, Cheney wrote, were too often more intrigued by the entertainment value of the country's corporate buccaneers, or caught up in zealously detailing their maneuverings—afflicted not by indifference, but by values more appropriate to "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous." "How often," Cheney asked, "did we read in news stories the connection between the high-priced lifestyle of business leaders and what went

on at their companies? How often did anybody dig into the impact of a billionaire's fortune on the world around him?"

But a decade after the heyday of Ivan Boesky, Michael Milken, Boone Pickens, Charles Keating and Carl Icahn, it's harder to point to such "colorful" and celebratory reporting as defining the genre. Mergers have quickened their pace since the '80's—last year they totaled almost a *trillion* dollars, a nearly 10-fold rise since the early '90's—but now tend to be the bland intercorporate accomplishments of business figures who lack the profile of latter-day Jay Goulds. Meanwhile the Boeskys, Milkens and Pickens of the world have been scrutinized repeatedly with far from adulatory eyes by the press, Jane Mayer's coverage in *The New Yorker* only one of dozens of examples.

If we're concerned—as Cheney was seven years ago—about relations between high-priced CEO compensation and their companies' performance, we have only to reach for *BusinessWeek's* annual review of executive compensation and corporate performance. There we surely may wonder why such executive pay has quintupled in the past two decades while average workers' wages have stagnated, but *hardly claim to be denied the facts.*

Even *Nieman* contributor Morton Mintz (a veteran watchdog reporter for *The Washington Post*), while denouncing what he called the press's too-frequent "pro-corporate tilt," acknowledged that in recent years there had been "superb reporting of many grave episodes of corporate misconduct," singling out "60 Minutes," "20-20," "Frontline," "All Things Considered," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Detroit Free Press*—and in particular *The Wall Street Journal*—for special mention.

But if today we in fact have a good deal of above-average watchdog economic reporting, isn't it being drowned in a sea of "infotainment," as many believe? If public impact is the measure, though, one can't reasonably claim that watchdog economic reporting—as distinct from the daily coverage of stock market, Consumer Price Index, or Gross National Produce fluctuations, or the

malfeasance of individual corporations—has gone unnoticed by the American people. Over 70 percent say they're aware that income and wealth inequality have grown worse in the last quarter century. Seventy-nine percent consider corporate CEO's "overpaid." Forty-five percent worry about downsizing, 48 percent worry about the inequities of low-wage global competitors, half doubt their children can hope for better lives in the future. Asked what should be "top priority" for American foreign policy, 77 percent say "protecting American jobs."

Indeed, in an era when many in both the press and public regularly bewail the media's focus on "infotainment," O.J., "The Killer Nanny"—and the President's private life—something else must be getting through: Americans have steadfastly told pollsters "the economy" was their premier concern for 22 of the last 25 years.

Are the Problems Therefore Minor?

One might be tempted to assume from such polling evidence that critics like Hoyt and Kurtz are over-dramatizing, that (warts and all) modern watchdog economic journalism is healthy and thriving—albeit far from always quite up to the standards of the profession's Progressive Era avatars.

Certainly, if we give credence to academic studies of the issue, U.S. economics and business reporting generally has been on an upward path in the last 20 years, whether measured by the volume or quality of reporting, or by the sheer number of outlets offering such information. While a decade ago, Jeff Greenfield, then with ABC, could joke that "economics reporting was once the blind date of journalism: better than staying home, but not by much," nowadays the claim seems stale and dated.

Most newspapers, for example, have made substantial improvements in their business sections, while the number of business and economic periodicals has soared. Television meanwhile now

abounds with business/economic shows and even channels devoted to the topic. With hundreds of thousands of Reuters, Dow-Jones and Bloomberg terminals, and now thousands of Internet sites dedicated not just to near-instantaneous reporting of market movements, but their larger meaning and context, insisting that we suffer from *too little* information about economics and business conduct seems malign.

But concluding that therefore all is well with the world of watchdog economics reporting requires a Panglossian stretch of decided proportion. "Information"—the ambiguous idea of the sheer quantity of knowledge available—isn't the right metric by which to judge journalism's (let alone watchdog journalism's) success, unless one assumes that a telephone book is no different than a daily newspaper. Both are surely dense with information, but no one confuses them, because their uses and purposes—their rationale, their underlying logic—diverge.

Yet the idea of a purpose or rationale behind not only journalism, but especially watchdog journalism, has been peculiarly neglected in recent years. The last decade's onslaught of computer-based "information"—whether on disks, hard drives, or now most importantly the Internet—has moreover, in a sense, deeply confused that distinction to our common detriment.

By fueling a soft-minded bacchanal about the end of the century as simultaneously the "dawn of the Information Age" (somehow, we're assured, analogous to the earlier Industrial Age), it has drawn our attention away from both the audience for, and purposes of, such "information."

Yet if journalism still has some role to play in sustaining an engaged public conversation about democratic life, our preoccupation with the "Information Age" has poorly reflected it.

For purely occupational reasons, of course, journalists have had good reason to focus on all the talk about the Information Age. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, journalists and their publishers were in high dudgeon, as figures such as Nicholas Negroponte of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology

pronounced the "end of journalism as we know it." In the new Information Age, he and others promised, everyone who wanted to could become a "journalist," with his or her own Web page offering up a personalized version of the news.

In slightly more moderate moments, it was said that "old-fashioned" news (i.e., crafted by recognizable professionals) would disappear from the morning doorstep, replaced by "me news," the on-screen presentation of reality pre-sorted to give you just what *you* wanted, drawn electronically and instantaneously from thousands of sources around the world, as "professional" or not as you preferred.

Television news, it was said, would change just as dramatically. Gone would be the network evening news; in its stead, you'd sit down whenever you chose to news bites assembled (again by computer, but now on your 60-inch or 90-inch or 200-inch combination TV/PC screen) from satellite feeds drawing "information" from the global ether. In a digital TV world of a 1,000 channels (500 apparently was technologically passé 15 minutes after it was announced), you could scan the dial (or pre-program it) for everything from reggae festivals in Kingston to Chinese cooking classes in Canton, from on-the-ground battlefield action in Afghanistan courtesy of mujahadeen combatants carrying miniature helmet-mounted cameras, to the latest floor debates in the Greek or Israeli or Indonesian parliaments.

In due course, it was claimed by some, if for whatever reason you somehow preferred a more "traditional" presentation of all this "information," that too would be made available. With the click of a mouse, advanced video graphics would create a "virtual" Walter Cronkite or Peter Jennings, with animatronic lips narrating your choice of visuals in a splendidly soothing, yet synthesized, voice.

Calming Down —and Looking Back

In the last year or two, some of this feverish concern about the disappearance of "traditional" journalism has cooled, the sense returning that somehow the profession will endure—just as it did years ago, after first radio's enthusiasts, then television's, foresaw the death of print. But harder to find has been a return to examining why a daily newspaper and phone book *are* different. Or why, for journalism's ongoing health in an age of "infotainment"—when the difference between the news hour and the sitcom following seems *less* different year by year—watchdog reporting is important, who its audience is, and why it needs to be done.

Back in the era when our ancestral "muckraker" titans walked the earth, no such doubt about purpose seems—from our distant vantage point—to have existed. As one historian of the era has put it,

What distinguished the reforms of the new century from those of the old were the range and depth of its proposals for organized solutions—often political and administrative solutions—to problems long recognized, but seldom systematically attacked. The writers of 1900 spoke no longer of charity but of minimum wages and workmen's compensation, less of social work and more of social security, slum clearance, employment agencies, and tax reform....

The spirit that inspired those writers—who, incidentally, faced their own competition from the "infotainment" of vaudeville, music halls, the first movie houses, and screaming tabloids—wasn't simply to report objectively and informatively on America's ills and inequities, but something else, something more.

The nation almost a century ago, we sometimes forget, was anguishing over conditions that sound eerily modern today. Theodore Roosevelt—who coined the term "muckrakers," borrowing from Pilgrim's Progress—warned his countrymen, for example, that "neither the Republican nor the Demo-

cratic platform contains the slightest promise of approaching the great problems of today either with understanding or good faith; and yet never was there greater such need in this nation...."

Exemplifying the age's "great problems," Roosevelt pointed to the popular disillusionment with government, to the challenges of a new global economy, to the bitter fruits of business's search for maximum efficiency, to growing wage and wealth inequalities and to the immense disruptions posed by new technologies. Against these problems—and the power that stood behind them—Roosevelt left no doubt a century ago that his was a call for combat.

"Surely there was never a fight better worth making than the one in which we are engaged," he told anxious Americans. "I hope we shall win, and I believe that if we can wake the people to what the fight really means we shall win. But win or lose, we shall not falter.... To you who strive in a spirit of brotherhood for the betterment of our nation, to you who gird yourselves for this new fight in the never-ending warfare for the good of humankind, I say: We stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord!"

Roosevelt's muckrakers shared his thunderous vision—if not always his own political ambitions or agenda. Like T.R. and hundreds of other reformer-politicians, they were for remaking America into something better, something of which all could be proud, something in which the American people themselves held final sway.

But they also saw themselves as far from revolutionary. As Charles Spargo, one of the early muckrakers, put it,

The things we were advocating were not advocated with a view to overturning the capitalist system. All that we wrote might as well have been written by an earnest Christian trying to apply Christian principles to a very definite and serious human problem.

Finley Peter Dunne's Mr. Dooley conveyed their purpose more color-

fully when he described the explosive impact of the “muckrakers” and their “journalism of exposure” on the times:

Th' noise ye hear is not th' first gun in a revolution. It's on'y th' people iv the United States batin' a carpet.

Why Is Our Age Different From the Muckrakers'?

So what then has changed since the Progressive Era that makes the current era seem to lack the driving persuasive force or vision behind the watchdog journalism of that earlier era?

Despite the popularity of the argument, it can't simply be the inanimate force of technology: for one thing, to insist that the modern Information Age, for example, represents a somehow incomparable leap in the *speed* with which information moves simply ignores the scale of transformation underway a century ago. It was the telegraph in the late 19th Century, spanning not just continents but oceans—and not the computer in the late 20th—that marked history's most singular advance in information's transmission speed, reducing the delivery time of news from New Delhi to New York to a matter of seconds—from what had been measured in months, if not years, across the span of earlier history.

Nor does today's sheer overwhelming volume of information—best symbolized by cable TV's 100-plus channels, or more recently the Internet—seem so novel, when we remember that a century ago, each day the average New Yorker could choose among 15 different newspapers rather than today's three, or that more American newspapers appeared in a language other than English than all the dailies available today, or that the thousands of libraries then being constructed each contained thousands (if not hundreds of thousands) of volumes that vastly exceeded an individual's ability to absorb even a fraction of the knowledge therein.

As for impact on human beings of

the sheer pace of technological change—and our much-debated sense of “information overload”—how should we imagine the effects on individuals of a world in which electric lighting, the automobile, the airplane, the telephone and wireless, motion pictures and the phonograph, all almost simultaneously appeared in a few short years? If Bill Gates and the microchip today somehow seem monumentally revolutionary, how shall we measure their impact against Thomas Edison's or Henry Ford's?

If Not Technology, Has the Audience Changed?

Another hypothesis: perhaps then the clue lies not in the speed, volume, or sheer choices our new technologies bring, but in the time we as audience have available to absorb them. Recent books with titles like “The Time Bind” or “The Overworked American” document how over the last 20 years work time has increased dramatically, especially for women, leaving less and less time for home and family life for all of us—including time to absorb our “new” cornucopia of information. *Innumerable press critics have noted the lamentable decline in newspaper readership, or more recently the collapse in viewership for prime-time evening news, and ascribed their decline in large part to this loss of available “leisure” time.*

But compare our present situation to the 60-, 70-, even 80-hour, six-day workweek of most Americans a century ago. If today too many of our children suffer from inadequate daycare, education, or latch-key neglect, what of the children of the Progressive Era, 80 percent of whom never went on to high school, or the hundreds of thousands of 12- and 13-year-olds whom reformers like Lewis Hines found working in mines and sweatshops? If today we suffer from too little leisure and family time, what was the suffering a century ago? If the average American comes home tonight, too tired and too burdened to do more than glance at a newspaper or turn on a TV game show

orsitcom, where was that vaunted “free” time at the dawn of this century?

A subtler version of the “time” hypothesis has interwoven two other elements about diminished audience “capacity” for news, including watchdog reporting. This argument has focused on two dramatic and widening gaps among Americans at the end of the century, one hinged around income and wealth, the other around education and the ability to use sophisticated new information technologies such as the Internet. In its more melodramatic forms, the argument contends we are in danger of dividing into a nation of information “haves” and “have nots,” while in its more muted versions, into something like the ranked order of a new “information feudalism.”

Its proponents say they see (or foresee) a world in which the MBA, lawyer or MD taps into a world of instantaneous, global and interactive information, trading currency futures with Singapore or supervising (even performing) surgical procedures in a hospital a continent away (and growing wealthy thereby), while millions of McDonalds cashiers or Visa data-entry clerks toil for a pittance at the peripheries of the same electronic world.

The attractiveness of such arguments is that, at least in part, they let us explain the simultaneous presence of seemingly excellent watchdog journalism with a larger public indifference to the message it bears. Here then National Public Radio exists alongside Rush Limbaugh or the banalities of “all-news” AM radio, “Frontline” juxtaposed against “Entertainment Tonight,” or The New York Times against The National Enquirer, one serving “hard news” to an affluent and well-educated minority, while the latter offers up a diet of “infotainment,” overheated (and ill-informed) opinion, plus murder, car crash, Hollywood drug abuse, or the latest heart-tugging case of a child's battle with life-threatening disease to the masses as the “news” of the day.

But like the others, this argument fails a key historical test: just such a differentiation has marked American journalism since the Jacksonian period,

and the first appearance of the mass-circulation "penny press." In the Progressive Era, for every McClure's that embodied a signal watchdog journalism, there were dozens of Hearst-style papers with their "yellow journalism" stew of tabloid sensationalism, imperialist jingoism, and eugenic-inspired racism, in many ways the one as "typical" of the period as the other.

Discovering and Inventing The Modern Era

If then the standard explanations aren't the answer, we face a problem: what has changed, if not the observable phenomena we've examined associated with technology, the available time for reading or viewing "information," or the variety of press styles catering to a differentiated audience?

One possibility is that the problems of the current era just aren't really significant compared to those a century ago. Work hours have declined, incomes and the standard of living have improved measurably, education and health care is much more widely available—isn't it simply the case that watchdog economic reporting today has less worth reporting on?

The problem, of course, is that human beings rarely reason in such terms, but rather by comparing themselves with both their contemporaries and with their imagined possibilities and dreams. The present is an improvement over the Progressive Era for most, just as the Progressive Era was equally an improvement over the Middle Ages, the Renaissance an advance over the Roman Empire, Rome an advance over the Neolithic; few care to judge the present by any of these past standards.

Moreover, most Americans share a strong sense of having advanced little in their own lifetimes, and of losing faith in many of America's institutions. The precipitous decline of public confidence in almost all institutions and professions is well-documented. With Washington awash in a sea of campaign money, for example, few draw comfort from hearing that Congress is less cor-

rupt or incompetent than a century ago.

In a sense, the answer to why watchdog journalism seems to lack the persuasive force or significant impact compared to a time like the Progressive Era likely lies rooted at a deeper level, one that seminal figures such as Weber, Simmel, Michels, Sombart, Tonnies, and Durkheim had begun to explore in Europe even as the Progressive Era unfolded in America.

Weber, like the other social scientists of his generation whose lives crisscrossed the end of a pre-capitalist order and the emergence of the modern age, saw in capitalism at the beginning of the 20th Century a new era of consciously *rational* control by institutions and *rational* behavior by individuals. It was the historical moment when thinkers, as one critic puts it, "discovered the modern."

Steeped in the effects of a near-simultaneous explosion of science and technology at the end of the 19th Century, they both remembered a world from childhood that was rural, agrarian and deeply customary—and saw firsthand as adults its break-neck displacement by a new world of urban, industrial power embodied in the giant industrial corporation. That new world, they saw, required for its successful operation not merely what Keynes famously called the "animal spirits" of entrepreneurs, but the skillful construction and operation of a rational economy and society that was symbolized not merely by the appearance of the assembly line, but by the bureaucratic management structures of the great corporations themselves.

Weber particularly saw that religious beliefs no longer could adequately tie such complex communities together, nor could the charismatic role of monarchs, revolutionaries, or statesmen who triumphed through the power of their personalities and personal visions of national order. Only the anonymous bureaucratic organization of society itself would suffice, with its characteristic organization charts, layers of managers and subdivision of authority along branch, regional and product lines.

Moreover, Weber shrewdly under-

stood, such change would force deep changes in personality, expectations, group behavior and our deepest beliefs about norms and ideals on all fronts.

Could Democracy Become Modern?

But nowhere more than in the United States at the dawn of the 20th Century—as Weber knew from his travels here—did such economically and scientifically inspired bureaucratic organization seem more at odds with the nation's idealized vision of the diffused power of democratic government, of small-scale economic production, and the underlying assumption of a rural and independent citizenry that undergirded both.

The tensions between two such different models of human life—the one privately owned, centralized, bureaucratic and tightly structured into a web of unequal dependencies (in which the vast majority were industrial or office workers, subordinated to the direction of managerial and stock-owning élites), the other based on the public vision (however fully realized, one must add) of a prosperous but semi-subsistent rural economy, in which the political role of an equal citizenry coexisted peacefully alongside the "natural" but limited economic inequalities that grew out of differences in individual energies and abilities—were inescapable and, by the end of the 19th Century, deeply drawn.

For a time in the 1870's and 1880's, Social Darwinism had glossed the changes by offering the comfort of a "scientific" and "objective inevitability" to those who benefited most from industrialization and deepening inequalities. By the century's end, however, a different interpretation of both "science" and its celebrated "objectivity" was on the upsurge, in reaction to the deeply plutocratic (and far from conservative, in the sense of tradition-preserving) consequences of America's new economic revolution.

Within the tiny but burgeoning world of university-based social science, the dividing lines were harshly drawn. On

one side were the men who supported the new “marginalism” of Alfred Marshall, and the legacy of Ricardo and Adam Smith: the calculus, assuming the rational self-interest of all individuals, they argued, provided deductive mathematical proof that free markets, and free markets alone, functioned best.

On the other were men such as Richard Ely, Lester Ward, Simon Patten, and John R. Commons, whose own instincts were, in analytic terms, radically empirical and in prescription, socially reformist. None in the latter group came close to being a Marxian; most, by Europe’s more radical standards, were barely Fabian. But all insisted that analysis and prescription were inseparable, and that over-attention to mathematical modeling devalued the inherent moral dimensions involved in the study of human beings versus inanimate or non-human life forms. Indifferent to the early models of physics and mechanics that so entranced the marginalist economists, they sought in biology—and in a Mendelian understanding of life’s infinite plasticity and adaptability, not the Spencerian vulgarization of Darwin—the key to conscious and purposive control over social change.

Their concerns fed into a widening stream of alarm that was spilling out into America’s classrooms, pulpits, foundations (an American innovation of the time), and—most important for us—the press. In the American press—especially since the dawn of the penny press in the 1830’s—there had been no lack of voices raised about growing inequality and economic power, about the conditions of labor and the organized suppression of unions, about the state’s “capture” by powerful economic figures, and the adverse impact of 19th Century fiscal and monetary policies on small farmers, businesses and workers. Greeley of *The New York Tribune*, Godkin at *The Nation*, Harper’s *Weekly*, Collier’s, journalists such as Henry Demarest Lloyd, Edward Bellamy and Henry George, had all won national followings for their exposures and denunciations of the *Robber Baron era*.

No less important (or less reported) was the growing alarm, as millions of

new immigrants arrived to fill up American factories and towns, not just about the human conditions in which people lived, but their effects on the tenderly nurtured and still-new vision of American democracy itself. The fear was explicit: these “new Americans,” unschooled in older virtues and views, threatened to overwhelm (and ultimately destroy) what Winthrop had foreseen as “the city on the hill” and Tocqueville and others had celebrated as the essence of America’s “civil religion.”

Thus in the early 20th Century, watchdog journalism took on new urgency and explicit form, as enterprising reporters came in contact with a new world of university social scientists, government statisticians and foundation-funded researchers who could give both empirical detail and quantitative summary to these concerns. Moreover, this newly invigorated and newly conceived journalism discovered a mobilized and attentive audience among burgeoning segments of the “older” middle class and “native” working class who saw in the economic condition of millions of both “new” and “old” Americans not merely cause for charitable or compassionate alarm, but a deepening threat to democratic aspirations and social order.

Would Journalism, Now A Profession, Help Modernize Democracy?

Historians have toiled for years to explain this upsurge of what some have called the “Professional Revolution” in the midst of the Industrial Revolution and its stunning concentration of power and wealth among the new manufacturing, merchant and financial classes. Influenced by Weber and others, they have pointed to the opportunities that the urbanizing and industrializing world gave to such men and women—the need to train a workforce, the need to administer laws and regulations, the demands for scientifically based medical care, and even to oversee and adjudicate (via government) if not always the fundamental issues of economic distribution,

at the least the inherent challenges posed by competition and concentration the Business Revolution posed for itself.

Journalism itself was ripe to join this “Professional Revolution.” For a host of reasons—ranging from increasingly mass circulation to a new-found dependence on advertisers for revenue, from faith that science offered new ways to interpret the world to new forms of American party politics, and not least a new pool of status-conscious college-trained writers—the press sought a new sense of its “professional” identity.

Ink-stained veterans, not surprisingly, fought a rear-guard action, complaining about the changes, most importantly the new “professional” call for “objectivity” in place of party, regional and class partisanship. One reporter famously called objectivity “The Grocer’s Bill: facts, facts, nothing but the facts. So many peas at so much a peck; so much molasses at so much a quart.... It was a rigid system, rigidly enforced.” But the protests were to no avail; journalism was to be part of this new American class, and would subscribe to its ambitions, values and worldview—but with a then-distinctive understanding of “objectivity’s” progressive meaning, that linked reporting to an underlying intention to promote ever-possible democratic and scientific progress.

How New Narratives Shaped A Once-New Era

In terms of its journalistic impact, perhaps most important was that this loose new professional alliance—of which watchdog reporting was only one, albeit a critical, element—identified and elaborated three vital and controlling “narrative” structures to sustain its energies.

The first was historical: it celebrated a rich and inspiring symbolic past—an America of small towns, a frontier of endless opportunity and a rough democratic equality of condition and income that stood critically as the historical baseline against which to measure modern change. In this redemptive

national story, the Civil War—no more distant from the Progressive Era than the '60's is from ours—had sanctified and rededicated those earlier values, moreover, it had sanctified them in blood, Lincoln's death (and that of 600,000 fellow citizens) the price America paid for their defense. To abandon those values in the face of industrial challenge, went this new history, meant a betrayal of all that Americans counted as sacred.

Second, alongside a "new history," they described a new, and optimistic, understanding of "scientific rationality." This was to be a "new science"—freed from Social Darwinism—that not only relied on empirical fact-gathering to document social and economic conditions, but made remedy of the ills revealed by such investigation responsive to a newly conceived rationality subject to the same sorts of criteria. "Science" was understood radically: it was not simply a value-free analytic tool, but the explicit engine of social progress, a progress moreover that carried with it universal benefits for all classes and individuals, and that far from standing aloof or apart from America's earlier democratic ideals, would serve to enhance and strengthen them.

Thirdly, they conceived a new institutional instrument for this optimistic rationality: democratic government itself—but with a newly interpreted assessment of its role in national life. Shedding their inherited 18th Century notion of a small, and diffused, structure of governance meant to block the historic European abuses the Founding Fathers sought to keep out of America, the Progressives defined a new and much enlarged notion of government power.

To forestall those old abuses, it was to be a new kind of government, run by a new kind of leader. America, by 1900, of course could count plenty of experience with more traditional sorts of governance, of the kind still alive today throughout the world. But the all-too-common (and well-reported) scandal of Tammany-and-Tweed-style government "by crony and kickback" was now—argued Progressives—meant to give way to a government-by-expert,

the dispassionate civil servant who in both person and policy embodied the optimistic "public rationality" the age foresaw.

Journalist Walter Lippmann at the time famously captured this vision by calling the new "scientific thinking" the "twin brother" of democratic politics, while the president of the American Economic Association sweepingly proclaimed a future for academic social scientists that "lay not in theories, but in practice, not with students, but with statesmen, not in the education of individual citizens, but in leadership of an organized body politic."

Crucially, Big Business—the power and wealth it represented, and the massive dislocations it entailed—weren't to be overthrown in this new view (as Marxists and many others had already declared essential). Rather, it was to be checked and tamed (in much the same way Americans imagined they had tamed the continent's vast natural power and wealth), its vast energies consciously directed to assure economic benefit for all, and to preserve (indeed strengthen and expand) the fundamental democratic structure of citizen government that had been the goal of the American Revolution.

A new government of dedicated experts and social scientists would thus set out to assure that trusts and unfair competition would be outlawed and minimum wages, maximum hours and safe working conditions established. Child labor would be abolished, tenement housing conditions reformed and public health criteria set, while education—in both technical skills and civic virtues, aimed not least at the "new" Americans—would be vastly expanded.

In such a government, a professional civil service would replace party cronies and "scientific" bureaus and commissions established to constantly investigate and recommend regulation; the U.S. Senate would now be directly elected by citizens, and initiative procedures introduced to assure the public's direct right to setting public laws that timorous or corrupt legislators feared. Government revenues would draw from new income and inheritance taxes on the wealthiest and a corporation tax on the largest enterprises. The revenues

would not only sustain "scientific governance" but provide compensating expenditures either where private enterprise failed to operate well, or where the distributive consequences of such enterprise left too many behind.

How Shared 'Narratives' Created Watchdog Opportunities

For watchdog economic reporting, the point to underscore is that its success in the Progressive Era—the visible and measurable effect of the Tarbells, Sinclairs and Steffens—lay not in the heroically idealized role of the lone citizen-scribe standing up to power, but in the very embeddedness of such work in this larger worldview and its narratives.

It is this impact and its context, not simply the voice of such watchdog reporting, to which we must be attentive to understand how such reporting gains importance. Otherwise not least we're bound to forget that "watchdog economic reporting"—in the sense of a press that provides ongoing monitoring of power's abuses and inequities in the name of "the people," had already been well established long before Tarbell, Steffens and Sinclair.

The Credit Mobilier scandal, for example, of the 1870's; the railroad financiers' corrupt capture of innumerable state legislatures in the 1880's; the appalling condition of inner-city tenement life; the nauseating excesses of the Gilded Age—all had been carefully reported throughout the country and provoked great outcry.

Equally important, however, such earlier reporting had provided little effective cure for the ills it had identified. Stock market regulation 30 years after Credit Mobilier was still non-existent; public oversight of the railroads, even with the Sherman Act, the Interstate Commerce Commission and state-level regulatory boards, was still broadly ineffectual; the number of urban Americans in poverty in 1900 was growing, not declining; the wealth of the very wealthiest continued to multiply astronomically, virtually untouched by in-

come, inheritance, or corporation taxes.

Not until the Progressive Era were all the elements in place that, in a sense, could make useful purpose of watchdog reporting. Without interwoven narratives—plausible, persuasive stories that could be told, understood and acted upon—about the contemporary relevance of America's early ideals and values; without an interpretation of "scientific" rationality decoupled from Social Darwinism and bound to beneficent change; without a vision of government as an instrument that guaranteed that such change would be widely spread (and without much-feared revolutionary dislocation); and most important, without a deeply mobilized and committed element of the non-big-business élites, centered in the burgeoning "professional" world of the university, the ministry and the foundations (plus a deeply threatened small business community), could "watchdog economic journalism" expect to have significant impact.

The Lost Narrative Thread In the 1990's

Compare those conditions with America today. The country's founding revolution—and its ensuing debates about a core national purpose and ideals—are now twice as far away, while direct experience of the rural, agrarian, pre-capitalist economy that undergirded them is utterly unknown to the vast majority of us. The saga of revolutionary ancestors has lost immediacy and relevance, located somewhere vaguely distant in our limited awareness after Columbus and before the Civil War.

Most Americans nowadays have grown up knowing nothing but the urban-suburban world, with the defining presence of the corporation the source of our work and consumption (and, to some great degree, identity). Talk about returning to a rural life—as many still did in the Progressive Era, when half of America still lived on farms—and today you would draw nothing more than bemused smiles, inviting the idea perhaps that you were some

sort of nature poet (or something equally harmless).

Meanwhile public faith in science—in particular the canonical Progressive Era belief in a public "scientific rationality" linked to endless and uniformly uplifting improvement—today seems vaguely naive, even fraudulent. While most Americans have hardly become post-modernist "debunkers" of science, the effects of growing up under the shadow of atomic war, worrying endlessly about pollution, or experiencing first-hand the appropriation and subordination of science by other more powerful institutions, seems to have drained no small part of the once-simple popular enthusiasm for an independent "science" and objective "scientific rationality" as a certain solution to the ills of modern life.

Our faith in science is hardly shattered, but neither is it heroic or inspired. Instead, ours is often today a deeply troubled faith, racked by a foreboding about Mephistophelian trade-offs, wondering whether, for example, genetic manipulation or global climate change foretell a darker, not a brighter, human future. But if the popular prestige of science has suffered over the years, it pales in comparison to the precipitous decline of government's prestige in the last quarter century. When it comes to believing that somehow "government-by-expert" and "scientific" formulations of public policy can save us collectively from the "crony-racked" and interest-driven corruptions of politics—let alone the manifest errors of the "policy" process itself—one need only glance at the public mood over Washington's failure to reform the power of money in campaigns, or the sour consequences of America's latest national "policy debate" over universal health care, to dispel such facile hopes.

No opinion poll fails to underscore that collapse, whether Gallup, Roper, or the academic National Election Survey. Forty years ago, for example, 76 percent of Americans said they basically trusted government "to do the right thing" most or all of the time. By the mid-1990's, it was 22 percent. Perhaps even more alarming—and arguably underscoring a core modern prob-

lem when compared to the Progressive Era—is the erosion of confidence in government among the very professional class that once made up the muckrakers and reformers. Among today's professionals, distrust is higher than for the nation as a whole, at 80 percent; among those with college and post-graduate degrees, the distrust is even worse: 83 percent.

Right alongside collapse of public confidence in government, of course, has gone loss of respect for journalists—as well as the other professions which formed the core, and provided the activists, of Progressive Era reform. If the American public distrusts government nowadays, it accords even less respect to the profession that claims to monitor government in their name: polls routinely show that only one in five Americans claims to have confidence in, or respect for, journalists.

Can Watchdog Journalism Recover Democracy's Lost Narratives—and Thereby Its Own Effective Role?

Ferretting out the causes of this decline has become something of an academic and journalistic mini-industry in recent years, without firm conclusion. What is clear, though, is that our current era seems to have forsaken belief in the very narratives that a century ago, taken together, so inspired the avatars of modern watchdog journalism and the audience and era for which they wrote.

But should we then conclude that watchdog economic journalism will never again have the influence it once did? Are we, in a sense, instead of celebrating Ida Tarbell's cracking Standard Oil, doomed to watching Geraldo's cracking Al Capone's safe, or in place of seeing reporters challenge the financial power of the Morgans and Rockefellers, must we content ourselves with TV's news "I-teams" breathlessly revealing excessive ATM fees?

In fact, far from needing to embrace disillusionment or despair, there are at least three compelling reasons to argue against such a conclusion.

The first is to understand that, however successful, the work of Progressive Era reporters and reformers was never uncontested, never unchallenged, never undiluted. Those whose own power and wealth were threatened most certainly resisted, but so did competing visions of reform, not least among labor and socialist groups who viewed muckrakers and their supporters as hopelessly naive about American power. Gradually, too, the ranks of muckrakers and reformers divided, producing fissiparous debate and divisions that ended in the movement's effective collapse with World War I.

The second reason is that, for all the changes between then and now, a surprisingly resilient faith endures in the public's own vocal beliefs about America's existing—versus desirable—arrangements of power, wealth and influence. When *Time* magazine not long ago surveyed who Americans thought had “too much influence in Washington,” more than 80 percent of respondents named “large corporations” and “the wealthy,” while barely 5 percent named “the middle class” or “people like me.” When the National Election Survey similarly asked Americans whether “government is run by a few big interests or for the benefit of all,” 76 percent responded “big interests.”

Seventy-five to 80 percent of Americans encompasses more than what Washington élites (including Washington journalists) have grown fond of referring to as “tax-and-spend liberals.” Indeed, of necessity, it includes liberals, moderates and not a small number of conservatives from both Democratic and Republican parties, as well as America's largest political party—those who no longer vote at all.

One is reminded by such polls of G.K. Chesterton's remark, written before the Progressive Era, that “America remains democratic, not in the literal sense of being a democracy, but in the moral sense of consisting of democrats.” One is also reminded that—contrary to the contemporary élite view that Americans' cynicism about government is rooted in our historic distrust of its power—how rapidly that cynicism and

distrust have arisen. As recently as 35 years ago, three out of every four—versus one in four today—thought government was run for the benefit of all Americans. By even stronger percentages, Americans once trusted Washington to “do the right thing” all or most of the time.

The third argument against the immutability of the present is to recognize that the issues the Progressive Era faced were in many ways no different from our own—and that the arguments then against the chances of their successful, and democratic, resolution were in many ways no different either.

Despite all our concerns and talk about the inevitability of the “new global economy” and its “unprecedented” impact on American living standards, for example, economists such as Paul Krugman and Robert Lawrence constantly remind us that in 1910 as much of U.S. Gross National Product was in international trade as it is today. The technological reinvention of our economy likewise was at least as vast then: Henry Ford introduced the modern assembly line in 1910, electricity and the telephone were as novel as the computer and Internet today and brute managerial-led “efficiency” as a universal standard—for the public sector as well as the private—just as much the watchword of the era then.

Income and wealth inequality has grown over the last 25 years, yet we know not only that economic inequality grew more swiftly around the beginning of this century, but also that it was, in absolute terms, dramatically worse. Inner-city life before World War I (as innumerable studies showed) was appalling, crime rampant, drug use of national concern. Education was narrowly available (fewer than 5 percent graduated from college; less than 20 percent from high school), immigrants were feared.

What Is to Be Done?

There are in such situations, of course, a number of practical measures that might be taken to strengthen modern watchdog eco-

omic reporting. Among the more elemental are:

1. Improving journalistic education: A recent study of America's journalism schools complains that the schools have grown too “academic,” with classes too often focused on abstracted “mass communications theory” rather than the practical elements of professional training—including watchdog reporting. Working journalists themselves, meanwhile, are the first to lament their own lack of formal training in “economics.”

But even “model” training programs—such as Columbia's mid-career Bagehot Fellowships—seem to lack a well-developed sense of “watchdog” responsibilities as a crucial form of economics reporting. Their textbook, for example, is densely concerned with reading balance sheets, distinguishing between cash and accrual accounting techniques and uses of sources such as the Securities Exchange Commission—certainly all useful. On academic economics, however, it lacks a sophisticated and up-to-date understanding of changes (it talks of Samuelson and Friedman as “contemporary” rather than as giants a generation ago).

Perhaps more importantly, it barely considers the “muckraker” legacy or the context that made it influential—surely elemental to enlivening modern watchdog reporting.

Here one could easily imagine a new course design—applicable both to new and mid-career programs—that integrates not just business and economic theory, but, important for journalists, the tensions inherent in incorporating both into fundamental democratic political concerns. Such a course could in turn easily use, for example, the history of previous struggles as case studies to introduce contemporary problems—and as antidote against the ever-present tendency to imagine the present as uniquely new.

2. Rewarding and recognizing watchdog journalism: In a profession nowadays awash in awards, this perhaps gilds a tarnished lily. But what if the Nieman Foundation or some other organization set out explicitly to recognize outstanding examples of modern watchdog reporting? What effect would a

Tarbell or Steffens award have on the profession? Would it be greeted as hopelessly out of step with the times, or serve to force the times to confront its own shortcomings? When the award was given, would the presenter only honor the journalist-recipient—or use the occasion to underscore the social and political context in which the original muckrakers worked, and remind today's reporters of what remains to be done?

3. Persuading editors and reporters of watchdog journalism's importance—and the complexity of its role: Over the last few years, "civic journalism" has arisen to argue that the low public respect, the internally reflected disillusionment, and sense of irrelevance that many journalists experience today can be solved by a new "attentiveness" to "the public's concerns." This isn't the place to assess its merits and liabilities, so much as to reflect on the divided response "civic journalism" has evoked.

On the one hand, a sizeable minority of print and broadcast outlets have embraced the experiment—at newspapers in Charlotte and Wichita and other medium-sized cities, at public broadcasting outlets in dozens of cities, to name a few. Critics have arisen as well, warning of the loss of journalistic autonomy and independent judgment, fearful that "civic journalism" is at best "goo-goo" reformism, at worst a new poll- and marketing-driven imperative that will accelerate the worst of the "news you can use" personalism already present in much of journalism.

Strengthening watchdog economic reporting, in a sense, requires acknowledging why civic journalism has arisen, but also recognizing why in its present form—sharply focused on electoral political coverage—its implications are still tangential (though important) to watchdog economic concerns. It's at that very tangent that editors and reporters might find rich new terrain to recover the public's trust—and give new energies to watchdog reporting.

Should Watchdog Reporting Ask a Different Question?

What if those committed to watchdog economic reporting took not as their question "Why isn't there more good watchdog reporting," but rather "Why, given substantial evidence of such reporting—and a well-documented public awareness of its concerns and conclusions—hasn't more in American life changed in response to what we know?"

Here watchdog reporting would find itself engaging the same issues that engaged the muckrakers: if our own period has been an age transfixed by the power of "The Market," and conviction that "The Government" is corrupt or ineffectual, so too were the years leading up to—and including—the Progressive Era.

But watchdog reporting would find itself facing a "missing link" that wasn't the same problem for the Progressive Era.

The missing link involves solving the deeper puzzle of the public itself. If, in recent years, dozens (if not hundreds or thousands) of watchdog articles and series have minutely explored the human face as well as the economic impact of global competition, corporate downsizing, growing income and wealth inequality, an uncertain retirement security, and diminished hope for the future of the next generations, how many journalists have sought to ask Americans directly: What is inevitable about all this? What must change? What about American economic and political life must be different for you to recover trust in our institutions and leaders?

In other words, might it be time for watchdog economic reporting's advocates to expand some of its traditional focus from the familiar terrain of flawed institutions and systems to investigating the audience for such reporting—and thereby beginning to search for the new "narratives" that will modify or replace the tattered inheritance with which we now live?

Rather than reporting again on a

quarter-century of wage stagnation for the average worker, for example, would watchdog reporting better serve all of us by asking Americans what they'd consider a reasonable or fair wage and benefit structure? What would we learn if we asked Americans what—in their opinion—blocks achievement of such a structure, and what would have to change for it to be achieved?

If four out of five Americans consider corporate CEO's over-compensated, what do they think is the alternative? If European and Japanese executives are compensated at much lower levels, are these goals—or does America's uniqueness justify something extra? If so, what?

If Americans today tell pollsters they're working too hard, spending too many hours to sustain the American Dream compared to a generation ago, or worry constantly about their health and retirement benefits, what kinds of hours would make sense to them, what sorts and features of benefits do they need to give themselves real security?

Importantly, one could learn from asking members of the professional class about their doubts not only about government, but also about their own fellow professionals. A century ago, it was professionals who formed the vanguard of Progressive Reform, supplied its research, drafted its programs, investigated and informed the nation. Is it simply that the class itself has grown so large, so entrenched and relatively powerful in its own right—whether in the public or private sphere—that reforms no longer make up a part of its common agenda, or is something else at play?

Note here that such a focus doesn't require reporters or editors to give up their commitment to objectivity, to shift to a value-laden reporting that presses one party's or one ideology's hidden agenda. What it requires is a shift in focus—from the documentation of what troubles Americans, to asking them to weigh solutions, their benefits as well as their costs. It is thereby, arguably, that journalists (and others) can begin to construct new narratives that will look once again at the problem of how to construct a viable American history, a vision of an American future, and a

Response: Demystify the Subject

BY PAUL SOLMAN

debate over the instruments that will lead us forward that once so occupied the muckrakers and their generation.

If modern-day watchdog economic reporting seems flawed, it is in the too-simple assumption—albeit an ancient one—that alone “the truth will set us free.” Truth-telling, especially when done by lone reporters or small teams working to document the abuses of power and privilege, without understanding or even reflection on what the audience already knows, fears, doubts, or dreams possible, utterly misses the lessons of the past.

The success of the Progressive Era wasn't built simply on truthfully exposing corruption and abuse, unfairness and inequality, but on communicating interconnected “narratives” to an American public that reconnected journalist and audience alike to redemptive values rooted in our history, that posited a vision of an equitable and generous public life, that argued for the use of collective democratic power and for the constraint of private privilege and power that opposed the search for a common good.

Intervening decades have frayed Americans' confidence in the ability of a “rational public science” to identify such a good, but not in the idea of a common good itself. Trust in government as the perfect instrument of such “rational science” has suffered enormously in the last quarter century—yet its past high regard argues against the immutability of the current era's attitudes.

Max Weber was among the very first to understand the powerful limiting, as well as creative and liberating, forces of the modern age. Yet understanding in Weber never gave way simply to acceptance or resignation. Perhaps we ought again listen to Weber, as he rebuked colleagues for their own pessimism a century ago:

We shall not succeed in banishing that which besets us—the sorrow of being born too late for a great political era—unless we understand how to become the forerunners of a greater one.

Then we might begin once again to do the real work of reporting for—and thereby nurturing—a democratic society. ■

Once upon a time I thought, along with Richard Parker, that “watchdog” journalism equaled “muckraking,” which would lead to “making America better.” Indeed, when Richard recruited me to help him with MotherJones magazine in the mid-'70's, it was because we shared an “alternative” notion of journalism: anti-war, anti-authoritarian, anti-establishment. In terms of watching the economy, we would serve the interests of democracy by dogging the footsteps of those who ran it—the rich and powerful. Thus would we prevent them from abusing their position to the detriment of the common weal.

To the extent that we, and those like us, were at all successful, it was probably because of what Richard now calls “narrative frames.” That is, our readers, like those of the Muckraking Era, shared a set of stories about the crises of the culture and how they could be resolved: in our case, about “imperialist” wars like Vietnam, about racial and gender inequality, about the abuses of corporate capitalism, large and small. And, of course, about the kinds of reforms necessary to make America better. Muckraking was a kind of crusade: in exposing the dirt, we were well on our way to cleaning things up (though I don't remember having Ida Tarbell or Lincoln Steffens in mind).

In the quarter century since, the frames have grown fuzzier. The reasons are various, but one effect seems clear: crusading journalism has less impact these days. In Richard's terms, perhaps: liberating the Holy Land is a harder story to sell. Or, to put it another way, the more you rake, the more muck you seem to expose.

That's not to say the project has been abandoned. As Richard points out, there's no obvious shortage of well-versed watchdogs, in the traditional sense, keeping an eye on, and sometimes raking over, the world of busi-

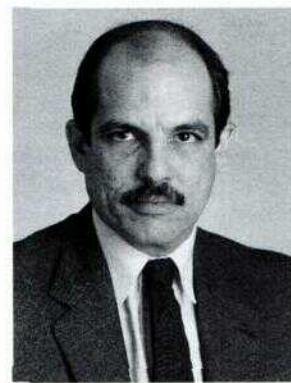
ness and economics. In what we used to call the “straight” press, these topics seem to receive more attention than ever. On the alternative front, MotherJones persists and thrives; so, for that matter, does The Nation.

But if, as Richard suggests, the goal of a journalist is to nurture democracy by improving life in America (instead of, say, simply to make a decent living doing really cool work), what's a watchdog to do these days?

Richard's tentative answer is to try to discover “new narratives” by asking Americans what they consider fair, what changes they'd like to see, “what sorts and features of benefits...they need to give themselves real security.”

I've asked an awful lot of Americans questions of that kind in the last 20-plus years. Their answers are best summarized by what a liberal congressman once told me, when asked how it felt to represent The People: “The People are no bargain. They want everything, but they don't want to pay for it.”

One of Richard's proposed questions is: “If four out of five Americans consider corporate CEO's overcompensated, what do they think is the alternative?” Well, how do you think four out of five Americans would respond? My own guess: “CEO's should make less—



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way less.” (The 20 percent would probably say CEO’s earn their fair market value—the same 20 percent, I’d imagine, who’ve made almost all the economic gains since 1973; they might even be the same 20 percent whose interest spurs the vast media commitment to stock market and other investment news.)

Let me not be cynical here. Richard isn’t plugging for a poll or survey, with one-sentence (much less yes-or-no) answers. He wants to strike up a dialogue, I infer; create new narrative frames by getting a conversation started; avoid the dead-end of raking muck for muck’s sake. *Maybe it’s a good idea.* You can’t change the world if you don’t learn how it really works. Since the ways of business and economics are, like everything else, best learned by doing, it might make sense to induce The People to do something: to grapple with the *cost/benefit tradeoffs of everyday life*. Ask them tough questions. In responding, they’ll be learning by doing. And providing the watchdog journalist with the threads of new stories (“narratives”).

My own approach is a bit different, however. With Richard, I continue to think a journalist’s job has something to do with bolstering democracy. But rather than asking basic business and economic questions of the audience, I ask them on behalf of the audience.

The purpose is to demystify—“Toto Journalism,” if you want to keep the canine metaphor alive. Trying, that is, to be the watchdog who pulls the curtain on the Glorious Oz, as opposed to the pit bull intent on tearing the wizard limb from limb. (Or interviewing the Munchkins on how they think they might try to become a little taller.)

No, that’s the wrong tone to take. I don’t mean to disparage pit bulls (muckrakers) or those who might go Richard’s painstaking dialogue route. I admire anyone who could do such things. It’s just that in a world of so much information, so little understanding, I feel getting back to basics is a job well worth doing. In terms of democracy, the idea is to empower the people by teaching them. In the process, new narratives might well emerge. ■

Response: What About Corporate Crime?

BY MORTON MINTZ

Richard Parker’s paper is an insightful, scholarly and valuable overview. But his analysis of contemporary watchdog economics journalism and his recommendations trouble this long-time reporter.

Consider these quotes: “It seems malign” to insist “that we suffer from too little information about economics and business conduct.” “[M]ight it be time for watchdog economic reporting’s advocates to expand some of its traditional focus...to investigating the audience for such reporting?” If watchdog reporting is to nurture a democratic society, there must be “a shift in [its] focus—from the documentation of what troubles Americans, to asking them to weigh solutions....”

These statements seem to me to boil down to this: Watchdog economics reporting is too confined in scope and should embrace some kind of sophisticated polling and politicking.

The principal mainstream media corporations, it must always be remembered, are themselves big business, are *financially dependent upon it, and have extremely close ties to it*. Their outside directors come overwhelmingly from big business (including law and accounting firms); none I know of is an independent professional journalist, a consumer advocate or a rank-and-file citizen. *Always allowing for courageous exceptions, they shortchange the citizenry—the supposed sovereign—by providing too much establishment and too little nonestablishment reporting and commentary on either economics or business conduct.*

Tobacco aside, news coverage of corporate crime and misconduct is generally wafer-thin. Editorials and columns rarely address it. In the papers I read—The Washington Post, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal—I

can’t recall a single editorial holding a corporate executive personally accountable for death-dealing or environment-destroying misbehavior, or a Journal editorial acknowledging that it exists. Many journalists shun this area.

Their perception of it as a career-derailer was fortified in March 1997, when The San Francisco Examiner killed a Stephanie Salter column critical of Nike, a co-sponsor of the paper’s promotional “Bay to Breakers” race, and again in February, when CBS news executives publicly savaged “48 Hours” reporter Roberta Baskin for criticizing CBS’s flackery for the same athletic-goods maker, a sponsor of CBS’s Winter Olympics coverage.

Is it “malign” to insist that Americans “suffer from too little information about economics”?

When the momentous NAFTA and GATT bills were pending in Congress, the news coverage and commentary in the big four newspapers—The Times, Post, Journal and Los Angeles Times—all tilted heavily toward approval. In the case of the GATT treaty, none of those papers, unlike The Boston Globe, undertook independent investigations; meanwhile, they nearly or totally ignored numerous other newsworthy developments, including:

- A seven-day Senate hearing held in October and November 1994—while other news from Capitol Hill was sparse because Congress was out of session.

- Letters to President Clinton from the attorneys general of 30 states, who warned that secret World Trade Organization tribunals would erode the states’s sovereignty, and from leaders of 51 media organizations (!), who protested the secrecy and inaccessibility of WTO deliberations as “an affront to the democratic traditions of this nation.”

For eight years, President Reagan’s Task Force on Deregulation initiated severe cutbacks of federal regulation against hazards in the marketplace and

workplace. Task Force chairman George Bush often boasted of its achievements. Yet up to the moment of his election as President in 1988, no major news organization investigated the pluses and minuses. Public Citizen, founded by Ralph Nader, did, and a few weeks before election day released a 52-page report at a news conference. The report said in part: At least 40,000 deaths and one million injuries can be traced to the [Reagan-Bush] Administration's delay in requiring air bags and automatic safety belts in cars. Hundreds of thousands of infants were fed nutritionally deficient infant formula while Bush and the Office of Management and Budget delayed rules requiring testing of infant formula.

No reporter from The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal or The Washington Post attended the news conference; none of these papers carried a story about it.

The savings and loan debacle occurred during the Bush-led war on regulation. Yet during the eight years of his Presidency the press did not ask him a glaringly obvious question: Did deregulation contribute to the S&L disaster?

Meanwhile, the mainstream media—The Journal's editorial and op-ed pages, in particular—devoted immense attention to the-market-is-God denouncers of regulation; but they made negligible efforts to recall the horrors that had brought us regulation, particularly of food and drugs, in the first place, or to explain that regulation, while always deficient and needing press monitoring, may have redemptive virtues.

Reporters who have the opportunities to do so seem almost never to ask Federal candidates and government leaders countless obvious economics-related questions that bear heavily on people's lives. For examples, should Congress:

- Cap loans eligible for mortgage-interest deductions, bearing in mind that a \$300,000 loan cap would save \$34.8 billion 1996 through 2000 (the Congressional Budget Office's estimate) and curb subsidies of the wealthy by, say, renters who can't afford to buy a home?
- Repeal the 1872 law enabling min-

ing companies to buy public lands for \$2.50 to \$5 an acre, extract minerals worth billions of dollars, and pay nothing to the owners—the American people?

- Require private broadcasters profiting from use of the public's airwaves to give free air time to Federal candidates? (Media lobbies fiercely oppose this.)

Are you concerned by:

- More unequal income distribution, and a wider gap between the pay of chief executive officers and workers, in the United States than in any other advanced country?
- The 13 percent increase in the share of income going to the top-fifth of Americans, and the 22 percent decrease in the share going to the bottom fifth, between 1979 and 1996? (A few media tycoons are billionaires.)

And:

- In 1994 the Food and Drug Administration's proposed tough teen smoking regulations that 124 House Republicans and Democrats protested. Were they influenced by tobacco-industry campaign contributions that, on average, were 69 times larger than those the industry made to the 86 Representatives who pledged to support the regulations?

Parker implies that the press covers business conduct adequately.

Well, we all know that a responsible press has a solemn obligation to monitor governance by all institutions empowered to determine whether we live or die, whether we are harmed or unharmed, whether the environment is damaged. This thesis was dramatically verified in an exchange of letters about 70 years ago by two ultimate insiders, Alfred P. Sloan Jr., President of General Motors, and Lamont duPont, President of E.I. duPont de Nemours.

At the time, Fords had had safety-glass windshields; Chevrolet windshields were flat glass, which shatters on impact into slashing, even lethal shards. For sound business reasons—his company made pyralin, the key component of safety glass—Lamont duPont urged Sloan to use safety glass in Chevrolets; Sloan refused, also for

sound business reasons.

"Accidents or no accidents, my concern in this problem is a matter of profit and loss," Sloan wrote duPont. Ford's use of safety glass is "no reason why we should do so," he continued. "I am trying to protect the interest of the stockholders of General Motors and the corporation's operating position—it is not my responsibility to sell safety glass.... You can say, perhaps, that I am selfish, but business is selfish. We are not a charitable institution—we are trying to make a profit for our stockholders."

The safety-glass case illustrates how a corporation governs directly by making a needlessly dangerous product or operating a needlessly hazardous workplace. Think of the Ford Pintos and Chevrolet Blazer pickups that became rolling human incinerators when their cosmetically shielded fuel tanks were rammed; of A.H. Robins Co.'s defective Dalkon Shield IUD, which rendered tens if not hundreds of thousands of women sterile; of Bhopal, India, where a gas leak from a Union Carbide plant left 2,000 to 5,000 people dead, at least 30,000 to 40,000 seriously hurt and up to 200,000 harmed. But, as do other nongovernment institutions of governance, a corporation also governs indirectly by investing in politicians so as to govern the government.

In this regard, a recent Associated Press story should have been, but certainly wasn't, front-paged everywhere. The Atlantic Richfield oil company, which has continuing large stakes in all sorts of legislation, paid for a week-long trip to England for a four-person entourage led by the Speaker of the House. The bill included \$20,268 for air and ground transportation for Newt and Mrs. Gingrich, \$12,225 for the couple's five days at Claridge's in London and \$947 for meals at the hotel. For two aides the transportation came to \$3,300 and hotel rooms to \$5,000.

Who doubts that Atlantic Richfield expects to, and likely will, reap enormous taxpayer-funded dividends from its investment of approximately \$42,000?

Parker asks:

"[M]ight it be time for watchdog eco-

conomic reporting...to investigat[e] the audience for such reporting...?"

No. If such a time never comes it will be fine with me.

Parker also asks:

"Might it be time...to move from documenting 'what troubles Americans, to asking them to weigh solutions...?"

No. The traditional focus is as correct today as ever, if not more so, partly because of the heightened perils of advanced technology, such as nuclear power. It's encouraging that The New York Times has in recent years vigorously implemented the "traditional focus" on corporate misconduct, as demonstrated by its aggressive, sustained coverage of massive fraud by the world's largest hospital company, Columbia/HCA Healthcare Corp. But it's dismaying that The Washington Post has for years headed in the opposite direction. One need only note that it routinely shrinks news of grave corporate misconduct and buries it in business section "Digest" items. Examples:

- The agreement of Laboratory Corp. of America to pay \$187 million in civil and criminal penalties to settle charges that it billed Medicare and other Federal programs for unnecessary blood tests.

- The \$115 million fine imposed on duPont for concealing evidence in a Federal trial involving one of its pesticides. DuPont "cheated deliberately, consciously and with purpose," the judge said. The criminal conviction of three C.R. Bard Inc. executives for hiding information about the use of faulty catheters in coronary surgery.

Would Parker argue that the "audience" is not interested in such news?

The shift in focus Parker proposes, if justifiable at all, might be warranted when William Allen White's dream—"I suppose in the end newspapers cannot be free, absolutely free in the highest and best sense, until the whole social and economic structure of American life is open to the free interplay of democratic process"—becomes reality.

Don't hold your breath. ■

Response: Help Is Available

BY EILEEN SHANAHAN

I start with a point from Richard Parker's discussion of needed improvements in journalism education and apply it more broadly.

Parker argues that "fundamental democratic political concerns" should provide the context in which business and economics are taught to journalism students and fellows. I would say that those concerns are also the exact context in which journalism itself needs to put the actions of businesses and business leaders.

It is no stretch to hold that what business does, combined with what its leaders advocate and work for in the political arena, affects nearly every aspect of American society. It is also true that business actions and advocacy intersect, at many points, with government. It is precisely that intersection of business and government that I want to focus on as a primary task for watchdog journalism. I will use a few specific examples and hope they will stimulate ideas about others.

Some of my examples would lead to stories that fit the category of traditional investigative journalism; others would not. Most would require reporting at the state or local level. All need to be carried in local newspapers and on local broadcast outlets for that is where people get most of their news.

On to the examples.

Health

Much has been written, and more will be, about cost-cutting HMO's that are keeping doctors from giving patients all the care the doctors think they need. Good. That controversy needs the ongoing coverage it is getting.

But this issue may be diverting journalists from pursuing an older, seamier and now probably a more pervasive kind of wrongdoing involving the taxpayers' money and medical care. The wrong is fraudulent billing of Medicare

and Medicaid by health care providers. A federal charge is pending right now against the hospital colossus Columbia-HCA, accusing it of basing its bills to Medicare on systematically deceptive record-keeping.

At the state level, where Medicaid is administered, pursuit of health care rip-offs by the authorities is not by any means universally what it should be (even though Medicaid is the largest or next-to-largest budget item almost everywhere.) Every state government does have a Medicaid fraud unit, and some are aggressive. But some do not even have computers set up to spot prepos-



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terous bills from scammers like the doctor who is asking payment for treating 35 patients every day—a factual example. Nor are they in any position to uncover billings that are merely suspicious, like a sudden three-fold rise in purchases of a particular piece of equipment for use by patients, or an explosive increase in the reported incidence of a particularly hard-to-treat illness. Journalists have, in fact, uncovered abuses of this kind, as far back as the 1970's. But they seem to be paying less attention now.

Chances are that committed public servants could be found in state health departments and fraud units or the attorney general's office who would welcome inquiries from a reporter. What are we waiting for?

Education

A number of state courts have, by now, held that use of the property tax to fund public education violates the state constitution because it results in less money, per child, being spent on inner city and rural schools. It has fallen to state government to make the necessary adjustments, which obviously means that one state tax or another usually must be increased. Recently, a few states have begun equalizing school spending without any court order, in the belief that their economic future depends on a good education for all future participants in its workforce or simply out of a compelling sense of what's right.

This is an issue that is likely to divide the business community everywhere it arises—a phenomenon, not uncommon in the field of public policy, but one that our coverage hardly ever even suggests. Some business executives will be in the forefront of those arguing for voluntary equalization, while others will “just say no” to any legislation that might require a tax increase (continuing, all the while, to complain about the quality of the new entrants into the workforce.) What happens, and why, when business leaders don't agree on a major public policy issue? That's a good story that isn't being covered.

Roads and Highways

Which ones to fund, and under what guiding philosophy (other than political horse-trading) has long been a divisive political issue at every level of government. But where the roads and highways will go, in the future, is a matter of increasingly serious concern to some heavy thinkers who worry about the growth of economic inequality in our society. Business executives, wishing to locate where they expect to find the most-qualified workers and the least threat from crime (among other ills) are pushing hard, in many places, for freeways that bypass the cities and the older suburbs, as well, on their way out into the exurbs. The result: even fewer jobs and more poverty and social pathology not just in the center cities but increasingly, in the inner suburbs, too. Is this being discussed and debated anywhere in the news media?

Campaign Finance

The most important, largely uncovered, issue here is not who is contributing, nor whether the contributions themselves are legal, but what the contributors appear to have gotten in exchange for their money. With elections to Congress coming up later this year, it's an ideal time for journalists to start examining the votes their Representatives and Senators have cast and determining whether they seem to match up with the interests of those who gave to their campaigns the last time they ran or so far this year. Of course, a mere match is not proof of influence, but are there matches that are inconsistent with what the politician says he or she stands for? (It should go without saying that the matchup would include not just business donors, but all donors.)

The task of putting this material together can be tedious, but there is help available, some of it comprehensive, reliable and free, from such groups as the Washington-based Center for Responsive Politics, which has up-to-date filings on line at www.crp.org.

Welfare Reform

Many businesses are trying to facilitate welfare mothers' transition to work, with on-the-job “coaches,” on-site or near-site child care, transportation assistance and other help. A look at what's

working and what isn't could be timely. A caveat: It may be the best equipped welfare moms who've gotten the jobs. Is anybody hiring the “hard core?” (State figures on the percentage of the welfare caseload in the center city today, compared with the pre-reform era, will suggest who's getting the jobs. Wisconsin's has gone from 37 to 50.) A story that should be revisited every so often. A good Website: www.welfareinfo.org.

What, specifically, might be done—other than suggesting un- or under-covered stories—to foster watchdog journalism in the area of business and the economy? A worthy undertaking would be a systematic effort to acquaint more reporters “out there” (as Washington locates them) with the many excellent Washington-based sources (like CRP) for data, research and analysis.

Much of the Washington press corps ignores these sources, as they chase after each day's hot story in packs. And too few reporters elsewhere seem to know about the good researchers and think tanks with their voluminous publications and staff who really want to help reporters and know how to. Among the best for economic policy and politics are the American Enterprise Institute, whose resident scholars are conservative to moderately conservative; the Brookings Institution, liberal to moderately liberal; the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, liberal; the Heritage Foundation, conservative, and the Urban Institute, moderately liberal.

Beyond all that, what would be most useful is the creation of some sort of system for information exchange among journalists in different places about actual stories they've done and even potential stories, such as those I've outlined. It could be remarkably effective, though not easy to launch, if a standing feature, covering just such material, could be incorporated into Editor and Publisher, the trade weekly of the daily newspaper business, and Broadcasting Magazine, which reaches the top executives in that field. They are the people who will have to decide whether to spend money on watchdog projects. ■



[132]

August 31, 1872

"What Are You Going To Do About It,"
If "Old Honesty" Lets Him Loose Again?"

THOMAS NAST, 1872

State and Local Governments

The second paper on watchdog journalism concerns state and local governments. As Washington has reduced its control of important functions, such as welfare, state and local governments have increased their powers, and, as a result, their impact on people's lives, thus placing a greater burden on journalists to monitor their performance.

For State and Local Government, The Key Is Sufficient Resources

BY JOYCE PURNICK

My assignment: examine the state of “aggressive journalism” in state and local government—whether we do enough of it, whether we are hard-nosed enough, whether we do what we do well enough. Whether solid, watchdog journalism is important.

I can answer the last question with an unqualified yes, it is very important. After that, I run into trouble.

I know how I think The New York Times’s Metro section is doing, because as its editor, I see it every day and work with its reporters and editors every day. I can speak with somewhat less knowledge about the other dailies and weeklies in my town. But after that, my insights into papers I don’t see every day could only be sketchy and anecdotal.

So rather than give readers inevitably facile observations, let me instead focus on why tough reporting is so tough to do, and why, therefore, I think that no newspaper—I’ll steer clear of television—can comfortably say it does enough “aggressive” reporting, which falls into two broad categories.

One category is investigative reporting—the vigorous pursuit of wrongdoing and institutional failures, ranging from police corruption to dysfunctional schools. The other category is aggressive reporting of the daily sort, stories answering the “why” of a story, putting politicians, policies and events into smart perspective.

I’d argue that both kinds of reporting are difficult to pull off consistently for a few reasons, starting with this: serious newspapers want to do it all and should do it all. Given the demands of daily local coverage, tough, probing journalism does not come first. It either comes last, or appears erratically, or not at all.

The main reason is, simply, limited resources. Most newspapers don’t have the money to employ the number of reporters they need to do it all. Or at least they don’t have the resources to do enough of it and that is even more true of local news because the demands on local coverage are greater.

Right or wrong, the conventions of journalism are such that our top priority has to be covering the news—what happened today. That’s true even if what happened today was a politician’s self-serving news conference that ultimately becomes a 150-word brief inside the paper. And if you’re covering your town, city and state, you cover the small, incremental stories as well as the big ones. The further away you get from your subject, the more latitude you have. Foreign reporters have the most leeway, unless they’re covering wars or crises.

Every day, local reporting requires that we cover crime. Education. The deaths of police officers. Natural, or near-natural disasters (like a water main erupting on Fifth Avenue). We have to keep up with competition, hopefully lead the pack, and match any story we miss.

Even a cursory reading of local newspapers anywhere in the country will demonstrate that on a given day local reporters are doing all of that and working on a number of news features and columns, to break up the crime and politics.

That leaves too few reporters available to conduct time-consuming and difficult investigations or, simply, to do some analytical writing. While the demands on foreign, national and business reporting are different, all departments in any serious newspaper

have to cover so many bases that doing in-depth reporting is not likely to lead the list of priorities. It’s just more so when it comes to local and state reporting.

We all watch our governors, legislators and mayors very closely. Mayors and governors have a captive press corps in press rooms usually located right in city hall or the statehouse. These elected officials know they can make news by churning out a press release or delivering a speech or making a provocative remark.



Joyce Purnick has been The Times’s Metropolitan Editor since June 1997. She is the first woman to head the paper’s largest news department. Since joining the paper in 1979, she has covered the state government in Albany, the New York City school system and New York’s City Hall, where she became the first woman to head The Times bureau. From 1989 to 1994 she wrote editorials. Purnick then returned to the news department to write the twice-weekly “Metro Matters” column. She has won numerous awards.

They can easily manipulate us with access. So they do. Even if they fail to get the coverage they want, reporters assigned to them have to listen to their every utterance, if only protectively. That takes time.

When I was covering New York City's government during Ed Koch's mayoral tenure, I counted his press conferences and interviews on one typical day: seven. And the city hall press corps had to cover every last one of those that were open to coverage, just in case. Once, when I missed a story because I didn't cover a Koch speech that had been billed as routine, I teased him about his getting a surgical implant so reporters would be able to plug in their tape recorders and have an audio record of everything he said, 24 hours a day.

The point is, we have to cover our elected officials diligently, exhaustively, and I don't argue with that. We should.

But since we dutifully keep track of what our mayors and governors and aldermen and council members say and do, we have an equal obligation to put their pronouncements and policies into perspective. We are not doing our jobs unless we point out the flaws, the hyperbole, how a promise compares to the last promise on the same subject, its connection to a campaign contributor.

We do not do so consistently enough, and it is even more important today than it used to be because of television, radio and the emerging influence of the Web, which reports so-called news instantaneously, tempting even serious newspapers to violate rules and print unsubstantiated or poorly substantiated "facts."

The news role of the Internet is still in a nascent state; I don't think public officials have quite figured out how to game the Web. Not so when it comes to television and radio: media savvy politicians have learned how to avoid the filter of the print press by talking directly to the electronic audience. They know their media market well, they know they are considered a "get"—a sought-after guest—by the local cable channel or news affiliate. They arrange for frequent interviews with news anchors who, because they are generalists, cannot possibly question them thor-

Misappropriation of Public Resource

Most of the seasoned journalists, that is, people who began in the 80's or were studying in the 80's...feel very uncomfortable about what's happening. And they do not speak because they have mortgages, they need to feed families, they want to keep working in the business. But everywhere across the country you meet people who are bailing out and have left. And they tell extraordinary stories of hyper commercialism. Again, this concept that you see repeated all over the press by these anchor people that "oh well, you know, it's all about money, it's all about ratings and we have to follow the ratings." That is not what it's all about. This whole concept that only the news that pays the biggest money or scores the biggest ratings...is a total



departure from the concepts under which the networks and the affiliated stations were allowed to broadcast. It represents an absolutely bald-faced misappropriation of the public resource.—Arthur Kent, author of *Risk and Redemption: Surviving the Network News Wars* and television journalist, at a Nieman Fellows seminar December 1, 1997.

oughly, and the television stations are only too willing to accommodate.

So pursuing aggressive journalism in the local press is critical, because if we don't do it, it isn't likely to get done. And for one other reason: the changing roles of government.

Local and state governments are more powerful than ever. Washington has "reinvented" government largely by shifting responsibility to state and local governments. Authority over spending—especially on social programs and education—has devolved from the center, from Washington to localities.

That makes our job as watchdogs even more critical than it used to be. The possibilities for corruption, waste, or simply bad decisions that can hurt the average citizen, are less likely to emanate from some distant bureaucracy in Washington than from around the corner. And given the limits of electronic and Internet journalism, if newspapers do not do substantive local reporting, for the most part it won't get done.

Doing that kind of critical follow-up reporting takes resources—good reporters and more reporters than most of us have. More often than not, the

reporter who wrote the original piece is covering the next deadline news development, unable to find the time to do the digging.

In-depth reporting also takes the will to challenge political authority. This sounds elementary, but I think that more than we realize, journalists are too quick to let elected newsmakers—elected officials in particular—set the agenda. Too rarely do we question the basic premise of the speech or pronouncement or policy.

Until very recently, for instance, it has been almost impossible to read intelligent, unbiased analyses of the so-called "drug war." We write story upon story about drug programs and drug related crimes. We quote political leaders and police officers about cocaine busts and how they impact the war. Too frequently, reporters are content to uncritically "cover" drug busts—publicity stunts staged by the police.

But how often do we—not columnists or conservative polemicists, but news reporters—write about the "war" itself, and whether it is being won or even making progress?

That's harder to do because stories like that question the conventional

political wisdom and rhetoric and that makes many of us uncomfortable. Traditionally, journalists are not supposed to set agendas; nobody elected us. True. But how narrowly do you define the observer's role?

Not long ago, we defined it very narrowly. I remember proposing to an editor in the early 1980's that we write about a Senate candidate's television ads because they were filled with provable errors and half-truths. I'll never forget the editor's answer: "That's for his opponent to do, not us."

Many reporters and editors would have agreed with him at the time and the culture, even at newspapers, changes slowly. Despite the Pentagon papers and Watergate, many journalists were, and some still are, wary of getting ahead of the story.

Probably most of us recognize now that if we are too passive we fail at our central role: informing the public as comprehensively as we can. Assessing political ads, for instance, is a routine part of political coverage these days. And stories that analyze government policies are hardly rare.

This January, for instance, after an undercover officer was killed in a gun battle with drug dealers in New York, *The Times* wrote a strong piece about undercover drug buys, citing how dangerous they have become now that officers are being lured indoors by drug dealers; in the past, officers conducted buy-and-bust operations outdoors. The piece even quoted police experts questioning the value of the undercover buys in waging what one called "the unwinnable" war on drugs.

It is interesting, though, that in the wake of this officer's death, the city's tabloids did not question the strategy. They were content to devote screaming headlines to the popular theme set by the mayor and governor: eliminating parole for violent felons, since the suspect in the officer's shooting was on parole (though he would have been free anyway, since at the time of the shooting, he would have served his full sentence).

I don't cite this example for competitive reasons, but because it provides a

TV Journalists Should Take Responsibility

Comments from two participants of the November 6, 1997, forum of the Committee of Concerned Journalists, held in Chicago



PHOTO BY BRIAN BAIH

We found [in a content analysis of 10 local TV markets] that almost 30 percent of the time spent on

local TV news was devoted to crime and court stories. Ten percent was devoted to reporting calamities and natural disasters. Government and politics accounted for little more than 15 percent. Two critical areas were almost nonexistent. Education stories totaled a mere 2 percent. Race relations totaled 1.2 percent.

Consultants tell us we should report stories the viewers care about... How can they care if they don't know about it? They don't care because we give them no reason to care. This is our job as journalists.

Every station is under tremendous pressure to keep costs as low as possible. Breaking news that is crime- and crisis-driven is cheap to cover and easy to cover. Murders, fires and traffic accidents require little background research.

As a profession, we cannot afford to throw up our hands saying there is nothing we can do. We cannot afford to blame the consultants, the accountants and business owners. Journalists must take responsibility and take back the decision-making process.—

Patricia Dean, Chair of the Broadcasting Department of Medill Journalism School, Northwestern University.



I will assure you that in almost every case—and we serve 140 local television stations across the country—the

general manager and the owner of those stations do not, in any way, shape or form, dictate what the news policy should be.

We as consultants come into a news department and are asked to tell people what is new, what they can do that is different... And when we suggest to them areas beyond what happens to be the standard approach, the first response that we get is, "Who else is doing that?" And when we say, "You asked us what's new, what's different." Then they say, "Well, maybe we'd better wait until somebody else does it to see whether it works or not." Whose fault is that? What chances are being taken by the professional journalists?

This may go against the grain of some here, but while they may be trained to write and while they may be trained to articulate what is written, the fact remains that many who call themselves journalists and are employed in local stations have no notion whatsoever about history, geography, political science, economics and other things about which an informed individual should have some grasp.

Unless and until the people in the profession come to grips with that there will never be a change."—*Frank Magid, Chair and CEO, Frank N. Magid Associates.*

good contrast: smart, analytical journalism, versus predictable, politician-driven journalism.

I think there is another reason we don't do as much aggressive journalism as we could, and this is just as true for local coverage as it is for national, for-

eign and every other kind of reporting: sometimes it requires us to admit, implicitly, at least, that we made a mistake the first time around, in the initial news story, or at the least wrote incomplete stories. There is nothing reporters or editors hate more than admitting error.

Let me give you two examples.

Mayors of New York City give an annual speech they call their State of the City address. These annual status reports are not required of New York's mayor the way they are legally required of presidents, but mayors going back to John V. Lindsay in the 1960's have given them, and why not? They get an hour of free television time and front page stories just for giving a long speech.

Last year, New York City's mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, in a typically upbeat speech, devoted a few sentences to the idea of building a tunnel beneath New York Harbor, to carry rail freight between New York and the rest of the country. This one idea became front page news in *The Times* (after a debate among editors). There were subsequent op-ed pieces and editorials. Letters to the editor. Television interviews.

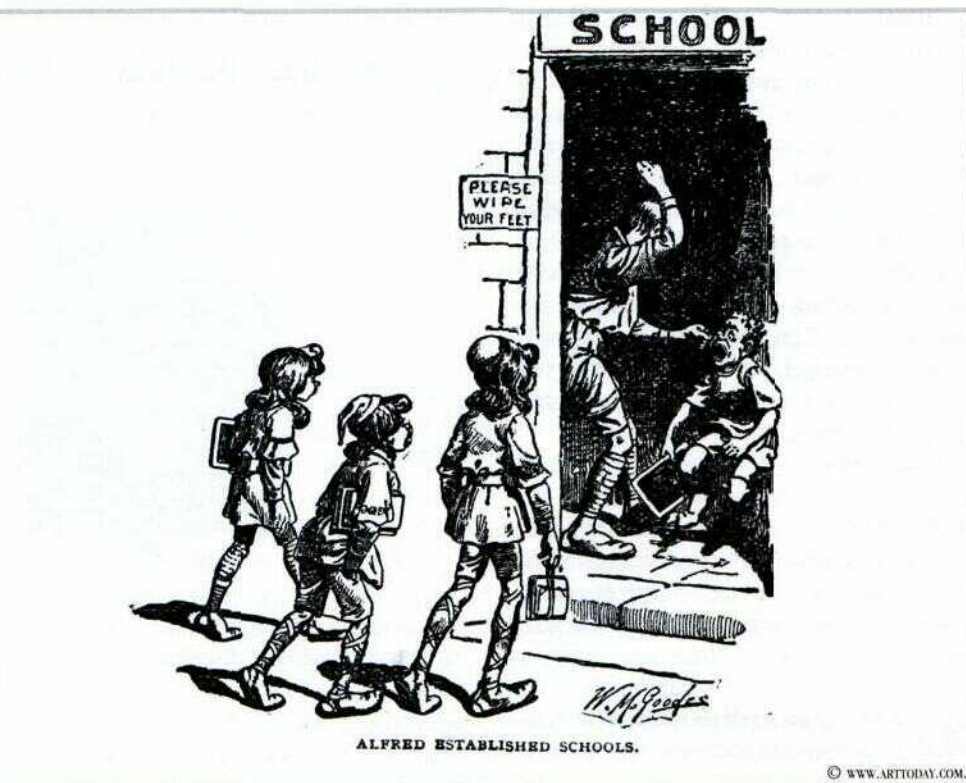
What there is not is a new tunnel beneath New York Harbor.

The idea has not advanced. It was evident from the moment Giuliani uttered those lines in his speech that he had jumped on an old idea that has little chance of going anywhere in the foreseeable future—but that sounds good.

It was legitimate to report what the mayor said and many of the caveats about the difficulty of ever building that tunnel were in the original story. But under the pressure of deadline, there was no time to give enough context in the first story. We did write follow-up stories that suggested the plan was mostly wishful thinking. But we had to question our own initial news judgment and be willing to implicitly admit we'd overplayed a story.

Another example is this year's State of the State address by Governor George Pataki of New York. He said he wanted to provide health care to all uninsured children under 19, but provided no details. By the next day, after the story hit the front pages, we found out that the money had already been appropriated by Congress, and that all Pataki was doing was saying, "I'll take it."

We ran a corrective piece, featuring it prominently—but not as prominently as the first day's story. The fact is, catch-up pieces don't get the same play, don't



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have the same impact. But sometimes we can't get the information on time or don't do our homework soon enough.

Aggressive reporting, especially the investigative variety, takes time. And, again, resources.

Another example: we frequently report in New York, as do newspapers in other states, government's claims of how many people have moved from welfare to work. But what happened to these people in the long run? Did they find permanent jobs, or did they just give up? Did those who dropped welfare move? How many of those listed on the welfare rosters are the same people who were thrown off welfare, appealed, and got their benefits back? How many *welfare mothers* who work are getting child care?

Those are just some of the questions that the self-congratulatory political announcements do not answer. The only way to answer them definitively is to get the names of welfare recipients, and former recipients, and interview them. The government will not provide those lists. *The Times* is in court trying to get them. In the meantime, we're doing as

much reporting as we can, trying to learn all we can about what is really going on with the largest workfare program in the country.

Once again we're back to resources.

That workfare project will probably take four months and the investment of four reporters. While they work on that, they are not available for other assignments.

Large, talented staffs are expensive—and spending a lot of money on newspapering goes *against the trend* in most of the country's newsrooms, even though we'll only be able to hold on to readers in the long run by giving them the depth of coverage they don't get on television.

Newspapers have to do it all. But they cannot cover the fires and the shootings and the press conferences—and undertake compelling projects that take significant commitments of time and staff—unless they keep growing.

Any paper that wants to get beyond the surface has to invest in its staff, and keep investing. Otherwise, we run the danger of being political billboards, and the readers will not only catch on, they will give us up. ■

Response: Make Enterprise Reporting An Ongoing Part of Newspapers' Mission

By ANTHONY MARRO

Joyce Purnick is right about almost everything, which means that a lot of the rest of us—and maybe even Purnick herself—should be rethinking some of the things that we do.

She's right that none of us have enough resources. Every good newspaper has aspirations that far exceed its grasp, and none of us have the staffing we need to do all that we'd like to do.

That said, The New York Times has a newsroom staff of more than 1,000 and sometimes has more people based in Moscow than it does in Albany.

Newsday has a newsroom staff of more than 500, and probably commits more staff time, expense money and newsprint to covering professional hockey than it does the routine of state government.

And The Times probably commits more resources to the coverage of food, wine and restaurants than Newsday does to the coverage of hockey.

Which is just a roundabout way of saying that we have to get past the issue of resources or we can't make any progress at all. If The New York Times doesn't have resources then none of the rest of us do. But the fact is that while none of us have the resources we want, most of us probably can find the resources we need if we decide that coverage of state and local government is a serious priority and set about covering it in different ways.

It's important that we do this because Purnick is not only right but right absolutely when she says that coverage of state and local government is becoming ever more important as Washington continues to shift ever more responsibilities to localities.

Maybe we should start by re-examining the notion that "our top priority has to be covering the news—what happened today" and that it's important to

cover all "the small, incremental stories as well as the big ones."

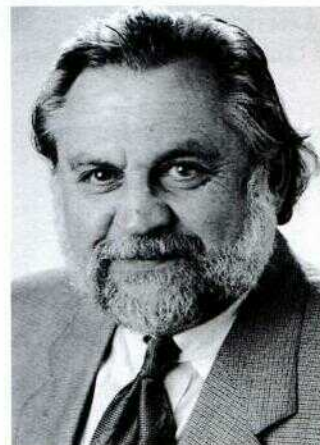
Sometimes the small and incremental are important, but often they can (a) be left to the wires, (b) dealt with in weekly summaries and wrap-ups, or (c) ignored. And people can get most of the small and the incremental and "what happened today" from radio and television and the Internet anyway. For newspapers to be useful they have to do more. For reporters to rush around chasing a mayor who is holding seven interviews and press briefings in a given day is like playing handball against three opponents all at once. They'll always be responding to what's being thrown at them, always responding to the sound bite of the day, and never getting a chance to set an agenda of coverage of their own.

Reporting what politicians and government officials are saying is the easiest thing that we do. Reporting what they're actually doing is harder but more important in the end—particularly if what they've been doing differs significantly from what they've been saying. If we can't do both, should we be tilting towards the former or the latter, knowing that one substantial story a week about a government decision that wasn't announced in a press release can be more important than a dozen reports on pre-scripted sound bites.

Purnick is right that some papers are hesitant to get ahead of a story, and that many editors are more comfortable focusing on issues that have been raised by others than they are raising issues themselves. This mind set has to change if coverage of state and local governments is going to improve. And this requires not just an allocation of resources but a commitment by editors to make serious enterprise reporting an integral and ongoing part of their re-

porting mission, something that is built into the structure of the newsroom and into the very spirit and fiber of the place. This sort of reporting has to be endless and ongoing, and not just an occasional or a sometimes thing.

I don't pretend that we have the perfect model at Newsday, but we probably do more serious public service journalism and investigative reporting than most papers our size. And for the last 30 years most of this reporting has been focused on local politicians and local government agencies. There have been spot news stories that we've missed and trend stories where our coverage has been both late and insufficient. But



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over time we've managed to examine repeatedly and in detail the extent of the nepotism and the abuses of patronage in Nassau and Suffolk counties, the way contracts have been awarded to insiders, the many ways in which political leaders have benefited from public policy decisions, and the methods, some bordering on extortion, by which campaign moneys have been raised.

At any given time, there are stories in town halls and in local zoning boards that surely are not getting done, or not getting done as fully as we'd like. But at any given time there also are four, five or six investigative or enterprise projects under way, all of them looking at the kinds of deals, decisions and patterns of conduct that aren't being announced in press releases or sound bites.

We should back up and rethink the premise that serious newspapers "want to do it all and should do it all." We should consider whether it's better instead to ignore some of the routine and the incremental—or do minimalist coverage of it, or just delegate it to the AP—and to shift resources to the sort of stories that never will get done if most reporters are forced to spend most of their working days covering the press briefings and chasing the sound bites. ■

Focusing on Balance

A valuable service that journalists are uniquely suited to provide is to investigate charges they report and inform audiences of their truth. But because their concern is with balance—presenting both sides—and because information tends to be filtered through our two-party system, it is easy to see how a reporter might feel the job is done when Democratic and Republican accusations are both reported. By focusing on balancing two sides, the press moves away from the investigative role for which it is so singularly well equipped. The result is that less needed information gets out.—Deborah Tannen, "The Argument Culture: Moving from Debate to Dialogue." Random House, 1998.

Response: What's Often Missing Is Desire

BY MELANIE SILL

Joyce Purnick speaks for many a metro and state editor when she describes the strain of keeping up with the news while watching for the big stories. At a midsize regional paper, the metro desk always answers the phone for a plane crash, weather disaster or late-breaking crime story. Legislative reporters have to be there to cover progress of the "bill that would" (lengthen criminal sentences, revolutionize day care and so forth). Reporters who like digging always have five tips tucked away for every one they pursue. Yet the biggest obstacles may be more fundamental than a lack of time or money. What state and local reporting need most is training for reporters and support from top editors: encouragement, good play and praise for the extra work it takes to do stories that reveal rather than speculate.

I have a joke about "the glamour of investigative reporting," which I've often cracked late on a night when a couple of reporters are hunkered over a stack of documents and the coffee's on for all of us. This kind of work is difficult. It's tedious, frustrating and sometimes fruitless. Someone in a newsroom has to be cheering for folks who try it. Someone has to teach how to read documents, interpret numbers, obtain databases, analyze statistics, use public records laws and, as Purnick notes, go to court when the bums don't give up the information. Editors who want their newsrooms to produce aggressive reporting have to get excited about stories that are going to take time, and help beat reporters do the juggling needed to pursue the tougher stories. I've never seen a newspaper hungry to do this kind of work that couldn't pull it off at all. What's missing, too often, is that desire.

The lack of commitment can't be blamed entirely on an overload of hard news. Editors and reporters may not spend enough time talking about stories and coverage with enough depth to go beyond superficial questions. As journalists, our skills may be behind the times to the degree that we can't report as aggressively or effectively as we should. Among editors, we might be too out of touch with information-gathering to teach reporters as we ought to. We are indeed slaves to the agendas of institutions and politicians. Instead of providing reports that help inform the public agenda, we often spend our time chasing conflict and explaining, endlessly, the various sides involved in disputes.



Melanie Sill, 1994 Nieman Fellow, is Managing Editor of *The News & Observer* in Raleigh, N.C. In 1996, *The N&O* won the Pulitzer gold medal for public service for "Boss Hog," a series of stories on environmental and community problems caused by the rapid expansion of industrial pork operations in rural North Carolina.

Conflict is the tinder for news stories, but Purnick is right in noting that conflict often masks what's really happening. In 1996 my newspaper won awards for a series of reports on the pork industry, including *investigative work* revealing how the chief executive of the nation's biggest hog company had pushed through a number of hog-friendly laws during 10 years in the state Senate. The irony was that none of those laws generated a dispute when it was passed, and thus we had overlooked most of them at the time. My guess is that we miss more significant legislation than we cover, because no one calls attention to it. We report on campaign contributions and the implied influence of corporations or industries on particular legislators, members of Congress, governors and Cabinet members. We're not as good at showing what effect, if any, these contributions have on the way people govern.

I too think that as news leaders, we have to put money behind our commitment to journalism that matters. Investigative reporting, aggressive daily journalism and good beat work all can put readers in the rooms where decisions are made. In many cases, business and government leaders set the course for public policy without public discussion. Aggressive reporting, whether it's project-level work or a breaking daily, gives the public a view of the process and the opportunity to have a voice in decisions.

The starting point for aggressive reporting is a well-developed sense among newsroom leaders of what that phrase means. Investigative reporting is many *things to many people*. Some think the aim is simply to get a government official in trouble, or out of a job. Others think it means proving criminal fraud. Some draw heavily on unnamed sources; others, including our newsroom, prefer documentable, on-the-record reporting. Aggressive reporting needs context, both for readers and for news staff.

Beyond an attitude that guides reporters and editors to pursue the tough stories, a newsroom needs expertise. Today's great reporters cultivate some

skills that weren't needed 10 years ago. In my newsroom, the best reporters coach and teach colleagues who ask for the help. We're working on spreading the skills, through brown-bag sessions, *one-on-one coaching*, *team-ups of investigative reporters and beat staffers*, and a more formal development program now under construction. Continuing education is a concept that journalism has never really embraced. For reporters and editors who want to produce definitive work, however, learning has to happen all the time, on the job and through extra efforts.

As difficult as it is to pull off successful investigative reporting, few other forms can be as satisfying. When a newspaper reveals wrongdoing with clear impact; when it uncovers secrets of obvious public interest; when it reveals the deeper story behind the superficial problem, it becomes truly valuable for readers and its community, large or small. As scarce as the resources seem sometimes, they're far greater than those at the disposal of any single person. After all, that's why we're here.

My suggestions are basic. Look for patterns in the news, and mobilize your people to find out what's causing them, who's benefiting and who's paying. Ask questions about stories, and spend plenty of time talking about coverage. Push reporters to answer the tough questions, on deadline or in enterprise pieces. Those basic questions are the foundation for any investigation.

Encourage your beat reporters to know who the players are and what their interests are—then watch for those interests in action. Invest in follow-up stories. Train your reporters and editors to be unbeatable in getting information. And look for that reporter hunched over her desk every night when you're headed for the parking deck. Chances are she's after the kind of story you want. She just might not know you care. ■

Response: Eye Always on Bureaucracies

BY DAVID BURNHAM

The late Peter Kihss was one of the greatest American reporters of the 20th Century. Year after year, on a huge variety of subjects, he produced spot news and investigative articles of extraordinary quality—tough, smart, fair and meticulous. But Peter also had a traditional, even conservative, sense of the news. I remember an occasion in the late 60's, for example, when Peter in his always courteous manner complained to me that he had a problem with some of the investigative reports that The New York Times had just begun to run. As I recall it, he worried that these longer pieces were squeezing out important information such as the arrival and departure times of the ocean liners that still served the city. The listing had been a fixture in the paper since its earliest days.

Joyce Purnick's explanation for why newspapers pay insufficient attention to investigative reporting suffers from the same logical fallacy as Peter's lament. No newspaper ever has enough resources to cover everything that should be covered. No newspaper ever has enough space to print all the stories that should be told. This means editors must make hard choices. Rather than dreaming about a larger staff or more column inches, they must decide that the shipping news is no longer relevant.

Curiously, Purnick herself acknowledges that the lack of resources argument she advances is not the core problem. "Right or wrong," she says, "the conventions of journalism are such that our top priority has to be covering the news—what happened today."

What is required, and what her Nieman paper fails to accomplish, is to

devise a definition of news that is not confined to the events of the last few hours. It, of course, is much easier to question Purnick's theory than to propose a substitute one that will withstand thoughtful criticism. But let me try.

First, let it be acknowledged that certain events that happened today indeed must be covered by any news organization. To take this to an admitted extreme, the 1996 crash of TWA Flight 800 obviously was a story that demanded the diversion of a substantial chunk of available news gathering resources. But even on that ghastly day The New York Times contained a good deal of unnecessary stuff—the 1996 equivalent of shipping news—that had been produced for the paper without any real justification.

Unfortunately, even the editors in the better news organizations allow their colleagues in the two-bit operations to set their agendas. "Oh God, what if The Daily News fronts something from a self-serving and easy-to-cover news conference staged by the mayor that we don't have?"

This kind of thinking avoids hard decision-making, but does it produce news?

Crime Coverage

The subject of crime is everywhere, from talk radio to prime-time TV to rap videos to films. If that is so, how can it be that Americans are so misinformed about crime? Why is it that we know so much about Joey Buttafuoco and so little about crucial crime issues? One reason is that the media have done an increasingly poor job of developing a balance between what is interesting and what is important. This is the difference between a crime story and crime coverage, between a story about yet another anecdotal crime and one that identifies the anecdote as either representative of a trend or representative of absolutely nothing.—*David J. Krajicek, "Scooped! Media Miss Real Story on Crime While Chasing Sex, Sleaze, and Celebrities." Columbia University Press. 1998.*

I believe the problem is fixable. All that is required is a slight modification in how we define news. Yes, news organizations must cover TWA Flight 800 and the break in a massive 5th Avenue water main and maybe even most of Bill Clinton's news conferences. But let's add one additional element to the definition of news implicit in those three choices. Serious news organizations like The Times also must devote a fixed portion of resources to the full-time examination of the performance of large bureaucracies like the police department, the schools, Consolidated Edison, the hospitals and the tax collectors.

Why is this genuine news? The steady growth in large public and private organizations means that, for good or ill, all of us are more and more dependent upon them. In a city like New York, a handful of large bureaucracies each day have a direct impact on the lives of millions of people. Articles about the problems of these organizations thus can have a far-reaching impact. They also will attract more engaged readers than most of the stories describing the staged events that "happened today."

About six months ago, a talented young Washington Post reporter named Michael Powell had a wonderful front-page article about his discovery that District of Columbia Water and Sewer workers were doing almost no work for the city while receiving millions of dollars a year to do illegal private work for citizens who were willing to bribe them.

This powerful article about the corruption of an essential city service was partly based on Powell's actual observations of selected work crews. It was a good yarn. But it also was groundbreaking in the sense that The Post, like virtually all American papers, rarely seems to have "the resources" to cover the actual operations of government. Scores of reporters for covering the news conferences and self-serving leaks that "happened today;" virtually none for investigating the actual performance of government.

During my years at The New York Times, I developed a personal statement defining the goal of my reporting about government: "My job is to describe the habits or procedures or other forces that *prevent the agencies I am*

covering from achieving their stated goals." Hold the agencies up to their own rhetoric.

It worked in New York City and it works in Washington. Sleeping cops don't patrol the streets, corrupt ones don't enforce the law. IRS agents, goaded by mindless quotas, don't treat citizens equitably. The disclosure of such problems is genuine news.

A side benefit of my formulation is that it is politically neutral. Who can seriously argue that the mission statement of the IRS is a radical manifesto? Some have contended my statement is unfairly negative, even cynical. But I believe that very few individuals or organizations ever achieve their stated goals and that the fair-minded investigation of organizations that serve the public is always warranted.

So please don't talk to me about inadequate resources. Just go make the decision that the true definition of news requires all respectable newsrooms, even small ones, to assign some reporters to the full-time investigation of the powerful bureaucracies that dominate our lives. ■

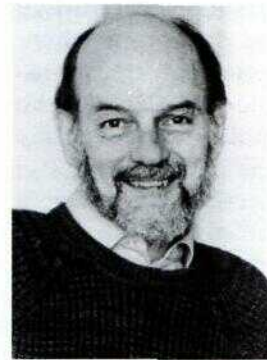


PHOTO © CYNTHIA JOHNSON

David Burnham, an investigative reporter and writer, has specialized in examining large powerful bureaucracies such as the New York Police Department, the National Security Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Internal Revenue Service and the Justice Department for the last three decades. A reporter with The New York Times from 1968 to 1986, Burnham since then has written several books and numerous magazine articles. Beginning in 1989, he also has been the Washington-based Co-director of the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse (TRAC), a data-gathering, research and data-distribution organization associated with Syracuse University.



Secretary of Defense Richard Cheney responds to questions from the media while taking part in a press conference held by U.S. and Saudi Arabian officials during Operation Desert Storm.

OFFICIAL U.S. NAVY PHOTO



Bernard Partridge

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National Security

The third paper on watchdog journalism deals with national security. The Pentagon uses slicker methods but the goal of controlling the press is the same as the outright censorship used by the Japanese military during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05.

On National Security, Five Ways to Respond to Restraints

BY DANIEL SCHORR

My first reaction to the assignment of writing about the lingering effects of Cold War self-censorship is to redefine the subject. If self-censorship means restraint, self-imposed or accepted by an individual journalist, I would consider that this is today only a negligible part of a broader problem of restraints on public enlightenment about the outside world imposed by profit-oriented media conglomerates, which generally find foreign news unprofitable. (Notice how today one speaks less of "the press" and more of "the media," a somehow less respectable word, and how "news" has joined entertainment, sports and stock quotations as generalized "information," fellow travelers on the information highway.)

More serious also, as a form of censorship, is the way the public, drugged by entertainment and notorious court trials, is hardly aware that it is no longer aware of the clash of peoples and clash of interests happening in large parts of the world. As Calvin Trillin expressed it in a 1991 poem in *The Nation*, "Whatever happened to Cyprus? So what's with the Greeks and Turks?" The poem ends "Are all these getting along now? Or killing each other in private?"

Let me recall a time when censorship, and self-censorship, were not negative concepts. In the Normandy landings in June 1944 the late great Charles Collingwood of CBS was one of a handful of correspondents who landed on the beachhead. Equipped with a heavy battery backpack, Charles was able to broadcast live, transmitting to a Navy ship offshore, which boosted the signal and relayed it to London, from where it went by squawky short-wave to New York and out over the network nationwide. Collingwood de-

scribed ad lib what he could see, carefully avoiding pinpointing American positions, as he had been briefed. Without much overview of the invasion and running out of material, he saw a Navy officer approaching and said, "Commander, I'm Charles Collingwood of CBS News. Do you have any word of how the invasion is going?" Live on the air, the man in Navy uniform replied, "Beats the shit out of me, Charlie. I'm the NBC correspondent."

The point of the story is that Collingwood in Army uniform with captain's bars, and the NBC man, in Navy uniform with lieutenant commander's stripes, thought it quite normal to be identified with the armed forces. And quite normal to broadcast from a battle scene without going through censorship because everybody was on the same side, and a war correspondent supported what was called, in those days, "the war effort."

Censorship, and self-censorship, had general support because the war had general support. Fast forward to the Vietnam war, when American authority and the American press found themselves no longer on the same side, in part because Americans were not all on

the same side. American journalists came to believe they were being lied to and that the Saigon briefings, called "the five o'clock follies," were just that.

Out of the painful perception that their government could lie to them, and perhaps to itself, came a breed of watchdog journalists like David Halberstam, Seymour Hersh, Stanley Karnow and Peter Arnett. Wars have a way of creating a class of journalists affected by the nature of the war they have covered. And so if World War II gave us a class of journalists with a clear idea of right and wrong and a willingness to accept their government at face value, so the Vietnam war, especially in combination with Watergate, gave us a class of journalists disillusioned with government and dubious about right and wrong.

Vietnam gave us also the birth of the "living room war," the televised war that would one day make the camera and satellite a lot more important than the reporter. The "living room war" started quite modestly with 16-mm black-and-white film that had to be shipped by airplane, processed and edited for broadcast. The built-in delay allowed time for Pentagon pressures



Daniel Schorr, Senior News Analyst for National Public Radio, is the last member of Edward Murrow's legendary CBS News team still active in daily journalism. His half-century career in print journalism, radio and television, overseas and in the United States, has won him many awards. As CBS's chief Watergate correspondent, he won three Emmy Awards. Investigators found his name on the Nixon "enemies list" and evidence that the President had ordered an FBI investigation of him.

on networks to kill or dilute stories considered likely to diminish public support for the war. So CBS News did, in fact, consider censoring the pictorial evidence of marines setting fire to an unoffending village with their Zippo lighters. (I am happy to report that CBS, after some soul-searching, went *with the story*.)

What also came out of that war was the deeply felt conviction of military professionals that the American press had given aid and comfort to the enemy—and perhaps had become the enemy. When the Reagan administration neglected to include press coverage in its plans for the invasion of the island of Grenada in 1983, a Pentagon colonel, veteran of Vietnam, responded to my complaint by saying “Okay, Schorr, next time we invade an island, the press will be in the first wave. *Only the press!*”

The attitude of the military is that its function is to fight wars and that anything that interferes with the fighting of the war is basically adversarial. Having seen what pictures and stories from Vietnam did to undermine enthusiasm for that war, the military could fairly conclude that the less the American public sees of a war, the better. It may well be that if America could see a war with all its horrors, it would not support any but a war on its own soil.

The military was determined, in 1991, that the public would see the Gulf War the way the military wanted it seen, and it largely succeeded. It erected an elaborate structure of press control, not trusting to self-censorship, but rather keeping reporters constantly escorted and under surveillance. The military’s task was facilitated by the fact that most of the war was an air war, to be reported mainly from what the Air Force was willing to show. It was, for all the public knew, a war of wondrously accurate “smart bombs” that knocked out facilities but never seemed to hit people.

Once the ground war had started, efforts were made to break out of censorship. Bob Simon of CBS wandered off to try to find out what was happening in southern Iraq and was captured by the Iraqis. Would-be watchdogs were, for the most part, effectively prevented

from doing independent watching. So effective was the manipulation apparatus the Pentagon had assembled that when news organizations filed protests against undue censorship, opinion polls indicated that the public, by crushing majorities, favored more rigid censorship. The idea of the nosy press endangering American lives for fun and profit had been well sold.

As a result, the American public was left with a homogenized version of the Gulf War. Edited tape from airplane cameras showed smart bombs doing smart things—not dumb bombs doing dumb things. Much later you might see a story in the print saying that only seven percent of the bombs had hit their objectives. But factual reality does not overcome the impression left by all those hairlines on the target and the bomb going right down the elevator shaft.

If the press learned anything from the Gulf War it was that coping with the management of news represents one of its greatest challenges. Fortunately, technology is providing a new kind of watchdog. The end of the Gulf War brought us a harbinger of what is to come. An ABC camera crew of seven with Forrest Sawyer and a CBS crew with Bob McKeowan entered Kuwait before the liberating troops and projected live pictures back to the United States. The feat took four trucks, a ton of equipment, and a portable satellite dish. Barrie Dunsmore, who studied the “Live from the Battlefield” phenomenon for Harvard University’s Shorenstein Center, wrote that in the next war equipment needs will be reduced to a hundred pounds, operated by a two-person team.

Censors’ Problem

There is little doubt that in the next conflict involving substantial American forces, and therefore attracting the attention of American television, the censors will be at some disadvantage trying to ride herd on these tiny mobile transmitting stations ready to bring the war home live and in living color—the culmination of the “living room war.”

And since global television will bring the battlefield scenes to the enemy, new ground rules will have to be negotiated between the military and the media to guard the security of the American forces. One way or another, combat journalism will become less a matter of the watchdog reporter and more a technological matter of the watching eye. And, to the extent that censorship will no longer be easily enforceable, mutually agreeable restraints will have to be negotiated.

For the old-fashioned watchdog journalist, dealing in words rather than pictures, factual reality rather than virtual reality, the work starts after the war is over. That is when we learn about the smart bombs that were not so smart, the Patriot anti-missile missiles that did so poorly, the sickness that soldiers brought home and the Pentagon dissembled about.

I have said that press-government relations were at their most amicable during World War II when there was general consensus on war aims and general trust in the word of our leaders. To a somewhat lesser extent that comity continued into the Cold War. The division of the world into two hostile blocs served as an organizing principle for government policy and for the press as well.

It Was Different Then

If President Truman said that the Soviets would penetrate Western Europe unless America supported the Marshall Plan and the rearmament of Germany, he was generally believed. If President Kennedy said he had to risk nuclear war to get Soviet missiles out of Cuba, there were few who disputed him. If proxy wars had to be fought from Angola to Nicaragua, they were, in President Reagan’s words, to support “freedom fighters” against Communist subjugation. And, even if missiles were traded with Iran for hostages in Lebanon, it was ostensibly out of fear of Soviet encroachment in Iran, or so President Reagan said. And it was the rare journalist who at the height of the Cold War would delve into CIA conspiracies

justified as being part of the life-and-death struggle with the "evil empire."

The Cold War is over. The Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union have fallen, and so have the scales from our eyes. Historians and journalists are having a belated field day with presidential tapes and documents exposing aberrations like assassination plots, break-ins on *American citizens*, *surveillance* and wiretaps on opponents—all originally justified, in one way or another, as necessary to grapple with the "evil empire."

In the post-Cold War world neither government nor the press has any unifying theme of how to view the world—or as much of it as bottom-line media barons will permit to be viewed at all. Without a guidepost, coverage has taken on a certain random quality. Famine in Ethiopia became an American concern almost by happenstance. In 1989 NBC, almost as an afterthought, ran a vivid story of starvation produced by the BBC. A wave of compassion swept America.

Hunger in Somalia became an issue for Americans because cameras were there. So did Rwanda. Sudan, without cameras, never quite made it onto our screens or into our hearts. Heart-rending pictures from Somalia caused the Bush administration to send troops to help. Pictures of an American airman's body being dragged through the street caused American troops to be pulled out. It was as though random pictures were producing random reactions.

"The end of the Cold War was a liberation," says Andrew Graham Yooli, former Editor of the London-based *Index on Censorship*, but "it is not yet clear how journalists can best use that new freedom."

Television's "CNN effect" or "global village" is a different kind of journalism—perhaps not really journalism so much as the opening of windows to admit the clamor of events into the halls of state and homes of citizens simultaneously. For government—even a superpower government—it can be quite disconcerting to have to react without time to deliberate and formulate policy.

On August 13, 1961, a Sunday, Com-

munist East Germany sprang a surprise in the middle of the night—it closed the border between East and West Berlin preliminary to building a wall. With an early morning start, my cameraman and I were able to cover the story, ship the film via Frankfurt to New York just in time to make the late news at 11 p.m. This was the first time a story filmed in Europe had gotten on the air on the same calendar day, although, in fact, almost 24 hours had elapsed.

Yet President Kennedy told associates that he wished he had more time for policy formulation before having to react to Americans who were seeing the despairing faces of Berliners, cut off from friends and relatives in a suddenly

Maggie Gallagher Citizens of World Or Americans?



I think that Americans are very disturbed when journalists report on foreign affairs as if they were citizens of the world rather than citizens of America. At least if they are in networks that are considered American. It's a subtle thing. I don't think that means that you can't criticize America, but the assumption that when America's safety and security is threatened, or Americans are endangered abroad, that we all come together as a people. I think that part of the dissatisfaction with journalism is a carrying of impartiality beyond the bounds of reasonableness or what's necessary to get the story.—Maggie Gallagher, Columnist, *Universal Press Syndicate*, at the December 4, 1997 forum of the *Committee of Concerned Journalists* in New York.

bisected city. And that was before the satellite, which reduced the time for reflection from hours to minutes, forcing the government to react not to the event, but to television.

I have made a comprehensive study of one particularly vivid chapter in government-media relations—the way the Bush administration reacted to Saddam Hussein's assault on the Kurdish minority after his defeat in the Kuwait war in 1991.

On February 15, President Bush called on the "Iraqi military and the Iraqi people" to rise up against Saddam Hussein. Twelve days later, the President ordered an abrupt cessation of hostilities, leaving the Iraqi dictator with enough armor and aircraft to put down Shiite and Kurdish uprisings. The Bush administration indicated that it had no intention of getting involved in a "Vietnam-style quagmire," and that the American public wanted their troops home as fast as possible.

William Safire wrote in *The New York Times* of "a failure of nerve," but White House Chief of Staff John Sununu told *Newsweek* that "a hundred Safires will not change the public's mind. There is no downside to our policy."

Kurds on Television

By the end of March, helicopter gunships had killed hundreds of Kurds and hundreds and thousands were fleeing across the rugged mountains into Turkey—where their desperate plight could be seen on television. The portraits of agony were almost overwhelming. A little girl, her feet sinking into the freezing mud. The anguished face of a child on the cover of *Newsweek*, with the caption addressed to Bush, "Why won't he help us?"

For a while the quagmire-shunning Bush administration continued concentrating on a formal cease-fire to speed the return of American troops. On April 2, filmed on a Florida golf course, in strange juxtaposition with scenes of shivering refugees, Bush said, "I feel no reason to answer anybody. We're relaxing here."

Then Bush's tone began to shift. April 3: "I call on Iraq's leaders to

halt these attacks immediately.”

April 4: “We will do what we can to help the Kurdish refugees.” An Associated Press photo showed a mother comforting her 10-year-old child who had lost a hand and an eye in a helicopter attack.

April 5: “We will do what we can to help there without being bogged down into a ground force action.” The Air Force began dropping bales of supplies—some of which fell on Kurds and killed them.

April 8: Secretary of State James Baker heard from the European Community, at a meeting in Luxembourg, of growing concern about the fate of the Kurds. He flew off for a symbolic visit to the Turkish-Iraqi border. The seven-minute photo opportunity produced an unplanned moment. One of the desperate Kurds said on camera, in English, “Please Mr. Baker, I want to talk to you. You have got to do something to help us.”

April 12: In a stunning change of course, the Bush administration announced that American troops would return to Iraq for a relief operation called “Provide Comfort.” The President’s post-victory approval rating of 92 percent had dropped to 78 percent.

April 16: At a news conference, Bush said, “No one can see the pictures nor hear the accounts of this human suffering—men, women, and most painfully of all, innocent children—and not be deeply moved.”

Military victory over Iraq was threatening to turn into moral—and political—defeat. The polls that had shown Americans wanting their troops home in a hurry now showed that Americans did not want the Kurds abandoned—even if that meant using American troops to protect them.

A most dramatic turnabout, and what did it? The press? Not in any conventional sense. The Bush administration had indicated its willingness to ignore the criticism of Safire and others in the printed press. It was also willing to ignore the criticism of radio and television commentators. What the administration could not withstand were, as Bush mentioned, “the pictures.”

Ezra F. Vogel Overcoming Fear In Chinese Sources



In terms of dealing with foreign press... one of the structural problems, I think, is that a lot of the Chinese cadres are afraid of making a mistake. They're afraid if they talk to a journalist and then the journalist writes up something, they can get in lots of trouble. It's much safer just not to see the journalist. And so, I think in order to make things better for foreign journalists, what they have to do is to tell these cadres, “Look, we're not going to hold you responsible for everything that guy writes. Talk to him, tell him what's going on. Let him see things. Let him write it up, and you're not going to suffer....” I think that's the only way they can resolve the problem in the long run. But they don't yet feel that confident and they haven't gotten that far. And I think some people in China who are more open-minded realize that's the way they ought to go, but they're not there yet.—Ezra F. Vogel, *Director of the Asia Center, Director of the Fairbank Center for East Asian Research and Henry Ford II Professor of the Social Sciences at Harvard University, at a Nieman Fellows seminar December 3, 1997.*

How does watchdog journalism survive in an era where media events replace stories and analyses, where parachuted stars replace permanent foreign bureaus (CBS no longer has a State Department correspondent), where media tycoons shrink the amount of air time available for international news other than Princess Diana's death?

First, those journalists who survive

the process (where are the new Ed Murrows and John Chancellors and Howard Smiths to come from?) must continue to insist on the need to explain the challenges of the post-Cold War era—the challenges of terrorism, abuse of human rights, a deteriorating environment.

Second, we need to try to re-establish a civil working relationship with constituted authority. We must persuade our leaders that we will not plague them with trivial pursuits of scandal if they will try not to lie to us. Between press and government, we are badly in need of a restored assumption of regularity.

Third, investigative journalism must find new arenas. Suffering in distant places, hunger in many places, unattended diseases in too many places are today worthier of journalistic attention than the latest personal failings of an elected official.

Fourth, media empires—including the empire one works for—can no longer be considered immune from journalistic investigation. In 1975 I went on the CBS Evening News to tell about the relations of CBS Chairman William Paley with the CIA.

That did not enhance my position in CBS, but it gave me a lot of personal satisfaction. Today's reporters—and executive producers—must be on guard against the pressures of their conglomerate parents. To mention only one example, CBS's 60 Minutes program found itself temporarily blocked from a tobacco exposé at a time when Chairman Lawrence Tisch controlled a tobacco company.

Fifth, it may be necessary to redefine our audience. James Hoge, Editor of Foreign Affairs, estimates the “attentive public” for international affairs at four to five million. Public radio and television provide a serious audience, if not a mass audience, for serious journalism. Perhaps the Internet will provide us with a self-selected audience.

This will undoubtedly be called élitism, but it may be that the future of serious journalists is identifying a serious audience and leaving the masses to the mercies of the mass media. ■

Response: an 'Unbridgeable Divide'

By PHILIP TAUBMAN

My departure point for any discussion of national security reporting is an evening in the early 1980's, when I was a Washington correspondent for *The New York Times*. Several days earlier, I had been handed a heavily classified memorandum to President Reagan from Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger. It outlined a series of steps the Reagan Administration was planning to take to expand American military activities in Central America, then a Cold War hot spot. The secret plans went far beyond the commitments publicly disclosed by the Administration. Government officials I called confirmed the authenticity of the memo and said many of Weinberger's proposals had already been approved.

Shortly before deadline, an editor, worried that my reporting was taking *The Times* into uncharted territory, asked one of our White House correspondents to run my findings by top officials. The reporter happened to be going to a meeting with Adm. John Poindexter, the senior military officer assigned to the National Security Council staff. After listening to a description of my story, Admiral Poindexter laughed and said he had never heard anything so ridiculous. Chastened by the denial, *The Times* hedged my story and layered it with White House assertions that no military escalation was planned.

The White House was lying, *The Times* was intimidated, and I discovered, perhaps later in life than I should, that even the most solid national security reporting can be at least partly trumped by the confident denials of senior government officials.

The incident came to mind as I read Dan Schorr's thoughtful essay. I am not as sanguine as he that one step toward a restoration of hard-headed journalism is, as he said, to re-establish a civil working relationship with constituted authority. I don't believe that constituted authority, in many cases, is pre-

pared to tell the truth, even if journalists would abandon the pursuit of trivial scandals.

In the American national security arenas I know best, intelligence and military operations, there is a fundamental, unbridgeable divide between the worlds of government and journalism. It existed during the Cold War and has changed little since—witness the tight restrictions on coverage of the Persian Gulf war. It comes down to a simple proposition. The government believes there are policies and activities that the public has no right to see and that the government shall be the sole judge of what is secret and what is not.

The attitude was often best expressed when I visited junior officials at the Central Intelligence Agency or the National Security Agency, invited by their managers to talk about the role of a free press in a democracy. My references to Jefferson were welcomed, and there was little argument that America would be diminished without a free press, but when discussion turned to more practical matters of coverage, a sharp line was always drawn. I was told in no uncertain terms that my work interfered with theirs, that they knew what was best for the country and that the American people had no right to know what their government was doing in such sensitive areas as intelligence collection.

Some activities are best conducted in secret. Every responsible journalist recognizes that and tries not to expose the sources and methods used in acquiring sensitive information. On rare occasions, as a correspondent and later as an editor, I have agreed not to publish information that could compromise important American intelligence and military operations or place American troops in danger. But the government often fails to distinguish between what should be secret and the vast amount of information that should not,

preferring to throw a blanket of secrecy around everything, including intelligence and military misconduct.

My fear is that the end of the Cold War, rather than liberating journalists to open new fields of national security reporting, will produce a more complacent and passive press corps, especially in Washington. Absent the Soviet threat, traditional national security matters may seem less important and the press may place less premium on uncovering the government's hidden diplomatic, intelligence and military agendas. The Middle East, for example, is an area where American interests remain in play. It seems highly unlikely that the Clinton Administration's public policies in the region, including its diplomatic efforts to encourage peace between Israel and the Palestinians, are Washington's only initiatives. The complex, tangled story of America's relations with Saudi Arabia, to cite one example, has never been fully disclosed.

The Pentagon budget is another fertile subject for more aggressive reporting. Though the budget has declined since the end of the Cold War, America is still spending better than \$250 bil-



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lion a year on defense, a figure that seems all the larger given the spending cuts in many domestic programs. Other than the occasional story about a troubled new weapons system, or obligatory reporting on Congressional action on the budget, the Pentagon's consumption of money has gone almost uncovered in recent years. It's hard to believe that the waste, fraud and often misguided spending habits of earlier years have been eliminated.

The C.I.A. continues to attract a lot of attention for its past abuses, but not much is written these days about new areas of agency concentration, including efforts to combat terrorism, drugs and the spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and technology. Money and manpower is flowing into these fields, but the public knows little about whether the resources are well used.

As the definition of national security broadens to include economic and environmental issues, the press needs to

be vigilant in covering those areas. The economic crisis in East Asia, for example, made many Americans aware of an organization most know little about, the International Monetary Fund. The I.M.F. can be as secretive as the C.I.A., and its decisions can affect millions of people. Fund policies, actions and officials should be the subject of intense *journalistic scrutiny*.

That is also true of the U.S. Treasury Department and the Commerce Department, which now often play as important a role in American foreign policy as the State Department. The Clinton Administration's effort to encourage American commerce abroad is sensible, but when that impulse overwhelms other American interests like the advancement of human rights, it's appropriate for reporters to determine how these decisions are made. In many ways, *the trade and financial links* between American companies and China are more interesting and important than diplomatic ties between Washington

and Beijing, and exert a powerful influence over those ties. I have long been eager to read a thorough report on the new China lobby, the constellation of American corporations that do business in China, and how these companies use their leverage in Washington, including campaign contributions, to influence American foreign and commercial policy.

It has never been easy to do these kinds of stories, and the incentive system at most news organizations doesn't adequately encourage enterprising work. The old pressures to make deadlines, be productive and help fill the news hole or news broadcast have been joined by new demands, some of them subtle but insidious, that come with the corporate empires that now own so many American newspapers and networks. That is a pity, because as the Cold War story line recedes into history and new challenges appear, Americans need this kind of restless journalism more than ever. ■

Response: Narratives and Analysis

BY CARLA ANNE ROBBINS

As I sit down to write this the United States is considering new military strikes against Iraq, Pope John Paul II is calling for freedom in Cuba, and the country is obsessed with the question of whether or not President Bill Clinton had sex with a 21-year-old White House intern.

Sex in high places will trump any other story. But it seems almost everything trumps serious foreign policy reporting in the post-Cold War world.

How reporters get their editors and readers to care about foreign affairs is one of the important issues raised by Daniel Schorr. However, I believe that if we choose our stories correctly we have a far wider audience than just the subscribers to Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Schorr, ever vigilant in the struggle against press censorship, also raises very serious questions about the U.S. government's continuing efforts

to co-opt and control national security reporting.

I saw it during the Gulf War. I helped set up the pool system (I still think I should have my head shaved for it) and then watched the system do everything it could to keep me and my colleagues away from the war.

Beyond my personal frustration, and the bad journalism, I think the Pentagon did a dangerous disservice to our country. Having seen a video game, rather than a real war, Americans have apparently decided that wars can and should be casualty-free, or not fought at all. Those unrealistic standards have seriously hobbled the White House's willingness to take even necessary risks in Bosnia. We will see how it plays out in Iraq in weeks to come.

We also have to be on guard against the more subtle co-opting of reporting in Washington. In 1993 I got a phone call from the office of then-National Security Adviser Anthony Lake. Would I

come to lunch in Mr. Lake's office on Saturday to talk about Haiti? When I asked if the session would be on the



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record or off, his secretary told me that I didn't understand. Lake was having in a group of Haiti experts to talk to him about *their* idea—and I couldn't write about it at all.

I said no thank you. But it wasn't easy.

Guarantee of Access

Here are all the counter arguments I rehearsed before begging off: I would have learned a lot had I gone. It would have guaranteed me future access to Lake. And maybe I could have done some good for my country. In the end I decided, what seems obvious from a distance: that there was no way I could write about a policy after I'd even faintly helped to craft it.

What makes it even more complicated is that I'm still not sure whether I was invited to be co-opted or because they really thought I might know something. Those scenes and those dilemmas are repeated over and over again every week in Washington. That is probably the best reason why a foreign affairs reporter should get out of Washington whenever she can.

Will anyone read what we write?

With readers who think they've seen it all on CNN, reporters have to do more than just provide the facts. They have to illustrate their stories with well-focused on-the-ground narratives and reinforce them with serious news analysis and well-reasoned projections of likely developments to come. CNN can tell us what just happened on a second-by-second basis. For those of us in the less-than-instant news business, the challenge is making sense of it before our readers turn off from sensory overload.

One of the biggest dangers for foreign affairs reporters is falling into diplomat or globaloney: talking like our sources rather than our readers. It's not just a language problem, it can be intellectually crippling.

Accept their catch phrases and you accept their assumptions.

Take the new taboo "nation build-

ing." Ever since Somalia Congress has forbidden, and the White House forsworn, nation building. But what does nation building mean? Does it mean rebuilding roads? Or escorting refugees or arresting war criminals?

In Haiti the White House and Pentagon decided it meant no repairs to Haiti's crippled infrastructure, even though without them Haiti's economy couldn't begin to work. In Bosnia they're still debating the refugee and war criminal issues. Meanwhile, what really went wrong in Somalia was the attempt to rebuild a failed society—and to do it without heavy artillery or casualties.

Some of the most challenging stories are those that test the assumptions and prejudices of American foreign policy-making on the ground. Is the United States doing enough in Bosnia to ever get out? To make the story work, the reporter has to be able to follow it from Washington (what's the policy? why is it crafted that way? and how have politics shaped those choices?) to Bosnia (how is it working? and what might work better?) and back to Washington (why can't they see or do what's necessary?) To do that one also has to have a tolerant editor and a good travel budget—both rarities.

Other good stories look at the assumptions and prejudices of the broader public. Take another favorite taboo: The United Nations. I did a profile a couple of years ago about a young Army private who was being court-martialed for refusing to wear a blue beret when his unit shipped out to Macedonia. One of the neatest things about that story was that it was hotter than hot on talk radio but almost no one in the mainstream press was paying any attention. It also got me out of Washington and into some tiny Texas towns to hear what real folks thought and feared about the UN and America's place in the world.

And as much as the phrase makes me panic, there is a lot worth writing about the global economy. It's easy to explain how most-favored-nation status for

China will affect the supply of Tickle-me Elmos. The real challenge is explaining how the Korean market crash may affect your job.

Even with shrinking budgets, there are still good stories about money worth pursuing.

The Wall Street Journal did a story last year about two U.S.-government-funded Harvard advisers who were writing the rules for Russia's new financial markets. The Agency for International Development had discovered that the wife of one and the girlfriend of the other were simultaneously investing in the same Russian markets. This was a story you didn't have to care about foreign affairs or stock markets to appreciate. How could two such smart guys make such questionable choices? If we also managed to sneak in some useful information about Russia's political development and American foreign aid, all the better.

Lots of Work to Do

Even without the evil empire, there are still plenty of scoundrels and bad guys for the determined reporter to ferret out. One of the stories I'd most like to read would try to figure out who in Russia is helping Iran develop a ballistic missile capability. Is it a secret government policy, lax scientific agencies or shady business interests?

Drugs, raping the environment, misusing government funds, terrorism, proliferation, human rights abuses, are all compelling stories with or without the Cold War.

The Washington Post's reconstruction of Bosnia's Srebrenica massacre, reported on the ground and in Washington, told an incredible tale about man's continuing capacity for brutality and civilized governments' continued willingness to look the other way.

If we write it right I still believe folks will care. ■

Nonprofits

The fourth watchdog paper reports on nonprofit organizations. An example of the story possibilities is the work done by Walter Robinson of The Boston Globe in uncovering paintings seized by the Nazis that museums obtained under questionable circumstances.



BOSTON GLOBE PHOTO/ALASTAIR MILLER

Francis Warin shows copy of records the Nazis kept of their pillaging of art from his great-uncle's estate in France. Many of the paintings are now in museums.



ASSOCIATED PRESS PHOTO

A reporter taking notes in front of Francisco de Goya's "Female Portrait" at a preview of art treasures taken from Nazi Germany in World War II, at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, Monday, February 27, 1995.

For America's Nonprofit Sector, The Watchdog Seldom Barks

BY GEORGE RODRIGUE

In the fall of 1996, Republican candidate Rick Hill had a problem. His opponent for Montana's only U.S. House seat, Democrat Bill Yellowtail, was ahead in the polls. Hill knew he could cripple Yellowtail by running ads resurrecting old charges of wife-beating. But if Hill slung the mud, he'd get his own hands dirty. And he had just promised to fight clean.

Fortunately for him, someone else took up the cudgel. "Who is Bill Yellowtail?" television commercials asked repeatedly. "He preaches family values, but he took a swing at his wife...."

Yellowtail's campaign deflated. Hill's hands looked clean. The ads weren't bought by his campaign, or by the Republican Party. A nonprofit group, "Citizens for Reform," paid for them. No one could say what it was. Only after the election would investigators find a document indicating that the Hill campaign had asked it to attack Yellowtail.

That was just a trickle in the secret river of money that Republican groups channeled through nonprofits. One group alone, *Americans for Tax Reform*, got at least \$4.3 million from the GOP. Democrats were outgunned, but not for lack of effort. They funneled \$3 million through another nonprofit, *Vote Now '96*. Its mission was to boost voter turnout, especially among voters who happened to be Democrats.

Meanwhile, Republican Presidential nominee Bob Dole pushed an unusual idea for helping the poor: Government would step back and let local charities provide welfare benefits. Newspapers took little note of his plan, or of the nonprofit leaders who called it a threat to their needy clients.

Failure to monitor nonprofits in one case. Failure to explain their problems, or protect vulnerable citizens, in the

other. Unfortunately, many experts say that's typical news coverage of nonprofits.

"The sector is poorly understood and is even more poorly under-covered by mainstream publications. We see an occasional investigative piece and an occasional feel-good piece and nothing much in between," said Charles Shepard, formerly a reporter at *The Washington Post*.

Shepard spoke at a seminar in 1993, after reporting on how the president of the United Way of America used charity funds to please his teenaged mistress. But many journalists say the problem remains today.

Media watchers in the nonprofit community agree. "The watchdog seldom barks," said Elizabeth Boris, director of the Urban Institute's Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy. "The media have not done a very good job of keeping the nonprofits accountable," agreed Robert O. Bothwell, President of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy. "But then, neither has anyone else."

More's the pity, because good coverage grows more important by the day, said Todd Cohen, who left *The Raleigh News & Observer* to found *The Philanthropy Journal of North Carolina*.

As the federal government retreats and businesses grow more profit-centered, Cohen said, a social gap is widening. Historically, nonprofits filled that gap, supporting everything from the early poorhouses to women's suffrage and the civil rights movement. With problems now increasingly localized, Cohen said, local charities offer reporters a window on key problems facing their communities: "poverty, racism, intolerance, poor health, illiteracy, the

state of natural resources and the state of human relationships."

But, he added, "the toughest thing for the media to cover is the process of change. It's a lot easier to cover a shooting or a train wreck or a scandal."

Big Money

Even people who care nothing for the poor may care deeply about nonprofits, because they are a huge and fast-growing part of the economy. Federal tax exemptions alone cost more than \$21 billion in 1997, according to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. A tally by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, including local property-tax exemptions, put the total tax expense at more than \$36.5 billion annually. The paper estimated total nonprofit revenues at \$500 billion annually. Paid and volunteer staffs account for per-



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haps one out of ten working Americans. The IRS has already granted tax exemptions to some 1.1 million organizations. Over the past decade, about 75 new groups have won tax exemptions daily. Since 1970, the sector has grown at four times the rate of the overall U.S. economy.

The sector is as diverse as it is huge, and not always profitless or charitable. Only about half of all nonprofits are churches or charities, and only about 10 cents of every donated dollar goes to the poor. The Little Sisters of the Poor are tax-exempt. So is Harvard University, whose \$7 billion endowment dwarfs some third-world economies. Your local little league is a nonprofit. So is the National Hockey League. Some hospitals are nonprofits, but they behave very much like the profit-making institutions with which they compete—to the dismay of some private business owners. Even defense contractors can be nonprofits. Witness Mitre Corp., which helped develop the AWACS aircraft and earned \$572 million in 1991.

Tax law creates several types of exempt organizations. Generally, only charities, churches and schools qualifying under section 501(c)(3) of the tax code can offer donors the chance to deduct gifts from their taxable income. Other nonprofits, however, can claim exemptions from income taxes, and often from local taxes as well. Those exemptions can be a major cost to local government.

Basic Watchdog Duties

Despite their diversity, nonprofits have much in common. They must promise to serve a public purpose when they file their IRS Form 1023 or 1024 to get tax-exempt status. They must promise that staff and directors—who do pay income taxes—will not benefit unduly from their tax-exempt status.

The most basic duty of journalism's watchdogs may be to ensure that they keep those promises.

Newspaper morgues are littered with the carcasses of people caught breaking that public trust. United Way of



GREAT FALLS TRIBUNE PHOTO BY STUART S. WHITE

Democratic candidate Bill Yellowtail presented his views as Republican Rick Hill, left, and Natural Law Party candidate Jim Brooks, right, waited their turn in a debate in Great Falls, Montana, about a month before the 1996 Congressional election.

America chief executive William Aramony drew a seven-year prison term in 1995 for misuse of charity funds. PTL minister Jim Bakker became notorious for cheating on his wife with a church secretary. He drew a 45-year prison term in 1989, after revelations that he used church funds to bless himself with a fleet of Mercedes and Rolls-Royce autos. He also bought an air-conditioned doghouse.

The Aramony and Bakker convictions, however, may serve less as proof of journalistic vigilance than as indices of widespread negligence.

Bakker founded his ministry in 1974, and stayed in the religion business long enough to bilk his followers of \$158 million.

Aramony spent the years before his conviction ostentatiously living the high life at the charity's expense. He spent \$40,762 on tickets for himself and his companions (including his teenaged mistress) to fly the Concorde supersonic transport between 1987 and 1990. His limousine bill for 1991 was \$20,000. His romantic misuse of charity resources was well known within the office. "He would meet somebody on an airplane, and she would be on the payroll the next day," said George Wilkins, a former

vice president with the charity. "You would question him, and you're told basically that was none of your damn business." But, insiders said, he was a terrific fundraiser, so the United Way's 37-member board ignored his misdeeds. Its tolerance was so noteworthy that Aramony's lawyer argued at trial that the board had approved his behavior.

To many analysts of the nonprofit sector, the cases that make headlines appear to be just a small part of the problem. In 1993, the IRS reviewed several dozen television ministries for Congress. It found 18 in trouble, mostly for excessive payments to ministers and their families or for impermissible political activity.

"Some charities exist more for the benefit of officers and fundraisers than the public," a congressional committee said in 1994. Connecticut's attorney general reported "a steady growth in the number of people and organizations that are willing to abuse the generosity of the public and flout federal and state laws." The Genie Project, set up to grant the last wishes of dying children, spent only 4 percent of its revenues for that purpose. A brain-tumor research organization raised \$500,000. On research, it spent \$5,000.

A Dozen Tips for Stories About Nonprofits

A dozen story suggestions from editors, reporters and nonprofit leaders:

- **Nonprofits that deliver.** Gather information on all major nonprofits serving your area, and compare the amount of resources they devote to solving problems, paying salaries, covering administrative costs and raising money.
- **Resources versus needs.** Compare the scope of a local problem with the resources of charities devoted to solving it. Check into the origins of those resources. What share comes from the government? What share from private donors? Can projected resources keep up with projected need for services?
- **Role models.** Consider an important community problem and find a nonprofit, in your area or elsewhere, that has solved it well. What lessons has it learned? Can its experience be transferred elsewhere?
- **Top earners.** Download from the IRS a list of all nonprofits in your area. Select the top 50 or 100 by size or impact. Obtain their Form 990s. Compare the salaries of their officers, from the nonprofit and from affiliated for-profit groups.
- **Big-time nonprofits.** Study in-depth the biggest nonprofits in your area. They'll probably be hospitals and universities. Using Form 990s, hospital Medicare data or Department of Education IPEDS data, discuss service, pay for all levels of workers, benefits to community or lack thereof.
- **Competitive nonprofits.** Describe the activities of nonprofits that look and act just like ordinary businesses. Some will be competing with for-profit businesses. What added social value do they bring to the table, to justify their tax exemptions?
- **Tax forgiveness.** If your state and local governments exempt nonprofits from property or sales taxes (and most do), what does that cost? What does society get back in return? How vigilant are local authorities in checking on the organizations? Do they visit "places of worship" to see whether they're legitimate?
- **Volunteers.** Find the most interesting volunteers in your area, and write about an important issue through their eyes.
- **Politics.** Which nonprofits (churches included) are most politically active in your area? Get to know them, attend their meetings, find out what they're up to, how they're thinking and working, and how they regard the federal laws against excessive political involvement.
- **Fundraising perils.** Some nonprofits have been forced to use shady for-profit fundraisers. Some of these companies hand over only a dime for every dollar they raise. *Unwary nonprofits* can get fleeced. And donors need to know where they'll get the biggest bang for their bucks.
- **Future conversions.** Nonprofits are ripe for conversion to for-profit status if they contain plentiful assets. That makes hospitals prime candidates. But universities may not be immune to the trend.
- **Creative bookkeeping.** Charities get public relations points for "education" but lose them for "fundraising expenses." So how do they record fundraising letters that contain educational tips? Just one of many accountability questions. ■—GR

Weak Internal Oversight

The structure of nonprofits partly explains the problem of misuse of funds. They lack many of the checks and balances built into private businesses. Donors are giving to the agencies, not buying from them. They have no reason to demand value for their money, as a business customer would. They have no incentive to protect their investment, as a stockholder would. Auditors, likewise, have no list of invoices to compare with bank deposits. And cash-strapped nonprofit groups may feel they cannot afford the large office staffs that provide some

built-in security for government and business organizations. At many nonprofits, the same staff person might receive a check, log it in and deposit it in the bank.

Many nonprofits also share a sense of mission that causes insiders to overlook misdeeds, or to circle the wagons to protect a cause in which they deeply believe.

Long before newspaper reports that he may have diverted more than \$1 million in National Baptist Convention USA funds to a secret bank account in Wisconsin, friends had doubts about convention President Henry J. Lyons. But despite "years of repeated whispers about a troubled marriage and

money grubbing," St. Petersburg Times columnist Elijah Gosier wrote, no one blew the whistle—until Lyons's wife, Deborah, found a deed at their home indicating that he had bought a \$700,000 house with another woman. Mrs. Lyons was arrested for setting fire to the home. Then the public learned that Lyons had bought it along with a convicted embezzler and church employee named Bernice Edwards. He'd also used church funds to buy her a diamond ring and property at Lake Tahoe. He called those business transactions, undertaken to help a friend. Meanwhile, he admitted keeping more than \$200,000 in donations meant for

burned-out black churches. Even so, colleagues rallied behind him. They voted to retain him in September, 1997, after he begged their forgiveness.

The need for journalistic oversight is all the greater because the Internal Revenue Service, the only nationwide regulator of nonprofits, is overwhelmed. "There are 1.1 million tax-exempt organizations and another 340,000 churches, and there are about 635 revenue agents who enforce this area of the law," said Jim McGovern, former chief of the tax service's exempt-organizations section. "That's an enormous number of tax-exempt organizations and extremely few resources.... So the role the media plays is of increasing significance."

In 1996, the IRS approved 48,635 applications and denied 577. Once approved, a group could expect to go 50 to 100 years, statistically speaking, without an IRS audit. Churches are not required to file tax returns. Of the 563,710 returns that *were* filed in 1996, the IRS examined only 11,020.

Audit rates have plunged since the 1970's, as Congress froze the size of the IRS's nonprofit auditing staff while the number of nonprofits doubled. The IRS could audit one out of 36 nonprofit returns in 1980. By 1993, it was down to one out of 100.

Congress's General Accounting office found in 1995 that the IRS was not able to enforce rules banning undue pay and benefits for nonprofits' officers and directors. Of 673 executive pay packages reviewed, 100 earned more than \$200,000. Many executives also profited from for-profit firms that were related to their nonprofit employer. GAO found that of 285 groups it reviewed, 29 percent of the top executives earned more than \$10,000 from related groups. Such pay ranged up to \$711,000.

The general lack of oversight troubled even leading nonprofits. In the early 1990's, they asked Congress to provide more controls, lest bad charities effectively drive out the good ones—or dissuade people from supporting them. "It's obvious that the IRS does not have a big enough staff in terms of oversight of nonprofit groups and our

organization believes that they should," said John Thomas, Vice President of Independent Sector, which exists to protect and promote the sector. "Ethics and disclosure and accountability are all things that we promote among our members." Without adequate policing, he added, bad charities could drive out good ones; public faith in the whole sector could evaporate.

Nonprofits fought harder for effective disclosure requirements than did the news media, according to Stacy Palmer, managing editor of *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*. "As a profession, we need to push for more openness," she said. "These organization are tax-exempt. We have a direct stake in what they do."

New Tools

Over the past few years, Congress has beefed up the IRS somewhat and allowed it to fine organizations and executives that break the rules. Those fines must be listed on Form 990 tax returns, giving reporters a new and potentially revealing indicator of misdeeds.

Congress also has toughened disclosure requirements on nonprofits. In the past, they were required to let the public view their tax returns, but only at their headquarters and only during office hours. In the future they will be required to mail copies of the tax documents to anyone who requests them and to charge a reasonable rate for the service.

The National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy calls that a badly needed improvement. In 1995, it set out to get Form 990's for 174 corporate nonprofit foundations. It took two years and cost \$35,541. Only 47 foundations cooperated fully. Ten refused to provide any information; 76 ignored all requests. The IRS wasn't much better. Initially, its clerks could provide only 18 returns. On average, it took the IRS five months to comply. Of the tax returns the committee got, 59 omitted basic information such as the name and pay of nonprofit board members.

Business Watchdogs

Many people in the nonprofit community hope journalists will use their new tools to go beyond the simple search for scandal. From their point of view, the crucial stories concern questions not of graft but of mission: What social purposes are nonprofits performing, in return for their tax exemptions? What problems do they face in achieving those goals? That will require reporters covering nonprofits to think like business writers.

While the news media focused on William Aramony's misuse of United Way funds, for instance, America's nonprofit hospitals and Health Maintenance Organizations were going through a quiet revolution. With their profits squeezed by government policies and market forces, all were changing the way they did business. Many were selling out to for-profit chains. Surveying sales as of 1997, one expert said some sales may have been motivated by greed, not need. Executives and board members sometimes benefited from stock options and deferred compensation, Lawrence E. Singer found. Some also got large pay raises from the for-profit firms they'd helped take over. Negotiating (unsuccessfully) to buy Ohio's Blue Cross-Blue Shield state plan, Columbia/HCA offered to let the nonprofit's top executives split a \$16 million consulting fee.

Public attention can powerfully affect such deals. Leaders of California's Blue Cross-Blue Shield sought to quietly convert it to a for-profit enterprise. The IRS regards such conversions as a sale, in effect, and requires purchasers to pay a fair price, with proceeds put into new or existing charitable foundations. The first offer for California's Blue Cross was \$100 million. After a public outcry, the price rose to \$3.3 billion. The public's return on years of nonprofit tax exemptions had grown by 3,300 percent.

Such scrutiny was not common enough, however, said John Griffith, a health policy professor at the University of Michigan. "There was a lot of stealth," he said. Indeed, sometimes

even the board members who were asked to approve the deals were kept in the dark about them. Trustees of an Ohio hospital were dismissed after they objected to being asked to ratify a sale "without telling us who it was with and what it was," said Robert Rownd, one of the trustees. "We never knew the amount of money involved."

Follow-up Needed

Even when newspapers focus on a sale, they don't always watch the aftermath. "In a whole range of cases the transaction took place for a set amount of money...and then the whole thing was sold again within a year to another organization for a gigantic profit," said Bradford Gray, Director of the New York Academy of Medicine's division of health and science policy.

That is not to say that conversions to for-profit status are invariably bad. Buyouts can be necessary to keep institutions alive. Nonprofits are not always paragons of good management, or avid practitioners of charity.

Cape Coral Hospital in Florida was sold after directors suddenly discovered that it was losing \$1 million a month. For years, those directors had ignored signs of trouble. Their curiosity was not aroused by high-living executives who resisted financial disclosure requests. Nor did they notice that the hospital repeatedly issued bonds for the same item. They demanded that executives boil down financial reports from 30 pages to 1, because they found the longer document too confusing.

Fiscal pressures finally forced executives to propose a sale. Only then, The Wall Street Journal reported, did the board learn that top executives allegedly had siphoned \$1.1 million out of secret accounts, created ghost employees and used their paychecks to buy cocaine, and even stolen the silver recovered from used X-ray film. Some board members also benefited from hospital funds; Cape Coral invested in improvements to the directors' commercial property.

"Exploiting charitable assets for personal gain isn't extraordinary in the

inbred world of nonprofit hospitals," IRS official Marcus Owens told The Journal. "The tremendous financial resources available in a nonprofit hospital, combined with a board of directors with local businesspeople and doctors, make it ripe for insider transactions and business deals."

As for charitable care, Methodist Hospital in Houston, Texas, preserved its nonprofit status despite policies that required all uninsured patients (save for emergency cases) to pay a pre-admission deposit equal to the full costs of care. Many other "charity" hospitals provide only a few percentage points of their revenue to non-paying customers. The Harvard Business Review surveyed nonprofit hospitals and reported in 1997 that they did not serve their communities better than for-profits. Rather, The Review found, hospitals used the benefits of tax exemptions to enrich affiliated doctors, "who are their main customers."

On the other hand, the consumer group Families USA recently reported that nonprofit HMO's tended to provide the most desirable care to Medicare recipients, while for-profit HMO's provided most of the least desirable care. The California Medical Association found that nonprofits generally devoted a higher share of their income to medical care than did for-profit HMO's. And there is some evidence that frail elderly people in nonprofit, faith-based nursing homes are less likely to be drugged into a stupor than those in for-profit homes.

"I don't think that this should be approached as a good guy, bad guy thing. Which is how too many of these public policy stories are approached," said Northwestern University economist Burton Weisbrod. Rather, he said, every nonprofit institution and every business deal must be evaluated on its merits. And reporters should not stop looking after the first deal is done. Watch what becomes of the charitable foundations that hold the proceeds. Some take a broad definition of charity. They fund sports events, art shows and flight schools.

Political Watchdogs

Political reporters also need to serve as nonprofit watchdogs.

Until the 1996 election, the major recent test may have been charting the rise of the Christian Right. Newspapers have earned high marks for tracking that development, according to American University political scientist Mark J. Rozell, who has written several books and articles on the subject.

In general, he said, the media have failed to describe the motives or methods of religious conservatives, who have seized control of Republican Party machinery in countless localities and many states. Because of that, he said, opponents think of the Christian Right in terms of stereotypes. And churches, absent meaningful oversight, have allowed themselves to be used as political platforms, in direct contravention of federal law.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State says some liberal ministers continue to issue endorsements from the pulpit. Conservatives do likewise. And while Pat Robertson vows to elect a Republican President in 2000, his Christian Coalition produces hundreds of thousands of "voter guides" for distribution in conservative churches. Impartial scholars say the guides are blatantly biased toward Republican candidates. The Church at Pierce Creek in Binghamton, N.Y., took out full-page advertisements in USA Today and The Washington Post during the 1992 election likening Bill Clinton to the devil himself. Clinton "is promoting policies that are in rebellion to God's laws," the churches said. "How then can we vote for Bill Clinton?"

"There are activities within the movement that are very questionable within the law and are not being reported carefully, and I'm not sure why," said Rozell.

During the 1996 elections, Associated Press writer Jim Drinkard was one of relatively few political reporters to glimpse a new problem. In late October, his colleagues reported that previously unknown nonprofits were pouring hundreds of thousands of dollars into ads attacking Democratic candi-

dates. Drinkard heard of the phenomenon in only a handful of cases, but wanted to find out more. He called one of the men who seemed to be in the middle of things: former Reagan administration political operative Lyn Nofziger.

"Lyn was, 'Aw, shucks, we're just trying to do some work out there,'" Drinkard recalled. "I think that it was clear to them that all they had to do was keep it a mystery for another week and they'd be home free. Which they were... I feel a little bit like we were asleep at the wheel."

The group Nofziger was associated with, TRIAD Management Services Inc., was using at least two nonprofit groups to run ads in more than two dozen congressional campaigns. In Montana, Citizens for Reform was labeling Yellowstone a wife-beater. In California, it was accusing Democratic House candidate Calvin M. Dooley of being soft on the death penalty. He could only respond that he had voted for it 28 of 29 times. Another TRIAD-affiliated nonprofit, Citizens for the Republic Education Fund, spent about \$3 million to air TV commercials across the country. Carolyn Malenick, a former fundraiser for Oliver North, who ran TRIAD, denied any illegalities or improprieties. She and her colleagues described their ads as "issue-oriented," and therefore exempt from Federal Election Commission disclosure requirements. Grover Norquist, whose Americans for Tax Reform nonprofit got \$4.3 million from the GOP for a pre-election ad campaign concerning Medicare, said likewise.

Federal law imposes virtually no limits on nonprofits that run issue ads. Ad buys need not be disclosed to opposing campaigns. The names of donors can remain secret. "The clear advantage that you get from being a nonprofit is secrecy. Stealth," said Drinkard. For the Republican leadership, nonprofits offered another advantage. Federal law normally places an indirect limit on parties' use of money from big donors, by forcing them to match such spending with money donated by smaller givers. Republican Party Chairman Haley Barbour told reporters just be-

Types of Nonprofits

The Internal Revenue Service recognizes several types of nonprofit or tax-exempt organizations. They are listed below, according to the tax-code provision under which they qualify.

Type	Description	Number
501c(1)	Corporations authorized by Congress	9
501c(2)	Titleholding corporations	7,025
501c(3)	Charitable and religious	626,226
501c(4)*	Social welfare	139,451
501c(5)	Labor, agricultural organizations	66,662
501c(6)	Business leagues	75,695
501c(7)	Social, recreational clubs	65,501
501c(8)	Fraternal beneficiary societies	92,115
501c(9)	Voluntary employees beneficiary societies	14,681
501c(0)	Domestic fraternal beneficiary societies	21,406
501c(1)	Teachers' retirement funds	11
501c(2)	Benevolent life insurance associations	6,291
501c(3)	Cemetery companies	9,433
501c(4)	State chartered credit unions	5,225
501c(5)	Mutual insurance companies	1,185
501c(6)	Corporations to finance crop operations	23
501c(7)	Supplemental employee benefit	583
501c(8)	Employee-funded pension trusts	3
501c(9)	War veterans' organizations	30,828
501c(0)	Legal service organizations	141
501c(1)	Black lung trusts	25
501c(2)	Multiemployer pension plans	0
501c(3)	Veterans' associations founded before 1880	2
501c(4)*	Trusts described in section 4049 of ERISA	1
501c(5)	Holding companies for pensions, etc.	638
501(d)	Religious and apostolic organizations	107
501(e)	Cooperative hospital service organizations	61
501(f)	Cooperative service organizations of operating educational institutions	1
521	Farmers' cooperatives	1,810
Total	1,165,139

SOURCE: THE URBAN INSTITUTE.

501(c)(3): The only nonprofits allowed to accept tax-deductible donations. Charitable, religious and educational organizations include the Salvation Army, American Cancer Society and Harvard University. Churches qualify under this section but do not have to file tax returns.

501(c)(4)*: Social welfare organizations include the American Association of Retired Persons and the Minneapolis Police Relief Association.

501(c)(5): Labor, Agricultural and Horticultural organizations include the United Auto, Aerospace and Agricultural Workers, and the Ohio Farm Bureau Federation Inc.

501(c)(4): Business leagues include the American Medical Association and the Chamber of Commerce of the USA.

fore the 1996 election that the GOP had received so many big donations from corporations and wealthy individuals that it could not match them with smaller donors' money. So, he said, the Republican National Committee chose to give the money to "several groups who are like-minded."

Yet federal law bans "coordination" between groups that buy ads and the

campaigns they benefit. Republicans have long accused the Democrats of coordinating activities with nonprofit labor unions, for example. They made similar charges against Vote Now '96, a get-out-the-vote nonprofit. And they did produce evidence that leading Democrats steered big donors to the nonprofit, confident that the voters it would get out would be Democrats.

The Republican majority ended Senate hearings before Democrats were permitted to dissect the GOP's relationships with friendly nonprofits. Democratic investigators with the Senate Government Oversight Committee say that had hearings continued, they'd have produced ample evidence of coordination. One TRIAD memo given to Time recounted a TRIAD operative's visit to the Hill campaign in Montana. It said the campaign needed a "third party to expose Yellowtail wife-beating."

Senate investigators cannot prove it, but they think that 90 percent of Triad's \$1.3 million war chest came from Charles and David Koch, two billionaire oil men with a fervently anti-tax, anti-regulation agenda. The few other known donors to TRIAD have described themselves as extremely successful business owners and extremely conservative.

But Senate investigators said they know of no journalists who accurately described the nonprofits' efforts before the election. Even when reporters looked, they could learn precious little. Nonprofits' expenses must be listed on their Form 990s, but the tax returns are not due until months after an election. Nonprofits need almost never disclose their donors.

Mark Braden, a TRIAD lawyer, said that is as it should be. Privacy is a legitimate concern for donors, he said. Drinkard, however, sees a danger to the entire political system. "It's a very insidious thing when people can inject themselves into politics anonymously," he said. "Normally when you get up to talk or debate, people know who you are. And that seems fair to me. If you are a well-heeled business interest, people should know that."

Politics and the Poor

Another emerging story concerns not what nonprofits are doing for politicians, but what politicians may do to nonprofits.

Influential conservatives say charities have done such a superior job of caring for the poor, compared to government, that they should take over virtually all public aid. In 1996, Republican presi-

dential contender Lamar Alexander called for government to get out of the welfare business and to encourage charitable donations by offering tax credits for charities that help the poor. Bob Dole later embraced the concept. The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, which generously subsidizes a number of conservative groups, later gave Alexander funds to develop the idea. One pioneer in the new conservative charity movement, Marvin Olasky, argues that welfare aid is ineffective unless it is accompanied by a spiritual message. "You need both moral suasion and practical help, simultaneously," he said.

Charities do hope to take on more responsibilities for helping the poor. Many, however, say the conservative approach is questionable philosophically and potentially disastrous in practice. Sharon M. Daly, director of social policy for Catholic Charities USA, says it supposes that the poor are morally derelict. More than half the people her agencies serve are working. "They don't have character problems. They can't find jobs, or the wages they get are too low to support a family," she said.

The link between faith and sustenance worries some. "The nice thing about government is that it offers equality to all," said Evelyn Brodtkin, a professor of social science at the University of Chicago. "If we go to a charity system, you'd better hope that there's a charity that likes people like you. Because if not, you have nowhere to go."

Even church-based charities leaders cite several reasons why they believe they cannot assume the nation's entire social welfare burden.

One is size. Catholic Charities USA, the nation's largest single charity, handles \$2 billion in aid annually. The entire United Way, including everything from soup kitchens to Boy Scout troops, covers about \$3 billion. Federal food stamp and welfare programs amount to \$44 billion. Small size can be a blessing. It makes charities flexible and personal, said Daly. "We can do counseling, help people cope or get a job...but only if somebody else is making sure they're not starving in the streets. And there's no one more efficient than government

at collecting revenues and getting checks to people."

U.S. Funds Still Sought

Many charities say that without government funding they could not provide even their current levels of service. The Independent Sector surveyed 108 charitable nonprofits and found that on average 32 percent of their funds came from government. To replace the social-services cuts once contemplated by Congress over the next seven years, each U.S. congregation would have to raise an extra \$1.5 to \$2 million. That would require an unprecedented 120 percent increase in private giving.

Conservatives say that money would flood into charities if government got out of the social welfare business. Many analysts disagree. Most studies show private donors would repay only pennies on every lost federal dollar, according to Virginia Hodgkinson, a nonprofit expert at Georgetown University. The most optimistic study predicted each lost federal dollar would be replaced with donations totaling 30 cents.

Moreover, there is no guarantee that the 30 cents would go where it is needed. Only 10 percent of all "charitable" donations go to help the poor, according to Julian Wolpert, an urban geographer at Princeton University. Most goes to services the donors themselves use: churches, schools, hospitals, arts and culture.

Even the purely charitable donations are spread unevenly. Across the nation, states where people support higher tax rates to help the poor also show higher rates of donation to charity. States with stingy governments have stingy donors, too. Within urban areas, suburban donors support suburban charities.

Inner-city charities can find themselves fiscal orphans. In Dallas, the inner-city food bank serves only 1 of 25 poor persons. Just across the city limits in the affluent suburb of Richardson, the food bank serves three of every four poor persons.

"As I talk to our local directors around the country, they are terrified by what is

coming," said the Rev. Fred Kammer, President and CEO of Catholic Charities. "Because they see that the people they serve will have less income, and they will have fewer resources to meet their needs."

"Charities across the country are being asked to do more with less," said Cohen, who is Editor and Publisher of the *Philanthropy Journal* of North Carolina. "But most people don't know about it. It's not on their radar screen. Because the media don't write about it... The infrastructure never gets covered. And yet it's the biggest problem facing the sector."

Some members of Congress want to ensure that nonprofits do not fight too energetically for more aid to the poor. Rep. Ernest Istook, R-Okla., and other House Republicans have repeatedly tried to win approval of a bill that would bar lobbying by nonprofits that receive government funds. He says taxpayers should not have to support "groups that do not necessarily serve the interests of the general public." Nonprofit leaders note that Istook would not forbid businesses with government contracts from lobbying. In effect, he would permit wealthy businesses to lobby for themselves, but ban charities from lobbying on behalf of the needy.

Nonprofit analysts generally say that good newspapers are beginning to offer more nuanced coverage. The Aramony scandal opened editors' eyes. Special mid-career or journalism school courses have trained a cadre of reporters in the tricks of the nonprofit trade.

Yet all agree that the media have a long way to go.

Some say a "sacred-cow syndrome" still inhibits editors and reporters. "Both the press and the public tend to look away from problems that they stumble across," said one Kentucky reporter. "Because there is this feeling that, 'Oh, look at all the wonderful stuff they do. We don't want to rock the boat.'"

Others say the problem is not fear but sloth. "It's a matter of initiative," said Neill Borowski of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, who co-authored a path-breaking series on nonprofits in 1993. Part of the problem, he added, is structural. Many good nonprofit stories fall be-

tween ordinary beats. University finances, for instance, are a great nonprofit story—but one that might not occur to an education reporter or to a business reporter.

"Nonprofits... are outside the usual beats and because they aren't government and don't hold meetings, most of the press don't cover them much," said Jim Aucoin, an Assistant Professor in the Communications Department of the University of South Alabama.

Improving coverage does not require creating a separate nonprofit beat, said Burnis Morris, a journalism professor at the University of Kentucky. After studying nonprofit coverage for five years, he concluded that papers simply need to do a better job of training reporters in what to look for, particu-

larly questions of money, mission and capability. "Courthouse reporters need to know that they should look out for these stories, because a lot of them turn up at the courthouse," he said. "Sports reporters need to look.... I'm not calling for anything all that drastic. I'm just saying that journalists do what they are trained to do."

But, Morris adds, editors should bear in mind that the training may have to come on the job. He surveyed 87 schools of journalism and found that none used a textbook that taught about covering nonprofits. He asked professors if they supplemented the texts with their own materials on the agencies.

"Most professors said no," he said. "That's remarkable." ■

Where to Find Information

The public is entitled to view the past three years of tax returns (IRS Form 990s) filed by a nonprofit and to obtain copies at reasonable cost. The nonprofit must also provide copies of its original request for a tax exemption. For charities, that is a Form 1023. For other nonprofits, it is a Form 1024. Many may now be posting the information on the Internet to spare themselves the expense of case-by-case disclosure.

Under proposed regulations issued in the fall of 1997, the IRS can impose "intermediate sanctions" on nonprofits that abuse their tax exemptions. Those fines and penalties are likely to be far more common than the IRS's only previous sanction, loss of the tax exemption. And charities will be required to report those sanctions on future tax returns. Watching for the sanctions can yield good stories.

Many nonprofits can also be probed through other information sources. They include audited financial statements, tax-exempt bond "offering statements," civil court records, bankruptcy court records, and records of the U.S. Tax Court.

The Internet contains ever-more information about charities. *Philanthropic Research Inc.* posts data on some 600,000 American charities on its Web site: www.guidestar.com.

The National Charities Information Bureau has quick-reference information on national charities at www.give.org.

Some of the IRS's tax-exempt organization data are available at www.irs.gov/prod/search/eosearch.html.

IRS data on nonprofits within certain ZIP codes are available on the World Wide Web: www.nonprofits.org/library/gov/irs/search_irs_zip.

The *Philanthropy Journal* covers nonprofits in North Carolina and around the country. Its Web site is www.philanthropy-journal.org.

The Internet Nonprofit Center offers reference materials about nonprofits, annual reports and other data posted by the agencies themselves, and a chat room to discuss nonprofit developments. www.nonprofits.org.

State regulators, often attorneys general, may obtain and provide far more information than the IRS. ■—GR

Response: Document Activities

BY DAVID HALL

When newspapers start believing what they are told, there is no surer way to cheat a reader. Good reporters never take a politician's word, but verify claims instead. Reporters know that even the most civic-minded corporate CEO's work for stockholders, not the public, so their reports are probed and their actions questioned.

As governments grow and corporations grow, so do community and large private foundations. Foundations, an important group in the nonprofit sector, today grow not only in wealth but also in social and political influence. But newspaper reporting has not caught up with the greater influence foundations wield. For years editors and reporters have tended to take foundation acts and statements at face value and to view their gifts as largesse rather than pursuit of a socio-political strategy. Foundation executive directors are viewed as godheads in most communities, their boards as men and women of selfless devotion.

With some exceptions such as *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and *The Wall Street Journal*, most newspapers don't regularly scrutinize foundations the way they do nonprofit advocacy groups. Newsrooms are busy. And, after all, unless the Cleveland Foundation grants \$10 million to an arts consortium, where's the news in the dozens of other grants to less visible organizations? Foundations often are covered no better than fires; stories are one-day occurrences.

Permit me an example close to home. The Plain Dealer and other community institutions watched Cleveland's two largest foundations play the front in late 1996 for a political move that set up Mayor Michael R. White's takeover of

the nearly destroyed school system. The executive directors of the Cleveland and Gund Foundations convened a large committee to recommend school governance changes; and although neither man took direct orders from city hall, their committee recommended with few wiggles what the mayor wanted. And the takeover law that passed the legislature is a good one—maybe the last hope for Cleveland's intensive-care school system. And *The Plain Dealer* covered the effort thoroughly, we thought.

Here is what we missed:

- We never pressed the executive directors hard enough about their intentions. With statements bordering on the disingenuous they talked of a full airing of community views. Hearings were never extensive.
- The committee's deliberations gave short shrift and ridicule to those who wanted more deliberate and participatory hearings.
- Although hearings were conducted by the Ohio Legislature, their process ran parallel to the ad hoc committee's, and the public was truly confused about which was the real democratic process.

Now, not wanting this to be a Cleveland shaggy dog story, let me broaden the point.

These two executive directors, who care greatly about Cleveland, behaved the way many civic-minded foundation leaders behave: show the flag, sound the bugle, lead the charge. Admirable! The nonprofit sector is free of stock-

holders' shackles and political avarice. Many foundation executives think they're free to help govern.

It's time for skepticism and caution.

As public policy, should foundations give away money and also be civic conveners in alliance with political ends? And if foundations become civic conveners, to whom are they responsible?

Participatory politics in this country needs to be revived. But while the ballot box has weakened as the major place where public policy is decided, it would be dangerous to believe that a web of foundations (run usually by noble élitists) can become the new town hall.

The Winter 1997 issue of *National Civic Review*, a quarterly of the National Civic League, was devoted to nonprofits, philanthropy and the civic



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life. It was rich with information, particularly the thoughts of Lamar Alexander (former Tennessee governor) on making foundation dollars work faster, and a warning by Pablo Eisenberg (Executive Director of the Center for Community Change) that philanthropy is compromised when it becomes too much like corporations and politics.

In one Review article, however, Council on Foundations President Dorothy S. Ridings stakes out a broad mission for foundations that just may stretch intellectual energy and political savvy too far. Ridings believes "foundations...can create friendly settings, unburdened by political baggage, where thoughtful people can seek common ground on contentious issues and join together in common strategies of action."

The rub comes at "common strategies of action." Foundations cannot pursue action too far without becoming entangled with one side or another. Politics, properly played, is a rough game. Foundations do better to tend their investments and direct grants as they choose. They can undertake bipartisan research and provide staff time for interpretation.

Increasingly, however, foundations have tried on the shoes of the agenda setters. The fit is ill, for the voice of the foundation is muted when it allies itself with the agendas of elected officials. Even the best politicians always have an eye on that short-term need for survival. In the Review, Alexander makes a critical point:

"Today too many precious charitable dollars are spent on too much study, too much talking, too little service, and too little hard-nosed evaluation of what people get for their money. There is too much distance between donors and donees. Some charities have become too dependent on government. Too much of organized philanthropy...dreams of changing the world instead of fixing tangible problems...."

Philanthropy as organized in the United States is unique. It is blessed by tradition and sustained by the tax code. Especially as nonprofit foundations drift more toward politics as a goal and a corporate structure as their style, news-

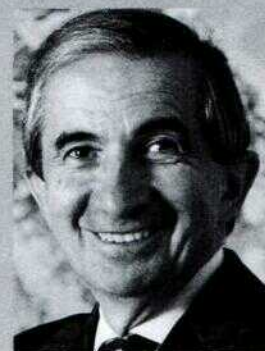
Lou Boccardi

Letting Sources Tell Their Stories

It will come as no surprise to anyone that the head of the AP appeared here this morning and endorsed objectivity and impartiality in news. You expected me to say that. But don't expect me to agree that this consigns us to a meaningless blather of he said/she said journalism that leaves everybody as ignorant and uninformed as when they started. In a sense, awash in information, but bereft of understanding. That is not what we mean by objectivity, fairness or impartiality.

We see the core of objectivity as freedom from bias or prejudice. It does not mean freedom from impact; it does not mean freedom from the capacity to outrage, or freedom from helping a reader to understand complex issues....

I'm very uneasy with the urgings of those who say it's time to cast off this old, outmoded straightjacket. It's not a straightjacket. I'm persuaded, on the



contrary, that a large part—not all, but a large part—of the estrangement that all the polls confirm between us and the audience is rooted in a sense that many of them have that we're just not fair.

At the modern AP we think you can investigate, you can analyze, you can explain, and all the while remain true to a standard of impartiality.—Lou Boccardi, President of The Associated Press, at a forum of The Committee of Concerned Journalists, in New York, December 4, 1997.

papers need to view them as they view city hall. Reporters should:

- Learn everything they can about a foundation's executive director, from personality and friendships to salary. Document outside activities.
- Find out who the foundation's staff sees for lunch and weekend picnics.
- Determine who the intellectual and political heavyweights are on the foundation staff.
- Document the nature of recurring grants.
- Interview regularly the grant recipients.
- Track any formal or informal alliances with political and civic groups.
- Know the board of directors.

Who are they, and what are their alliances? Interview them, not just the staff.

The public interest requires that foundations get regular, more sophisticated coverage from local, regional and national newspapers. Such a change in practice will cause wounded consternation in many foundation suites, long comfortable and clubby. They are not used to scrutiny and understandably will wonder why reporters are showing up with tough questions. It's unfortunate, really, that journalists have waited so long to focus on America's foundations. But as they become richer and as more assume political roles, old-fashioned reporting is needed.

And old-fashioned reporters don't believe what they are told, only what they can prove. ■

Response: Check on Creative Accounting

BY JOHN CREWDSON

Americans are the most generous people in the world, donating more to charity each year than the gross national products of many countries—some \$120 billion, all told. As George Rodrigue argues convincingly, the media has done less than it could to illuminate the workings of the organizations to whom this money is given on faith. But Rodrigue touches only lightly on the less-than-complete financial accountability of nonprofits, and the concomitant difficulty for donors of assessing how effectively their contributions will be used to promote good works.

Unlike most European countries, the United States has no federal agency with which charities must register. Understaffed state attorneys general and consumer affairs bureaus often respond to complaints by referring donors to the Better Business Bureau, which, like the National Charities Information Bureau and other private-sector watchdogs, has virtually no teeth. Ironically, most prospective contributors get their information from *Money magazine's* widely quoted guide to the "Best Charities in America."

Most of the organizations that make *Money's* top 25 list are relentless in letting potential donors know they're among the "best managed" charities in the United States. Reassuring as that may sound, *Money* gets most of its information from a trade publication, the *NonProfit Times*—supported in large part by subscriptions and advertising from the charitable industry—which simply ranks charities according to the percentage of income they allocate to programs as opposed to management or fund-raising. In the world of nonprofits, a pie chart showing at least 80 percent of income dedicated to

program expense has become the unofficial hallmark of an efficient and effective organization. "Save the Children is proud of the high proportion of our funds that we dedicate to program services directly benefiting those we serve," says the message accompanying that well-known charity's 1995 pie chart, which shows an impressive 83.3 percent of its income devoted to "program services." While most major charities hit the 80 percent target, there's a fair amount of legal fiction behind those calculations.

The first page of the federal tax return filed by nonprofit organizations, IRS Form 990, reports the allocation of total expenses among programs, overhead and fundraising. It is from these totals that come the numbers published by *Money*, and which go into the charities' ubiquitous pie charts. Look deeper into Form 990, and the fiction gradually becomes apparent. Within those three broad categories, expenses are divided into subcategories like salaries, benefits, rent, legal fees, travel and telecommunications, and it is there that the IRS permits nonprofits to obscure how they actually spend their money. Save the Children, which is by no means unique among nonprofits, filed a federal tax return for the 1996 fiscal year reporting program expenses of \$94 million, compared with \$7.2 million for management and overhead and \$13.3 million for fundraising.

Save the Children's contributors might be forgiven for assuming that nearly 82 cents of every dollar they sent Save the Children had bought school supplies for African children. Peel back the layers, however, and "program expense" includes salaries of \$17.5 million—more than three-quarters of Save the Children's total payroll—as well as

89 percent of the organization's travel budget and 87 percent of its occupancy costs. Other "functional" program items include legal fees (\$97,102), office supplies (\$13.2 million) and \$14 million for "other project costs, other professional fees, advertising and miscellaneous." If the expenditures for salaries, benefits and other management expenses labeled as "program" are shifted to "management," Save the Children's program expense would decrease from 82 percent to 39, while its management expense would increase from six percent to 49.

Most nonprofit organizations "functionalize" their expenses in the same way, and they argue that salaries paid to employees who arrange the delivery of school supplies to African villages represent a legitimate program expense just as surely as the cost of the school supplies themselves. The same argument presumably applies to fees paid the lawyers who draft the contracts for purchasing the supplies and to the telephone bills incurred in arranging for their shipping and delivery. If that sounds reasonable, then by extension Save the Children might as well claim that since its only business is helping children, every last penny it spends, from limos to light bills, is a program expense. Beyond the fact that functionalizing salaries and other overhead expenses allows a charity to be as wasteful and inefficient as it likes, a pie chart that showed 100 percent of every donor's dollar going to programs would

John Crewdson, a senior writer for The Chicago Tribune based in Washington, recently participated in that newspaper's examination of child sponsorship organizations.

be beyond belief, just as one showing 39 percent would be likely to put a major damper on contributions. By shuffling expenses between this category and that until the 80 percent threshold is reached, a reasonable fiction is created.

The IRS, which doesn't pay much attention to nonprofits in the first place—less than two percent of all 990's were audited in 1996—also doesn't care how a charity apportions its expenses among programs, management and fundraising. What matters to the IRS is whether a charity has spent its money on something besides its primary charitable business, or has conferred an "inordinate private benefit" on one of its officers. In the extreme case, a charity that wanted to appear ultra-efficient could appear to be claiming that 90 percent of its donations had been used to pay for its programs when the real figure was 20 percent, and still escape the IRS's wrath as long as it wasn't making a profit. But explaining functionalized accounting, and what it means to potential donors, is something the media can do better than any government agency or watchdog organization—and ought to. ■

Internet Freedom Necessary, Too

As we progress, more and more of what we say to each other is going to be electronically transmitted, and anybody concerned with freedom of expression has got to insist that we break down that barrier and that whether or not speech is electronically transmitted cannot be a reason for giving it less protection than other speech, or else 20 years from now we're going to wind up with a lot less free speech in this country.—

Representative Barney Frank, Democrat of Massachusetts, at New York forum for Concerned Journalists, December 4, 1997.

Response: It's Easier to Be Passive

BY PAUL DELANEY

When I was teaching journalism—communication, as most educators prefer nowadays—the authors of a widely used introductory textbook insisted that part of the media's mission is the "transfer of culture." Meaning, perpetuating the mores, habits, etc., good and bad, that bind us as a society. It certainly happens that way, but as a journalist, emphasizing that fact as essentially positive was disturbing to me. I dearly believe that an important part of our function is to hold an open mind on many cultural matters about America, recognizing that it is still a work in progress.

Nevertheless, there it was in the book, being passed on as fact and motto to young, impressionable minds, future journalists who should be taught to raise relevant questions rather than automatically "transfer" culture. Questions about government policy, for instance. Mind you, I am pro-government, a believer in a strong central government—to distinguish myself from right-wing, tear-it-all-down, anti-government ideologues. I do not want aspiring journalists, and certainly not veteran professionals, to shy away from the extremely tough issues. Like the dicey social issues involving economics, race and racism, gender—problems that divide us but cannot be willed away no matter how we try.

In passing along the traits of our society, the activity of nonprofit organizations by far overshadows that of government. We are bound to and indelibly influenced by churches, school activity such as team sports and cheerleading, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, civic and social clubs, professional groups, PTA councils, college attractions such as fraternities and sororities, foundations and outright propaganda

programs such as "support your local police."

Much of the media coverage of those groups and activities consists of features gloating about the good works the organizations are said to be performing—and let's agree that most of them perform admirably. However, most of the coverage is superficial, almost propagandistic, as the media put very few resources into delving into the inner-workings of the groups. If one accepts as legitimate and proper the media's role in transferring culture, they should be much more aggressive as the public's watchdog in this area.

It is easier, and cheaper, to be passive, and it causes fewer headaches with neighbors and friends, to wink and blink rather than look too closely at possible wrongdoing. The media certainly has a record in the area of social



Paul Delaney was a reporter in Washington, Chicago and Madrid for The New York Times. He also served as an editor on The Times National Desk in New York and as a senior editor involved in recruiting reporters and newsroom administration. He gave up his chairmanship of the Department of Journalism at the University of Alabama to help plan for "Our World," a newspaper with a black perspective.

issues, positive and negative. After the civil rights movement of the 1960's and the great progress made then and subsequently, the government—actually, politicians—was effective in taking the topics off the national agenda. Or at least lowering expectations that the problems could ever be solved, thereby feeding a spreading backlash. Much of the media went along, helping to turn attention away from the unpleasant-

...owners and publishers can finally escape the old accusation that they are in the pockets of big business, mainly because now they *are* big business. As such, they are even more distant from the masses than their employees, the reporters and editors.

ness that those issues generated.

The inattention was also the result of a number of other factors: our short attention span, our penchant for very short-lived fads, the focus on self during the "me-generation," and the fact that many Americans were just plain tired of being reminded that those serious problems seemed so intractable, tired of hearing about race. Plus, urban, social and racial problems were so complex that it was easy to move on. Editors and reporters did so.

In this atmosphere, therefore, the deficient coverage of nonprofits and philanthropy should be no surprise. At the end of the 20th Century, much of mainstream media is reeling from the same forces that are shaking and shaping our world. Globalism, mergers, the unseemly encroachment of business into areas of our lives that were previously respected as off-limits, the pace and immediacy of events, the ever-changing ethnic makeup of the country and resulting turf fighting, the amount of information and misinformation out there, and, most importantly, the powerful impact that information, whether it is true or false, has on people the world over.

In addition, journalists remain pretty distant from the average reader. This is more so today than, say, 100 years ago when the nation was smaller, topics and beats easier to cover and, to a certain extent, rather homogeneous. As immigrants kept coming, and particularly as their hues became darker, conflict was exacerbated, making solutions and coverage much more difficult.

Also, owners and publishers can finally escape the old accusation that they are in the pockets of big business, mainly because now they *are* big business. As such, they are even more distant from the masses than their employees, the reporters and editors. The shrinking of the field by mergers and gobbling up by non-media moguls and corporations, already generally regarded as very dangerous, was made easier by the encroachment that I mentioned, whereby we were all softened up by steady propaganda that allowed the corporations to be portrayed as the good guys. They convinced a sizable chunk of the public that business can do it all, that it commits no wrong, can solve all problems, run the schools, operate governments, even nations.

We were softened into accepting that credo, for example, by the corporate gallop to rescue us from the economic mess that they and the politicians helped to get us in. The payback for that rescue is a blank check that permits the logo and motto and brand name into our homes and onto our institutional nameplates: MCI-Capital Arena, Nokia Sugar Bowl, Southwestern Bell Cotton Bowl and even Poulan/Weed Eater Independence Bowl. Where will it end? Will we someday have to contend with the Bell Atlantic-White House? Black and Decker-Yale University? I hesitate making such suggestions even in jest for fear they may come to pass.

Given this recent history and background and trend, why would anyone expect media coverage of nonprofits to be much different from what it has been, or better? Given that mainstream media follow the actions and activities of government—check the number of journalists covering Congress and the Administration—and politicians are not

usually in a mood to tackle something as numbing as race, etc., the small part of the nonprofit community that focuses on serious social problems will continue to receive short shrift. Those kinds of stories are not at the top of too many journalists' priority lists.

"A reporter wishing to make his or her mark at the company is not going to waste time on stories the editors are not going to put on page one or pay much attention to," remarked a foundation official and former journalist.

"Most papers don't see a great deal to be gained by assigning a nonprofit beat. Or, if they do, they'll name a weak reporter, or someone on the way out, or someone out of favor the editors don't know what else to do with—that's symptomatic of the thinking in the newsroom."

On the other hand, another foundation officer said the nonprofits share some of the blame for the trouble with the media. He said many nonprofits have neither the skills nor resources to communicate their message, in contrast to corporations and some individuals of stature. "Many nonprofits do not have the sophistication to know that's what they need to do," he commented.

He cited a study of organization lead-

Unless there is a radical turnaround, the media will maintain their ho-hum attitude, devoting little substantive coverage to nonprofits, and will present more of the same light features and breaking news when there is scandal—remember the United Way and Jim Bakker.

ers who were asked what they were doing to get their story out. Some said they refuse to talk to journalists, not even about good things, "because the press would come back later and look for something bad."

"A lot of local nonprofits feel the press is out to get them, that it is not interested in the positive things they do," he went on. "There is some merit

Response: Avoid Close Relations

BY JANET WILSON

The local head of a nationally recognized charity earns nearly \$200,000 a year, travels the globe at the nonprofit's expense and receives a new car of the model of his choice every other year from his board of directors. A review of the organization's books by accountants and attorneys who specialize in nonprofits shows that little, possibly none, of the public's donations are going to poor clients, while the executive director's entire salary is improperly reported as programming.

The newspaper buries the story deep inside and refuses to print the executive director's name. One editor tells the reporter the story is a "cheap shot" against a do-gooder organization.

The incident points up something George Rodrigue underplays in his otherwise fine piece—a soft underbelly of journalistic ethics, our relationships with nonprofits.

Every time I get a United Way solicitation with my paycheck, every time my employer holds a newsroom auction for an abused children's home or helps sponsor a 10K marathon for a heart disease prevention organization, I cringe. I contribute sometimes, uncomfortably. The suspicious side of me wants to order up a batch of 990 tax forms and get over to the nonprofit's offices and take a good, hard look at the ratio of program to administrative expenses.

Call me old-fashioned, call me jaded, call me what you will. I am a former employee of a struggling nonprofit that truly did good work and was forced to lop off a piece of our precious grant money every year to pay for our national executive director's six-figure salary. I am also a hardened newspaper reporter. From both perspectives, I think the old adage about separation of church and state was possibly never better applied than to newspapers and nonprofits.

to that. I found journalists much too interested in conflict and negatives."

Unless there is a radical turnaround, the media will maintain their ho-hum attitude, devoting little substantive coverage to nonprofits, and will present more of the same light features and breaking news when there is scandal—remember the United Way and Jim Bakker.

But it is in the mundane area of local government budgets, for example, that media should be concentrating, rather than the nightly trek through police blotters and looking for the wild and weird that compete with the likes of Jenny Jones and Jerry Springer.

Stories like the activity of the president of the National Baptist Convention should be on the front page long before his wife is arrested to provide a peg—again, from the police blotter. Journalists should be on the case of a William Aramony early rather than late; they should go over corporate and philanthropic boards as they would a presidential appointment. Who's on local and national boards and what, if any benefits, they receive, as well as the salaries and perks of administrators, are legitimate public concerns that demand press scrutiny.

As for nonprofits themselves, they should open themselves up to closer examination. They need to overcome fear of the media in order to allay the suspicions. The Ford Foundation gives huge sums of money to fund projects in ghettos round the world, but only those privy to organization's quarterly reports seem to know about a few of the endeavors—not even recipients of the foundation's generosity. Ford should spend more money on media activity, perhaps setting up shop and establishing an obvious presence in those ghettos and, without employing the unseemly tactics of corporations, let people know the foundation is there—just as media outlets should put bureaus in inner cities if they are serious about quality coverage. ■

Covering powerful institutions, from the CIA to major banks to key government figures, is tricky. But covering nonprofits may be trickiest of all. Journalists share a common mission with many of the best frontline charity workers: corny as it sounds, we want to save the world, and so do they. Publishers and editors want to be good corporate citizens and players in the communities they serve—it helps win readers, and it's the right thing to do.

But there can be a real downside.

At a large, well-respected paper a few years back, the publisher decided to start a civic journalism program that linked a special team of reporters with community charities to foster solutions



Janet Wilson, a staff writer for The Los Angeles Times, covers social trends, including welfare reform and issues affecting the elderly. A 1995 Nieman Fellow, she previously covered criminal courts at The Detroit Free Press, with specialized reporting on juvenile, domestic and police violence. She was a general assignment and investigative reporter at The New York Daily News and New York Post and at two northern New Jersey newspapers. She has freelanced for ABC News "Nightline," CNN and others. Her first job after graduating from Yale College in 1980 was working as program coordinator for a nonprofit organization, paying starving musicians and other artists to perform in inner-city schools.

to some of the area's most egregious problems. Within months, the paper had to do front page coverage about how the celebrity head of one of the charities had absconded with funds. The editors did the right thing, they ran the stories. What was embarrassing was that the paper had to describe its partnership with the organization.

The good news is that many reporters and editors rise to the challenge of covering "do-gooders," which can be wrenching in a way other stories never will be.

When I told a kindly elderly woman last spring that the clothes she had just donated to Goodwill would probably end up being sold in impoverished Third World countries for exorbitant profits, she thought for a moment, then said sadly, "I'll never trust anyone in the world again."

It made me momentarily question not just the story, but my life's work. The questioning is good.

Detroit Free Press reporter Dennis Niemiec did a series in 1991 on how little money raised by Michigan nonprofits was actually going to charitable work.

"They ought to outlaw that phrase 'All proceeds go to charity,'" he said recently. "What's left after the professional fund-raiser and the caterer and the band leader and the public relations firm are paid is what goes to charity."

After Niemiec's series ran, the heads of major banks, utilities, sport franchises and other prominent businessmen—all board members of the charities he had examined—began a drum-roll of phone calls and letter writing to the paper's publisher and top editors. Eventually a meeting was held.

"There were people in that room who had never set foot in a newspaper before, all the bigwigs," recalled Niemiec. "One man cried, he actually wept as he tried to explain how the stories were going to hurt their fundraising efforts. He just didn't get it."

Niemiec heard about the meeting afterwards; he was not invited. His assigning editor told him it would be better if he wasn't. In the end, he thinks



Orlando Bagwell

Not Black, Not White, It's American History

Somewhere back there, someone decided that rather than jump off a slave ship and kill themselves, they saw a future. Rather than give up and die and not deal with the horrors of plantation life, they decided there was a future. I'm testimony to that. Therefore they saw in some sense that my future was here, this was my land. They had an investment here and I'm testimony to that. With that in mind, then this history is as much my history as your history. This history is as much my history as anyone's history. With that recognition, we as a people *have to engage history together*. It's not a black history, it's not a white history. It's about an American history.—Orlando Bagwell, founder and President of ROJA Productions, a Boston-based independent film and television production company, at a Nieman Fellows Seminar January 22, 1998.

she made the right choice. She took any perceived heat, not him.

"I never felt any recriminations," said Niemiec, who later did critical reports on area United Way activities, even though The Free Press publisher sat on the United Way board. He thinks every business section should have someone devoted to covering nonprofits.

As long as we walk the line properly between our desire to do good and our first responsibilities as journalists, more comprehensive coverage of nonprofits could and should be part of every newspaper. It is a burgeoning sector, as Rodrigue points out so well, and there are great stories to be told.

A few additional suggestions on covering nonprofits. The hardest of all may be churches, who under federal and many state laws are not required to report much more than their incorporating name. The Salvation Army, which does fine work in many places, sometimes hides under this shield. So do one-man boiler room operations.


For any nonprofit, if you can't find anything out from the IRS or your state Registrar of Charitable Trusts, try a neighboring state. California laws regarding churches are notoriously weak, but Oregon brings vigorous lawsuits, often against the same businesses that go untouched in the Golden State. Also, a specific nonprofit can be good and bad. National offices may be top heavy with administrative staff, while local chapters or branches who actually do the work struggle financially and could use the boost afforded by a thoughtful, fun feature.

In a given region, there is a hierarchy. Brand name charities may receive the lion's share of funds and recognition for a given type of service, while offering the least return or the most conservative approach to solving a societal ill. Search out alternative, legitimate organizations for their stories, too. ■

Netscape: March 3, 1998 -- Testimony on Tobacco Settlement

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 **In Congress** American Civil Liberties Union
Freedom Network

**TESTIMONY
OF THE
AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION
FOR THE
SENATE COMMERCE, SCIENCE
AND
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
TOBACCO HEARING
ON
ADVERTISING, MARKETING & LABELING
MARCH 3, 1998**

Members of the Senate Committee:
The American Civil Liberties Union is a national, non-partisan organization dedicated to preserving the principles of liberty embodied in the Bill of Rights to the U.S. Constitution. Among these basic principles is the First Amendment's protection of freeexpression.

The ACLU respectfully submits this testimony to members of the Senate Committee and for the public record, to address the constitutional implications of the proposed prohibitions on tobacco advertisement in both legislation and proposed regulation by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The ACLU believes that the breadth of the prohibition on tobacco advertisements at issue today is wholly unprecedented and, if enacted, will most likely fail to withstand constitutional challenge. Moreover, we believe that the enactment of the proposed tobacco advertising restrictions would impose a drastic curtailment of commercial speech and could have a chilling effect on the right of the public and businesses to engage in free speech about controversial subjects. The ACLU, therefore, urges the Committee to reject any legislative enactment or regulatory scheme that provides authority for government suppression of truthful, non-misleading consumer information about lawfully protected products.

I. THE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED ON ADVERTISING AND OTHER PROMOTION OF CIGARETTES AND SMOKELESS TOBACCO ARE INCONSISTENT WITH THE FIRST AMENDMENT

In the following pages Morton Mintz examines the alliance between the American Civil Liberties Union and tobacco companies that have provided it with financial support.

The ACLU and the Tobacco Companies

By MORTON MINTZ

The American Civil Liberties Union has defended the Bill of Rights since its founding in 1920. This proud record does not necessarily mean that the ACLU welcomes an exercise of the First Amendment right of freedom of speech concerning its own affairs. I found this out when I inquired about the Union's ties to the tobacco industry, basing some of my questions on internal documents.

The reply was astonishing: My questions embodied charges that not only lacked "any basis in fact," but were "false and misleading." So wrote Ira Glasser, the ACLU's strong-willed Executive Director and de facto boss since 1978. For this grave allegation he offered no evidence. Nevertheless, he warned that were I to repeat the charges in an article, "we will appropriately respond at that time." If this was not an outright threat to sue for libel, it was, lawyers tell me, crafted to be read like one.

The reply was also bizarre. I cannot recall so much as an implicit threat of a libel action during the half-century that I've reported, extensively and often, on sensitive subjects, particularly misconduct and criminal conduct by deep-pocket corporations—including tobacco companies. Yet such an apparent threat now has come from the organization that has prided itself, for more than 75 years, on defeating efforts to weaken or circumvent the Bill of Rights.

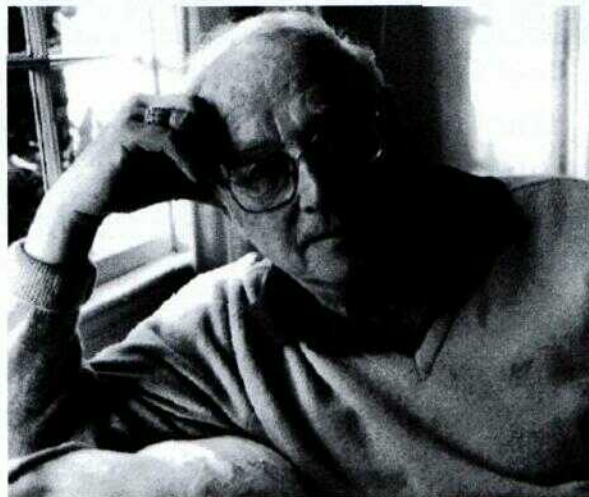
Glasser's response is rooted in "Allies: The ACLU and the Tobacco Industry," a report I had released in July 1993. "Allies" drew press coverage focusing on the Union's solicitation and acceptance of \$500,000 from Philip Morris, the leading cigarette

maker, in the six years 1987 through 1992. But the report raised other significant issues, starting with the ACLU's conflict-of-interest troika: The Union was at once seeking and taking tobacco money, allying itself with the tobacco industry to oppose (with testimony, press releases and "Dear Senator" letters) legislation intended to ban or restrict tobacco advertising and promotion, and—crucially—failing to mention either activity in the endless stream of "emergency" and "urgent" fundraising letters it sends to its approximately 300,000 members, its quarterly newsletter, Civil Liberties, and its annual reports.

I began thinking about revisiting the ACLU/tobacco alliance on the spring day in 1994 when the top guns of the tobacco industry raised their right arms at a congressional hearing and swore that they did not believe nicotine to be addictive. There followed a series of developments that convulsed the industry, including Liggett Group's admissions that it had long known that nicotine *is* addictive and that cigarette

smoking *does* cause disease; the Food and Drug Administration's classification of nicotine as a drug and of cigarettes as drug-delivery devices, and the outpouring of internal documents demonstrating that the industry targeted children. But what finally made me decide to follow up on "Allies" was the publication, in late 1996, of a book in which former Union employee John Fahs exposed a bundle of highly embarrassing internal documents, only to be all but ignored by the media and reviewed nowhere.

In "Allies" I had concluded that the ACLU was untainted by "financial impropriety" and that its integrity was "not the issue." Glasser used these very quotes to enhance the credibility of statements like these, made to inquiring reporters and complaining ACLU members: "There is no quid pro quo;" "none of the grants is for issues directly related to tobacco company interests;" the ACLU "seek[s] support to carry out *our* agenda and advance *our* principles; we do not accept money with any condition on it that would require us to



Morton Mintz, Nieman Fellow 1964, was a Washington Post reporter for nearly 30 years, until he left in 1988, and is a former chair of the Fund for Investigative Journalism. He received the 1996 Hugh M. Hefner First Amendment Award for Lifetime Achievement. In addition to this article he wrote a critique of economic watchdog journalism that begins on Page 28. He lives in Washington.

bend our principles or carry out an agenda not our own."

The Fahs book—"Cigarette Confidential: The Unfiltered Truth About the Ultimate American Addiction"—persuaded me that I had inadvertently misled my readers. The documents demonstrate, author Fahs declared, that the ACLU undertook work "on behalf of cigarette manufacturers...in *direct exchange for funding—a quid pro quo arrangement in direct conflict with the institution's status as a government-subsidized, tax-exempt, non-profit institution* [emphasis added]." In addition, he alleged, the National Task Force on Civil Liberties in the Workplace, the ACLU unit that advocates "smokers' rights," "owes more than 90 percent of its annual budget and 100 percent of its continued existence" to grants to the ACLU Foundation by Philip Morris and R. J. Reynolds Tobacco Company (Glasser had declined, in a 1992 interview for "Allies," to disclose the amount of the contribution made by the RJR Nabisco unit).

"Philip Morris provides no general contributions to the ACLU, only earmarked money for workplace rights," task force director Lewis L. Maltby told Glasser in a September 1991 memo. But neither in the 1992 interview for "Allies" nor in subsequent damage-control efforts did Glasser so much as hint at earmarking. Rather, he deflected attention from it by emphasizing my own calculation that Philip Morris's grants amounted to less than one-half of one percent of ACLU revenues. "Tobacco companies are not a major source of support for the ACLU," he said.

Tobacco Paying ACLU Piper

Fahs's case is that the cigarette companies paying the ACLU piper call its tunes. The Union got the money "for advocating smokers rights," he alleged. What other explanation could there be, he asked, for the ACLU's failure "to defend a *nonsmoker's* civil right not to breathe in toxins from secondhand smoke?" This question resonates with the advice to smokers given in 1993 by the American Smokers

Alliance, which is partially funded by the tobacco industry: If you believe you have been discriminated against, the ACLU "wants to come to your defense [at] no cost to you."

On November 13, 1996, the Berkley Publishing Group joined with New York antismoking activist Joseph Cherner, founder and president of SmokeFree Educational Services, Inc., in launching Cigarette Confidential with a news conference in front of ACLU headquarters in Manhattan. By then, according to Fahs, the Union and/or its tax-exempt ACLU Foundation had taken more than \$900,000 in tobacco money; ACLU affiliates had taken hundreds of thousands of dollars more.

Basic Integrity at Stake

The press kit contained a devastating declaration by Melvin Wulf, who was the ACLU's own legal director from 1962 to 1977, who had argued 10 cases for the ACLU in the Supreme Court and who remains "deeply attached" to its principles. "The information in Cigarette Confidential...threatens the basic integrity of the ACLU," he said. He went on to say, in "the first critical word I've had to say publicly about the Union:"

"The justification that the money is used to support workplace rights is a sham. There is no constitutional right to pollute the atmosphere and threaten the health of others. The revelations...support the conclusion that the ACLU's mission is being corrupted by the attraction of easy money from an industry whose ethical values are themselves notoriously corrupt and which is responsible for the death annually of 350,000 to 400,000 persons in the U.S. alone."

Also in the press kit were internal documents "proving the ACLU's quid pro quo—direct work for funding—relationship with Philip Morris and R. J. Reynolds," as Fahs described them, and a Cherner statement contrasting the positions on tobacco taken by the ACLU before and after it began to solicit and accept industry money. For example, he said, the Union did not oppose ban-

ning cigarette advertising from the airwaves, health warnings on cigarette packs and ads and laws to create smoke-free workplaces; but in 1987 the ACLU began to oppose legislation to curb tobacco advertising and its tax deductibility, to require new, large warning labels on cigarette packs, to require smoke-free public places and workplaces and to denigrate evidence that cigarette advertising increases the incidence of smoking.

The book launching flopped; only some local radio stations covered it. ACLU spokesperson Emily Whitfield may have chilled news coverage by dismissing the author as "a disgruntled employee who had been fired for incompetence." This was a cheap shot, as the ACLU's Washington spokesman, Phil Gutis, indirectly conceded months after the damage was done. Fahs, he told me, had "resigned." This squared with the account of Fahs, not Whitfield. "I challenge the ACLU to produce one shred of evidence that I was fired," Fahs told me. "The fact is, I simply quit...of my own volition." He had performed clerical duties as a secretary/assistant in media relations from July 1993 to January 1995. He went on to become, his publisher said, "an investigative reporter who has written extensively for Spy and other publications."

Last year, I sent Nadine Strossen, the elected President of the ACLU's Board of Directors since 1991 and a professor at New York Law School, a four-page letter summarizing the post-"Allies" developments and asking questions reflecting them. Later, I offered to interview her; she didn't reply.

False Charges Alleged

Three weeks later, however, Glasser sent the letter alleging that I had made baseless and "false" charges. Notably, he didn't say who made them. Nor did he identify the putative defendant. Me? Not necessarily. To my knowledge, Glasser has nowhere alleged that I made charges in "Allies" that were inaccurate or unfair, let alone false. Although Fahs, Wulf and Cherner all had made statements at the

heart of my query, Glasser has threatened none of them with a libel action. I sent each a copy of Glasser's letter to me. None flinched; all counterattacked—in writing.

"I am particularly struck by Ira's accusation in his letter that you persist in repeating false charges, but he never says what they are," Wulf wrote. He also said:

"Although the record seems to be perfectly clear that the ACLU...has tailored its tobacco-related positions to fit the industry's interests, Ira persists in ducking embarrassing questions about the uses to which the money has been put, and about the objectivity of the ACLU's public positions on tobacco-related issues.... His entire letter, in my opinion, is an evasion of troubling questions about the ACLU's integrity."

Fahs stood by his allegations as "accurate and true" and defied the ACLU to "prove them wrong by opening up...any and all of their records...pertaining to their relationship with cigarette manufacturers." Cherner recalled inquiring of Glasser whether his before-and-after statement "accurately reflected your positions," but had no response.

"Allies," according to "Cigarette Confidential," moved only one ACLU leader to complain to Glasser. In "lengthy correspondence," Fahs wrote, Ramona Ripston, Executive Director of the Southern California affiliate, protested "the internal conflict of interest in accepting money from cigarette companies and then aggressively advocating on their behalf." She also likened the situation to one in which the ACLU would take money from a marketer of harmful children's toys and then defend its "right to publicize the products." Six months later, the author said, Glasser sent Ripston "a six-page, typed, single-spaced missive that...reiterated his line about no strings being attached to the money received and repeats that the ACLU would never undertake work for money...he vehemently defend[ed] the virtue of association with cigarette companies, saying, 'I am disturbed about the demonization of companies like Philip Morris.'"

Interview Declined

Ripston declined to be interviewed. "My letters to Ira Glasser re: the tobacco industry were private correspondence," she told me. "I never released them to anyone, including John Fahs. My understanding is that they were stolen from ACLU files. They were never to be released, and I do not want them to be released now."

"I didn't steal any documents or letters," Fahs responded. "I did make Xerox copies of many files that I had daily access to through my work in the ACLU's Media Relations office. After making copies, I returned all the files to their rightful place. The reason I made copies of the cigarette files is because I found in them evidence that the ACLU had routinely and knowingly lied to its members and the national press in responding to your 1993 report 'Allies.'"

Fahs named two Food and Drug Administration investigators, Gary D. Light and Thomas P. Doyle, who met with him. They saw tax "implications" in the Philip Morris and RJR donations to the tax-exempt ACLU Foundation and copied his files for the Department of Justice, he said. The FDA and Justice declined to comment.

Antismoking Bias Charged

The soaring rate of increase in alleged discrimination against smokers moved an ACLU executive to liken their plight to that of people victimized by the color of their skin or their sex. If the trend continues, he said in a 1990 document, "smokers will soon encounter discrimination comparable to that experienced by racial minorities and women." Fahs told me the official was Lewis Maltby. In the book, Fahs identified the task force director as "the driving force in the push to add a Smokers Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution."

If Maltby was hallucinating about a constitutional amendment, he was insightful about why cigarette companies funded his task force. "The only interest these people [Philip Morris] have in the ACLU is our role in fighting lifestyle

discrimination," he said in his September 1991 memo to Glasser. Of course, "lifestyle discrimination," "workplace privacy" and the like are primarily ACLU and cigarette-industry code phrases for the imputed right of smokers to light up off the job where and when they wish.

On Christmas Eve 1991, Maltby thanked Philip Morris official Lance Pressl "for your commitment to contribute \$85,000 to our efforts to increase workplace privacy," and Maltby aide Jonathan Anderson asked Pressl to cut a \$25,000 check "to the ACLU to cover the expenses in connection with the Vermont privacy campaign," as agreed in "your conversation with Lewis Maltby." The check arrived a few days later.

Fahs provided numerous examples of close cooperation and coordination between the ACLU task force and the two leading cigarette makers. Philip Morris's "in-house advertising and graphic arts department designed, wrote copy for, produced and sent out an entire direct-mail campaign concerning smokers' rights that used the ACLU name and logo," Fahs disclosed. In 1991, he wrote, "Maltby traveled to North Carolina for extensive meetings with five top executives from RJR to ascertain what the firm's priorities were with regard to lobbying for smokers' rights and how the ACLU could best coordinate its efforts to address those priorities."

Philip Morris officials Derek Crawford and Jack Nelson gave Maltby "oral approval" to his request for \$125,000 annually for his task force. "For internal PM reasons, Jack prefers that we make our initial request for \$100K and submit a second request for the balance later," Maltby wrote to Glasser on June 4, 1992. In July, Philip Morris sent a check for \$25,000 to the ACLU Foundation; the receipt shows it was earmarked for Maltby's task force. Crawford and Nelson had lunch with Maltby three weeks later and gave him a \$100,000 check. In December, Fahs

said, Maltby "requested \$22,750 [more for] the Michigan affiliate in order to keep that office's smokers' rights lobbying efforts going."

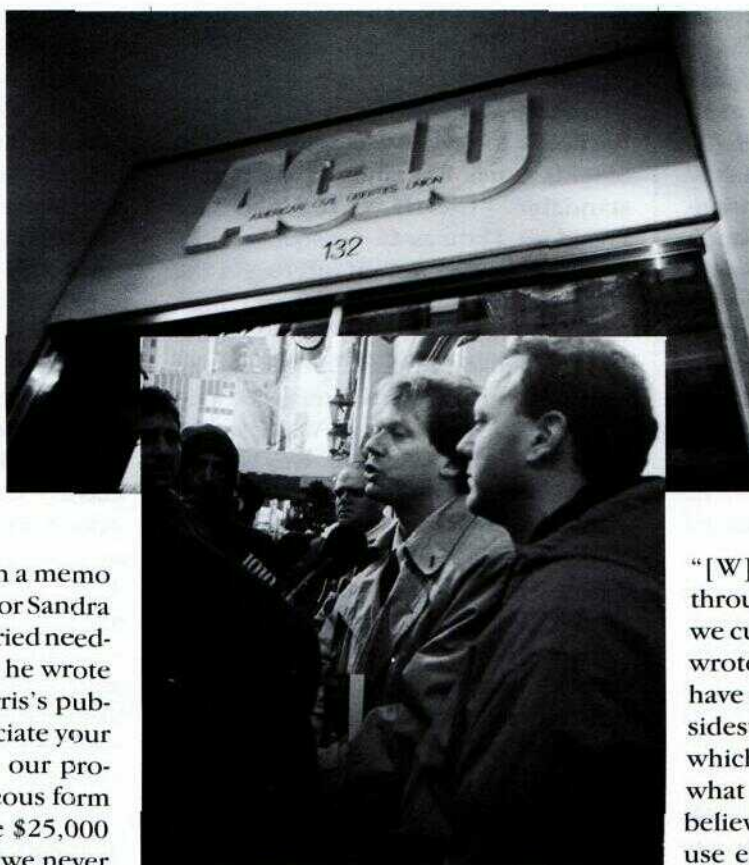
Funding in Doubt

In August 1993—a few weeks after the release of "Allies"—Maltby emerged from "a long budget meeting with PM" worrying that the outlook for further Philip Morris funding was bleak because its "budgets are being slashed," he said in a memo to ACLU development director Sandra Sedacca and Glasser. He worried needlessly. Only eight days later, he wrote to Alan R. Miller, Philip Morris's public affairs manager: "I appreciate your offer to help us restructure our proposal in the most advantageous form [and] to help us resolve the \$25,000 of last year's funding which we never received."

In December, Crawford sent Maltby a letter enclosing a check "in support of [the] ACLU Foundation's 1994 research activities in the area of workplace discrimination (\$100,000) and to close out previously recommended support for 1993 activities (\$25,000)." Maltby thanked Crawford for Philip Morris's "generous contribution to eradicate workplace discrimination" during a "difficult time."

Six Secret Polls

In 1966, faced with mounting scientific evidence incriminating environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) as harmful and even lethal, the tobacco industry commissioned the Roper Organization to do six secret biennial polls. At the end, Roper concluded that rising public concern over ETS was "the most dangerous development to the viability of the tobacco industry that has yet occurred." The industry reacted with fierce campaigns—some of them covert—to block laws banning indoor smoking. The efforts included the



A former ACLU employee, John Fabs, left, and the SmokeFree Educational Services President, Joe Cherner, speaking at a press conference November 13, 1996 in front of the ACLU about tobacco contributions to the organization.

launching of a nominally independent international magazine for which Philip Morris, as I reported in March 1996 in *The Washington Post Magazine*, passed more than \$1 million through Covington & Burling, a prestigious Washington law firm, to Healthy Buildings International, a small indoor-air-quality firm in nearby Virginia. The magazine's central, recurring and false argument was that banning indoor smoking was unnecessary because the concentrations of ETS were so low as to be harmless.

Philip Morris "would clearly love to have us take a position that people should be able to smoke at work and in public buildings where they can do so without subjecting others to sidestream smoke," Maltby said in the memo to Sedacca and Glasser. But caving in to Philip Morris on this issue, Maltby un-

derstood, could be highly embarrassing. The ACLU's position on "employer control of off-duty conduct," he pointed out, is "a corollary of [its] fundamental position...that each of us has a right to personal autonomy which entitles us to live as we choose *so long as we do not infringe the rights of others*" (emphasis supplied).

The ACLU admitted that it was ignorant about ETS and its implications and that this created problems.

"[W]e have not thought through...essential questions for which we currently have no answers," Maltby wrote. For example, "Do non-smokers have a right to be protected against all sidestream smoke, or only to levels which create health risks? If the latter, what concentrations of smoke do we believe create risks? Is it acceptable to use engineering controls [which conform with the industry strategy] to achieve a smoke-free atmosphere?"

"The crucial question is whether the benefits of taking an expanded position are worth the costs," Maltby continued. "We have taken a great deal of heat over our present position. The reaction to an expanded position would be far worse."

Indoor smoke pollution in the ACLU's offices provoked chronic complaints from its employees. At least two presented doctors' letters saying that for health reasons they needed a smoke-free workplace. In July 1992, office administrator Linda Gustafson was moved to seek "the most recent information [on] the effects of smoking on non-smokers and the causal relationship between ETS and cancer and other serious health effects in nonsmokers." She did not turn to the Environmental Protection Agency; the source she chose was Thomas Lauria, a Tobacco Institute spokesman.

The ACLU has pressed hard for enactment of state laws prohibiting employers from controlling behavior away from the workplace. Choice magazine

put a noble face on this in a September 1991 article. The ACLU was standing up to "a threat to the privacy of all Americans," the writer said. Choice was a self-described "service of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company;" the writer was Maltby. Still, there's a truly troublesome issue. For example, some employers say smokers who enter a building merely smelling of tobacco cause health problems for a subset of workers, particularly asthmatics; *ACLU officials say that forbidding employees to smoke, certainly in their own homes, is as indefensible as forbidding them to eat too much fat.*

In several states, nevertheless, no trace of nobility marked the Union's activities. Nor did these activities reflect the modest distancing from the tobacco industry implied by the ACLU Foundation in an unsigned "executive summary" of a circa 1990-1991 request to RJR Nabisco. The request was "for a three-year grant of \$450,000 to support the creation of an in-house public opinion research and analysis unit [that would] conduct a series of public opinion surveys about fundamental civil liberties questions," the summary said. "We will begin by examining the issue of personal privacy."

State Lobbying Effort

The ACLU did not create the in-house unit, deciding instead to tighten its embrace of the tobacco industry, Fahs says. "As a routine practice," he reported in his book, "many of the surveys and telephone interviews conducted as part of the ACLU's state lobbying efforts for smokers' rights used questions scripted by R. J. Reynolds and were conducted with the tobacco firm's money. Using this technique, RJR has been able to generate favorable public opinion results that can be used to lobby state legislators who are unaware of the survey's true origins."

The financial dependence of the ACLU affiliate in North Carolina on R. J. Reynolds, which is headquartered in Winston-Salem, was underscored by a request for money its executive director made to the company in late 1991.

Without "additional support" from Reynolds, James Shields warned Glasser, the affiliate "will end up \$30K in the red this year...." If the top Reynolds lobbyist who responded to Shields came off as smug, it was understandable. "Clearly," Executive Vice President Thomas G. Griscom wrote, "we have seen renewed interest in the issue of personal freedom and individual choice."

(Tangled-web note: Early this year, The Wall Street Journal reported that Griscom, a former Reagan White House communications director, was becoming the overseer of public relations and corporate affairs for Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. Murdoch sits on the boards of Philip Morris and of the "libertarian" Cato Institute in Washington.

(A Cato senior fellow, Robert A. Levy, has denounced the proposed \$368.5 billion "settlement" reached last year by the tobacco companies and most state attorneys general, calling it "a shameful document, extorted by public officials who have perverted the rule of law to tap the deep pockets of a feckless and friendless industry," and "a bald transfer of wealth from a disfavored to a favored group." Levy "has consistently received respectful media coverage—without reference to the links between the tobacco industry he defends and the think-tank that employs him," Norman Solomon wrote in the January/February 1998 "Extra!")

In Oklahoma, the ACLU commissioned a poll "on public attitudes toward employer policies regulating employees' off duty conduct." Requesting reimbursement from Philip Morris, Maltby said in a June 1991 memo, "Cost of poll—\$11,000." In a March 1992 memo, Maltby aide Jonathan Anderson asked Philip Morris to reimburse "\$1,500 to cover the bill [it had] agreed to pay" for "one radio news release for targeted distribution to New York state stations" in the previous year. A month later, Maltby told Glasser in a memo that Philip Morris "provided the funding for our Mississippi affiliate's recent conference on free speech."

Most adult smokers were hooked as kids; a person who starts to smoke at age 19 or older is highly unlikely to

become addicted. So it was striking that Ira Glasser, in an essay on mind-altering drugs six years ago, called cigarettes "highly addictive." I asked him about this during an interview in late 1992. Considerately, he had chosen a day when president Nadine Strossen and Morton H. Halperin, who was leaving the ACLU's Washington office after heading it for 10 years, could participate.

"So long as nicotine is a legal product which is not a prescription drug, the government cannot restrict speech about products containing it," Glasser told me. But if the government should classify the addictive substance as a prescription drug, the ACLU "would not oppose" all regulation of it. The ACLU's "basic position" on advertising and promotion of tobacco to youngsters, he said, is that government "can't restrict speech to a level that only children can hear. It can't bring the whole adult population down to the level of children."

A Valid Curb on Ads?

Since then, of course, the FDA has actually classified nicotine as a drug and cigarettes as drug-delivery devices and acted to prevent the advertising, promotion and marketing of tobacco products to children. Under an ACLU policy statement formulated in 1975 there are "occasions when public interest in health and safety permit valid restrictions on commercial advertising." The administrative and court proceedings in which the industry tried to block the agency were such an occasion. The ACLU chose not to support the FDA. One of my unanswered questions to Strossen was, why?

The ACLU did not report its silence on the FDA action to its members, just as it did not tell them of its solicitation and acceptance of tobacco money. As "a matter of editorial judgment," Strossen doubted that news of the grants would "trump" the editorial matter in the ACLU's quarterly newsletter. Really? In the winter 1992-1993 "Civil Liberties," most of page three was occupied by the text of 14 amendments to the Constitution; a photo of the Union's

new development director consumed 25 square inches on page eight.

The ACLU leadership has also been unforthcoming with the membership about its one-size-fits-all contributions guideline, which had blipped in 1992, when New York Times columnist Anna Quindlen wrote that Ira Glasser had told her, "If John Gotti wanted to give \$10,000, we would take it." In an interview for "Allies," Burt Neuborne, a New York University law professor and a former ACLU legal director, summed up the guideline in nine words: "It's self-destructive to turn away money for constructive projects." Within limits, all sorts of organizations—civic, cultural, religious, sports—would concede that this is their guideline, too. Still, it's fair to wonder, if Glasser would not spurn money from a Mafioso, how about Pol Pot? The Cali cartel? I asked Neuborne whether he would agree that the ACLU had erred in not disclosing that it was taking tobacco money. He cited "the special circumstances and emotion surrounding the tobacco issue," but then broke ranks. "You're probably right," he said. "Sure, they should disclose it."

In the late 1980's I was struck by the near-congruence of the tobacco industry and ACLU bottom lines on issues such as the hazards of second-hand smoke and addiction. Other than the ACLU and certain First Amendment lawyers who often represent both the Union and tobacco interests, Melvin Wulf wrote in a 1986 Washington Post op-ed piece, "only the Tobacco Institute...and the occasional representative of advertising agencies that seem to profit from the industry seem capable of denying the overwhelming evidence of harm inflicted by smoking tobacco."

In 1991, a startling example of ACLU zealotry emerged in a conversation between Morton Halperin and Pamela Gilbert, then director of Public Citizen's Congress Watch. At one point, Gilbert told me, Halperin hypothesized a bill legalizing the sale of poisoned meat but containing an unrelated provision sought by the Union. Trade in poisoned meat being a form of commerce on which the Union takes no stand, she recalled him saying, the ACLU would be

right to support the bill. Halperin did not respond to a written request for comment.

Censorship 'Contagious'

Glasser warned in his 1987 article in *The Nation* that banning tobacco ads is censorship, and "censorship is a contagious disease." On Capitol Hill, similarly, Union spokesmen have warned that a ban on tobacco ads for tobacco is a "slippery slope" that could lead to bans on ads of other necessities susceptible to abuse, including automobiles. At the bottom of the slope the First Amendment would lie eviscerated.

"We are not interested in tobacco," Glasser insisted in the 1992 interview. "We are interested in the First Amendment." But why did an ACLU that constantly agonizes about limited resources feel compelled to spend a penny to war on legislation to restrict tobacco advertising while tobacco interests control Congress? As a matter of principle, he replied, the government cannot be allowed "to start picking and choosing targets for exceptions to the First Amendment."

Yet the Union's own 1975 policy statement affirmatively validates consumer-protection laws—never overturned by the Supreme Court—that authorize government agencies effectively to *censor* advertising by recognizing "the need for the regulation of selling practices to minimize fraud, deception and misrepresentations." Thus the Securities and Exchange Commission demands a "tombstone" format for ads for securities offerings—no photos, and a text saying "no more" than SEC regulations allow. The FDA actually effectively *dictates* the text of ads for prescription drugs, which a manufacturer cannot legally sell without agency-approved labeling; the advertising must faithfully reflect the labeling.

Such ACLU absolutism has been ridiculed by two of its own former high officials, Aryeh Neier, who was Executive Director from 1970 to 1978, when Glasser succeeded him, and Melvin

Wulf. "There is no First Amendment problem in any form of regulation of tobacco advertising," Neier told me. Wulf brushed off the "slippery slope" argument. As it relates to ideational speech, he said, "it is often right and often effective," but as it relates to tobacco advertising it "is wrong and ineffective; it has no merit. To believe it you must also believe that our legislators and judges do not know how to exercise judgment...don't know the difference between a substance which has been proven to be harmful in and of itself, and a substance which is enormously useful but which may have some injurious effect. I think Congress can tell the difference between an egg and a cigarette."

The seedbed of the ACLU's zealously advocated defense of corporate tobacco speech is the Supreme Court's startling usurpation of the legislative function more than a century ago. The case involved the Fourteenth Amendment's command that no "person" shall be denied "the equal protection of the laws." The framers' clear intent was to protect the newly freed slaves; there is no evidence that they imagined a corporation—an artificial entity given life by the state—to be a "person." Nothing in the legislative history argues the contrary. But in 1886—only 18 years after ratification—the Chief Justice of the United States, Morrison R. Waite, made a stunning announcement at the outset of oral argument in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad*: "The Court does not wish to hear argument on whether the provision in the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which forbids a state to deny any person the equal protection of the laws, applies to these corporations. We are all of the opinion that it does."

The ACLU's leaders do not call the members' attention either to Waite's thunderbolt or to the Court's insistence for over a century on distinguishing between the commercial speech of paper persons and the speech—political speech, particularly—of individuals and groups of individual human beings. At the same time, however, the leaders tirelessly remind the members of the Union's resoluteness in protect-

ing the rights of people. For example, in "The ACLU Commitment," a charter-like document celebrated in its annual reports, the Union says that it has always been "the country's leading champion of *individual rights*" and declares, "Our mission is to realize the promise of the Bill of Rights for all *people* in the United States [emphasis supplied]." The Commitment does not acknowledge that the ACLU's dedication to the Bill of Rights has significantly benefited corporations—mostly tobacco corporations.

'Alive With Pleasure'

Most courts that have struck down ad bans have done so because the information the ads sought to convey was "truthful and verifiable," Public Citizen's Alan B. Morrison, an expert on commercial speech, reminded a House panel in 1990. By contrast, he pointed out, most cigarette ads "have no information at all, but simply present visual images, with a few catchy phrases like 'Alive with Pleasure.'" (Morrison suggested "a more appropriate caption... 'Dead with Cancer.'")

In requesting the 1992 interview, I had told Glasser, in good faith, that I was preparing an article for a magazine. Subsequently, several magazines turned me down; and the only one to express interest insisted on unacceptable brevity. In the end, my work was rescued from samizdat status by an ad hoc cluster of anti-tobacco activists—the Center for Science in the Public Interest, the Coalition on Smoking OR Health, Ralph Nader, Public Citizen, Inc. and the Trauma Foundation, which became sponsors—and the Advocacy Institute, which agreed to publish "Allies...." In his letter to me, however, Glasser challenged my integrity by asserting that "Allies" had been "commissioned by an organization apparently not very interested in objective reporting." In fact, the sponsors had not "commissioned" the report; they took it off the shelf, so to speak, and exercised no editorial control. Moreover, they neither paid me a cent nor reimbursed my expenses.

No matter: I should have notified Glasser of my failure to interest a magazine.

"Now you want us to go through the same sham process" as in 1992-1993, Glasser continued in his letter. Liking my questions to "interrogatories in an adversarial proceeding," he wrote: "We decline.... If we were asked for an interview by a disinterested journalist we would, of course, grant it.... But, under the circumstances, we do not feel any obligation to cooperate with what we believe is a hostile attempt to spread false and misleading charges about the ACLU, in order to support a conspiratorial view of our positions, to which you and your sources of support seem committed regardless of the facts." I have never concealed my sources of support. I would add *only that my wife and I were ACLU members for approximately 40 years; we stopped paying dues because of the tobacco connection.*

Sexual Abuse Cases

The ACLU is seeking \$25 million in its first-ever endowment campaign. In June 1996, a few weeks after the campaign began, columnist Nat Hentoff cited "an epidemic of civil liberties disasters" in which, solely on the basis of "testimony of very young children who have been coached by therapists and police investigators," workers in day-care centers have been charged with, and sometimes imprisoned for, sexual abuse. Yet, he wrote, the Union and its more than 300 chapters stayed aloof. "It is indeed a hard time for the ACLU—as well as for those other civil libertarians who do not regard it as the mother church," he went on to say. "However, it has internal civil liberties problems that money cannot solve. There is an increasing ideological rigidity within the organization."

Glasser's ideological rigidity was on display in 1987, the year in which he began—without, he told me, the knowledge of his board—to solicit and accept money from Philip Morris. "In a fair contest between medical facts and the industry's self-serving propaganda, the

facts will win," he wrote in *The Nation*. "That is the premise of the First Amendment. And that is what the past 20 years demonstrate."

"A fair contest?" The industry that former U.S. District Judge H. Lee Sarokin once said "may be the king of concealment and disinformation" systematically *squelched the facts*. Tobacco Institute Vice President Frederick R. Panzer boasted of this in a 1972 confidential memo revealing the "holding strategy" that the industry had "brilliantly conceived and executed" for nearly 20 years *to obscure and defeat the most conclusively documented medical fact of all: Smoking induces disease*. Panzer also disclosed the strategy's three components: "Creating doubts about the health charge without actually denying it;" "advocating the public's right to smoke, without actually encouraging them to take up the practice," and "encouraging objective scientific research as the only way to resolve the question of health hazard." Each year, meanwhile, the medical facts were fogged by billions of dollars of tobacco advertising and promotion—much of it designed to addict children; buried or suppressed by publications dependent on that same advertising, and brushed aside by a Congress significantly bought by the industry.

"[T]he facts will win"? During the 20 years to which Glasser referred, millions of people died of tobacco-induced diseases, more millions were harmed, and yet more millions were hooked and doomed. Tobacco-induced mortality and morbidity on this scale will continue to win worldwide for decades to come, no matter whether Congress approves, disapproves or amends the \$368.5 billion so-called "settlement" reached last year by the tobacco companies and most state attorneys general.

The ACLU's alliance with the tobacco industry was not among Nat Hentoff's examples of the Union's ideological rigidity. Had it been, might the headline on his column in *The Washington Post*, "Two Cheers for the ACLU," have been arguably generous? ■

The Need for Expert Education Reporters

*Harvard President Calls for Better Training—
Asks About 'Credentialing' Journalists*

Following are edited excerpts from a discussion between Neil Rudenstine, President of Harvard University, and Nieman Fellows on December 12, 1997.

Q.—Journalism is one of the few worthy professions that Harvard doesn't teach. I wonder if you can tell us the reasoning behind not having a graduate school of journalism.

Rudenstine—I've actually read through the Harvard presidents' reports from the time at which they were first published, 1826, I think it was. I have to admit sadly that I can't recall a mention of the thought of having a journalism school. We used to have an agriculture school. We used to have a mining school. We used to have all sorts of things. We've never had a journalism school. And I don't know historically the answer to the question of why it never came up, why it was never invented.

Whether it would be possible? In theory, yes, it's possible. I wouldn't want to start one, quite honestly, with much less than somewhere between \$100 and \$200 million if you were going to make it good. That's about the scale you would need right now to make it any good. Of course, a new school isn't something we'd ever embark on without a great deal of discussion and planning. And here's an interesting threshold question. There is, if you will, a credentialing system in most professions—academic life, medicine, law, not all,

but many. What would be a sensible credentialing system for journalism? Would you want one?

Bill Kovach, Nieman Curator, and others—The answer is no.

A.—If the answer to that is no, then what would be a good journalism school, and what would it do? I don't mean to say you couldn't have a curriculum, or you couldn't have a degree. And I don't mean to say that one might not teach and learn a lot, because I happen to think it's a powerful, powerful set of questions that journalism raises that need to be researched, that need to be taught, that need to be thought about, that need to be tracked, etc. The Nieman program's already doing some of that; so is Marvin Kalb's program at the Kennedy School. But you know as well as I do what would be needed to mount a really major effort to take on a whole school.

If we wouldn't want credentialing, can we say why not?

Kovach—Because it leads to licensing.

A.—In what sense, of what sort?

Kovach—Well, if you've got credentialing, someone has to pass on that credential and say yes, you're a journalist, [or] you're not. The whole notion of a free and independent press is challenged by the idea that there is somebody out there who decides who is a practitioner and who is not.

A.—What if it's your own profession that's doing it?

I'll give you an example. The academic profession is a credentialed profession, and yet it likes to think it's free, open, and so on.

Kovach—It likes to think it is. My question is, is the bar association?

A.—Well, that's different, because it doesn't have freedom of inquiry as its main tenet. That's why I chose the academic because freedom of inquiry and professional expression is at the heart of what the academic profession does. And the academic profession is in effect credentialed. But it's credentialed by its own members. The faculty of a given school evaluates quality, they vote degrees, they put forward new faculty appointments and promotions.

Kovach—But that's by institution.

A.—Yes, although there's a kind of norm across the country. It would be awfully hard in most institutions without a Ph.D.

Kovach—I'd have to think about that. That question has never been put to me.

Rudenstine—I'm not advocating it. I was just surprised at the universal negative reaction.

Kovach—The closest thing we've ever dealt with in this country so far as I know is the idea of a news council made up of, preferably, journalists, who pass judg-



ment on performance, behavior. And that was opposed by some of the best and most powerful journalists in the country on the basis that if you take the average across the country of journalists practicing, you would have a very conservative sense of what good journalism was. [If a council like that had] been in place when the Pentagon Papers were on the table, or Watergate was under investigation, they would have said, no, don't do that. And that would have put downward pressure on your independence and your freedom. So the notion has always been, you've got to resist, if you want to remain free to pursue anything, anywhere, you've got to remain free of that kind of restriction.

A.—Actually, I would be as worried as you on that end of the spectrum. I'll give you a sense of the sorts of things that worry me, let's say, on behalf of higher education. Very, very few newspapers have actually trained people who know a lot about, think a lot about, study and understand the economics of higher education—just the economics, which are very complicated. Therefore, I can almost write for you the story every spring. Tuition goes up more than the CPI, etc. Well, actually, tuition has gone up, or the cost of higher education has quite consistently gone up more than the CPI since 1905. It's not a new thing.

[We need journalists who will] look at the economics of higher education and write the sorts of articles that journalists now write about the economics of East Asia. But so far we don't have many journalists actually investing the time to build a base of knowledge about higher education, the way others have in the political or the economic or even the scientific arena. There's good scientific reporting in *The New York Times*. And it's way beyond whatever you would find in higher education reporting, on an issue such as diversity in faculty hiring. There is hardly a person I talk to in the media world who has studied in detail the number of people who are going into the academic profession by race or gender. Therefore, when you get into a discussion, it's hard because there's a limited base of knowledge.

So, credentialing aside, there's a ques-

tion of how best to build a base of knowledge among journalists in areas that are important to the country or to a whole set of institutions, even if we end up with different views about what should or shouldn't be done. Is there some way to somehow try to raise the investment in the media on those subjects?

Q.—It's interesting that official institutions have not discussed the foundations supporting things like education writers fellowship programs. We have fellowships for environmental reporters. We have fellowships for science reporters. There are programs like that.

A.—That's a good idea. It would be terrific. Because you know, the subject now, if you look at the GNP and see what the nation spends on education, it's not a trivial pursuit.

Q.—You're right, the quality of reporting on all levels of education, except for the largest news organizations, is very, very low on the scale. It's not a career ladder. You don't say, hey, I want to be the education reporter, because that's going to make me famous or give me the kind of clout I want or stature I want in the community. It's not going to work.

A.—Exactly. And it may never work. It just may not be the kind of subject that draws people.

Q.—In news rooms there's almost a bias against having a great deal of expertise in subjects. And I wondered in just the reading about higher education that you have—you're looking puzzled.

A.—I am puzzled. It goes against the grain of my academic—

Q.—There's this idea that you should

For Shame

[W]e need to quit being so frightened and ashamed of shame. It holds a central position in all lasting cultures for a reason. Shame is not the disease; properly used, it is the cure. As a social construction, it is how we communicate certain key virtues, how a sense of decency is developed.—James B. Twitchell, *For Shame: The Loss of Common Decency in American Culture.* St. Martin's Press, 1997.

almost dumb yourself down to be at a level of the *tabula rasa* so that you'll be like the average person, if you're going to write about a topic. So instead of encouraging education on a topic, you sort of demolish it. But my question here is just in terms of what you see in writing about higher education in general. Do you detect a tone of a sort of contempt in articles about, not only Harvard, but any educational institutions that do set themselves up as icons of this other form of life, the life of knowledge and unerring vision and all that? I've detected that.

A.—I don't sense a feeling of contempt or scorn. Obviously you're going to get some of that, because any major institution is going to come in for its hard knocks. And I take that more or less as it comes. The part that worries me the most is when you have important topics, like diversity in faculty hiring, or the economics of education or student aid or the cost of higher education—where a large part of the public is vitally interested and it affects them. In a way, you get a lot of parents out there who read, "Harvard costs \$30,000 next year. It went up higher than the cost of inflation." Well, that stays imprisoned in your mind. That's the headline. There is no headline that says student aid went up faster than fees, which [has] actually [been] the case in recent years. The amount of student aid we're providing our students [has] gone up faster than our fees have gone up, so that we actually have 70 percent of our undergraduates on student aid. And that piece of the headline doesn't come in. So a lot of parents go away with [the message] not just that it's expensive, but it's impossible. So we spend an enormous amount of our time out in the field trying to persuade students and their parents that they actually can afford to come to Harvard.

I have read so many stories about the Catch-22 student aid-tuition spiral. And I could show in three minutes why it is not an accurate picture. And yet, there's nobody out there.... And every time I start talking to a reporter, it takes 10 minutes to get to first base about even what the nature of the "industry" is.

Q.—Have you thought of going into journalism?

A.—My stories would be too wordy. ■

He Saw Folly of Racism Through Prism of Humor

BY SANDER VANOCUR

In April 1960, The New York Herald Tribune published 12 articles by Harry S. Ashmore, who had just left The Arkansas Gazette where he had served for 12 years, first as editorial writer, then as Editor. Two years earlier, The Gazette had been awarded a Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of attempts by Governor Orval Faubus to block minimal efforts to integrate Little Rock's Central High School in 1957. Ashmore, a 1942 Nieman Fellow, was also awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his editorials.

In 1960, Ashmore, who had written primarily about how Southerners dealt with the issue of race, decided, at the urging of Robert White, Editor of The Trib, to write a series of articles about race relations in the North and Ashmore focused his attention on Harlem.

He used the series as the foundation for a book titled: "The Other Side of Jordan: Negroes Outside the North." Ashmore noted in the introduction to the book that his use of the word "Negro" had brought down upon him the wrath of an organization called The Committee to Present the Truth About the Name "Negro," which contended that the really only acceptable term was Afro-American.

Ashmore, a man who throughout his life was guided by a sense of humor about the folly of racial prejudice, began his book with this anecdote:

Harlem's favorite joke these days goes like this: Two colored maids are rattling uptown on the subway at the end of the day's work. One is telling the other about her new job.

"They're fine folks to work for and it sure is interesting. They entertain a lot and know all the important people. Why just last night, we had Vice President Nixon, Adlai Stevenson, Governor Rockefeller, Senator Lyndon Johnson, Mayor Wagner, Mrs. Roosevelt, Dag Hammarskjöld, Claire Booth Luce, Chief Justice Warren, Helen Hayes, Carl Sandburg and Robert Frost."



Harry S. Ashmore
1916-1998

"Sure enough. When big people like that are just among themselves, what do they talk about?"

"Us!"

"Us" was the North Star of Ashmore's life, for in his mind, the word embraced whites and blacks, especially in the South as they played out the sad ritual of race. Unlike his dear friend, Ralph McGill, Editor of The Atlanta Constitution, an Old Testament voice of outrage against segregation in his columns, Ashmore viewed the matter through the prism of absurdity. He simply believed that segregation, whatever variety, North as well as South, was a practice that insulted rationality.

And Ashmore, preoccupied then, as he had been in his earlier years with the issue of segregation, knew that by 1960, the issue had become national. "In any event," he wrote in the introduction to "The Other Side of Jordan," "The South is paying in the coin of steadily diminishing national political influence for the mingled pleasure and pain of what is likely to be its last stand.

"But the not yet fully recognized fact is that the race problem is no longer the exclusive or even primary property of the South, and neither is the resistant white attitude normally associated with the beleaguered region."

I first met Ashmore in early 1958 when I went to cover Little Rock for NBC News. We were introduced by John Chancellor, who had covered the

events of 1957 for NBC with particular distinction and was now going off to Europe. It was my friendship with Ashmore and other Southerners like Johnny Popham of The New York Times and his successor on the "seg beat," Claude Sitton, and Bill Emerson of Newsweek, that led me to believe that once the curse of segregation was lifted from the South, that region would make racial progress faster than the North.

Part of this was realism, part of it was romanticism on my part, no doubt induced by my admiration for the people in Little Rock who supported The Arkansas Gazette and Ashmore in the fight against Governor Orval Faubus. And I did not think for a moment that there would not be ugly times ahead in other places in the South where racial hatred was much more deeply ingrained than it was in Arkansas.

I also became indebted to Ashmore for allowing me inside the circle of friendship that he enjoyed with McGill and Bill Baggs, Editor of The Miami News. When they would gather at the Jefferson Hotel in Washington, where I was then based, the occasions served to remind me that the three of them represented what another Southerner, William Faulkner, must have had in mind when he accepted his Nobel Prize for Literature and spoke of the necessity not merely to survive, but also to prevail.

All three are now gone, McGill and Baggs more than a quarter of a century ago, Ashmore in January, after suffering a fatal stroke while helping me celebrate my 70th birthday. One minute Ashmore was talking, drinking and laughing. Then, when he rose from dinner, he fell mute, never to speak again, and in a matter of days, he was dead.

For the last 20 years, as I found myself spending an increasing amount of time in Santa Barbara, Harry and I would often lunch together and as old

The Fred Friendly Impact

BY EILEEN MCNAMARA

journalists are prone to do, we would vie with one another in an effort to embellish the past and deplore the present. We also often dined with his wife, Barbara, and my wife, Virginia. In Virginia, Ashmore found a new audience for his tales of folly and triumph. Having heard most of the stories before, I laughed on cue. But Barbara Ashmore was not so patient. Just as Ashmore was about to get to the punch line, Barbara would wave her hand at him and say: "Harry, fast forward, fast forward."

Some of his old friends gathered in Little Rock on February 17 for a memorial service, presided over by his longtime friend, U.S. District Judge Henry Woods. Old colleagues from The Arkansas Gazette, now merged with its once-arch rival, The Democrat, spoke, among them The Gazette's Publisher, Hugh Patterson, and Roy Reed, who went from The Gazette to The New York Times, then back home to the University of Arkansas.

Later that night, sitting in the bar of the hotel where we were staying, I raised a glass with Sitton and Emerson in memory of all that Ashmore had meant to us and to the South. We agreed that because of editors like Ashmore, McGill, Baggs, and Hodding Carter and their editorial broadsides, the South had gone much further than the North in racial matters, but much to our mutual regret, we found ourselves without Ashmore's eternal optimism about race in the rest of the nation.

It has been said that old men forget. But as we rose from the table that night, we agreed that none of us would ever forget what Ashmore meant to us when we were young reporters covering the greatest story of our careers.

I trust that Ashmore has by now been reunited with McGill and Baggs at God's private watering hole. Though I do not know what the eternal bartender is pouring, I do know that the stories will never end. Harry, dear departed friend, fast forward forever, but not too fast. The stories, like you, are too good to forget. ■

Sander Vanocur now heads his own production company, Old Owl Communications.

It was a coin toss as to which pro-voked more contempt in my youth, authority or celebrity.

Fred Friendly combined them both, though his celebrity was of the professional, behind-the-scenes sort. He was the radio and television producer behind the very best work of Edward R. Murrow. Together, on "See It Now" and "CBS Reports," the Murrow-Friendly team invented the news documentary.

Friendly himself made headlines only once when, as president of CBS News in 1966, he quit after the network refused to preempt a rerun of "I Love Lucy" to carry Congressional hearings on the war in Vietnam. It was an act both of pique and of conscience. It would have been a footnote to a decade defined by acts of righteous indignation were it not for what Fred Friendly did with his life after that.

He taught, energizing his classroom with a passion that mocked that old canard, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach."

In the aftermath of the Watergate scandal, students with their sights set on MBA's or juris doctor's imagined themselves would-be Woodwards and Bernsteins instead and re-routed their career paths to the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, where Friendly was the aptly named Edward R. Murrow Professor of Journalism.

Those interested in broadcast news scrambled to get the Great Man as their faculty adviser, a careerist display that triggered my aforementioned contempt. I asked the dean to assign me to anyone but Fred Friendly.

Had I known Friendly—irascible, egotistical, controlling—I could have predicted what happened next. After learning of my snub, he insisted I be assigned to him. "So," he boomed at our first meeting, his towering height as intimidating as his stentorian voice, "you're the young woman who thinks I have nothing to teach her."

Veterans in the news business think of journalism schools as the Romper Rooms of their craft. If you want to be a reporter, their thinking goes, the way to learn is by doing the job, not by doing homework. There is much to be said for that view. But Fred Friendly's mission was not to teach his charges the mechanics—such as placing attribution first

or spelling foreign names phonetically when preparing a broadcast report. Mostly, he taught us how to think and how to push.

At CBS and at Columbia, he took the suggestion that an assignment was impossible as an affront. When Daniel Schorr insisted he could not get into East Berlin after the Wall went up in 1961, Friendly made him try until he did get in. When my master's project required a trip out of state, he would hear nothing of logistical obstacles. He took me home to Riverdale, lent me the family car and pointed me toward the highway. I don't know what scared me more: writing a thesis for him or driving his car on the Merritt Parkway in a thunderstorm.

There is a statue of Thomas Jefferson outside the window of the seminar room where Friendly and Columbia Law School professor (and later president of Yale) Benno Schmidt taught a course on journalism and the law. Jefferson would have appreciated what went on in that room. Pacing, challenging, demanding, Friendly trained journalists as if democracy itself depended on the results of his work.

To answer "I don't know" to an ethical dilemma he posed in that room would bring his fist down on the seminar table. "You need to know; you have to know," he'd shout.

"When you leave here, there will be no time on deadline to ask what's right. You need to know it here," he'd say, gesturing to a spot somewhere between his heart and his gut.

We didn't know it then, of course, but his message had as much to do with life as it did with journalism: we decide who we are and what we stand for, every day with every decision we make.

I am little more enamored of authority or celebrity today than I was 25 years ago, but having a celebrity-adviser did not turn out to be a crass career calculation, after all. My first job out of graduate school was as a secretary.

Fred Friendly, dead this week at age 82, did not give his students jobs. He gave us his conscience and pointed us toward the highway. ■

Eileen McNamara, Nieman Fellow 1988, writing in her column in the March 7 issue of The Boston Globe.

Falling Into the Fault Line Chasm

BY DORI J. MAYNARD

He was young, but he knew it was the kind of story that could change lives and win prizes so he didn't hesitate when his editors asked him to spend two months living in a crack-infested community. Years later, Fernando Quintero would pull out the special section with the dramatic pictures of people smoking crack and show it to a journalism class. Not because it won any prizes. It did, but more importantly it raised questions, questions he wished he had asked earlier. His almost all-white newspaper had virtually ignored the African-American community until it learned that crack was being sold near the local school. When the story hit the stands community residents wanted to know why the newspaper had noticed them now. For Quintero, who had relocated from San Francisco to Albuquerque, it was a good question. And there were others. What about the middle class members of the society? Should they have been included as well as crack dealers?

Quintero, who is now Director of the News Watch Project at the Center for Integration and Improvement of Journalism at San Francisco State University Journalism Department, was then a young reporter at The Albuquerque Tribune. That was only one of the differences between him and those he profiled in his piece. He was also of a different race, a different class, and of a different geography.

Without knowing what to call it, Quintero had fallen into a fault line chasm. Fault Lines is the phrase my late father, journalist Robert Maynard, coined to explain the complicated tangle of interaction and reaction we in this country have with and toward our fellow citizens.

It was his belief, and we at the Maynard Institute have come to share that belief, that our nation is split along

the five Fault Lines of race, class, gender, geography and generation. It is now time to not only admit that we are divided along those lines but to also begin to think about those differences in a more sophisticated manner.

For we have spent far too long trying to pretend these Fault Lines do not exist, that we live in a colorblind nation, that ours is a classless society.

Then something happens to make us doubt. Perhaps it is the verdict in a trial. And then it is as if the very ground beneath us begins to shake, and we have no safe haven in which to find shelter. We have seen it twice now within the last five years. And our sense of shock or dislocation often depends on where we sit on the Fault Line grid.

About a year ago, I was speaking to an African-American woman about this notion that the shock of some trial verdicts can trigger social earthquakes. "All of us weren't shocked by the verdict," she said. "You expected the Simi Valley jury [in the Rodney King case] to find the police officers not guilty?" I asked. "Oh, that verdict," she said. I think she was thinking of a somewhat more recent verdict. So we believe, as my father wrote, that if we first acknowledge those differences of perception and come to see them as natural as the geologic fault lines just beneath the earth's surface, we can then begin to build structures of integrity that will bend and not break when the shaking begins.

Honest discourse across Fault Lines with the goal of reaching an understanding, irrespective of agreement, is a first step toward creating that safe haven. For once we give up the notion that we are all alike, we can give up the idea that if we all talk long

enough and loudly enough, we will win others to our side. And once we let go of the need to be right, the need to win, then perhaps we can begin to truly listen to each other. It is also our belief that we in journalism have a special responsibility. For together we can create foundations for those structures of integrity by making sure the picture our fellow citizens receive from the media is a picture that accurately reflects and defines the world.

We have heard a lot about fair journalism, a laudable goal we believe is included in the Fault Lines philosophy.



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For we believe we in the news media can be balanced, can be fair. But first, we as journalists must honestly acknowledge where it is we sit on the Fault Line chart.

A couple of years ago I was party to several conversations with some white male colleagues who were grappling with this notion of multicultural cover-

My geographic Fault Line is deep and wide and I'm not planning on getting over it any time soon. I am an urban dweller. I love the premise on which cities were built, the notion of many people mixing together in a relatively small space. I love the fact that the older Eastern cities were built for walking. I love the stores, the restaurants, the neighborhoods each with its own flavor and feeling.

age. Finally one guy just blurted out, "I am a white man. I will always be a white man, and I will always view the world as a white man." *There was a moment of silence and then all the white men in the room gave this fellow a standing ovation.*

I agree. My colleague is indeed a white man, and he will indeed see the world through those eyes. It's not only OK for him to say that, it's something we all need to hear. All of us, regardless of our race, class, gender, generation or geography, will indeed see the world as shaped by our Fault Lines perspective. We also must understand that others are doing the same. As journalists we have a special charge to acknowledge our Fault Line perspective and then ask ourselves to try and see the world through someone else's eyes.

I think of Anna Deavere Smith, a black woman whose work has shown us how many of the residents of Brooklyn's Crown Heights, be they black or Jewish, felt about the 1991 riot in their community. She didn't try to defend any of those points of views. She left the judgment up to the audience. What she did do was suspend her

own point of view and allow other voices to be heard through her. I think that is the true answer to this question of balance and fairness.

In a book written by the white male journalist Peter Early, "Circumstantial Evidence," he goes to the same town on which "To Kill a Mockingbird" is based and follows the trial of a black man accused of killing a white woman. The man is convicted of the murder and sentenced to die, a move that attracts a Harvard-trained defense attorney to review the case. It quickly becomes clear that the condemned man is innocent. A new district attorney reviewing the case begins to doubt the convicted man's guilt, but he does not believe he can free a black man convicted of killing a white woman without having another strong suspect. Again, Peter Early does not pass judgment. And as a reader, I certainly did not agree with the D.A. I could, however, understand why he acted as he did. He felt trapped by his geography, his race and his generation.

Are there those who rise above the Fault Line grid through compassion, empathy, or a sense of fairness? Yes, of course there are. Anna Deavere Smith and Peter Early are only two and there are many others. But there are also many others who do not rise above their Fault Line perspective. Even so, we journalists have a duty to give them voice as well.

My geographic Fault Line is deep and wide and I'm not planning on getting over it any time soon. I am an urban dweller. I love the premise on which cities were built, the notion of many people mixing together in a relatively small space. I love the fact that the older Eastern cities were built for walking. I love the stores, the restaurants, the neighborhoods each with its own flavor and feeling. In Washington, you would never mistake Adams Morgan for Fox Hall Drive for Georgetown for Anacostia for Capitol Hill.

Then you have the suburbs, where one housing development blends into another, where houses are separated by sterile plods of grass, and the only places you can find people walking around are in enclosed shopping malls where it could be winter or summer,

day or night, Milpitas, California, or Oakland County, Michigan. I go to the suburbs and I practically break out in hives. Born in Brooklyn, I have lived in Washington, Boston and Detroit, and now Oakland.

Detroit, however, is a city like none I had seen before. It has some beautiful architecture, much of it boarded up. It has a fantastic farmer's market and some attractive neighborhoods. But there are few stores like the ones that I usually associate with cities. It could appear as if the central core of the city had virtually collapsed. Where once there had been a Sak's and a Hudson's, there were parking lots and vacant buildings. "The only thing you can get downtown is a wig and a hot dog," one unsuccessful mayoral candidate used to say. On closer inspection, there was much to do and see in Detroit, but it was a kind of hunt and peck city, not the type where everything you wanted could be found at your fingertips.

What Detroit did have was a mayor, Coleman Young, who had been in office since 1973 and was ahead in the polls when I moved to Detroit in 1989. This made no sense to me. Here he had been in charge of the city during a period when people and businesses had left in droves. Now the remaining citizens, many with the means to live anywhere in the United States, were going to re-elect him. I had never seen anything like this. "Well," people told me, "you have to understand, Coleman is Detroit's first black mayor." Yet other cities with large black populations had elected more than one black mayor in that period. Then I began to listen more carefully to the people of Detroit. One day I was interviewing a prominent local lawyer. He looked out at his sweeping panoramic view of Detroit and began to describe his childhood. Back then, the city had scores of stores and restaurants. But when his father wanted to take the family shopping or out to dinner they had to cross the river to Canada because they were not welcome in Detroit. "We had the stores," he said, "but what good were they to us?"

Coleman Young was more than just the first black mayor of Detroit. He made the people of Detroit feel as if

they truly owned their city. The loyalty toward him was race based, but also generation based. Many voters remembered living in a city in which they were not truly welcome. Young's support was also, of course, geographically based. Many of the people pouring out of Detroit were moving to the surrounding suburbs, leaving Detroiters feeling as if you were either a Detroit or a detractor. To oust Young, for some voters, was to embrace the suburbs and the very people who had rejected and to some extent reviled the city.

That made sense. What did not make sense was looking at it solely through the prism of race. Then you ended up with an explanation that essentially said once the black voters of Detroit have elected a black candidate they will never vote that candidate out of office. Race has a role, but there are times when the other lines on the Fault Line grid play an equal if not greater role in how we view the world.

I was still living in Detroit when the first Rodney King verdict was announced. I knew that there was going to be an explosion. I also knew there

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would be no trouble in Detroit. And I suspected we would hear the same question we always hear the mainstream media ask after every disturbance: "Why do they burn their own neighborhood down?"

My time in Detroit was teaching me that while that looked like a question that crosses the race Fault Line, it is really a question that crosses the class Fault Line. It is asked by those who own

about those who not only don't own, but often have little stake in their neighborhood. "They" aren't living in or looting "their" neighborhood. That's why I knew there would be no trouble in Detroit. The citizens of Detroit felt as if they not only owned their home, but they were true stakeholders in the city. The same thing happened in Oakland.

The trial of Rodney King's assailants was full of lessons about Fault Lines. On the surface the most obvious lesson was about the racial divide, but there were also lessons about geography, gender and class. Yet it wasn't until after the acquittal of the four police officers that we began to focus on the fact that Simi Valley, from which the jury was chosen, was a mostly white neighborhood where many police officers and former police officers live. Is it a surprise that the jury would believe their own?

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Yet then, and again during the coverage of the O.J. Simpson trial, we saw the same inability to look at individuals as a compilation of their Fault Lines and not just as black or white and male or female.

Marcia Clark, a white woman who felt she had a certain rapport with black women, bet the case would turn on gender, not on race. She knew the black women of the jury would identify with Nicole and Marcia more than they would identify with O.J. and Johnny Cochran. She was wrong. I can't help but believe if she had looked at all the Fault Lines of the jury she would have had a better chance of winning.

The O.J. case also demonstrated another Fault Line tenet—that we need to begin to talk to each other with the goal of understanding and not agreeing. Between the criminal trial and the civil trial, when the country was in the grip

of O.J. mania, you could turn on the television or radio any time and find the same discussion. One side said he was obviously guilty, calling any one who thought otherwise deluded or racist. The other side said he was clearly set up, calling anyone who thought otherwise naive or racist. Both sides sneered at each other in louder and louder decibels. Meanwhile, journalists con-

Our audience needs to understand the nuances and the subtleties. That is how the media can play a crucial role in helping to build those bridges of integrity.

tinued to tell our audiences that the Simpson trial had uncovered the racial divide.

If we as journalists had looked across all the Fault Lines, we might have been better able to explain how the Simpson and the Simi Valley juries divided along more than racial lines.

Our audience needs to understand the nuances and the subtleties. That is how the media can play a crucial role in helping to build those bridges of integrity.

Some time ago, I heard Ted Koppel say with what sounded like a touch of amazement that his show included a black man opposed to a formal government apology for slavery and a white man in favor of such an apology. Had he understood that each man sees the world through all of their Fault Lines, and not simply in black and white, it might have made more sense to him. Perhaps the white man was of the '60's generation and still believed in the idealism we equate with the times, like justice and equality. Perhaps the black man came of age during the '50's, and from a class where slavery was not discussed. Instead of looking at those subtleties, we got instead a superficial discussion on a very complex issue.

Race. There have been several calls, President Clinton's not the least of them, for conversations across the racial Fault Line. It is not enough. We must begin to

talk across and acknowledge all the Fault Lines, otherwise our conversation, and our coverage, will not make

But we, particularly we journalists, have an obligation to begin to understand, not necessarily agree with, but understand other's Fault Line perspectives. For Fault Lines finally gives us permission to own who and what we are without *having to apologize* for a middle class point of view, or a white point of view or an urban point of view.

sense. To understand where I stand, it is not enough to know that I am a black woman. You need to know where I sit on the Fault Line grid.

My friend, journalist and author and fellow Nieman Fellow, Francis Pisani, says we should think of the Fault Line grid as a sort of hopscotch board. On one issue your reaction may land on the gender square. On another it may land on the race square. On another it may land on race, gender and class.

When the ebonics story first broke it was, and really continued to be, covered as a story of race. It is not only a story about race. It is also a story of class and generation and geography. It is about mostly middle and upper middle class African-Americans, from a generation that dearly loves the trappings of middle class life, appalled that "street talk" might be legitimized. I was back East when the story first broke. I was not amused. "My brother graduated from the Oakland school system, and I can assure you he does not speak ebonics" was my first reaction. I guess it touched a nerve on my class Fault Line. Geography played an important role as well. It is an issue because of the geography in which we tend to think of ebonics being spoken and because of where the proposal stemmed from—Oakland—identified with the Black Panther Party and other things radically black.

None of that was really explored. Instead we had an almost circus-like atmosphere as the media trotted out

one prominent African-American after another to condemn ebonics, never giving the audience the background to understand why they were against it.

To get back to my frustrated white colleague, yes, he always will be a white man. And no, we should not expect him to see the world any differently than his Fault Line grid would allow. But we, particularly we journalists, have an obligation to begin to understand, not necessarily agree with, but understand other's Fault Line perspectives. For Fault Lines finally give us permission to own who and what we are without having to apologize for a middle class point of view, or a white point of view or an urban point of view. (Please don't ask me about that suburban point of view.) It then also frees us to listen to other points of view, realizing they may not be ours, but they may still be legitimate, that in fact, there may be many legitimate ways to view one issue.

The journalist and writer Roy Aarons was looking over some of my Fault Line writings. Roy, a MIJE co-founder and friend of my father's, became somewhat apoplectic when he reached this point. "You're saying it's OK to be racist and I simply don't buy that." Then, after he spent a great deal of time editing my initial Fault Lines presentation, Sandy Tolan, my friend and fellow Nieman classmate and independent radio producer, sent me E-mail in which he argued that I am ignoring the role of empathy and understanding in building bridges across the fault lines.

I hope I am doing neither. I certainly don't think it's OK to be racist. I do, however, acknowledge that just because I don't think it's acceptable that I can abolish it. I can't. Here's what I can do. I can tell you that if you want to talk with me or work with me, we have to agree to give each other mutual respect. I won't call you names or tell you your ideas are stupid. I do want to know how you came to those ideas, and I also want you to know that even then I probably will not agree with you but I may understand a little better. I also think that through empathy and understanding I may be able to paint an accurate picture of who you are and what you believe, even when I completely disagree.

That is some of what I would have

liked to have seen in the coverage of Timothy McVeigh. There is no excuse for what he did. But to some extent I think we as a nation bear some responsibility. We watched the bunker at Waco burning. We knew people were dying, and no one really spoke out. Those who died in Waco fell between the Fault Line cracks. They were poor whites from a strange part of the country. Not only were they not us, we didn't even know to whom to go to speak for them in a way that humanized them. We did get plenty of stories about badly dressed, armed white men living in the outback swearing allegiance to any nation other than the United States.

In contrast, we knew the bombing of the Move headquarters in Philadelphia was wrong, and we also knew to go to black leaders to get the outrage quote and give some sense that we as a nation

Again, Fault Lines is not about agreeing with or condoning. It is simply about learning to understand. We all have Fault Line blindspots. The point of the project is to admit that and then try and be aware of them and then try to understand other's blindspots.

don't condone the government's incineration of our fellow citizens. We didn't see that with Waco or Ruby Ridge. We didn't allow some of our fellow citizens to be heard, let alone understood.

Again, Fault Lines is not about agreeing with or condoning. It is simply about learning to understand. We all have Fault Line blindspots. The point of the project is to admit that and then try and be aware of them and then try to understand others' blindspots.

So if we are to make this national conversation or our coverage on race mean something, we as journalists have an obligation to make sure it includes the other four Fault Lines. Otherwise we run the risk of continuing to insist that the content of our character is defined by the color of our skin, or like Quintero, we will write a story that wins a prize and misses the mark. ■

On the Web, Speed Instead of Accuracy

BY TOM REGAN

It was, yet again, another “defining” moment for on-line media. Most of the early details of the alleged affair between President Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky had emerged on the Web. Between Matt Drudge’s Drudge Report and Newsweek’s AOL site, and the enormous resources poured into the story by countless other on-line organizations, the best way to find out what was not happening in the president’s private life was over a modem.

During that first, somewhat breathless week, as pundits fiercely speculated about what hour the president would actually resign, on-line news sites continued to pump out “exclusive” stories. What was on the tapes, what Secret Service agents saw, what Vernon Jordan said to whom, what Betty Currie said to the grand jury. Unfortunately much of what was written in these stories was not true. In place of well-researched facts, news organizations ran pieces constructed on rumor, gossip and false leaks—just as long as they got it on-line first. Speed, not accuracy, was the benchmark.

Yet what was the most remarkable about this turn of events was how blasé on-line news organizations were about these lapses in basic journalistic rules. At Editor & Publisher’s Online News Summit in February in Seattle, more than a few executives from large on-line news sites crowed about their achievements during these early days of Interngate. They talked about numbers of visitors and how important on-line news had become to the overall news business.

When asked about problems with accuracy, however, they either shrugged it off, chalking it up to the vicissitudes of an immature industry, or in traditional journalistic fashion, denied the obvious and provided examples of how they hadn’t rushed to publish false facts as news—on other occasions. (Since the conference, I’ve read comments of a few on-line news executives who angrily defended what they did, saying it was the future of journalism. God help us all.)

What none seemed to realize was how close we in the on-line media came to shooting ourselves in the foot. (I think we did, although we might have lost only a few toes.) Rather than being able to bask in the glow of breaking well-researched, hard-nosed, journalistically sound stories, on-line media types spent long hours defending their actions as criticism about their story decisions cascaded on their heads.

In the end, however, the situation was, to some degree, out of their control. After all, when you create an 800-pound gorilla, and the gorilla says it’s hungry, you can’t ignore it. And that’s exactly what we’ve done. When you look at the number of 24 hour-a-day media outlets opened in the last 10 years (or even in the last five) on TV, cable and the Web, the appetite for “news”—or should I say content—is endless.

And if you take this bottomless appetite for content and

combine it with the increasing corporatization of news organizations—and the need to keep the shareholders happy, rather than their readers/viewers/listeners properly informed—the pressure to skip a few steps in the journalistic chain of reporting becomes almost unbearable.

In other words, the soul of on-line journalism is in danger of being traded for the riches bought by—to quote Matt Drudge—“80 percent” accuracy. If news Web sites continue to skip a few steps, the results will be deadly. We will become the virtual tabloids of the ’90’s—read by thousands, even millions, believed by hundreds and all of them crackpots.

If the Web is ever to achieve its potential as the great new news medium, it’s going to have to learn to ignore the intoxicating elixir of breathless immediacy, take a few steps back and check our facts. We can still get news out to people faster than we could in the past, but it can’t be at any cost.

Recently Dianne Lynch, Chair of the Department of Journalism at St. Michael’s College in Burlington, Vermont, wrote an article for the electronic edition of *The Christian Science Monitor* where she proposed some new guidelines for the on-line media in the ’90’s. I think they are worth repeating:

1. Slow down. Scoops are just a professional conceit; your readers don’t care who got it first. They just want to trust that you got it right. The first time.

2. Refuse to quote anonymous sources. Forget that tired excuse that you have to do it because everybody else is doing it; it didn’t work with your mother and it won’t work with your readers, either.

3. Go back to work. Don’t join the mob trampling the lawns outside of sources’ homes. Important stories go unreported while you stand around in somebody’s flowerbeds.

4. Stay out of it. Fascinating though you may be, you are not part of the story that your readers want to hear. Save your pontificating for the press bus.

5. Believe us when we tell you what we want. We do know what’s good for us. We know that there are important events emerging around the world, events that have far greater implications than the tale of who saw whom doing what in the White House. We’re as titillated as we can tolerate, so let’s get back to the real news.

6. Just do it, to quote a too-harsh Nike ad. Stop complaining about the woes of the American media, its declining credibility and the pressures of the new media age. You know it’s broken. Have the courage to fix it. ■

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BOOKS

Unfettered Access Is King

In 1991 H.G. Bissinger, a 1986 Nieman Fellow, wrote a best-selling book showing how life in Odessa, Texas, centered on its winning high school football team. With unlimited access to the football team, "Friday Night Lights" dealt with the town's culture and racism as well as football. His new book, "A Prayer for the City," tells from the inside how Philadelphia operated under a new mayor. It, too, has received favorable reviews. At a seminar with Nieman Fellows on September 26, 1997, Bissinger explained how he went undercover to gather information for the book. Here are edited excerpts from that seminar.



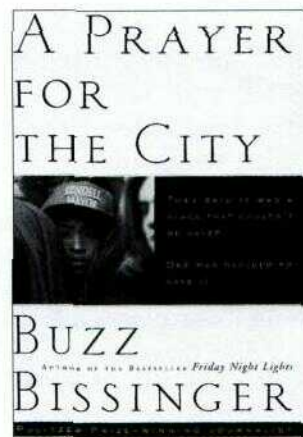
If there's any lesson to be learned from me, and I'm not sure that there is, ideas are important. The most important thing about the idea is that you feel it in your heart. I've seen the best ideas become the worst nonfiction books. And I've seen the worst ideas become the best nonfiction books.

It all depends on your own level of commitment and passion. If you're creative and you're a good reporter, you can do a bang-up job really with almost anything.

The original inspiration for doing "A Prayer for the City," which is modeled [after] and based in Philadelphia, was not that I worked there as a reporter; it was that I was interested in cities.

While I was a reporter in Philadelphia, I used to drive down these blocks on the way to covering stories and they were obliterated. You could tell that at one point in their lives, these had been good, vibrant blocks. Something horrible, something fundamentally horrible had happened. They'd been allowed to deteriorate. People have left. It really did look like Dresden in the World War II bombing days. It was emotionally disturbing, but beyond that it was a simple question of: What the hell happened?

So, you have this kernel of an idea. But, you've got to put it on the page and, for me, the key in nonfiction books is what I will call legitimate access. Access is king, and it's king in books if you can get unfettered access. I would not have done the book if the mayor had said "I will let you do the book, but



here's a list of conditions: 'I want to read it ahead of time. I have approval over this. I have approval over that.'" I wouldn't have done it, because then it's sort of this conditional access.

It was the same with "Friday Night Lights," that the town, perhaps to its regret, gave me access to the team unfettered and there were no conditions attached. Access is important because it allows you to write in a way that is powerful, with real emotional resonance.

I used to do a lot of reconstructions as a journalist, because they were challenging and enabled you to tell a story. But, frankly, I began to wonder about people's memories. I mean memory's one of the greatest things in the world, because it's completely selective. You remember what you want to remember and how you remember it and, you know, you've done these stories and you never quite know if it is true or what the hell really happened.

I needed access because I wanted to tell about cities and urban life in a human way.

In 1991 [just before Edward G. Rendell was elected Mayor] I called his chief campaign manager and said I had this weird idea. "I'd like to spend four years with you guys literally inside your office to do this book. I was in Chicago. He said, [Rendell would] be in Chicago at a fund raiser. "Come meet us at the top of the Sears Tower."

I went up there, and, I figured, this would be a very long pitch. You know, I'd see him once. I'd have to see him twice. He was a former lawyer. He was a former district attorney. I'd need reams of documents to convince him. He looked at me. I hadn't see him in four years. He said, "Hi, how are you? I don't have much time because I'm about to go to a White Sox game. Here's my only concern. We have to make sure that we can get you into meetings so they don't know who you are, because if they know who you are, they'll lie and they won't tell the truth. As far as I'm concerned, you can come whenever you want to come."

That was it. It took all of 10 seconds.

I said, "Wait, there's gotta be more. This is a trick, right?"

"No," he said. "If you want to come and you want to be bored out of your fucking mind for four years, I don't care."

He was not joking. [Later] he would look at me and sort of shake his head when I was in his office and say, "You know, it's truly tragic. You wrote this terrific book ["Friday Night Lights"] and you really ruined your career. I'll see if I can get you, maybe, a job after this book comes out as, maybe, the city biographer."

He's a very funny man. But, in his own way, he's a great benefactor of the First Amendment, because what he did in giving me real access was phenomenal. We're talking about getting into meetings not just locally, [but] with Henry Cisneros [Secretary of Housing]. I'd meet Bob Dole, all sorts of senators. So, I had the access, which was key.

Q.—Did you keep your job at the same time?

A.—No, I quit. I think you have to. I'm not trying to be cavalier. Part of what makes for a good book is fear. I mean, if there's a lot on the line, you're committed to it, and not just because you want to be sort of a romantic, passionate writer, because if it doesn't work out, what are you going to do? Plus, I wouldn't be able to do it, because I wanted to be immersed for four years and I got a very good advance from the publisher. When you spread it out over the eight years that [I'd be out of a job] it isn't that much. But, it was enough so I could do this (with some other income) really exclusively.

He was inaugurated January 6, 1992, and that's when I showed up. I went back to Philadelphia with my family and with my kids. So I was there and it became clear almost from the first week I would have tons and tons and tons of material.

And, then, the first question is what do you do with it? How do you organize it? Organization is so important. It is so boring. It is so plodding. It seems so absolutely meaningless. But, the way I did it it really worked, because when it comes time to write, I think you save yourself as much as a year in terms of knowing where everything is. I would keep copious notes. I never used the tape recorder, because all you hear about people using the tape recorder is what a bitch it is to transcribe the tapes. It continually adds to the level of work. Personally the tape recorders make reporters lazy. I think you depend on the tape and sort of the tone of the other person's voice. You don't ask the sort of follow-up questions that you need to ask, and I just don't, I don't like it.

At least once a week, I would look at those notes, make categories of everything, probably ended up having 250 different categories. They have computer programs where you can write on index cards and then print out the index cards. I did that every week. I ended up having probably 2-3,000 index cards.

They were all categorized by person, by event, by moment. And then I had a separate category called great

moments. Moments that I knew, when I was there, which somehow I knew were delicious—whether they were funny, whether they were dramatic, whether they were poignant—I knew they needed a home in the book. You write up those moments immediately. You don't care about grammar. You don't care about punctuation. You write it up because you want the emotional zest and freshness, all those wonderful things that you're thinking at the time. That's what you want to come out on the page. You can play with all that other stuff later. But, that's what you want.

So, I was organized. I also kept a running, daily log of events and put that into one of these calendar computer [programs]. So that when it came time to write it, I would have everything across these big poster boards and would know where everything was.

It became abundantly clear, that [the mayor was] incredibly flamboyant, human, passionate, terrifying and somewhat crazy. He once turned to me and—let's face it, it's luck in having a guy like this—he says, you know, I'm very, very weak. If I was a woman, I'd be pregnant all the time.

And, it wasn't like I was there for four years. You meet this guy for five minutes and he's the same way. I mean, he's just an alive, bizarre, crazy, kind of wonderful person.

Q.—Just a logistical question. He obviously knew that you were there reporting, with access to all those meetings. Did every person coming into the mayor's office know—

A.—No.

Q.—No one had to be informed?

A.—Some interesting ethical questions. He felt and I certainly felt, if people knew that a reporter was there—you know what it's like. I mean, they're not going to do anything. There's going to be a lot of posturing. There was never any lying. If people said, "Who are you?" I would certainly tell them who I was. I would not go as far as a lie; "I'm just sort of this aide to the mayor except I don't get paid. Don't worry about this legal pad...." There were

certain moments where I felt it was important to act as an aide. I mean, when the mayor was meeting with Henry Cisneros to discuss how we spin PHA [Philadelphia Housing Authority] to the media and what do we do with the Public Housing Authority, which was very troubled in Philadelphia. [It] was taken over by the Federal government for the first time ever, which was an absolute nightmare.

It was a big meeting in Washington. And I would always wear my sort of dark, gray suit and wear my hair short and we'd get to Cisneros's outer office, the mayor just hands me his briefcase, says "just shut the fuck up and just follow me." We just walked right in. He would always sort of mumble my introduction. You know these Washington officials are so full of themselves they didn't care who I was and just would go right on and it was unbelievable.

One of the most powerful moments and saddest moments in the book, and to me this says a lot about cities, is the level of corporate greed and what these corporations do to hold these cities hostage. It is, I think, really chilling and disgusting.

So, there's a moment in the book where Breyers, which is an ice cream company, which has been in the city for almost 130 years, is leaving and they've already made the decision to leave, but they're worried about what kind of spin. You would not believe—90 percent of the time that is spent in government is trying to figure out how to spin to the media. It is really tragic in many ways. A lot of it is silly.

But, they were very worried about how we're going to look in the media. They called a meeting with the mayor basically to get the mayor to lie, saying Breyers is making every effort to remain in the city. This was tragic, when they had made the decision weeks ago. The mayor turned to them and said, "Well, you're asking me to lie and I'm not going to do that."

That was a meeting where I went right to the cabinet table and sat right [next] to the mayor and did my best to look like an aide, because if they had known that there was a reporter in

Kurt Vonnegut On the Value Of Semicolons

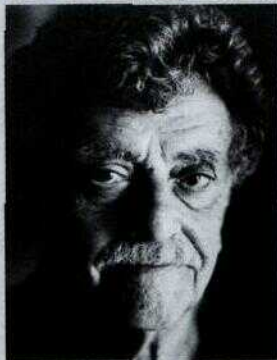


PHOTO © JILL KREMENTZ

I've never had formal training in English literature, just simply had to take freshman courses in English or whatever. My training has been as a scientist, although I have no gift for that field. But I have worked for newspapers. And that's my style, really, to write as simply as possible. And I think one reason the critics have been slow, even up to this moment, in acknowledging me as a serious writer, is that I don't use semicolons...; I never understood them...; They don't really stand for anything...; I think it's a way of just showing off you've been to college.—Kurt Vonnegut on Christopher Lydon's talk show "The Connection" on radio station WBUR Boston, September 30, 1997.

there, they probably would have canceled the meeting and they would [not] have been nearly as blunt to try to get the mayor to massage the media and show to what degree they're trying to—

Q.—What about libel? Is that an anticipated problem?

A.—To me it's not libel because (A) it's the truth (B) it's all public business. This is all the business of public government and you're dealing with public officials and you're dealing with crucial city business.

I never specifically lied, nor did the mayor. We [were] you know, perfectly honorable in that. I was in pursuit of accuracy in the meetings and so, remarkably, was he.

Q.—How were you able to essentially unstack the deck? I mean, really, Rendell's a smart man. He knows who you are. He knows how he's going to appear. He can play to you. Breyers does not have that advantage. They are ignorant and I would not be surprised if in that exchange Rendell comes off well. They don't come off quite so well. He has an advantage they don't have, and one that in essence you gave them. How do you level that playing field?

A.—That is a very good question and I think that one of the reasons I wanted access for four years, or in the case of "Friday Night Lights" for a year, in a sense, was not just to find a narrative, which was important. No one—I don't care how good an actor they are—after a while, is that good to completely sort of say I'm going to put on this face to this guy and I'm not going to reveal the other side of me, because, in that case, Rendell did come off well. But, I think I can say candidly, this is not a prettified portrait. There are things about the mayor, simply based on my observing his behavior, that are abhorrent, that are disgusting. I mean, he physically attacks reporters. I mean, physically. I'm not exaggerating. It's not meant to sound funny. I mean, at certain moments when he would lose his temper and, you know, he'd grab a reporter by the neck in a way that was terrifying and inappropriate and completely uncalled for. That's in the book. There are moments where he is impulsive to a degree that seems almost childlike. He can be very, very profane. He can also be very funny. So, at certain points, the access does work in a sense both ways. If you're with someone long enough, you're going to get the true hue of the person. And, certainly, in "Friday Night Lights," the reaction to the book in the town of Odessa was that I really screwed them, which was not true. I was there and I observed all these things frankly they felt comfortable in saying to me. They trusted me. That's up to them. There was no manipulation there. There was no promise of what type of book I would write.

So, I think it's a good question. [Rendell] was helped by his access. But, in a sense, he took a certain risk. ■

Covering Abortion From the 'Humanity Principle'

Articles of Faith: A Frontline History of the Abortion Wars

Cynthia Gorney

Simon & Schuster. 575 Pages. \$27.50.

Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War

James Risen and Judy L. Thomas

Basic Books. 402 Pages. \$25.

Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000

Edited by Rickie Solinger

University of California Press, Berkeley. 413 Pages. \$45 hc, \$16.95 pb.

BY JAN COLLINS

After noting that each of these book titles contains the words "abortion war," consider these facts:

- Two major media studies conducted several years ago showed that 80 to 90 percent of U.S. journalists personally favor abortion rights.

- The American Newspaper Guild has officially endorsed "freedom of choice in abortion decisions."

- A comprehensive analysis of television, newspaper, and magazine coverage of abortion issues done over an 18-month period in 1989 and 1990 by Los Angeles Times media critic David Shaw found that coverage was skewed—in favor of abortion rights—in all three media.

So why is it that the vocal anti-abortion forces in America seem to be getting so much air time and so many column inches lately?

The answer could be that many anti-abortion folks are public relations experts, well-funded and well-equipped to get their message out. Then, too, the tactics employed by the violent wing of the "pro-life" forces—murdering doctors and staffers, blowing up clinics—are headline grabbers.

The answer could also be that journalists have begun to mirror the genuine ambivalence about abortion that pollsters say continues to characterize Americans' viewpoints on this topic. (In a 1990 Catholic Conference poll, typical of many others before and since,

60 percent of Americans said they believed that every "unborn child" has a right to life. At the same time, 69 percent believed that abortion, at least under certain circumstances, should be legal.)

Whatever the reasons, the apparent anti-abortion rights trajectory in the media recently can be crystallized in an arresting photo that took up nearly a quarter of a page in the "Week in Review" section of the January 11, 1998, edition of *The New York Times*. The photograph—of a four-month fetus—had no caption explaining that the image had been magnified many times, since in reality, a fetus of that age would be about 3 inches long. As Alisa Solomon writes in *The Village Voice*, there was no umbilical cord visible either, and the accompanying story, about technological advances in medicine making abortion less palatable to some, treated the fetus as an "autonomous being."

Recent stories about Congress attempting to ban "partial birth abortions" have also shifted the focus to the fetus. Has "the woman," Solomon asks, disappeared from our collective American consciousness?

It's disturbing questions like these that make the appearance of three new books on America's abortion wars particularly timely. Two of the books—"Articles of Faith: A Frontline History of the Abortion Wars" by former Washington Post reporter Cynthia Gorney, and

"Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War" by Los Angeles Times investigative reporter James Risen and Kansas City Star reporter Judy L. Thomas—are nicely written narrative tales that place in a cohesive whole the wrenching battles that have beset the nation since the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion 25 years ago. The third book, "Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000," edited by historian Rickie Solinger, is a collection of 18 essays, all written by abortion-rights supporters.

The Gorney and Solinger books, particularly, put women back where they belong: squarely in the middle of the story.

Gorney's book, published to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Supreme Court's seminal *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, is an elegantly penned, impeccably fair chronicling of events on each side of the abortion conflict. Gorney tells her story by following the careers of two passionate partisans: Judith Widdicombe, a registered nurse and leader in the pro-choice movement, and Samuel Lee, a pacifist and would-be seminarian who became a fixture in the anti-abortion movement. Putting names and faces to theoretical issues is a time-tested technique of journalism, of course, and it works here. If most of our perceptions of the abortion controversy over the years have come from cinematic snippets of sit-ins and protesting crowds seen on the 11

o'clock news, "Articles of Faith" helps put it all in perspective.

Gorney's book helps us remember the women, too. She listens to Dr. Robert Duemler, an obstetrician who remembered that night in 1962 when he walked into the emergency room of a Missouri hospital and saw more blood than he thought possible.

"There was blood on the walls. There was blood on the floor. There was blood on the gurney and on the towels and on the hands and arms of the emergency crew, who were silent now, and no longer moving rapidly. Beneath them lay a woman whose skin had gone pallid and slack, and when Duemler lifted her legs into the stirrups and cleaned some of the blood away, he saw that someone had pushed inside her vagina with a sharp instrument and aimed it toward the cervix and thrust straight up. The blood vessels to either side of the cervix had emptied all over the Air Force emergency room and the car in which this woman's husband had driven her the 20 miles between the abortionist and the hospital. The husband told Duemler they had five children already." The woman, of course, died.

"Articles of Faith" also reminds us to what nightmarish lengths women were driven in the years before abortion was legal. Lysol douche, artist's paintbrush, curtain rod, glass cocktail stirrer, knitting needles, chopsticks, bicycle pump and tube, gramophone needle, turpentine by mouth, plastic tube with soap solution, telephone wire, slippery elm stick, intrauterine installation of kerosene and vinegar. Sick to your stomach yet? Gorney tells us these are just a few of the ways, as recorded in American medical journals, that women attempted to induce abortions before 1973.

Rickie Solinger's collection of essays also helps us remember the women. "I am an abortion practitioner because of my utmost respect for motherhood, which I refuse to believe is a punishment for a screw," writes Dr. Elizabeth Karlin in one of the book's most moving essays. Karlin, who says she has performed almost 9,000 abortions since 1990, says she knows that

none of her patients "had sex with the intention of having an abortion.... I cannot both judge and practice good medicine."

Dr. Warren M. Hern, who began performing abortions in 1971 and who is on the "hit list" of a radical anti-abortion group, writes passionately about "the need for safe and legal abortions for the sake of women and their families. I said we would not return to back-alley abortions for the same reasons that we would not go back to slavery, public flogging, and the bubonic plague. That barbaric time in history is over...."

These and the 16 other essays in Solinger's book contain a wealth of historical, legal, political and philosophical information about abortion, but anti-abortion activists won't find much fodder here.

"Wrath of Angels" is a compelling account of the rise of the anti-abortion movement, beginning with a few Catholics who came out of the civil rights movement and anti-war protests of the 1960's and '70's, then joined forces with Protestant fundamentalist activists. That pairing was eventually followed by the violence that ultimately decimated the movement. *But it also became "a rallying point for the newly muscular Religious Right."*

Judy Thomas first covered the story when working for The Wichita Eagle during *Operation Rescue's* six-week attack on clinics in Wichita, Kansas, in 1991. Maintaining her wide range of contacts, Thomas teamed with Risen to trace the anti-abortion movement's roots. *Based on hundreds of hours of taped interviews, personal documents and video tapes, "Wrath of Angels" gives the definitive explanation of why the movement ultimately descended into murderous violence.*

Thomas and Risen seem to believe that the murders of abortion doctors and staffers in the 1990's so sickened the American people that the anti-abortion movement is now on its last legs. But the January 29, 1998, bombing of a women's clinic in Birmingham, Alabama, that killed an off-duty police officer and badly injured a nurse, seems to undercut that argument. The FBI

believes the Alabama bombing—responsibility for which was claimed by an anti-abortion group calling itself the Army of God—is connected to three earlier bombings in Atlanta, including the explosion at Centennial Olympic Park during the 1996 Summer Olympics.

Indeed, it appears as though abortion will continue to be, as Risen and Thomas put it, "the most volatile, most divisive, and most irreconcilable debate" in America since slavery. And that means that reporters and editors will continue to cover that debate. How shall we do it?

Obviously, any good reporter or editor will try to do it fairly. But how about objectively? Personally, I've never believed the myth that journalists are objective. We're not. Our upbringing, our parents' values, our schooling, our religious beliefs (or lack of them), our values, our social class—all of these things influence which stories we choose to cover, which people we choose to quote, and which people we choose to not quote.

The gender gap in how abortion stories are reported is proof, in my view, that journalists can't really be totally objective. According to a content analysis done by the Washington-based Center for Media and Public Affairs of 224 print and broadcast news stories about abortion in 1991 and 1992, in stories reported by men, most opinions quoted were anti-abortion. In stories reported by women, most opinions were pro-abortion rights.

This shouldn't surprise us. After all, it's women who get pregnant, and this makes abortion an intensely personal issue for female reporters and editors. Still, being intensely personal doesn't mean it can't be covered—fairly and well—by female journalists. (Gee, should males, who allegedly have a sports gene, be allowed to cover baseball, football, hockey, basketball and soccer?)

I would argue for covering abortion according to Martha Gelhorn's "humanity" principle. Gelhorn, who died February 16 at the age of 89, was a journalist and novelist who covered every war

from the Spanish Civil War to Vietnam. When she died, a friend told National Public Radio that Gelhorn didn't believe in being objective. She believed, instead, in reporting the story according to her "humanity" principle, i.e., how is this particular event affecting *people*? In the case of abortion, I hope that journalists remember to include the woman—the living, breathing woman—who is at the heart of every agonizing decision to terminate a pregnancy.

As Congress, the U.S. Supreme Court and many states continue to narrow access to abortion (federal funding won't pay for abortions for poor women; state hospitals can't be used for abortions; states may require waiting periods and parental notification; abortions are banned at military hospitals; federal health plans no longer cover abortions), it's particularly important not to lose sight of the women.

It's also vital not to lose sight of this final elemental question: In the new millennium, who will perform abortions on the more than one million women expected to seek this operation each year? Nearly 60 percent of all abortion doctors today are at least 65 years old, says Jack Hitt, writing in the January 18, 1998, edition of *The New York Times Magazine*. Moreover, few medical students are being trained in abortion techniques today, despite the fact that abortion is the most common obstetrics surgical procedure. (If current rates hold, 43 percent of American women today will have an abortion at some point in their lives.)

It appears that the murders in 1993-94 of five abortion doctors and clinic staff members have scared abortion providers. And without competent, well-trained abortion doctors, the legal right to abortion is an increasingly hollow prerogative. ■

Jan Collins, Nieman Fellow 1980, formerly Jan Stucker, is an editor at the University of South Carolina. She is also a Southern correspondent for The Economist and coauthors a nationally syndicated column on divorce and transitional life issues called "Flying Solo."

Children of Despair

Lost Futures: Our Forgotten Children

Stan Grossfeld

Aperture. 176 Pages. \$45.

Stan Grossfeld of *The Boston Globe* saw unimaginably horrific violence in his travels through such areas as Sudan, India, Haiti, Brazil and Thailand—and the United States. The victims were children, and some of the scenes, he says, "were too horrible to photograph, like the 'tail of hunger' where the intestines are forced out several inches from the anus as the body feeds on itself." Grossfeld, a 1992

Nieman Fellow, sought to find out why the world allows this suffering but more importantly how to end it. His first step was to show the results of hunger and violence through his photographs. The second step was to state the ways people can help, by listing names, addresses and phone numbers of support groups. All royalties from the sales of "Lost Futures" go to the U.S. Committee for UNICEF.—Lois Fiore



Mineirinho, a Rio street kid, inhales glue to quell his hunger and to escape reality. "If we want rain, we get rain. If we want a rainbow, we get a rainbow," he says.



Roberto Flores sits in an Apopka, Florida, apartment that the landlord refuses to fix. "The sewage leaks into the kitchen when it rains," says his mother, Maria Santana. "And the baby gets rashes all over his body." They have since moved.

Remembrance of Things Past

Paris In The Fifties

Stanley Karnow

Times Books. 352 Pages. \$25.

BY FRANÇOISE LAZARE

A journalist always finds the need to wrap up a story at some point. Forty years after he left Paris, where he had been based for a decade immediately after World War II, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Stanley Karnow has published his book of souvenirs. "Paris in the Fifties" is a lively account of life in the French capital as it was resuscitating from four years of German occupation.

Arriving by boat in France in 1948 for a summer vacation on graduating from Harvard University, Karnow, as so many Americans before and after, easily succumbed to the charms of its capital city, and incidentally to those of a young French woman. His stay in Paris lasted 10 years, during which he had plenty of time to marry, then divorce, the young Claude Sarraute, to get acquainted with the French way of life, and to get his journalistic career firmly started. Time magazine, which at first only hired him as a researcher and a translator, gave him the opportunity to cover events and to meet characters that belong to history.

Speaking French fluently, smoking Gauloise cigarettes, Karnow, who now lives in Washington, is clearly proud of his knowledge of French culture. For sure, he has witnessed historical events and writes nicely about them in "Paris in the Fifties." His recollections of interviews with flamboyant actress Audrey Hepburn, gloomy director Orson Welles, of a visit to the backstage of a Christian Dior fashion show and of a disappointing meeting with aging writer Ernest Hemingway are moving. Even more, his accounts of a winetasting adventure in Burgundy and of several criminal cases turned into national

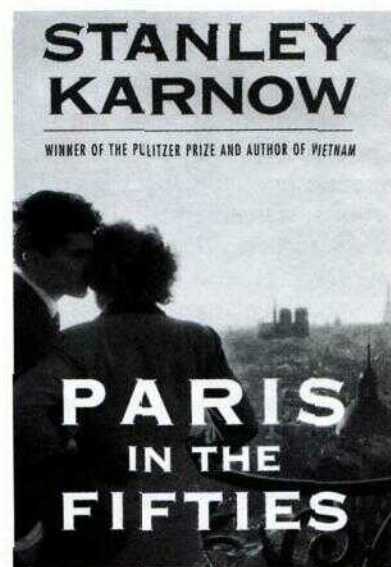
drama give excellent snapshot illustrations of French society.

Karnow is keen on noticing that the French are so fussy about their language that they determine with precision the position of words in a sentence. Yet he calls the literary movement of the early 50's "roman nouveau," whereas it is officially known as "nouveau roman."

The lessons about journalism drawn by Karnow from his Parisian experience are quite interesting. Like other Time veterans, he despairs about the magazine's operation:

"A worldwide network of anonymous correspondents would cable long and frequently authoritative dispatches to the headquarters at Rockefeller Center in New York, where they were completely revamped—and inevitably distorted—by skilled wordsmiths into a few silky-smooth, swift-paced, adjective-riddled paragraphs. Assiduous women researchers then placed a red dot over every word to indicate that it had been checked and double-checked for accuracy, yet the final product was filled with errors." Such "grope journalism," as Time staffers called it, and Henry Luce's vision of the French "as morally permissive and thus unreliable allies" inevitably gave life to many clichés: "a Time subscriber might conclude that, and by large, France was a degenerate nation of gourmets, adulterers, leftist intellectuals, and volatile politicians," writes Karnow.

Clichés, though, fit comfortably in Karnow's book, where gastronomy and passionate crimes are emphasized more than literature and the economy. War-time "collaboration" with German occupiers is absent from the book, as it was from the public scene at the time.



We know "collaboration" was then taboo. It was nonetheless central to personal histories, and it is key to understanding the numerous fractures of French society. Today, the trial of a former high civil servant, Maurice Papon, dominates French news.

Karnow brings readers' attention to the French resistance to change in daily customs or historical events. The impoverished, deeply wounded country of the 1950's refused to think that it had lost its grandeur of the 1920's, or that its aristocracy had been completely abolished after the 1789 revolution. In the 1950's, aristocratic families were still hosting luxurious dinner parties. For them it was not so far from 1671, when a cook killed himself after failing to perfectly organize a large dinner party that King Louis XIV had commissioned.

In the fifties, believes Karnow, people were already fearing the ruining of Saint

Germain des Pres, invaded by fast food restaurants. In the nineties, it is customary to hear about the dying Saint Germain, once the center of the intellectual scene, today overtaken by the high fashion industry. And should we be surprised by the post-Diana death hysteria, knowing how much "visiting monarchs electrified Parisians"?

Karnow also recalls that up to the fifties, convicts were deported to penal colonies in Guyana, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. In 1953, he covered the return of the last convicts. Remembrance of the penal colonies is particularly apt. France recently celebrated with much publicity the 100th anniversary of the publication of "j'Accuse," Emile Zola's denunciation of injustice against Captain Dreyfus, deported in 1894 to Cayenne.

The death penalty was abolished in France in 1981. But who remembers that in the second part of the 20th Century the country was still using the archaic guillotine?

If nothing more, Karnow's book is a wonderful snap insight into France that a visitor would benefit from reading before boarding a first flight (if not boat) to Paris.

After 10 years spent in Paris, Karnow finally found an incentive to return home in 1958—to Harvard University and the Nieman Foundation. ■

Françoise Lazare is a Nieman Fellow 1998. Based in Paris, she covers international affairs for Le Monde. Born in Paris in 1965, Lazare missed life in the City of Lights in the Karnow years.

Shapers of Literature

Theodore Dreiser and Ernest Hemingway...brought the newspaper and the novel closer together, with Dreiser claiming the newspaper's most sordid and sensationalistic subject matter as appropriate material for fiction and Hemingway appropriating the terse "objective" style of the modern newspaper for his own ends.—*Michael Robertson in "Stephen Crane, Journalism and the Making of Modern American Literature," Columbia University Press. 1997.*

Defining Moments for the Press

Sentinel Under Siege

Stanley E. Flink

Westview Press. 325 Pages. \$28.00.

BY URI BERLINER

The ideals of freedom and social harmony do not coexist smoothly. America, founded in a violent spasm against stable, prosperous yet despotic rule, has always held liberty first among virtues. This desire to be unfettered was anchored in the Bill of Rights, especially in the remarkable First Amendment protection afforded to the nation's fledgling press.

It was an unruly press, given to personal attacks, gossip and innuendo. But the founders (at least most of them) understood that an experiment in self-rule could not succeed without an informed citizenry. "A Popular government without Popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy, or perhaps both," wrote James Madison more than two centuries ago.

Steeped in history, Stanley E. Flink's "Sentinel Under Siege," is a clear-eyed examination of the America media, with a bow to founders like Madison and a warning to journalists who exploit their freedom without exercising responsibility.

As Flink demonstrates, the rights of journalists, explicitly granted in the Constitution, have been reaffirmed and strengthened by the Supreme Court. But the obligation, moral not legal, to cover the events of the day with a commitment to fairness, accuracy and independence, has been recognized only sporadically by the press.

This tension, between the vast liberties permitted under law and the exacting standards ideally forged by conscience and citizenship, forms the core of Flink's book.

Its great value is that he vividly shows how the defining moments for the press have been inextricably bound to the nation's even greater struggles over race, industrial development and the power of government.

The landmark 1964 press victory in *The New York Times v. Sullivan* case not only prohibited states from subverting the Constitution by limiting criticism of public officials; it also gave a green light for citizens to agitate against the racism practiced by the state of Alabama.

Likewise, the Pentagon Papers case slammed the door on prior restraint, while opening up a secret government history of the unpopular Vietnam War for all to see.

"Sentinel Under Siege" also lays bare journalism's darker moments. Pandering for profit has a long history that took off during the competitive Gilded Age maelstrom a century ago. Vying for millions of urban readers, newspapers fabricated stories, drummed up war fever and reveled in sex, crime and celebrity.

Today, a bulimic media erupts around the clock—O.J., Monica, Di—a stream of gossip, half-truths and anonymous quotes that provides cheap thrills but squanders credibility. Flink, a former *Life* magazine correspondent and a journalism professor at New York University, is well aware of the echoes between the centuries. Like any serious observer, he is dismayed by much of what passes for journalism today.

He offers a range of proposals, from greater collaboration with universities to a stricter internal code of accuracy and accountability, that might help news organizations regain their footing. Flink's prescriptions are a good starting point. Because, as he suggests, the alternative to self-imposed standards is government regulation of the press. And virtually nothing else would cut so harmfully against the American grain. ■

Uri Berliner, a staff writer for The San Diego Union-Tribune, is a 1998 Nieman Fellow.

Too Much Freedom?

Media Scandals:

Morality and Desire in the Popular Culture Marketplace

Edited by James Lull and Stephen Hinerman

Columbia University Press. 256 Pages. \$45 hc, \$17.50 pb.

The Troubles of Journalism:

A Critical Look at What's Right and Wrong with the Press

William A. Hachten

Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 188 Pages. \$45 hc, \$21.50 pb.

BY CARA DeVITO

Blessed with a detached and naive view of American freedom that could only come from growing up on Mars, or mainland China, Yin Hui, a current Nieman Fellow from Beijing, silenced a gathering of this year's Nieman Fellows and their guest speaker, Seymour Hersh.

"In China we cannot talk about sexual relationship of the leaders.... It's wrong, because there's no freedom.... Here [in the United States] freedom is everywhere, in everybody's hands. But sometimes when some things happen in America [referring to saturated commentary of allegations against President Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky] *I think maybe they need to learn how to use freedom. Because when they are born, already the freedom is in their hands. They don't need to fight to get it, [but] they don't know how to use it.*"

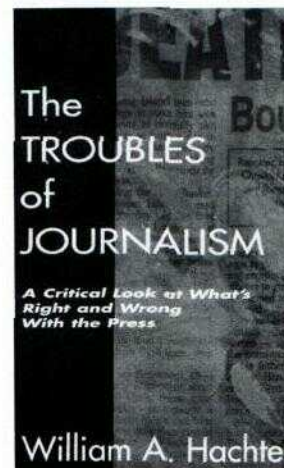
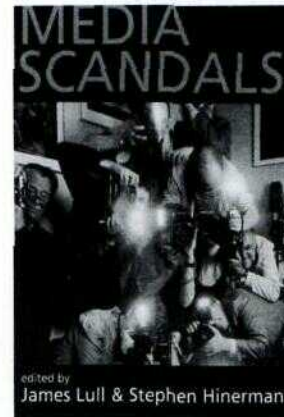
Hersh, a brazen wordsmith by trade, uttered only "I hear what you're saying. That's actually pretty profound."

Profound indeed. In the wake of recent media controversies, that is the *critical view held by much of the nation*. Two books released this January take up the challenge of making sense of the behavior of the press today and its implications for a healthy democracy. They are "Media Scandals," edited by two communications professors at San Jose State University, James Lull and Stephen Hinerman, and "The Troubles of Journalism," by William Hachten, a former newspaper reporter turned professor at the University of Wisconsin in

Madison. Both are compendiums of data about how the news media are organized to process fast-breaking news, accelerated by a constantly updated Internet infrastructure. "Media Scandals" is a compilation of scholarly essays, and "The Troubles of Journalism" is one veteran reporter's essay on the evolution of news delivery since the 1940's. Both books were published just days before headlines of investigations of allegations of the Clinton-Lewinsky story dwarfed coverage of an impending air strike against Iraq.

These two books, which address the balance of power in American democracy, should be mandatory reading for *anyone in the press today*. William Hachten concludes, "This volume has been concerned about the fate of serious news and public information at a time when our vast popular culture apparatus has engulfed legitimate journalism into a churning melange of entertainment, celebrity, sensation, self-help and merchandising—most of which is driven by corporate entities devoted to advertising, promotion, PR, marketing and, above all, a healthy bottom line." If Hachten's assertion is correct, the Fourth Estate is not pulling its weight as a democratic check and balance of power.

The 11 essays that compose "Media Scandals" are written by scholars of anthropology, sociology and communications from around the world. Sometimes revelatory, sometimes dryly academic, they frame the issues that journalists must resolve regarding the



intersection of private lives and public morality. Sociologist John B. Thompson, from the University of Cambridge in England, contends that the growing *emphasis on scandal is symptomatic of technological advances that have altered the visibility of peoples' lives*. Now public figures are known primarily through the way the media shows them. This "rise of mediated visibility has become the source of a new and distinctive kind of fragility" and there is little that political leaders and other public figures can do about it no matter how they try to manage their self-presentation. "They cannot completely control it." Unlike scandals that occur in a localized setting, where the strategies of face-to-face interaction reveal what is known or not, mediated scan-

dals usually have dire consequences. "Those who live by the media are most likely to die by the media." How do we control the conscience of an entity that has a life of its own?

William Hachten in "The Troubles of Journalism" refers to what used to be the seven traditional gatekeepers of the American news business—the executive editors of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, the executive producers or anchors of the CBS, NBC and ABC evening news shows, and the editors of *Time* and *Newsweek*. These days, with the proliferation of cable news stations and the myriad nightly newsmagazine shows broadcast on the networks, Hachten concurs with Los Angeles Times press critic David Shaw that the ever expanding number of news outlets creates "...a vast *maw* craving information, 'infotainment,' around the clock." Who, they question, are the new gatekeepers, the conscience of the new business?

So far this year, Nieman Fellows, as temporarily non-working journalists, have observed their working colleagues claw their way through the shock of the death of Princess Diana; grapple with covering the leader of China, a nation steeped in human rights abuses, as he spoke at Harvard, America's symbolic pinnacle of the virtues of free speech, with the caveat of accepting only two questions from the audience, and witnessed the escalating ill-sourced allegations about the veracity and sagacity of the President. We concluded that the 24-hour news infrastructure has pressured reporters to be less responsible in confirming the reliability of their sources. Reporters must learn to be their own gatekeepers.

As Hachten maintains "...a real strength of U.S. journalism is the long-time and still common practice of criticism of press performance from within the ranks of journalism." Journalists must not be restrained by government or private sources, but censure from within may be its greatest salve. ■

Cara DeVito, a 1998 Nieman Fellow, is a producer and editor at NBC News in New York City. She is spending her year at Harvard developing a news show for adolescents.

A Practical Guide to Health Writing

Health Writer's Handbook

Barbara Gastel

Iowa State University Press. 226 Pages.
\$29.95 pb.

BY MOLLY MARSH

Barbara Gastel's *Health Writer's Handbook* is a practical guide packed with specifics on how to write about health intelligently and with sensitivity. She includes basic information helpful to the beginning health writer, such as finding story ideas and identifying people to interview, but her lists of names, telephone numbers, addresses, E-mail addresses and Internet sites for hundreds of health-related associations and publications also will be helpful to more experienced writers.

Gastel, a medical doctor and Associate Professor of Journalism and Medical Humanities at Texas A&M University, writes succinctly about such topics as health writing techniques and ethical issues writers encounter. Particularly useful is her chapter on how to evaluate medical information, such as the design of a study. Many writers are unaware of the distinctions between longitudinal, cross-sectional and randomized double-blind controlled clinical trials, for example; others have confused incidence rates with prevalence rates, and morbidity rates with mortality rates. Gastel clarifies these terms and highlights other problem areas, such as calculating relative risk, statistical significance and confidence intervals.

Her chapters on health writing techniques and genres of health writing are loaded with examples of what she considers to be good writing and why. She includes extended excerpts of health pieces used by, for example, National Public Radio's Morning Edition, *The New York Times Magazine* and *The Associated Press*, and comments on the content and technique of each. While

these are helpful, more samples—including examples of "bad" health writing—would have been useful.

Gastel also offers suggestions about how to write with sensitivity—how should one depict disfigurement? What is the distinction between a disability and handicap?—as well as more basic questions—is it died *from* or died *of*? When are disease names capitalized? Does a person have a fever or a temperature? What is the difference between a sign and a symptom?

She devotes a chapter to key topics within health writing—heart disease, cancer, infectious diseases, mental illness, healthcare technology, and healthcare policy, among others—directing readers to specific organizations and institutes that address these issues, as well as questions writers might watch for.

Gastel's concluding chapters focus on career options in the health-writing field, professional organizations and educational opportunities for the health writer. She includes a list of about 30 awards available for writers, as well as college courses, degree programs, internships and fellowship programs in science, health and communication.

Gastel's work is aptly named—the book is well-organized, the index and bibliography are extensive, and the chapters can be read in any order. It is a valuable resource for beginning and experienced health writers—the former for a basic orientation to the field, and the latter for those looking to improve their reporting. ■

Molly Marsh is the Editorial Assistant of Nieman Reports.

Juicing Up Tired Editorial Pages

BY MURRAY SEEGER

Across newspaper-land, editors are attempting to pump new blood into the tired arteries of their editorial pages. Many are opting for the easy route, printing more letters, columns, artwork and op-ed contributions.

Some papers have juiced up their writing, taking sharper opinions or using stronger language to express their usual positions, as in *The New York Times* under the regime of Howell Raines as Editorial Page Editor. At the opposite end of the circulation spectrum, Michael Gartner won the 1997 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing in *The Daily Tribune* of Ames, Iowa, with a punchy style on such topics as lap dancing in local saloons, a First Amendment case if there ever was one.

Still, beyond a few good examples there is a terrible sameness on editorial pages. The opinions are remarkably uniform on issues such as international trade, budget deficits and taxes and the "peace process" in the Middle East. When was the last time we saw a non-consensual view on any of these issues?

The natural tendency of publishers is to avoid offending any powerful interests, so editors stick to a consistent right-of-center line. To stir up things it is cheap and easy to take on a columnist or print an article pushed through the telefax machine from some organized lobby or realm of academia.

There was a time when editorial page staff were the hiding places for the publisher's brother-in-law or a reporter who had suffered terminal burn-out. With the fading of personal publishing, however, editorial pages are more professional. The new generation is looking for more contemporary ways to increase readership.

A recent collection, "Great Editorials" (Vision Press, \$21.95), offers a historical perspective on opinion-writing that emphasizes the literary, non-confrontational approach. There are examples from Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, William Cullen Bryant, Horace Greeley, Charles Dana, Joseph Pulitzer, and everyone's favorite, William Allen White. In 1981, it turns out, Theo Lippman of *The Baltimore Sun* defended nude dancing on First Amendment grounds—perhaps that is where Gartner got his inspiration.

With a few exceptions, such as contributions from Hodding Carter Jr., Lauren Sloth, John Harrison and Paul Greenberg, however, the preserved editorials are bland, not even the best examples of the named authors. There are no samples from those who took on Joseph R. McCarthy in his heyday or Lyndon B. Johnson during the Vietnam War. We do not find names such as Harry Ashmore, Ralph McGill, Erwin Canham, John Oakes, Alan Barth and Phil Geyelin.

There has been no comprehensive survey of editorial page readership in a decade, according to Stephen J. Simurda, a professor at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. The last survey, by Prof. Ernest C. Hynds, head of the University of Georgia Department of Journalism, found a "flattening out" of readership a decade ago.

In a new examination of 16 papers, Simurda found "dramatic" changes taking place on editorial pages. Hynds, he said, agreed that editorial writers were more likely to express strong opinions now than they did 20 years ago.

There are certainly more op-ed pages today, a tribute to Harrison Salisbury, who showed the way at *The Times* 25 years ago. Some publishers must wonder if the exercise is worthwhile because running a good page for outside contributors ties up a lot of staff just to clear the fax machines. The number of syndicated columnists expands unabated.

This growth in the volume of disseminated opinion raises the questions of quality, variety and editorial judgment. We are already awash in unexpurgated, second and third class opinion from talk radio, the Internet and every other public media. Every savvy public relations consultant is in the game of flooding the air, letters' columns and op-ed pages with hired voices that sometimes overwhelm the professional editorial writers.

In a neat recent finesse, a Republican lawyer with a Chinese name wrote a piece to contradict *The Times'* editorial support for the Chinese-American lawyer nominated by President Clinton to be Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. Fortunately, *The Times* could quickly dispute the views of John C. Yoo and reiterate its support for Bill Lann Lee.

Other editorial pages are overwhelmed by the flood of outsider contributions that are often stronger in tone and smoother in style than what the newspaper can produce. The newspaper that does not sort out the good and bad, right and wrong, from the cacophony of opinion fails its readers.

Successful newspapers win the confidence of their readers by rejecting cookie-cutter editorial writing. They gain respect and carry out their journalistic mission when they challenge conventional wisdom or the entrenched powers in their community. Readers disdain editorials that are predictable or dull and turn elsewhere for guidance in making vital decisions. ■

Murray Seeger, a 1962 Nieman Fellow, teaches at George Washington University.

NIEMAN NOTES

COMPILED BY LOIS FIORE

An Alabama Journalism Partnership

BY STAN TINER

Over the course of my three decades in newspapers, I have observed that relations between journalism and journalism education have been less than passionate. It is not so much that the two institutions dislike each other, rather there is a detached indifference that sets the two adrift on parallel azimuths.

Surely this is not universally true—there are notable exceptions where caring parties on each side have made exceptional contributions toward amiable and professionally meaningful exchanges designed to bring intersection of purpose between those otherwise parallel bodies.

Nonetheless, I would posit that relations between the two have suffered during the 30 years I described, even as each institution has suffered declining public trust.

My own cognizance of this estrangement, then, made me a willing listener when an old colleague and now journalism professor at the University of Alabama, Dr. Bailey Thomson, visited me last summer with an intriguing proposition.

Thomson's idea was straightforward—a group of his students would devote several months of their school year reporting on Alabama's Black Belt, a slice of black soil that roughly intersects the state's middle. It is the poorest pan of a poor state and it has not benefited greatly from Alabama's modern industrial gains, such as Huntsville's high tech concentration, or the route joining Tuscaloosa and Birmingham described by the corporately hip in the state as the Mercedes corridor.

The students would do all of the

reporting and photography while The Mobile Register would provide the final editing and then put their work together in a 20-page broadsheet section that would be distributed to The Register's 120,000 Sunday readers.

Clearly, there was some risk involved. There was no way of knowing whether the students were capable of issuing a report at a level worthy of publication. Indeed, the students involved were not an elite group; they were simply 20 students whom Thomson taught in his advanced classes.

I quickly decided it was a risk worth taking. If well done, which I thought it would be, it would be a valuable contribution to our readers' understanding of the many problems confronting the Black Belt and its people. Furthermore, it would be information for the state's leadership, perhaps providing an impetus to move ancient boulders an inch or two in the direction of progress.

But what if the students didn't deliver? What if their work didn't measure up? In that case, I decided it would be good for the soul of my newspaper—and perhaps my own—to have done so noble a deed. More so, it would certainly advance the relationship between The Register and Alabama's journalism department, which strives with great energy to be one of the best in the South, just as we strive to be one of the best newspapers.

So the answer was go. It was both the right answer and a good answer. The students delivered a fine piece of reporting and photography that captured the life of the Black Belt and its vast problems accurately and movingly.

The Black Belt project examined the

culture, politics, agriculture, religion and history of the region with depth. One student lived with a rural family for many weekends and wrote a wonderful and intimate story about their lives. The students also explored how the nation's new welfare thrift is affecting many people in this poor region.

After the class had gathered its stories, Thomson and some of his students moved into The Register newsroom, where they spent an intense week polishing their stories and working with a team of the newspaper's editors, headed by Dewey English, who pulled the work together in a fine product.

So far as I can tell, everyone has benefited from the experiment. The Register's readers have responded favorably to the report and many especially appreciated the collaboration with the students.

The students certainly gained. Daniel Cusick, a project participant and now an environmental reporter for The Register, said the project, more than any classroom event, allowed him to fuse his two great loves—newspaper journalism and the geography of the South. Reporting about the region helped him to understand not only the Black Belt itself, but how the region fit into the larger puzzle of Alabama.

For Thomson, the project provided a laboratory for testing the efficacy of his teaching methods. Too, it showed a side of journalism that sometimes is missing, emphasizing the public service possibilities available in the newspaper world. "I wanted my students to realize they can contribute to society in creative and important ways," he said.

The cost to the newspaper for the

20-page section, for those editors who might ask such crass questions, was about \$10,000 outright, mostly newsprint costs. Additionally, some of our staff members were heavily involved in the production of the section for about a week, and that detracted from our daily report during the period.

Still we would do it again. In fact, I can say we will do it again.

The most gratifying response has come from those parties who live in those parallel universes we mentioned earlier—editors and journalism professors. Since the publication of the Black Belt, we have heard from folks in both, saying they liked it so much they might like to seek out partners of their own and try something similar.

It just makes sense. In those parallel worlds of indifference, neither party succeeds quite so well as the two parties might together. ■

Stan Tiner, Nieman Fellow 1986, is Editor/Vice President-News for The Mobile Register.

—1941—

George Chaplin writes to say that after “40 great years in Hawaii,” he and his wife, **Esta**, moved back to Charleston, South Carolina, on March 1.

—1963—

Shelby Scates has written a book, “Warren G. Magnuson and the Shaping of the Twentieth-Century America.” Published by the University of Washington Press, it is a biography of Magnuson, the Democratic Senator from Washington state, who died in 1989, and who had an important impact on such issues as Social Security, Medicare, clean air, decent water and safe clothing for children. Scates, a former Seattle Post-Intelligencer political reporter and columnist, now writes full-time.

—1977—

Alfred Larkin, Jr. has been promoted to Vice President and Assistant

Nakasa Honored

The South African Nieman who committed suicide in New York in July 1965—Nathaniel Nakasa—has not been forgotten in South Africa. The South African Nieman alumni and the National Press Union have instituted the “Nat Nakasa Award” for the enhancement of Press Freedom. The first winner of the award will be announced at The *Sowetan’s Press Freedom Day* later this year.

Nakasa had to accept banishment from South Africa to become a Nieman Fellow. He went to New York at the end of the academic year. Six weeks later he was found crumpled on a sidewalk below an open window of a high-rise building. Only 28 years old, he had grieved for his country.—*Barbara Folscher, Nieman Fellow 1995 and Chair of the Nieman Society of Southern Africa.*

to the Publisher of The Boston Globe. Larkin joined The Globe as a reporter in 1972, and has been Editor of the Sunday magazine, Assistant Managing Editor for local news and Managing Editor of the Sunday edition. He has been Managing Editor of Administration since 1990, overseeing the newsroom’s legal, labor, personnel and budget issues. In his new position, Larkin will serve as a liaison to the editorial department and senior advisor to the publisher, and will continue to oversee newsroom legal matters.

—1979—

Michael McDowell has been appointed Senior Director, Strategic Communications and Fellow of the Overseas Development Council, a Washington-based international think-tank. Joining ODC’s senior management team, McDowell will head their communications department and will also write on public policy. McDowell had been senior editorial producer and manager at The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s U.S. Bureau. McDowell

began his career with The Belfast Telegraph in Northern Ireland, where he was born. He also has been a Senior Associate of The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, foreign affairs writer for The Globe and Mail in Canada and a reporter and producer with the British Broadcasting Corporation.

—1982—

Ameen Akhalwaya, 52, died on February 2 at his home in Johannesburg, South Africa, after a long struggle with cancer. **Barbara Folscher**, 1995 Nieman Fellow and Chair of the Nieman Society of Southern Africa, writes:

“Award-winning journalist and human rights activist Ameen Akhalwaya...was a highly respected journalist who dedicated his life to the upliftment of the poor. He built his reputation at The Rand Daily Mail, [where he started as a freelancer in 1971], the Union of Black Journalists, SABC Television and the Media Workers Association of South Africa...”

In 1997, Deputy President Thabo Mbeki awarded Akhalwaya an “extraordinary” award from the Foreign Correspondent’s Association of Southern Africa. Akhalwaya was also the founding Editor of The Indicator.

Akhalwaya is survived by his wife, **Farida**, and their children, Zaytoon, Zain and Zaheer.

—1984—

Correction: Jacqueline Thomas has been appointed Editorial Page Editor at The Baltimore Sun, not at The Detroit News, as reported in the winter issue. Thomas had been Washington Bureau Chief at The Detroit News.

—1985—

Mike Pride, Editor of The Concord (New Hampshire) Monitor, received the Yankee Quill award in recognition of his contributions to New England journalism. The award, presented at a dinner last fall in Danvers, Mass., was established in 1960 to “honor the effort, integrity and dedication” of journalists who have had “a broad influence

for good" in New England journalism.

Pride has been at The Monitor as Managing Editor and Editor for 21 years. He began his career before he was 20 years old, covering sports in Florida, where he grew up. He went to the Concord paper in 1978 from Tallahassee, where he was City Editor of The Tallahassee Democrat. Under Pride's leadership, The Monitor has received widespread recognition as one of the region's best newspapers.

Pride lives in Concord with his wife, **Monique**, a teacher. They have three sons.

Samuel Rachlin brings us up-to-date on his work:

"Back in the USSR, oops, Russia.... 1997 has been a year of changes. After two and half years in the World Bank's External Affairs, I have decided to return to journalism and some of my old haunts. My former employer, TV2 Denmark, has asked me to help them out in Moscow. After thinking about it I decided to do it and return to my old beat, which, of course, is not quite the same as when I left it in 1984.

"From January 1, 1998, I will be dividing my time between Washington and Moscow spending about two weeks each place with stopovers in Copenhagen. It will be a lot of flying and jet lag, but I look very much forward to resuming my journalism career, exploring Russia and the new Russians, and having the chance to observe the world from two or three capitals.

"All my Washington coordinates are the same: 4425 Westover Place, N.W., Washington D.C., 20016. Phone: (202) 244-7876, Fax: (202) 244-2704, E-mail: samrach@aol.dot Moscow phone: 134-4091. E-mail in Moscow and Copenhagen: sara@tv2.dk Keep in touch or just come by.

"My wife, **Annette**, is trying to build a business importing Danish office furniture. Daughter Sarah, 18, is now in college and Natalia is in sixth grade."

—1988—

Lindsay Miller is in a new job:

"Having started out in print and

moving on to television, I'm now working in the medium where I've gotten a lot of my news all along, radio. I'm the Senior Editor for "Morning Edition" at WBUR-FM and enjoying it very much.

"**Emily O'Reilly** breezed into Boston in February, while her husband, **Steve Ryan**, was judging a news layout competition in New York State. She came with pictures of her four beautiful kids and tales of her new book, which is about the murdered Irish reporter Veronica Guerin.

"We had a mini-reunion with **Michele McDonald** and her husband, **Adam Schwartz**, and their amazing Chinese daughter, Annie."

Miller's E-mail address is: lmiller@WBUR.BU.EDU

—1992—

Michael Ruane is now with the metro staff of The Washington Post. Ruane had been with The Philadelphia Inquirer since 1982, most recently at the Washington Bureau and for three years before that as Pentagon correspondent.

—1993—

Tim du Plessis was instrumental in getting a significant group of the journalists who work for the Afrikaans publishing giant Nasionale Pers (Naspers) in South Africa to make a submission to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

The TRC is chaired by Nobel Peace laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It investigates the country's past in the apartheid era.

In September 1997 the TRC had three days of hearings on the role of the media under apartheid. Naspers, which owns Beeld, the Afrikaans daily where Du Plessis is a deputy editor, refused to participate. Du Plessis and some 130 other Naspers journalists did not agree with this position and decided to make submissions in their individual capacities. The journalists told the TRC they believed the newspapers in the Naspers stable played a part in upholding the apartheid system through their sup-

port in elections and by-elections for the then-ruling National Party. They also admitted to neglecting their journalistic duty by not fully reflecting the *aspirations and suffering of black South Africans* in the apartheid era and that they too readily believed the denials of the apartheid government when questions were asked.

Tutu welcomed the statement, calling it a significant contribution. Du Plessis and his colleagues were severely *rebuked in public statements by management*. No one, however, was fired.

Suzanne Daley, a New York Times correspondent in South Africa, said in a February 22 article that the Naspers board of directors, "furious, issued a statement accusing Mr. du Plessis of 'ill-conceived disloyalty.' Colleagues of his say that as a result he was passed over for promotion to the editorship of another Naspers paper."

Gregory Roberts is now with The Post-Intelligencer. He writes:

"I relocated from New Orleans to Seattle just over a year ago, in December 1996. I was the restaurant critic for The Times-Picayune; now I am the restaurant critic and food writer for The Post-Intelligencer, the morning paper in Seattle. That means I still review restaurants, but I also write food feature stories. **Gina** [Roberts's wife] teaches in a local private school now and is expecting twin boys in April. That will balance our family nicely. Allegra, a Nieman kid, is now 6. Her sister, Raina, 3, is a preschooler. We're retrofitting our Volvo station wagon with a rear jump seat to accommodate our rapidly expanding family and otherwise bracing for the onslaught.

"Our E-mail is ginagreg@w-link.net. Address is 5512 Canfield Pl. N, Seattle, Wash., 98103, and phone is 206-547-4105 (my work phone is 206-448-8356). We'd love to hear from any of the old '93 gang, especially any visiting Seattle."

—1994—

Paulo Anunciacao and Christina Lamb continue their Nieman romance in Portugal, where wedding bells will soon ring. Paulo is still working at O

Independente, where he does the weekly celebrity interview ("too many supermodels!" says Christina), and Christina is on leave from The Sunday Times to finish her second book, "The Africa House," scheduled to be published in London by Viking Penguin for the Christmas season. Lamb says:

"The Africa House' is the true story of an English aristocrat who fell in love with Africa in the early part of this century and decided to create a spectacular English manor and village by a beautiful lake, near where [David] Livingstone died, in a remote part of Northern Rhodesia. World War I intervened, but decorated as a hero, he returned to build his very own paradise.

"Unfortunately things did not work out as planned. He built the 73-roomed house, importing everything from a four-poster bed to glass chandeliers and carrying them across crocodile-infested swamps on the heads of porters. But the land was poor, draining away his fortune, and the aunt whom he had planned to have as his mistress refused to join him. His childhood sweetheart married someone else, and eventually years later, when she was dead and he was bald and middle-aged, he married her 17-year-old daughter—not the happiest of matches, particularly as he got increasingly involved in politics, shocking other white settlers by having African independence fighters at his dinner table.

"Today the house by the crocodile lake is in ruins, inhabited only by bats and spiders. One of the most evocative sights in Africa, it stands testimony to one man's dream, an age gone past, a broken heart and a brutal double murder.... Now buy the book!"

Anunciacao and Lamb have moved to a house by the sea. Their new address is Rua das Flores 12, 2765, Estoril, Portugal. Their phone & fax number is (351-1) 467 2030.

Melanie Sill's appointment as Managing Editor of The News & Observer in Raleigh, North Carolina, was announced in January. Sill has worked as a reporter, columnist, editor and top manager at The N&O over the last 15 years.

At the time of her appointment, she was Assistant Managing Editor for special projects. Sill's work as an editor included a number of award-winning series, including "Children on the Edge," a 1993 series on juvenile crime in North Carolina that won a National Headliner Award, and "Boss Hog: North Carolina's Pork Revolution," which won the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for public service and other national and regional awards.

—1995—

Chris Bowman has been chosen as the first Senator John Heinz Fellow. He will be based in Ghana this summer, reporting on natural resource-public health issues and training journalists in writing about the environment.

Bowman's wife, **Linda Ackley**, and children, Casey, 9, and Emma, 6, will join him in the seaport capital city of Accra. Bowman returns to his reporting job at The Sacramento Bee in the fall.

The fellowship was established by the International Center for Journalists with a grant from The Teresa and H. John Heinz III Foundation. It is named in honor of the late U.S. Senator who championed the use of market forces to better the environment, not destroy it.

—1996—

Ying Chan was one of six journalists honored by the Committee to Protect Journalists at their annual benefit dinner in October. The journalists, the Committee said, "provided independent news coverage and viewpoints in the face of arrest, imprisonment, violence against them and their families and threats of death."

Chan and a Taiwanese journalist were cited for battling a criminal libel suit by a Taiwanese ruling party official over their reporting of an alleged offer of an illegal contribution to the Clinton re-election campaign. In April of 1996, a Taiwan court acquitted them of all criminal charges, which carried up to two years in jail, and also dismissed a \$15 million civil suit. The decision was hailed as a landmark victory for press freedom and democracy in Taiwan and the region. The official has appealed the ruling.

Hisa Miyatake, who covered the summer Olympic games in Atlanta in 1996 for Kyodo News service, was in Nagano to help publish the official daily for the 1998 Winter Olympics. He writes:

"I organized international reporters for the official three-language (English, French and Japanese) Olympic newspaper, called 'Nagano 98,' and for the 'Info 98' system, IBM's on-line device which was full of flash quotes from the world athletes. The 24-page daily, with a circulation of 60,000, was published for 20 days.

"We had over 30 international reporters from 12 countries. Most were freelancers. I found the journalists are the same globally. From my position, Deputy Executive Editor, with Nagano Olympic News Agency (NAONA), I can say some of them were demanding, rude, selfish, wild and noisy. They complained a lot. Yes, the media are always the first ones to complain.

"Kyodo News sent me to NAONA simply because, I think, I am not the big fan of the sports events. CBS of the United States, the TV rights holder, sent 1,600 people to Nagano. Can you believe that?"

Jacques Rivard is the first Canadian member of the Board of Directors of the Society of Environmental Journalists. He writes: "The association has 1,100 members in the United States, but only dozens actually in Canada and Mexico. I was the one who proposed that a representative of Canada, and eventually of Mexico, become a member of the board.... With global problems like El Nino...and the Free Trade agreement linking Canada, the U.S., Mexico, and soon Chile, my proposal came as a normal evolution...."

—1997—

Rich Read and his wife, **Kim Kunkle**, write that their daughter, Nehalem Kunkle-Read, was born on December 21 in Portland, Oregon. The name Nehalem comes from Oregon's Nehalem River, named for a Northwest native tribe. Nehalem is Read and Kunkle's first child. ■

End Note

A Turkish Pioneer

BY STEPHEN KINZER

On my first reporting trip to Istanbul several years ago, I desperately sought an experienced local journalist who could guide me through the complex world of Turkish society and politics. Never did I imagine I would be so lucky as to find Mustafa Gursel.

After our first frantic day of work covering the hijacking of a ferry by Chechen nationalists, we finally had a few moments of peace. Only then did I learn that Mustafa, who died in Istanbul on December 9 at the age of 53, had been a Nieman Fellow in 1981, the only Turk ever to be so honored.

The Nieman Fellowship was not all that made Mustafa unique. He was the first Turkish journalist to make a mark in the wider world of news reporting, and when he returned to what was then an insular and unsophisticated country he brought not only broad knowledge and experience, but also a cosmopolitan flair that helped transform the profession in his native country.

Every leading journalist in Turkey knew Mustafa, and many worked with him. Several wrote moving tributes after his death. One described him as "a witty, urbane man known for his modesty and integrity as a journalist" and said he "had none of the snobbery associated with other Turkish intellectuals."

At his funeral, the British correspondent Andrew Finkel, who has lived in Turkey for many years, said with a smile that he had never forgiven Mustafa for luring him away from academia and into journalism. Surveying the crowd, which included many of the brightest lights in Turkish journalism, Finkel said: "When these guys couldn't even put sentences together, Mustafa was working for ABC News. No Turk had ever done anything like that. He was a superstar."

After graduating from the English-language Robert College in Istanbul, Mustafa, who had been an actor in college, studied theater at Ohio State University. While winning his M.F.A. degree, he directed many plays, including a daring version of "Lysistrata" that scandalized the local burghers. He also organized mischievous protests against the university's cooperation with the Vietnam War effort, such as arranging for every toilet on campus to be flushed at the same time.

Ever anxious for new horizons, Mustafa went on to study filmmaking at the University of Southern California. One of his closest companions there was Robert Zemeckis, who went on to fame as the director of "Forrest Gump" and other successful films.

During the 1960's Mustafa worked for several Turkish newspapers and for The Associated Press. In 1973, when the left-leaning government of Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit came to power, he became part of a team assigned to invigorate the somnolent state-owned television network

TRT. It was the only network in the country, and he and his colleagues had a profound impact on reshaping the way Turks perceive the world. His boss at TRT then, Ismail Cem, is now Turkey's Foreign Minister.

When the Ecevit government was replaced by a rightist coalition in 1975, the TRT team was fired. Mustafa joined Ismail Cem and others to found a newspaper called Politika, and he became its culture editor. Under his guidance it became the first Turkish newspaper to offer a full page of arts coverage every day.

Politika was shaken by internal conflict, and when a new management team tried to turn it into an organ of a single party on the Turkish left, Mustafa quit. It was a period of jingoistic nationalism in Turkey and Greece, with leaders of the two countries threatening to go to war over oil fights in the Aegean. One of the most important Turkish papers, Milliyet, hired Mustafa to head its Athens bureau. He lived there with his family for several years, immersing himself in Greek life and writing hundreds of articles that helped calm the anti-Greek belligerence many Turks were then feeling. Not satisfied by newspaper work alone, he also filed audio reports for ABC Radio, Deutsche Welle, Swedish Radio and the BBC.

In applying for his Nieman Fellowship, Mustafa wrote that he could not predict his future career path because he came from "a country where conditions are most indefinite." He was prescient as always; soon after he arrived at Harvard the army seized power in Turkey.

Not wishing to work under a military regime, he became a producer for ABC-TV, based in London but spent much of his time working in Beirut and other trouble spots. Later he was part of ABC's coverage of the Persian Gulf War and the ensuing Kurdish refugee crisis.

At every stage of his life, Mustafa was an enemy of reaction and chauvinism. His tolerant and open-minded approach to life and politics, as well as his firm refusal to join the chorus of slogans that often dominates public life in Turkey, put him at odds with the power structure. Some of his friends saw him increasingly frustrated by his inability to make as great a mark on Turkish society as he had made on Turkish journalism. Yet he left a personal as well as professional legacy, a gentle man and boundlessly proud father of Zeynep and Umut who was also an incisive and biting observer of the world around him.

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