

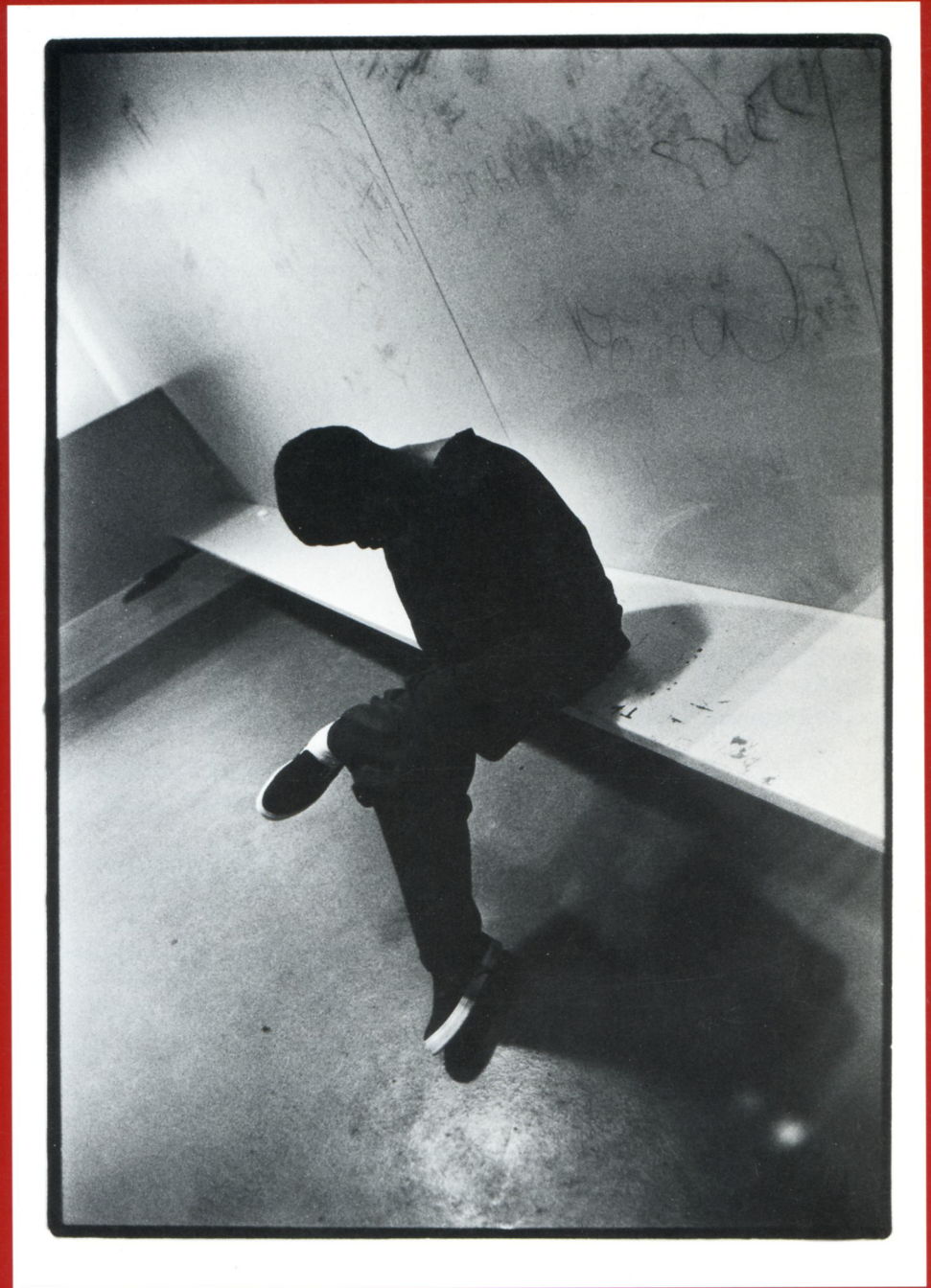
NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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Five Dollars

Children and Violence: The Witness The Victim The Accused



Reporting the Horrors of Apartheid

Journalists in South Africa Cover the Truth and Reconciliation Hearings

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

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

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The cover photograph was taken at the Wayne County Juvenile Justice Center in Detroit, Michigan.
Photo by Pauline Lubens/The Detroit Free Press.

Ribbon of quotes from "Things Get Hectic: Teens Write About the Violence That Surrounds Them," by Youth Communication. Edited by Philip Kay, Andrea Estepa and Al Desetta. New York: Touchstone, Simon & Schuster, 1998.

Public Pressure for a Responsible Press

By Bill Kovach

The dizzying whirl of spin and counterspin which marked the months of coverage of President Clinton's sex life has now come to an end. It's time to ask what we've learned about journalism today.

The results of the grand jury investigation are on the table in the report of the independent counsel to Congress and we can come to some conclusions.

Maybe the most important is that contrary to White House accusations, the relative handful of reporters who did the bulk of the original reporting of the Starr investigation were not trafficking in false leaks and fabrications. What emerges is a picture of a news media culture that in breaking stories usually relied on legitimate sources. The initial reporting of certain now well-known stories, such as the blue dress, were proven right, and none was made out of whole cloth.

But other findings of the study make it clear that it is a dangerous oversimplification to say the press has been vindicated. For even in carefully reported stories journalists tended to accept interpretations from their sources uncritically helping perpetuate the hopeless feeling that there was no truth to be found in Washington. There was, for example, no evidence in Starr's report to Congress that President Clinton had helped write a set of talking points to help Monica Lewinsky lie or of an independent witness to events in the Oval Office—both of which were widely reported on the basis of "informed sources."

The most troubling indication of a journalism losing its way was the tendency by the reporters to adopt the perspective of the investigators over those being investigated. While this has always been a danger in source reporting especially for investigative journalists—Richard Jewell should have been warning enough on this point—the apparent conclusion of the special prosecutor himself should give us all pause. In court papers defending himself against charges he had violated federal rules by leaking grand jury information to the press, Judge Starr alludes to his relationship with reporters as that of an investigator to an informant.

Whether or not that analogy is correct, the fact it was raised by the prosecutor highlights the fact the journalists were not reporting on activities of his office and its treatment of the people drawn in to the grand jury process—long considered the role for watchdog journalism. Nor, as of this writing, has there been any effort by the Washington press corps to look into Judge Starr's characterization of the reporters who dealt with his office during this period.

We can now also see that the commenting culture is a major part of the news business. Journalism is being pushed aside to make room for a growing group of loosely credentialed, self-interested performers whose modus operandi is

like that once used to describe New York Senator Chauncey Depew who, and I'll paraphrase: Would launch an army of words which wandered aimlessly over the field until it came across a lonely fact and carried it kicking and screaming in their midst until it died of overuse and abuse.

These modern day Depew's, who do no work of journalism, prey on the facts produced by a handful of journalists to fill the world with unsubstantiated suspicion and wild speculation that threaten to undermine the reporting culture. Worse, the major news organizations are aiding and abetting its growth.

What's emerging may be the outlines of the next phase of a news business organizing for competition in cyberspace. The electronic media seem to be compartmentalizing, creating venues to appeal to the mass audience for gossip and speculation while preserving the traditional venue for news based on journalism.

And all of this reminds us that the new world of unlimited competition in a deadline-every-minute world is here to stay and will require total concentration and commitment on the part of those who believe in journalism in the public interest.

Finally, if Matt Drudge is a symbol of the power of the new technology to override the methodology of journalism to capitalize on a public appetite for scandal and gossip, there is a counterforce as well.

Anyone tuned in on the Web on October 14, 1998 saw the power of the Internet to spawn a public pressure for more responsible behavior on the part of institutions of power, including the press. On that day an organization called "Move On" invested \$89.95 to post a notice to organize a petition drive to let Congress—and by extension the press—know that they were tired of the focus on the Clinton affair to the exclusion of other more important issues and events. Within weeks they had gathered and delivered a quarter of a million signatures on their petition to Congress to censure President Clinton for his behavior and move on to more important problems facing the public.

It is just possible that those citizens who are hungry for a responsible public interest press can, through the agency of the Internet, come together and form the demand side market for such a press to offset the counter pressure that now prevails in the financial markets. ■



Children and Violence:

The Witness

The Victim

The Accused

In this edition of Nieman Reports, we examine ways in which we report on children and violence.

First, we travel to the sites of the five recent and highly publicized school shootings. There, we listen as the editors of local papers and a national correspondent walk us through their reporting on these tragic events and explain how coverage of this story impacted them and their newsrooms, then and now.

Next, we journey into the private realm of family violence, as seen through the eyes of children who witness it. Two reporters who covered such a story and experts who work with child victims of domestic and community violence demonstrate how essential it is for us, as journalists, to make these connections as we report on children's antisocial behaviors.

From there, we move into courtrooms and juvenile detention centers, probing ingrained tensions that exist when we try to merge the job of reporters, the protections promised to

our young, and the concerns of judges. We also get a glimpse of adolescent girls' increasing involvement with crime.

Then, we take a look at how customary methods of coverage shape public perception and policymaking in the arena of child and juvenile crime, including studies detailing the role media coverage plays in buttressing Americans' views and attitudes about race, children and violence. For those who are dissatisfied with how this topic is generally covered, we offer information about a new and different approach to presenting coverage of violence.

Finally, editors at Chicago's two newspapers take us inside their decision-making when it comes to coverage of children and violence. ■

Making Sense Out of a Tragedy: Don't Report What You Don't Know

By John Schwartz

It was awful. We were all staking out the Craighead County Jail outside of little Jonesboro, Arkansas one afternoon last March. Inside were two boys who the day before had shot 15 of their classmates and teachers in a mid-day ambush at Westside Middle School, killing five. Now the pack of us, probably 100 print and television journalists from around the world, was waiting for people to show up for the boys' arraignment. We surged toward each car that pulled up, and when one boy's family finally emerged from a car, the mob surrounded them hungrily. The miserable clot of family members hugged each other for strength and support as they silently made their way along the 50-foot walk to the building, the journalists moving with them like a human oil slick, silent, too, except for one British journalist who called out, "Have you spoken with the boy? Has he expressed remorse?" His accent drew the final word out to sound like "remauwss." Again, "Was there remauwss?"

I had no idea whether the boys felt remorse, but I sure did. These people of Jonesboro were made victims twice: first by the boys and then by us. Many of those thoughts were confirmed more than a month later when the Arlington, Virginia-based Freedom Forum cosponsored a public meeting in Jonesboro with the local newspaper and Arkansas State University. Though some praised the journalists for hard work and compassion under pressure, the general sense was that those of us who had

"The powerful hold of incidents like the Jonesboro shootings on the national psyche is not that they are typical but that they are unique."



Photographers line airport road to photograph one of the funerals of a Westside Middle School shooting victim. Nettleton cemetery is located across the street. *Photo by Bill Templeton/The Jonesboro Sun.*

arrived to tell the story had only contributed to the town's nightmare.

Retired Lt. Col. David Grossman of Jonesboro said that many he talked to spoke of "enormous anger" over the journalistic swarm. "The analogy that was made was one of flies on open wounds," Grossman said.

Not a pretty comparison. But what the news media did in Jonesboro wasn't very pretty.

The hat I usually wear at The Washington Post is that of a science writer; my reporting assignments usually involve coverage of the Food and Drug Administration, the Internet and other science and technology topics. When the boys in Jonesboro opened fire, though, the regional bureau correspondents who would usually be sent were unreachable. I offered to go and ran for the plane with the clothes I was wearing and a borrowed laptop and cell phone.

In pulling together enough interviews to round out the first-day story, I rang up \$300 worth of phone calls on the plane to Memphis and wore out a cell phone battery on the drive to Jonesboro that night. Experts in adolescent psychology I had spoken to for stories on behavioral science told me that violence in schools was on the rise, though by most measures it was actually falling. Once I arrived that night, Jonesboro locals gave me what information they could.

I was proud of the stories I wrote that night and over the next few days, although of course they could certainly have been better—sharper, more focused, smarter. But I was dismayed to see a lot of the other news reports that came out of Jonesboro. Many relied for many of their quotes and observations on "activists" who each took the tragedy as an opportunity to rehash their attacks on violent television and movies, or on the lack of religion in the schools, or whatever societal ill they were most involved in rectifying. Others looked to causes in dark undercur-

rents of violence and gun ownership in southern culture.

As a science reporter, I was stunned by what I was reading and seeing about this story I was now covering. The most basic rules of epidemiology said that anything held up as a cause of a condition or a disease should include the afflicted and exclude the well. The Jonesboro story presented the opposite case. Kids across the nation see the same TV shows and movies. Guns were everywhere in Jonesboro, where the beginning of hunting season is a school holiday. Where was the distinction that could account for these two boys' actions but which would explain why Jonesboro and a thousand other towns hadn't erupted into bloody violence? And if there was something inherently southern about the crime, how do we account for Mitchell Johnson's upbringing in Minnesota? It didn't make sense.

In fact, the powerful hold of incidents like the Jonesboro shootings on the national psyche is not that they are typical but that they are unique. As I watched and read the stories about the "southern gun culture," I recalled that I learned to shoot a gun when I was growing up not too far away in Texas, and I fondly remembered hunting trips with my folks. But I was no killer, and neither are millions of other kids in the South who learn how to shoot when they are young.

I was so troubled by the trip and the stories that came out of it that I wrote an essay for The Post's Outlook section. The headline read "Pat Journalism: When We Pre-Package the News, We Miss the Story." In it I wrote, "What bothered many of the town's citizens—and still tears at me weeks later—was the way that many journalists looking for quick answers out of Jonesboro seemed to have brought them along in their luggage."

I was prepared to be treated like a self-righteous prig by my colleagues, but their response was overwhelmingly positive. After the story appeared in

Outlook, I received far more phone calls and letters than usual, all of them congratulatory. A Supreme Court reporter for a competing newspaper said that I had expressed his feelings exactly, and a network television producer thanked me for saying what "needed to be said," even if the piece came down the hardest on her colleagues in television.

The piece ended with this: "I'm not saying that we should ignore stories like what happened in Jonesboro. I'm simply saying that as journalists, we should cover these stories more thoughtfully, and with decency and compassion, instead of cookie-cutter bathos. We should, in other words, do what we're paid to do: get the story right."

It sounded great, that last line. I'm still trying to figure out what it means. I do think that it means taking every story on its own terms: what makes one particular incident different from others is just as important as what makes it the same. It also means paying attention to more than just the accuracy of a story, our gold standard: it means getting the tone right as well. It's only natural to try to play a story for all it's worth, to try to imbue it with all of the emotion we think it can support. But sometimes we ring an alarm when a calmer message would do. Sometimes, I guess, you have to dare to be dull. ■

John Schwartz is a science writer on the National Desk of The Washington Post. He has written about the Food and Drug Administration, the tobacco wars, dinosaurs, the Unabomber and Viagra. He writes a regular column on social implications of computers and on-line technologies.

Restraint and Empathy Defined Reporting in Pearl, Mississippi

By Deborah Skipper

Reports of shootings at some inner-city schools in Jackson, Mississippi, while not commonplace, are not totally unexpected. Violence pervades many of the neighborhoods around the schools. So it's reasonable to assume that violence will occasionally invade the schools near them.

What shocked Mississippians about the October 1, 1997 shootings at Pearl High School was the community in which it occurred. Largely white, heavily Christian, predominantly conservative and politically Republican. A community not given to gang activity, which is what the public normally associates with violence.

When the shooting occurred, it became an empty-the-newsroom, devote-all-available-resources situation. Whoever got there first and got the most information about what happened would write the main story. As it turned out, it was a police reporter and the higher education reporter. The latter, Andy Kanengiser, was sent because he lives in Pearl and drove to the scene not knowing if his son, Elijah, might have been among those shot.

Reporters who would have been the first chosen to head to the scene because of their experience in covering this kind of story were not immediately available. They were brought in several days later to report follow-up stories that explored more deeply the “conspiracy” prosecutors were alleging.

Our coverage did not come up lacking for the reporters we did utilize. One of the benefits and burdens of a smaller newsroom is that you have reporters capable of doing anything

assigned to them—and who volunteer to help even when not called upon. Among them, on this story, were our

legislative reporters and feature staff. The result was the most complete report on what happened of any news-



Pearl High School students pay homage to their fallen classmates during a candlelight memorial service held at Paul Truitt Memorial Baptist Church. Photo by Vickie King/The Clarion-Ledger.

paper or television news team that covered it. It was so complete and the follow-up so extensive that a half dozen calls daily came in from other news operations—from New York to California, from London and Ireland—with requests to interview our reporters.

Teams of two editors were assigned to oversee various aspects of the story. For example, one team handled stories about the killings and law enforcement response. Another team focused on stories on reaction from the community, parents, students, church leaders and legislators. Two others focused on developing profiles of the suspect, Luke Woodham, and the victims, as well as organizing a look at past incidents of teen violence and clues to a troubled youth. A former metro editor, now in editorial, was called in to do quality control of our entire package of stories, making sure all names, ages, place references and times were accurate.

In a mass meeting held on the first day of the story, reporters were given the complete list of stories and instructed that if they obtained information that would fit another story better than their own to pass it along to the appropriate reporter.

The coverage naturally involved photography and graphics, which were part of the planning process. We had to decide what photo was most appropriate to which story. People on staff who had children in the school helped us to get yearbook photos of some of the students and to provide a layout of the school's commons area to show graphically where the shooting occurred and step by step what happened.

Reporters had been dispatched to the school, the police department, the hospitals, the sheriff's office, and finally to the suspect's home, when his identity became known. By then, of course, police had found the body of Woodham's mother, Mary Woodham. She had been stabbed to death and bludgeoned.

As editors and reporters, we respond immediately and intensely to breaking news. But working for a newspaper as

opposed to television news allows us more time for deliberation. We knew the allegations of Satanism's role in the shootings, but we were not prepared to sensationalize the story with tales of

“[Our reporters] didn't descend like news-hungry vultures, taking what they wanted and disappearing.”

devil worshipping. Our caution was justified. Luke Woodham's manifesto, as it turned out, had more to do with Nietzsche than with Satan. And Luke Woodham's problems had more to do with a feeling of inadequacy and ostracism than with devil worship.

Our subsequent coverage fell primarily to two reporters, Butch John and Mario Rossilli, both of whom are dogged diggers of information. John has done a plethora of stories examining teen violence, child abuse and the criminal justice system, stories that won a Silver Gavel Award. Rossilli previously covered the county where the shootings occurred and won a Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award with groundbreaking work covering the state's AIDS drug-funding crisis.

Those two reporters, along with the rest of our reporting staff, brought something more than their reporting expertise to the coverage of this horrible event. They brought restraint. They didn't descend like news-hungry vultures, taking what they wanted and disappearing. They reported the news from a community, a bedroom community of Jackson, and did their jobs with a sense of responsibility that comes from being a part of a community. Effortlessly, it seemed at times, they walked that difficult line of persistence and respect. In doing so, John was able to secure interviews with the families of the two students killed. Now, a year later, he remains among only a handful of reporters to whom one of those

families will talk. When other reporters chased the sister of that victim trying to get an interview, he stood back. And when he called the family later that day, it was not to get information; it was to make sure they were all okay.

Our reporters showed empathy and respect to the victims and their families, but they also handled their professional decisions with the kind of care not always evidenced by journalists today. They resisted the kind of sensationalism that was played up by other media when six more teenagers were arrested and charged with conspiracy in the case. Their restraint gave them a reporting edge, as well, with those teens' attorneys and family members. It was not a situation in which they underreported the allegations; instead they placed them in the proper context of speculation. And when other breaking news shoved the story from the limelight, our reporters continued to follow it. They continued to ask how this could have happened and why and how it could have been prevented.

Now, one year after the shootings, we can reflect on how the city of Pearl and the school have changed. Both lost their innocence but have gained insight. Administrators there are not concentrating solely on security but on mentoring youth and getting parents more involved, on promoting inclusiveness and educating youth about how to prevent violence. Consequently we, too, are focusing more on these issues in ways we might not have before this tragedy occurred.

The only aspect of the story that remains not fully told is that of Mary Woodham. Who was she? In the telling of this story, she became a footnote: "...also killed was..." Her family did not—and does not—want to talk about her. Luke Woodham's father remained an enigma and is unreachable. And so Mary Woodham disappeared into a journalistic footnote as the cell doors closed for life on her son. ■

Deborah Skipper is Metro Editor of The Clarion-Ledger in Jackson, Mississippi.

Context, Contacts and Accuracy Were Key in Paducah, Kentucky

By Jim Paxton

No one had a hint of—and to this day even he cannot describe—the demons haunting 14-year-old Michael Carneal's soul. But on December 1, 1997, the first day of school after a quiet and unseasonably warm Thanksgiving weekend, this seemingly ordinary child from a well-respected family slipped up behind the pre-school prayer circle that voluntarily assembles at Heath High School each morning. He calmly inserted earplugs, reached into his backpack, and pulled out a .22 semi-automatic pistol. At the instant the prayer leader said "Amen," he fired 10 shots from close range into a group that included several of his best friends. For a small pistol wielded by a small boy, the lethality was shocking.

It became our job to explain this tragedy to the community and, as it turned out, to shape the way it was described to the nation. The Paducah Sun is a regional morning newspaper with a daily circulation of 30,000. Its news and editorial staff numbers 32, including 10 reporters, three photographers and three sports writers.

The scene in our newsroom that day still seems surreal. We are thinly staffed on Monday mornings because of our reporting cycle. On this morning the newsroom was almost empty, except for a blaring police scanner heard by Executive Editor Karl Harrison. Soon he was fervently punching reporters' phone numbers and sending them scrambling to cover this developing story.

Even as authorities talked in confused terms over the scanner, newspaper controller David Mathis walked into the newsroom. He was speaking

"Such damage to our credibility would have been irreparable."

on a cell phone with his son Trent, a student at the high school, who was also on a cell phone. Trent was 20-feet away when the shooting started, and he became our first eyewitness source. Trent told his father who had been shot and how badly. As events unfolded, coverage of this chilling story continued to intersect with our personal lives. Our executive editor's wife had taught some of the victims, and that day some of the siblings of the slain and injured students were in her classroom. Some of our employees had children at Heath.

Despite this high level of personal anguish, decisions about who to assign to cover it were not tough to make. We assigned everyone we had, leaving only a skeletal staff to keep an eye out for other news. Matters weren't made any easier by the fact that we were short-staffed. Four key staffers were in Utah beginning two weeks of computer-system training. We considered bringing them back, but decided against it. Were we faced with that decision again, we'd bring back our design editor. We not only missed his special skills but the time top editors spent trying to do his job by committee would have been better applied working with reporters and photographers.

Throughout our 16 hours of first-day coverage, the editor, executive edi-



This photo of Michael Carneal was taken during an early court appearance. *Photo courtesy of The Paducah Sun.*

tor, city editor and acting copy desk chief met several times to map coverage. We employed the "Maestro Concept," deploying our reporters to try to answer some four or five key questions our readers were likely to have about the case. We wanted each of these themes to be visible on page one, either embedded in a story, a headline or a pull quote. The most compelling of these became our day-one headline. In four-inch type, floated in white space that spanned the entire page, we printed the word "Why?"

Our day-one edition, painstakingly planned and assembled by so many

different people, was widely praised and, as best we know, factually accurate in every detail. The importance of our accuracy was driven home the next day when we learned that the Louisville newspaper, which had flown in its own team of reporters, had published a photo of a teenager who was uninvolved in the tragedy and misidentified him as Michael Carneal. Worse, the Associated Press opted to go with that newspaper's photo. It was also picked up by national and international media.

We had it right. Everyone else had it wrong. This was not the sort of thing an editor gloats over, but it was a moment when I gave thanks for the expertise of

“It would not be enough for us to stay even with the national media on this story. This was our turf.... We'd be expected to have better sources and better information. Stories the national media told at night should be ones we broke earlier that day.”

my staff. An out-of-town newspaper can eventually live down such blunders but for a local newspaper, such damage to our credibility would have been irreparable.

Coverage became easier to manage after the first day. Critical elements of the story began to emerge because of the experiences and expertise of our beat reporters. For example, our obituary writer, Linda Cocke, became an invaluable resource because of relationships she'd built with the funeral

directors. She used her contacts as go-betweens with the slain girls' families as we worked out ground rules for coverage. Her work, as well as some persuasion by the executive editor, made us the only print media allowed to have a photographer and reporter in the church during the funeral service.

We relied on our more experienced reporters to cover the courthouse, sheriff and prosecutor. We added to this mix our top investigative reporters, Bill Bartleman, a 25-year veteran of The Sun and James Zambroski, a crime specialist. Experience does pay off. From the start, Bartleman, the lead reporter, reminded the others that it would not be enough for us to stay even with the national media on this story. This was our turf, he said. We'd be expected to have better sources and better information. Stories the national media told at night should be ones we broke earlier that day.

In the days that followed this team produced a string of seven copyright, exclusive stories. Notable among them were the sheriff's disclosure that he believed Carneal did not act alone (in grand jury testimony, no proof emerged that others conspired with or helped Carneal), the revelation that Carneal referred to a scene in the obscure film "The Basketball Diaries" to explain his actions, and the first interview with a shooting survivor, who had been paralyzed. We led coverage so often that one of the networks cut a deal with a copy editor to bring our latest edition from the press room to their hotel on the way home from his shift, which ended at one in the morning.

Naturally when a tragedy occurs, one question is always asked: What can we do to keep this from happening again? The most common reaction (and many times a correct one) in the wake of tragedies is for a newspaper to launch a crusade for change. Instead, as events unfolded, we found ourselves a bit on the other end, advocating more security, but cautioning against extreme measures that would provoke even greater fear among children.

Editorially, we advocated adoption of key pieces of a school violence prevention plan that was modeled on a North Carolina program and has been put on the state legislative agenda. While this overall initiative got stalled because of a side issue, a committee of parents and school officials in our community put into place in our schools some of the components of that plan. These measures include security officers posted at each of the three high schools, armed and casually uniformed, photo ID badges for all students, faculty and staff, controlled entry and exit to school parking lots, and an anonymous tip line for students to report threats by other students. Metal detectors were not set up because community members did not feel their schools should become prisons because of Michael Carneal.

At our newspaper, coverage of the schools and youth in our community has not changed. We still have one reporter assigned full time to report on what is happening in our classrooms (as opposed to covering just school board meetings). Obviously this tragedy has made us, as watchdogs in our community, more sensitive to what is happening among our young but our daily assignments and duties have not been changed by it. ■

Jim Paxton is Vice President and Editor of The Paducah Sun, flagship newspaper of the family-owned Paxton Media Group, which publishes 25 daily newspapers in nine states.

Voicing the Community's Horror Worked Well in Jonesboro, Arkansas

By John W. Troutt Jr.

While I lay no claims of being a prophet, during the days after the Westside Middle School shootings in Jonesboro, I remarked, "This will happen again." I knew that if four students and a teacher could be gunned down and five others wounded by two children here, then it could happen anywhere. Only a few weeks later a student entered the cafeteria at a Springfield, Oregon school and sprayed bullets at classmates.

Westside was the last place I would have expected boys 11 and 13 to carry out a well-planned and somewhat sophisticated massacre. The youths, Andrew Golden and Mitchell Johnson, were more or less typical boys—no major problems had been noticed before the shootings, although in hindsight some disturbing tendencies were recalled.

Westside Middle School is located just west of the Jonesboro city limits. About one-third of the students are residents of Jonesboro, a town of about 54,000. The others live in smaller towns a few miles away or on nearby farms. The school district is predominantly blue collar, with a few of the students from wealthy farm families and a few from families with incomes below the poverty line. The school gets high academic ratings, and annually students score in the top percentile on achievement tests. The number of minority students is fewer than one percent.

When the unthinkable happens, as it did for us on the morning of March 24, 1998, it puts a strain on any community and any newspaper. The entire community feels victimized. The children who were the shooters and those

who were the victims were part of our community, and having this horrible outbreak of violence happen in our backyard made it more difficult to comprehend.

At The Jonesboro Sun, we immediately decided to treat our entire community as victims and cover, as best we could, the ways in which members of our community were responding to the tragedy. That did not mean that we would try to cover up any of the details of the shootings or the legal maneuvers that followed, but we would also try to steer away from pop psychology and stick to hard facts.

I think this comprehensive approach of coverage, including learning about the feelings of individuals with no direct ties to the shootings, was important. Members of the community needed a vehicle by which to express horror and act on their desire to do something to help out.

Now that some time has passed, I am not sure how the Westside tragedy

"We immediately decided to treat our entire community as victims."



Tristan McGowan, an injured seventh grader from the Westside Middle School, is pushed from the hospital by his grandfather, Bill McGowan, after being released from the St. Bernard's Regional Medical Center. *Photo by Bill Templeton/The Jonesboro Sun.*

has affected our general coverage of youth crime. But we are running more positive stories about the activities of

young people. Actually, youthful crime and violence has decreased in this area in recent years, which is something we reminded readers of in the course of covering this school shooting, and most of the teenage violence that does occur can be tied to drug use. Of course, the problems of adolescent drug use are not unique to Jonesboro.

During the days following the shootings at Westside, we tried to contact the families of the shooters and victims alike and get their perspectives. We talked at length to the family of Andrew Golden and to the divorced father of Mitchell Johnson, who came from Minnesota with lawyer in tow after the shootings. During those early days Gretchen Woodard, mother of Mitchell Johnson, was angry with The Sun over a story we had run quoting students about things that her son had done. Later she talked to us at length, and we developed a good relationship.

If there are any lessons to be learned from this tragedy, they are to assume nothing and report fully, letting the chips fall where they may. Remember, too, that all citizens of the community feel violated and many want an opportunity to be heard.

Nobody knows—except perhaps court-appointed psychiatrists that have examined the shooters—why Westside happened. There are no obvious answers. The usual suspects—availability of guns, too much violence on TV, violent video games, etc.—can be trotted out, and in this case they were.

What I can say with some certainty is that it will happen again in a place that residents believe is the last place on earth in which such a tragedy could take place. And when it does, those whose job it is to determine what is newsworthy and beneficial to that community vs. the kind of news that might sell a few more newspapers but lessen the standards that are our lifeblood will be put to the test. It's a test, I think, we passed. ■

John W. Troutt Jr. is Editor of The Jonesboro Sun in Arkansas.

The Freedom Forum's Critique of The Sun's Reporting on the Westside Shootings

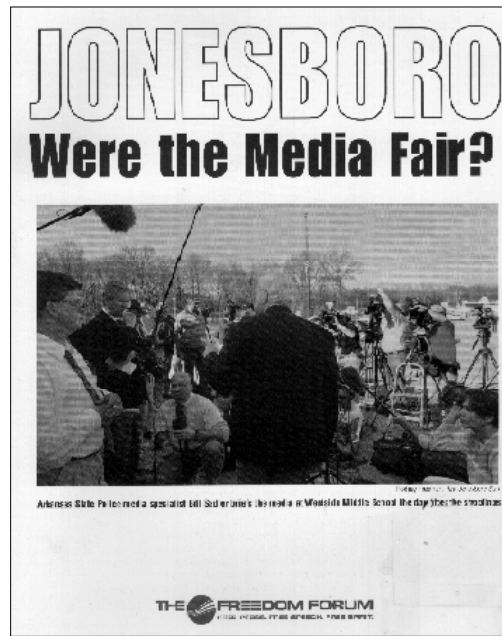
Here are excerpts form the Freedom Forum critique.

The Sun covered the story unblinkingly, in the best journalistic sense of that word. It's coverage not only was thorough and fair but a virtual model of how a small news staff can roll into a major breaking story and cover it with accuracy, balance, completeness and detachment. Moreover, The Sun news team not only achieved that on the first day; it maintained cruising speed for the next 20-days.

Even more impressive, it did it in a way that not only fully informed readers—shielding them from none of the details of the event—but that also helped the community deal with its grief and slowly begin to heal itself.

To accomplish that would be a worthy challenge for a staff of 100 or more. But the entire Jonesboro Sun news staff comprises 16 reporters and editors, three photographers, four sports staffers plus some part-time students and two society reporters. How this small staff in a sparsely populated corner of Arkansas managed to do this is a story that is not only commendable for Jonesboro. It also can be instructive for all who care about doing the job right....

As important to the community as The Sun's coverage was, the respect the



newspaper holds in the community and its commitment to educating its readers on the ways of the media played a crucial role in minimizing the potential for a media disaster when the story broke.

From government officials to average readers, there exists in Jonesboro a great understanding of

the role of the media, the importance of getting information out to the public and the difficulties reporters face. "I credit that to John Troutt," Bill Sandler, the media specialist for the state police, said. "There is tremendous trust in that paper."

"If there is anything I can get violent about, it's freedom of information and the right of the press and the public to know what's going on," Troutt said. "Everybody around here knows that if they try to hide something, we are going to court....(The Sun) will sue just about every time somebody tries to keep public information secret."

Troutt said it also is important that the newspaper carry a lot of stories about the media, their role and the way they work: "the press is very important. That makes what it does—good and bad—legitimate news." ■

Sensitive Early Reporting Opened Up Good Leads in Edinboro, Pennsylvania

By Bob Lloyd

It began with one of the hundreds of calls we hear each day over the police scanner, most of them routine, most forgettable.

It came in on Friday night, April 24, 1998. Details were sketchy at first: there'd been a shooting at a school dance in Edinboro, Pennsylvania; a person was running from the scene. Later we would learn that a middle school teacher was dead, others wounded, and a student from the school accused of the shooting.

For the next week, our reporters and editors—who write for three papers, *The Morning News*, *The Erie Daily Times*, *The Sunday Times-News*—would find themselves covering this story. All of us understood after the

“[Residents] were unaccustomed to granting interviews. The rush of news media was disconcerting. It made them feel uncomfortable.”

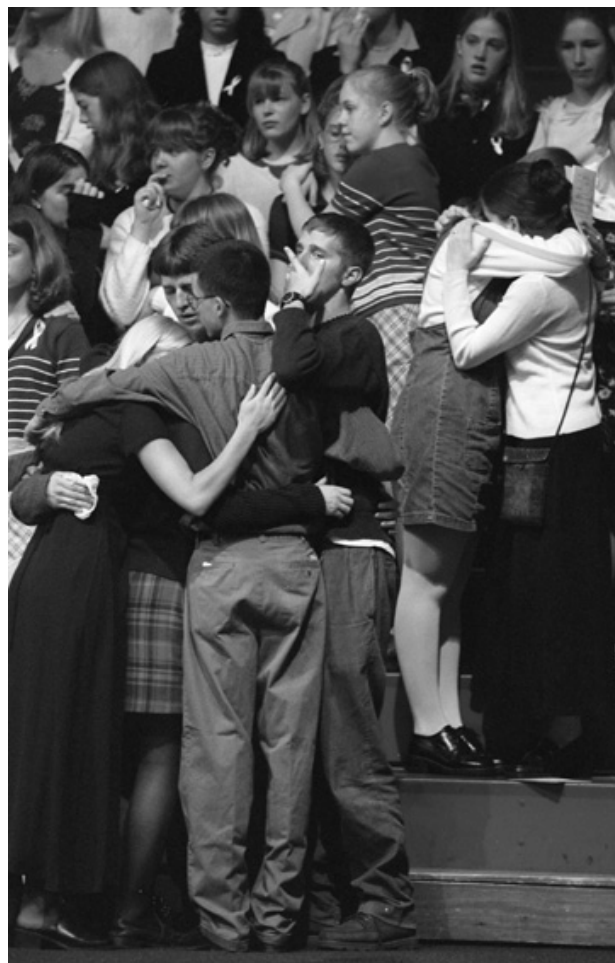
first wave of reporting that this was an event that would capture the attention of national media because of its similarities to other recent school shootings. Our hunch soon proved true. Print and electronic media from outside the area soon arrived in force.

Their presence, while intrusive for many, forced our reporters to relearn an essential lesson. As local newspa-

pers, we remain members of the community forever. We live among those we write about and photograph long after other reporters leave. Mistakes and insensitivity made early on in a newspaper's coverage can later return to sour relationships with people who, through no fault of their own, find themselves pushed into the less empathetic glare of the national press. Our professional pride urged us not to let outside media produce better reports than ours. But we cautioned ourselves to try, within the dictates of our job, to follow the wishes of the victim's family and the community during the week. Maintaining that perspective turned out to help us a lot as the story evolved.

On that first evening, our police reporter called the story from the hall where the dance was held. Our photographer was able to get us a picture of shocked students and parents for Saturday's page-one story.

The next day we sent two other reporters and a photographer to Edinboro while a host of others worked the story from the newsroom. Our re-



Students show their grief as the procession of slain teacher John Gillette leaves the McComb Field House on the campus of Edinboro University where an open memorial service was held. *Photo by Rich Forsgren/The Erie Times-News.*

porters in Edinboro were both experienced journalists and had covered police stories before, though neither had specific expertise in juvenile violence. Our overriding concern was straightforward newsgathering: Who was the

student? Who was the teacher? Was there any connection between them? Why did the student fire the gun? How did the community react?

Even at this early stage, our reporters discovered that the adults in the community had closed ranks. One reporter and the photographer drove to the teacher's neighborhood. Instead of going immediately to the family's home, they talked to neighbors first, including one acting as family spokesman. He told them the family preferred to grieve privately and that meant no interviews. We respected their wishes and avoided calling the widow or the teacher's grown children. Our reporters did speak with several students who were at the dance and who knew the student accused of the shooting. Most spoke freely. In one case, a mother told one of our reporters not to talk with her son or others in their circle of friends. The reporter complied.

By Saturday afternoon, many members of the national media had arrived. Their ever-increasing numbers further complicated newsgathering, making original reporting all but impossible to do. By then, school officials had set up a centralized media center.

One of our strengths, we discovered, emerged out of how we wrote about this story when it first broke. The Sunday paper, *The Times-News*, circulates widely in Erie County. Even though overall numbers have dropped recently, we still enjoy one of the highest market penetrations in the country.

As part of Sunday's coverage, our sports editor wrote a column about the teacher, who for many years coached at area high schools. His family called the sports editor to thank him for the tribute and to compliment the paper's efforts. Later, the editor broached the topic of reporting about the funeral and helped arrange for coverage of it. The family allowed us to cover the funeral based in part on how we conducted ourselves as reporters and how the paper read that Sunday.

As more time passed, many Edinboro residents grew exasperated with most

reporters and photographers. They were unaccustomed to granting interviews. The rush of news media was disconcerting. It made them feel uncomfortable. We knew we had to be respectful of family members if we wanted to maintain our access and provide comprehensive coverage.

This balancing act was played out on the day of the funeral. Our photographer was the pool photographer for all print media. He had to arrange coverage with the funeral director and the victim's family. We learned that the family wanted to have the funeral photographed but did not want the photographer to be obtrusive. Having this awareness made us able to comply with that request and still come away with powerful images.

In the midst of planning our funeral coverage, these sensibilities were tested. The family asked that news media stay out of the cemetery. We could be on the road leading up to the gravesite, but the family wanted a private burial with friends and members of the Edinboro community. We knew, however, that even with these restrictions, the crowd at the cemetery was going to swell to perhaps 2,000. We discussed renting a plane and photographing the scene from overhead.

Technically, one side of the newsroom argument went, we wouldn't be in the cemetery. We'd be following the family's wishes and still be able to run an amazing news photo. In a meeting of top editors, the idea of an overhead shot was rejected. We decided that failed to meet the spirit of the family's request. We used photographs from the road and elsewhere that complied with their wishes.

Later that week, after the funeral, our photographer who worked on the funeral procedures with the teacher's wife also arranged an interview. One of our lead reporters was writing a story piecing together the events of that Friday. Using information known only by the teacher's widow, he was able to weave what both the teacher and student did until the time when the shoot-

ing occurred. We were able to get this information because of the way we'd handled the reporting and photography in previous stories on this tragedy.

Since then, staff members have written several related stories. Our earliest efforts focused on news events, among them the trend in many schools to install metal detectors at spring proms. We interviewed national experts about how the shooting would affect the community. They told us that our community was forever changed, that we would make decisions and base policy on preventing another shooting.

We also followed the court proceedings of the student accused in the shooting. He has yet to face trial. But coverage of the preliminary hearings broadened into a series of stories on the juvenile justice system. As part of the stories, we looked at the history of the system, which turns 100 next year. We also examined specific cases of juveniles who have succeeded and failed. It is doubtful these kinds of stories would have been pursued and given the prominence and length they were unless we'd been touched by this violence. We plan to publish more stories related to this central topic of juveniles and violence.

The lesson from Edinboro, as the story is called in our newsroom, is that sometimes it's better to try to think beyond the initial rush of reporting.

That's not always possible, or prudent. Yet our experience tells us that it is important to do so, especially when reporters have to return later to face family and community members. Doing so, we were still able to offer our readers a credible report. And we learned that our conduct as journalists helped us in our overall reporting as we gained the trust of potential sources. Those well treated during the time of crisis were certainly more receptive to us as their grieving began to ease. ■

Bob Lloyd is Executive Editor of The Morning News/Erie Daily Times in Erie, Pennsylvania.

Giving Readers Ways to Heal and to Help in Springfield, Oregon

By Jim Godbold

May 21, 1998: It became The Day That Changed Everything. It changed everything we took for granted about what it means to send our children off to school. It changed everything we assumed about the stuff that “can’t happen here” and everything we believed about the power of love within a strong and stable family to immunize a child against the plague of inexplicable violence that always seemed to strike somewhere else.

The phone at my home rang a few minutes after eight that morning. Features Editor Bob Welch was calling to tell me he’d just received a frantic phone call from a student who works on the Thurston High School newspaper, The Pony Express. Shots were fired in the school cafeteria. Pandemonium had erupted. During the next 30 minutes we dispatched every available reporter and photographer to the high school and the two area hospitals that were receiving shooting victims.

At nine that morning, I gathered the editors together to map out a plan. We decided right away to cover the shootings more like we would a disaster than a multiple homicide. This meant that our reporting would emphasize victims’ condition, the ordeal of the families, the community reaction, and how people could help.

One of the first calls I received was from John Troutt, Editor and owner of The Jonesboro (Ark.) Sun. His call initiated an amazing series of conversations in which he offered valuable advice about how to deal with this horrific event. He had recently been through a similar tragedy and was almost evan-

“It changed everything...we believed about the power of love within a strong and stable family to immunize a child against the plague of inexplicable violence.”



Mourners at the memorial fence. *Photo courtesy of The Register-Guard.*

gelical in his effort to help us do the right thing. His willingness to share hard-won wisdom about what to watch for in the unfolding hours and days was a compass that would guide us well through this sad and unfamiliar territory.

Nothing in our experience prepared us for dealing with the accumulating horror of the details: four people dead, including suspect Kip Kunkel’s mother and father and two Thurston High School students; 22 students wounded,

two of those critically injured. And the suspect was the fresh-faced 15-year-old son of two respected and much-loved educators.

The next morning a spontaneous “memorial” began to take shape along the chainlink fence in front of Thurston High School. People left flowers entwined in the fabric of the fence, and then messages were woven in, followed in succeeding days by stuffed animals, personal mementos and things that took your breath away, like a Thurston

graduation cap and gown. I've never experienced anything like the feelings I had as I walked along that fence and let the sorrow of a city wash over me. It was a feeling we needed to find ways to convey in the pages of our newspaper.

The poignant words reporter Eric Mortenson wrote about this memorial were, I believe, the kind of journalism our readers needed during this time of anguish and incomprehension:

"Faun Maddux totters down the fence line outside Thurston High School, her blue coat flapping and her short white hair sticking out like iron filings. She just had to come, she says. 'Had to hop in the car and drive down. Came alone.... I don't know if I'm the only one here from Vancouver, Washington, but I'm here,' she says. 'I had to come see. Even though I wasn't here, it's breaking my heart.'

"Join the club. It has a huge membership these days.

"Place a flower or a note on the fence and join the broken heart club. Or just walk down the fence line like Faun Maddux. Ignore the lights of the TV crews who are lined up parallel to the fence line. Ignore the incessant hum of the motors that fire their oppressive death star satellite trucks.

"Say out loud to yourself, like Faun Maddux, 'This is so hard, you can't take it in.'

"But it gets in. It gets in and breaks your heart. Walk down the fence line. Ignore the hum of the motors and listen to the silence as the people stand in small knots and read the messages.

"The broken heart club has a huge membership these days.

"Walk down the fence line. See that, in places, the flowers cover the cyclone fence like a vertical carpet.... Like blooms springing out of sorrow.

"Read the notes and feel that clench in your chest again. See the sympathy card from one of the Springfield firefighters, the people who did so much to help. See what he wrote. 'I am so sorry we could not have done more.'

"He's in the club...."

Ultimately, our coverage would

touch every section of the paper, including sports. Readers told us appreciatively time and again that the distinguishing feature of our approach was the combination of daily "How You Can Help" information and a forum in which readers were invited to offer their suggestions about how to address the problem of youth violence.

The Register-Guard's archive contains 301 stories on the Thurston High School shootings and their aftermath. Among those are a large number of stories that have examined the issues of youth violence and problems through the eyes of a community that has had to readjust how it thinks about these topics and acts in regard to its children. The response in the wake of this tragedy has been nothing short of phenomenal. Close to half a million dollars has been donated to a fund to help the victims. Schools, social service agencies, mental health centers and at-risk youth programs have begun an unprecedented dialogue aimed at coordinating services and responding to previously unmet needs.

The Register-Guard has joined the community response to the tragedy. We have reported extensively on the plight of parents searching for help with out-of-control kids. Since the shootings we have devoted more of our coverage to examining the capacity of the local social service agencies to meet the needs of the community. The paper continues to explore the causes and consequences of youth violence.

Perhaps the most enduring lesson for us has been that the story of Kip Kunkel and the Thurston High School shootings does not lend itself to reporting that presents easy answers or quick fixes. This story is no more a clarion call for gun control than it is an indictment of school building security. What happened in our backyard is just as much the product of a culture that has grown oblivious to media violence as it is the result of a well-intentioned father's misguided decision to buy his son a gun. It sets out no foolproof responses for parents seeking to pre-



Photo courtesy of The Register-Guard.

vent another mixed-up teenager from acting out in deadly anger.

If anything, we've only learned that the unthinkable can happen here, and that there is no guarantee that it won't happen again. The challenge we, as journalists, face is what to do with this ominous lesson. For The Register-Guard, the short-term answer has been to engage the issues raised by the Thurston shootings in ways that help our community heal. Over the long term, the task is more formidable. We must strive to balance coverage of some of our society's most intractable problems with solution-oriented reporting that holds out hope. We must maintain a keener watch on the complex relationships between our schools and the agencies that support children and families. Finally, we must redouble our efforts to help readers connect the causes and effects of youth violence in ways that they can translate into meaningful community action. ■

Jim Godbold is Managing Editor of The Register-Guard in Eugene, Oregon.

Mapping Children's Roadway to Violence: The Early Years

By Claudia Glenn Dowling

I kept checking the map. It kept saying this was Vermont. But this Vermont where I was reporting a story about children in a violent family had as little congruity with my Vermont—the one where I'd driven back roads and lived for a time—as the map did with the mud under my feet. I had never been in this place of fear before. The children whose story I was here to report called this terrifying territory home.

The girl of four and the boy of seven lived with their mother. Their father was in jail for attacking her, as he had throughout their short lives. When I began reporting their story, he was soon to be released. The family's fear was contagious. Their aging mobile home was isolated and had only one electrical outlet. Photographer Donna Ferrato and I stayed overnight once in a while, because the children's most extreme behavior occurred in the early morning. As we got ready to bed down on the convertible couch one evening, a car's headlights blazed through the trailer's window. The dog barked. We huddled on the couch with the family, thinking, "Is this him? Does he have a gun?" I finally went outside with a flashlight. It was a false alarm. But I, an adult, was scared. The children always lived with such stress.

My greatest fear was not that their father would kill me, but that in chronicling their lives, I would betray the children's trust. They liked having us stay with them; it made them feel safer. They knew we were doing a story for a magazine, but they were too young to really understand what that meant. To them, we seemed more like family



"I went to Vermont and showed Ernie this story, as it appeared in the magazine. I started from the back and showed him the last picture with his mom. She's playing with him and he's happy. I showed him some of the school pictures, and then we finished with this picture of him in the car attacking a doll and screaming. As I showed him the story, he had been very serious all along but when he saw this picture, he started to sort of half smile. Like he really didn't know what to make of it. So we talked about it, and I said, 'You really scared me when I saw you taking that doll and ripping it apart and the things that you were saying. That's when I realized that you really needed help. And I want you to continue talking to people about what you feel inside.' He accepted what I said and was quiet and then he went back to being with his friends and his mom. But there was a whole process to go through with that." —Donna Ferrato.

Photo © 1997 Donna Ferrato.

friends, one with a camera, one with a notebook. Because they were not media savvy, part of my job became protecting them from myself. I had to think constantly about how my story in

print, with photographs of their faces, would affect their lives.

I call myself a documentary reporter. I don't do interviews. I listen and watch. But journalists, no matter how quiet,

"Dear Mom, The reason I left home when I was 16 is not that I don't love you. I love

change the dynamic simply by being present. A relationship with the subject develops, and the longer you stick around, the less professional it is likely to be. When I'm in my office I try to be objective, but I find it hard on the road to stand back and simply observe.

On this story, I couldn't just watch for very long: I am a mother as well as a journalist. Because we were in the trailer so much, we bought food. I washed the kitchen floor; Donna folded the children's mounds of clothing. When Ernie began beating on his sister, Donna separated them. When they began to trash a borrowed car, I stopped them. And those were the easy calls. After their father got out of prison, the children and their mother, frightened by rumors that he was looking for them, showed up at our motel in the middle of the night. Should we have turned them away in the interest of journalistic integrity? Or should we have let the tired, frightened children and their mother sack out in Donna's room, while she moved into mine? I agonized every time I intervened but, in the end, I had to act from my heart.

Even though Donna and I wondered whether involving their father in our story would protect the children or expose them to greater danger, we visited him while he was still in prison. When we explained what we were working on, he stormed out of the visiting room. The next day we went back. We knew he could see us in the parking lot from his cell window, so we waited there to let him think about talking to us this time. Then we sent a note in with the guard saying we needed his side of the story. He agreed to meet with us and told us his life story. When he saw our Mother Jones article, angry as he was, he said that everyone in this country should read it.

If the children's parents wanted the story to be told, the therapeutic community did not. We were met with hostility from caseworkers, counselors, psychologists and probation officers. Since the purpose of our story was not only to focus on an aspect of domestic

violence that rarely receives media attention, but also to show what one model program, the Addison County Children Who Witness Violence Project, was doing to help these children heal, I was stunned. I had been counting on these people to help me interpret what I was seeing and put these children's reactions in a broader context. Instead, I was presented with a formal list of concerns. Many of these I shared—protecting the children, confidentiality of therapeutic information, the dangers of quick in-and-out coverage. These days few media outlets are willing to pay for long-term coverage. But to do a story such as this one a reporter can't just drop into a child's life for a week and then leave, especially when there's a history of untrustworthy adults left behind. In the end, I found ways to report this story off and on for a year.

Some of their concerns I found insulting, for instance that I had come with a hidden agenda. I could only assert the purity of my motives and the depth of my professional experience. But what I regarded as the most egregious "concern" was the service network's belief that Ernie's mother was incapable of making the decision to participate in a story she felt was important. When she realized this, she bristled at their arrogance and theorized that the reason they didn't want her to cooperate was that they, too, were afraid of the children's father.

In the end, the family court mediator and coordinator of the Children Who Witness Violence Project welcomed us. So did an organization called Women in Crisis, including the leaders of a battered women's group and the counselors of a summer camp for children from violent families. The others never did help us or, I think, trust us. And now, sadly, even as experts from all over the nation want help setting up similar programs, the one in Vermont has collapsed due to lack of funding. Yet in part because of the program's work, Ernie and his sister appear to be thriving. They are now living with their mother in a nicer trailer in town and

visit their father in controlled situations. We just heard that Ernie got a perfect score on a spelling test. Ironically, too, our relationship with the family has outlasted that of the psychologists who predicted that we, the journalists, would hit-and-run.

Generally, I must write what the market demands, and today that seems to be unambiguous stories that display tensions, historic context, "color," resolution—all wrapped up neatly with a clear beginning and a definite ending. But any story about a family's life can only be a segment chopped out of the middle of a continuing saga. I don't know how Ernie's story is going to end, because it hasn't ended. But perhaps the examination of a childhood shadowed by violence can inform our understanding of why, as they grow up, some such children strike out at others or turn their rage on themselves.

When I went out to Jonesboro, Arkansas and Springfield, Oregon, the sites of school shootings, my new awareness caused me to look for violent homes there, too. I never really found out what went on, possibly because violence is usually a family secret.

But make no mistake; we all live in the Vermont I couldn't find on my map. That place of fear is in every one of the United States. It is the place where, without warning, loved ones—parents and mates and even children—can turn into monsters. The lessons from a few words and pictures are not easy ones to face, but they are important. Fear cripples. Every child counts. Every act has consequences. A slap at the wrong time can harm. A word at the right time can help. Children grow up. The slaps and the words will echo in the world we have to live in. ■

Claudia Glenn Dowling has been a staff writer at Life magazine for 15 years. A recent winner of the PASS Award from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency for "Women and Babies Behind Bars" (Life, September 1997), she has the greatest respect for the photographers with whom she has worked.

you very much. I left home because Dad was always beating me, punching on me

Interview with Photographer Donna Ferrato

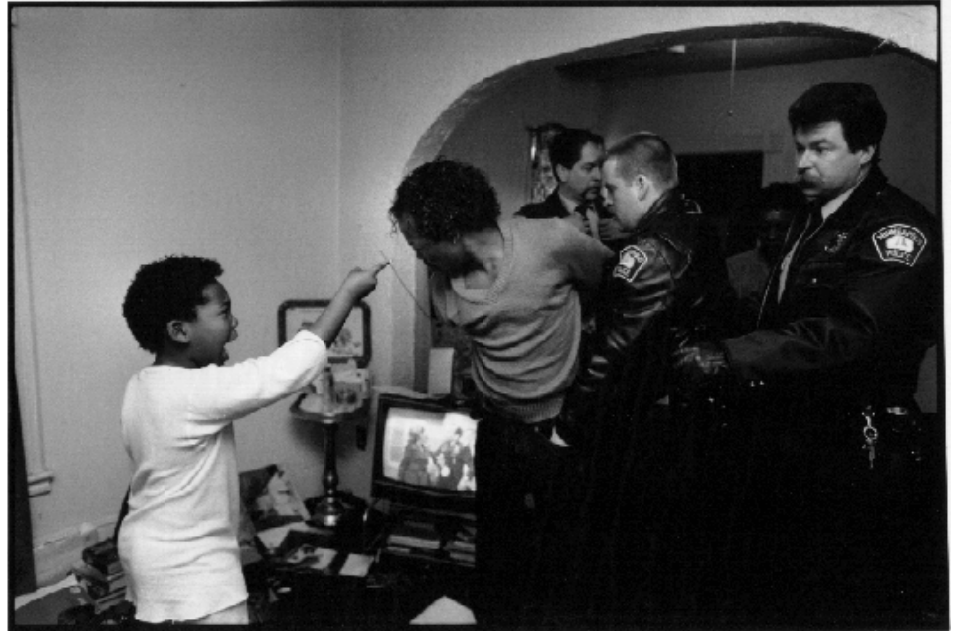
Melissa Ludtke: You've spent nearly two decades of your life documenting domestic violence and focusing to a great extent on the impact it has on children. Why do you think this is such an important story to tell?

Donna Ferrato: I see the children as the ones who suffer repercussions more strongly than the women do. In my experience, women who've been abused by their husbands, *if* they can get away from him, get into a shelter, *and* start going to support groups, they heal. They are able to make sense out of what happened and go on with their lives. But the children I usually come in contact with, they are like time bombs. In a therapy session, I saw a young boy climb the wall, scale it like a human fly when forced to remember what his father had done to his mother again and again and again.

ML: What aspects of this story do you think you, by using your photographer's eye, can tell that perhaps writers have a harder time conveying?

Ferrato: I think that a photograph of a face that's been through a lot, a face with emotion, tells more than pages of words. The photograph makes people identify with and often feel something for the person because they can see that person is real. We never can quite tell if the story is real when it's an essay without photographs. The photos give it a reality. And certainly a black and white photograph pulls us deeper in than a color photograph does. Color is often distracting. We get so easily distracted by the detail of the wallpaper or the pattern of a woman's dress.

ML: One of the things that clearly has to happen when a photograph of a face is used to portray a situation or to bring an issue to life is that the privacy of that



"This is, by far, the most powerful picture I've ever taken because it shows exactly how a child feels when they see their mother being beaten.

"The boy is saying to his father, 'I hate you for hitting my mother, and I hope you never come back to this house.' Nobody, even the parents who signed a release for this picture, realized how powerful it was going to be until they saw it in the magazine and they flipped out."—*Donna Ferrato.*

Photo © Donna Ferrato, Domestic Abuse Awareness Inc. (NYC) from the book "Living with the Enemy" (Aperture).

child's life is broken. Recently I heard Dr. Maggie Heagarty, who is Chief of Pediatrics at Harlem Hospital, tell a group of children's journalists that those who use poor and sick children's real names and publish pictures of their faces should "fry in hell." She was very angry at certain members of the media who had displayed photos of so-called "crack" babies across the front pages of their publications. How do you reconcile this issue of privacy in

these children's lives with turning their faces into published images?

Ferrato: Perhaps I'm one of them who will fry in hell because I have done something like that, most recently with Ernie's story, then again during this past summer with a story that appeared in *The New York Times* magazine about child sexual assault in South Africa. In *The New York Times* story, there was a nine-year-old girl named Masindy who

when he got drunk and threatening to kill me if I ever told you." Frankie. "When I

had been raped by a neighbor.... Her mother gave me permission to follow them through the medical examination, treatment and court proceedings.

ML: You mean you followed her with your camera?

Ferrato: With the camera, I told her story. I was really the only one there. Sometimes her mother couldn't even be there because she was so poor she had to work and then be at home with her other children. I was able to spend that time with her at the hospital and stayed with her while she was diagnosed with syphilis. I didn't think that it was right to use her real name in the story [the editors did decide to use it], but I firmly believed people needed to see her face, to understand that this is a real child. I hope that children are not exploited by my work, but that through it they have a chance to show what they are going through. They have a right to be able to show that and to say, "I hurt, I'm angry, this has happened to me. I need help." Like Ernie through his behavior of trying to hurt his sister was saying, "I need help, I am in a rage." I believe that photographs can point to that rage far better than any words connected to an anonymous child.

ML: Do you always get permission from the guardian or parent to publish photos of a child?

Ferrato: Always. Not just the guardian or parents. I talk with teachers. I talk with doctors. I talk with everybody connected to the child.

ML: Do you also talk with the children about the fact that their images will be used?

Ferrato: Yes. With Ernie, who was seven- years-old, I spoke to him all the way through it. He knew what was happening, as much as he could. When the story was ready for publication, I drove from New York City to Vermont to talk with Ernie, to show him the



"There was this couple that I'd been with for a while, when one night he began to attack her. Earlier that day their three-year-old son cried when his father tried to drag his mother away. That night I heard the father shouting at her and I heard her screaming. I ran down and found him tearing the bathroom apart, looking for drugs. I started taking pictures, thinking he would stop. When he raised his hand back, like he was going to slap her, I couldn't believe my eyes. I kept thinking, 'My God, if I don't have a picture of this, then nobody will ever believe it.' I got that picture when he hit her. But when he went to hit her again, I put my camera down and I grabbed his hand, and I said, 'What the f... are you doing? You're going to hurt her!' He just threw me down like I was a bug, then he said, 'Look, she's my wife and I'll do whatever I have to do to make her understand she can't lie to me. But I'm not going to hurt her, so you stay out of this.'"—*Donna Ferrato.*

Photos © Donna Ferrato, Domestic Abuse Awareness Inc. (NYC) from the book "Living with the Enemy," Aperture.



was little, I thought a lot of calling those hotlines for abused children, but I was al-

story, to explain to him what this was about, and why it was important for people to see this. And I said, "You're getting help now, Ernie. Your life is changing. And people understand how angry you were and how scared you were inside. You still need a lot more help. But there are other little kids who aren't getting the help and who have the same fears and are terrified of violence and they act it out and they're not getting help. And maybe you can help other kids, so that there will be programs set up in their communities." That is how I explained it to him. Maybe it is too much to put on a child. But today there are so many bad things that happen to children, they don't have a chance to be innocent anymore.

ML: In another conversation you mentioned the reluctance some editors have to publish images like the ones you photograph. Why you think this is so, or what's been conveyed to you by these editors in terms of what causes this reluctance?

Ferrato: Perhaps it is to do with protecting the rights of the child. Perhaps the child isn't really old enough at nine or 10 to say whether or not they want their story to be put out in the public's eye. I will give them that. But at the same time I think that what's been going on for the last 10 years is the dumbing down of America. There is a great reluctance on the part of editors to tell stories which are too tough or too strong and show the realities of people's lives. And when you get into children's lives, editors are extremely squeamish. But they're not afraid to show the children after they've done some horrible deeds, after they've killed five kids in the schoolyard. Then they'll show that picture on the cover of every newspaper in the country and on TV every night. For whatever reasons, the editors at Life and The New York Times were afraid to use the pictures of Ernie. What the top people at The New York Times said was that they felt that it would ruin this boy's life. I just didn't

agree. And I really felt, also, that this boy had the potential to help countless other kids and to make people understand these children need help....

Ernie's story is a positive story. It shows him in trouble. We did not go in there and do a quick hit and get some pictures of him freaking out and attacking his sister. We stayed with his family, off

“There is a great reluctance on the part of editors to tell stories which are too tough or too strong and show the realities of people's lives. And when you get into children's lives, editors are extremely squeamish. But they're not afraid to show the children after they've done some horrible deeds, after they've killed five kids in the schoolyard.”

and on, for more than a year. We did an extensive interview with his father in prison, who had been abusive with Ernie and extremely violent with the mother. We got him to understand that his children are the real victims and that he's responsible for his son being so angry and beating on his sister all the time and beating on kids in the playground. The father is responsible. The father has to change his behavior. The father has to show his son the right way to be a man....

For so long we didn't see the faces of these kids and so the men who did these kinds of things were able to hide. The kids were anonymous before. By showing their faces, these children gather their own kind of strength and power from being heard and being understood about what happened to them....

Especially with children, a journalist has to follow through and figure out how to protect them. It is a big step for the children's mother or father to say "Yes, we believe that this story should be made public." But then how do we protect the children in their communities? I did not want for Ernie's mother to have this story shown all around their hometown. In the end, it was good that it wasn't published in Life because that would have meant it would have been at the checkout counter of her local supermarkets. It was better that it appeared in Mother Jones where it would not be put next to all of those magazines that sensationalize everything. The idea of Ernie's story is to educate people, including children, about what was happening in so many families.

ML: So from your perspective, using these children's images has to be done carefully and it has to be done strategically?

Ferrato: Yes, in a way that makes people care about what is happening. I don't think it sinks into their minds for very long if they can't see it. ■

Donna Ferrato is a photographer whose documentation of domestic violence has earned her numerous journalism awards. In 1991, Aperture published "Living with the Enemy."

ways afraid they would somehow ... figure out who I was." Ana Angelica Pines.

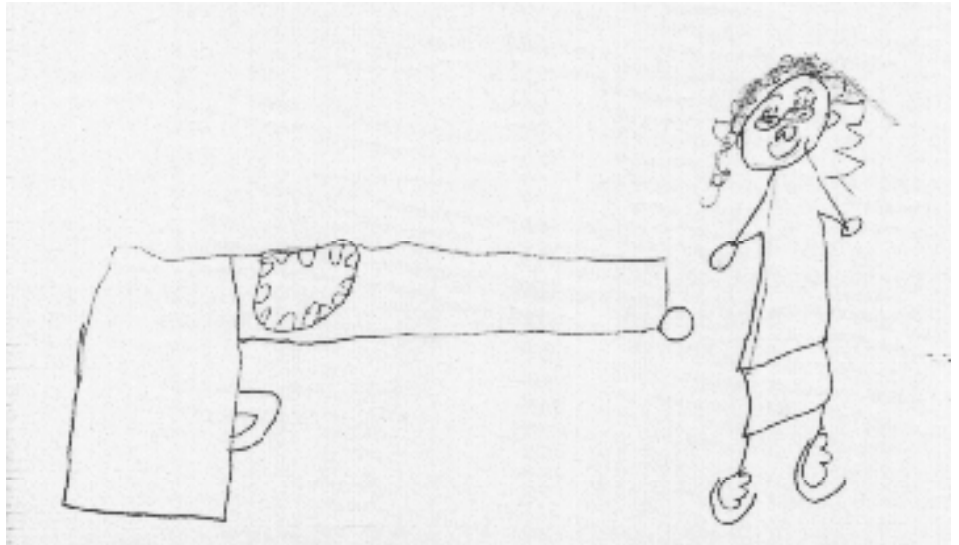
Children's Exposure to Violence: A Critical Lens for Reporting on Violence

By Joy D. Osofsky and Howard J. Osofsky

Each year in our country at least three million children are exposed to violence within their homes. These children are the victims of violence, even though scars are often invisible. Another several million children confront violence in their neighborhoods, and most children are exposed to scenes of violence on television or at the movies, on the Internet or in the lyrics of popular songs. These children's stories deserve to be told. In fact, they need to be told, for within them reside valuable clues about the violence that comes to inhabit all of our lives.

From our vantage point—as researchers of and counselors to children who are exposed to violence—the roles media play can either be informed *and* beneficial or insensitive *and* harmful. For our children's sake, we would hope that members of the media might pause to calibrate the effects of their work and learn about ways to improve their coverage of these issues.

Clearly the news media have as a primary responsibility the job of reporting what happens and, by necessity, do so while keeping an eye on ratings and circulation. Therefore, the media have an obligation to report violent crimes, but there are ways to do this in a responsible manner that help to educate the public. It is important that the media guard against sensationalizing and glorifying violence for if they don't, then a numbing desensitization can occur. Youth, especially, can start to identify more with the perpetrators than the victims. And



In therapy sessions, children use art to describe their lives. “*Children in a Violent Society*,” Edited by Joy D. Osofsky, The Guilford Press.

members of the media ought not to be afraid to report on what *does* work within the justice system and reiterate the message that those who do commit violent acts usually do bear the consequences of punishment for their behavior.

In addition to these basic guidelines, it is vitally important that those who report on violence spend time understanding the impact that exposure to violence has on children during their formative years. There is fallout from these early traumatic experiences, and the public needs to know this. Readers and viewers should also learn through media coverage that help is available for children who live in the midst of violence, and the public deserves to know that therapeutic ap-

proaches are working to minimize the consequences later on.

Unfortunately, there are many people—including some who report on violence in the media—who don't know that young children are adversely affected by witnessing violence. Others believe the numbers of children who are affected by exposure to violence are small. However, scientific evidence about the traumatizing effects of such exposure is indisputable. Exposure to violence can determine how children process the experiences of their lives, how they behave in various circumstances, and how they respond to provocation. Children who endure chronic exposure to community violence and/or domestic violence are at increased risk of becoming vio-

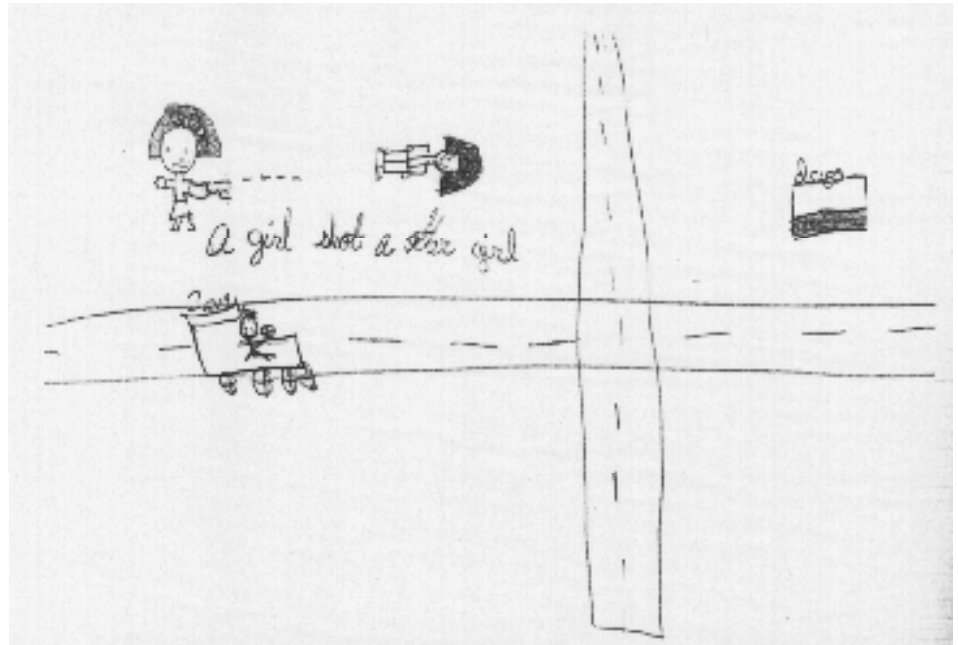
“When I was two years old, I saw my father laying in the street, shot dead. My family

lent themselves, in part because they have not had an opportunity during their early years of development to learn other ways of coping with the inevitable stresses of life.

Surveys are finding also that young children are exposed to violence at a much greater extent than many professionals realized only a few years ago. Research done at Louisiana State University Medical Center revealed that 51 percent of the children interviewed in two urban elementary schools in New Orleans reported they had been *direct* targets of violence while 91 percent of them said they had witnessed some type of violence. In other urban areas, surveys reveal similar results.

The implication for members of the media seems obvious to us: If violence is penetrating these children's lives at such a pernicious pace, then vigilant coverage of its origins, impact and potential remedies is merited. There are important stories to be told of children who, with help, become resilient survivors as well as stories of circumstances in which the untended exposure during a child's early years manifested itself in actions he took a decade later. We think this issue of exposure to violence offers a critical lens through which many stories about violence should be seen and heard.

Fictional violence, be it on television, at the movies or on the Internet, brings with it similar issues and concerns. Glamorization of make-believe violence is dangerous, and those who manufacture it must bear some responsibility when youngsters model the inappropriate behaviors they see portrayed in front of them. Whether it is in the imaginary world of film or TV or in the news media's actual depiction of events, adults who convey stories about violence to audiences that are likely to include children should avoid characterizations that encourage risk-taking, promote the seeking of revenge, or possibly will lead to copycat behavior. One thing we know about children and adolescents is that they believe in their invulnerability: No message from the



"Children in a Violent Society," Edited by Joy D. Osofsky, The Guilford Press.

"...it is vitally important that those who report on violence spend time understanding the impact that exposure to violence has on children during their formative years."

media should provide additional care and feeding of this belief.

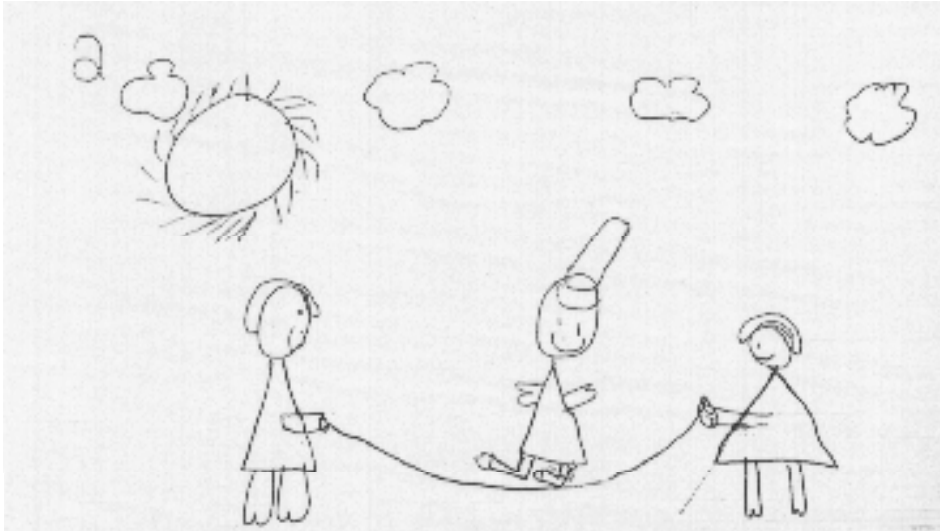
There must be creative ways in which those who are in the business of depicting stories about violence can do so in more positive ways, without sacrificing ratings or profits. A search for alternative routes to reaching this goal is certainly warranted, given what we are learning about the dire consequences of staying the course.

Our experiences working with journalists convince us that such stories can be told and can hold the public's attention. In our work with the Violence

Intervention Program—a joint effort by LSU's Medical Center and the New Orleans Police Department, its public schools, and community and neighborhood groups—we've worked with reporters who were willing to be educated about these issues, then translate their learning into interesting and informative stories. They begin by finding out about our community-based program, an initiative we designed with four goals in mind. We wanted to respond directly and empathetically to children and families affected by violence. We set out also to educate police who are called to respond to violence about the effects it has on children who witness it. We wanted to teach families living with violence how to keep their children safe. And we insisted on a rigorous evaluation of the effectiveness of our efforts.

In the five years the Violence Project has existed, it has put into place a 24-hour hotline for police officers and families and moved police officers through training sessions in which they learn about the roles they can play in helping children. Each year, counselors at the program provide thousands

didn't know who killed him. . . . After my pops passed away, nothing was ever the



“Children in a Violent Society,” Edited by Joy D. Osofsky, The Guilford Press.

of hours of clinical services and consultations in schools with children, parents and teachers.

In 1995, a nine-year-old boy, James Darby, was brutally and senselessly murdered in a drive-by shooting while he was walking home from a picnic with his family on Mother’s Day. Just nine days earlier, after an interview at The Violence Intervention Program, James had written the following letter to President Clinton:

“Dear Mr. Clinton,

“I want you to stop the killing in the city. People is dead and I think somebody might kill me.

“Would you please stop the people from deading. I’m asking you nicely to stop it. I know you can do it. Do it now. I know you can.

“Your friend, James”

We’d promised James and other children that we’d send their letters to the President. After James’s murder, President Clinton released this letter to The Associated Press. Thousands of letters were then sent to us, some with postmarks from other countries. In the wake of James’s death, we gave countless interviews, watched as articles were published in the domestic and international press, appeared on radio and TV

talk shows, and had a (CBS) Sunday Morning segment done about The Violence Intervention Program.

Although this intensive media coverage was exhausting for us and for

“The media’s focus needs to be taken off of unnecessarily graphic reporting of crimes and put on... the ways in which violence—and its depiction—can and does breed more violence.”

members of James’s family, we were heartened by the fact that public awareness about violence was being heightened and news about positive efforts like ours was reaching the readers and viewers. Since then, local and national media have continued to return to

James’s story and our program’s efforts to minimize the harmful effects of violence on children as a way of telling a story that can illuminate important issues. Through this experience of working with the media we have been able to more widely educate the public about youngsters’ behaviors that are linked to post-traumatic stress disorders brought on by exposure to violence. And our advice on the safeguards needed to protect children from witnessing violence has been picked up along the way. Colleagues of ours who operate similar programs in Boston and New Haven have also worked hard to persuade members of the media to stick around after their reports on violent events have been broadcast or published so they can see what happens to those children.

For the impact of violence on children to be reduced, the media’s focus needs to be taken off of unnecessarily graphic reporting of crimes and put on to the task of increasing the public understanding of the ways in which violence—and its depiction—can and does breed more violence. Our experience demonstrates that when members of the media take the time to be informed, their coverage can be beneficial. ■

Joy D. Osofsky is a Professor of Public Health, Psychiatry and Pediatrics at Louisiana State University Medical School. She has served for the past four years as the Founder and Director of the Violence Intervention Program that is affiliated with LSU Medical School. In 1997 her book, “Children in a Violent Society,” was published by Guilford Press. Since 1986, Howard J. Osofsky has been Professor and Head of the Department of Psychiatry, LSU Medical School, New Orleans, where he works to provide community outreach of mental health services to low-income children and families.

same. My mother had two nervous breakdowns, and I lived with relatives.” Wunika.

Inside the Juvenile Justice System: Lifting the Veil of Secrecy

By Jill Wolfson and John Hubner

In the summer of 1993, we made an appointment with Judge Leonard P. Edwards, Presiding Judge of the Santa Clara County (California) juvenile court, and described our idea to him: We wanted to spend a year or so in his courtroom. We wanted to shed light on the system that is so often closed to the public by following the children and families that come before him, through not only the courts, but the shelters, the foster homes, the juvenile halls, the drug rehabs and therapy.

In our initial meeting, we emphasized that we didn't want to do what the media more typically do when covering child welfare and juvenile justice, which is to single-mindedly clobber the system. In most cases, the media appear in these public institutions of last resort only after there is a disaster—a child dies in foster care; a judge releases a delinquent who returns to the street and kills someone. The media then scramble to find the culprit, the person upon whom to lay the blame, whether it's an incompetent social worker, an overburdened probation department, a harried judge, or a law that doesn't seem to work.

In telling this story in a book, we would have the luxury of both time and space, luxuries that are denied to most journalists. Our intention was not to focus on the spectacular events, but to target and give voice to the “garden variety” cases that more accurately reflect the day-to-day reality of these interwoven systems.

We approached Judge Edwards because John had gotten to know him while working on several articles for

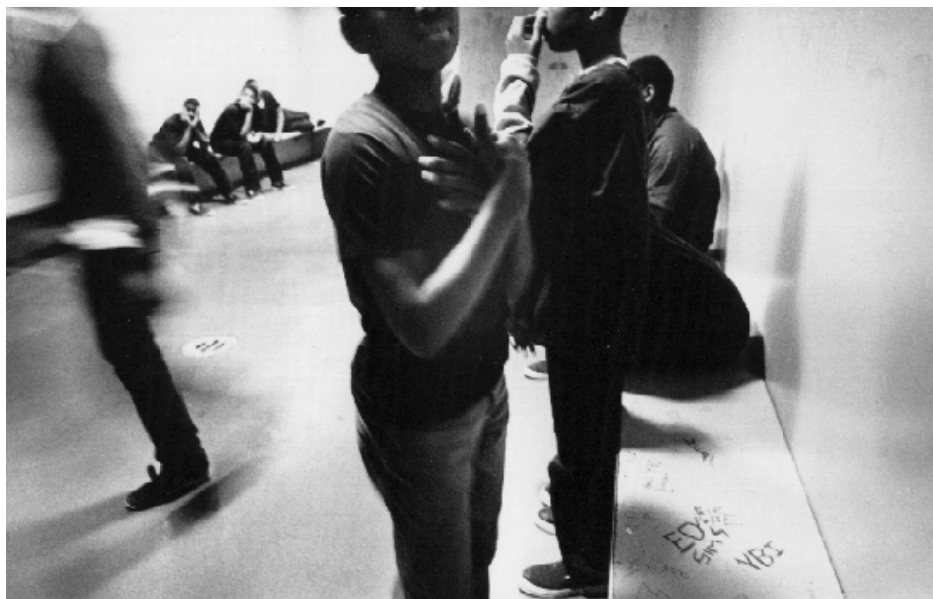


Photo by Pauline Lubens/The Detroit Free Press.

WEST, the Sunday magazine of The San Jose Mercury News. Both of us as reporters had sat in his courtroom observing, with something approaching awe, the flow of humanity, the powerful, elaborate dramas that unfolded there each day. We expected him to be interested in the project. He had long been outspoken in his belief that if the system was ever going to improve, the public must be involved in the process. They must understand the laws, why they are in place, and how well they function. To do this, however, it was clear to us that the public must be able to see the complexities of working with families and children, especially those who are already in trouble, and why there is no “one-solution-fits-all” scenario.

“Sure. Do it. You’ve got to do it,” he said at the end of this meeting.

There was, of course, the “small” matter of confidentiality. We told Judge Edwards that if we were going to tell the comprehensive story of what happened to the children who came into his courtroom, we needed access to more than one or two specific cases. We wanted to come and go at will, to be allowed to read a wide variety of case files, and to speak with as many professionals and families in the system as we could. We needed to be free to hear different viewpoints. And everyone needed to feel free to talk to us.

And we wanted to use real people, real names. We did not want to use composites.

Judge Edwards was more hesitant

“I was taught that if you kill, you go to jail. You pay for yanking a loved one out of a

about acquiescing to this request: “Let me think about that one. When the time comes, we’ll deal with it.” His thinking involved conferring with judicial colleagues around the country. Meanwhile, we did our own legal research and concluded that the framers of the juvenile court system in California had not intended, by their regulations, to keep the press out. We took our “breakthrough” to Judge Edwards. He reminded us that we would be dealing with lawyers. If we showed them the law, they would argue us to death. They would take us up on a writ. Judge Edwards suggested that it would be better to proceed slowly in order to get people to “buy into this project.”

So we started a lengthy process, part negotiation, part persuasion, and a large part political. We spent weeks interviewing the “main players” in his courtroom and telling them why we wanted to write this book. What we heard were lots of complaints, about their department, their bosses and previous media coverage of their work.

The afternoon when we sat in Judge Edwards’ chambers and told him that we needed to start interviewing families is one we’ll never forget. We needed to speak with attorneys and social workers about specific people in specific situations. He spun around in his chair and did something that had never been done in California—or, as far as he knew, in the United States: He issued a broad judicial order that broke open the cocoon of both the Department of Family and Children’s Services (DFCS) and the county’s Probation Department. Our project had begun.

Or so we thought. Quickly, we learned how the habits people acquire can lead to mindsets that are difficult to alter. The first impulse of a sealed-off system is to reject intruders. A district attorney called Judge Edwards to say he didn’t think the judge could issue such an order. He was all for a book—the work he did and the children he represented existed in a shadowland—but somebody would surely take the order up to the appeals

court and bring a stop to this project.

Social workers were incredulous. They felt they’d been scapegoated in the press for years. They wanted to talk about specific cases—but were they reading this order correctly? Could they really open their files to outsiders?

The public defender was all for the book. The parents he represented were always under attack, he told us, but social workers had no right to open his clients’ files without their permission. The judge was throwing confidentiality out the window!

As these arguments raged around our project, we kept on interviewing and reading cases. As we did that, a remarkable thing happened. People gradually accepted our presence. District attorneys and public defenders, social workers and activist groups that detest social workers, called with cases we “absolutely had to write about.”

The confidentiality issue finally did come to a head after we selected 10 specific cases we wanted to build the book around. Judge Edwards called a special hearing to examine the issues involved in each case, subpoenaing children, their families, their attorneys and caseworkers. At the hearing, anyone who had objections to our using the information would be heard.

This was an anxious time for us. We had accepted an advance for the book. We had spent almost a year conducting interviews. Now, at these hearings, the entire project could be shut down.

This first hearing was very intense. Judge Edwards’s small courtroom was packed with court insiders. An attorney who had told us in the hallway that she couldn’t wait to read the book was suddenly on her feet, attacking our project. “It’s the precedent that concerns me, your honor,” she explained. “Once you let the press in, you can’t keep them out. You’re opening the door for every tabloid that issues a press card!”

In the end, the first case was opened, on the condition that Judge Edwards read the manuscript for “identifiers”—a street address, an exact occupation

that might inadvertently hurt someone innocent. In other hearings, people signed waivers that would allow us to use their real names.

But to our own surprise, it was often us who decided as we wrote the book to change names and slightly alter identities. During the three-year process, we found ourselves walking the line between being journalists and being advocates for people in fragile circumstances. If we were going to err, it would be on the side of protecting people who had let us into their lives. It took great courage for many of them to relive their pasts and share their present. We could find no justification for why they and their children should have to relive them forever, nor would using their real names have made the stories any more true or meaningful.

This experience taught us some valuable lessons that could be applied to reporters who cover these issues as part of their daily job. Just as the juvenile court is considered the least prestigious assignment among judges and attorneys, the juvenile beat often doesn’t hold a lot of prestige within the newsroom. It’s pegged facetiously as the “dead baby beat” or the “good program beat.” In many newsrooms, it’s not even a specific beat. A general assignment writer with little experience is sent to piece together the most recent catastrophe.

Editors need to recognize the need for solid beat coverage and to assign more experienced reporters. And these reporters, once assigned, will find that this is an assignment in which drama is not lacking and stories are waiting to be told. Our own experience reinforced the need for the same reporter to be assigned to write the feature stories about successful social service initiatives or community youth programs and also do the investigations of child deaths and juvenile violence.

Even better would be to have a team of reporters devoted to coverage of all aspects of youth-family issues, weaving together reporting from the arenas of juvenile crime, child welfare, educa-

family’s life. But no one has paid for David’s murder.” Grismaldy Laboy.

tion and welfare reform. We discovered that there are plenty of people who work in these child- and family-focused systems who are eager to talk. But understandably they don't want to have to start from scratch each time "news" breaks and speak with a reporter who is not able to provide broader context and perspective for their information.

When John returned to his reporting job at The Mercury News, he found he had dozens of new stories to write, stories that could only be found when you are immersed in the system and have earned the trust of the people who work in it. There was a sense among his sources that he was not out to unnecessarily bash the system or the people who worked in it or to defend it. People who he relied on as sources saw his goal as one of helping readers understand troubled families and children. Access, which can be a journalist's nightmare especially with stories concerning children, no longer was a problem.

"The facts in any case we have are 80 percent on the record," Judge Edwards says. "A good reporter who knows the system can get the other 20 percent. It's not hard."

It's not hard, if editors and newspapers are willing to give their reporters the time and resources to establish the working relationships and trust they'll need to move these stories out of the shadows of secrecy. ■

John Hubner is on the projects team at The San Jose Mercury News and worked for two years as a probation officer before becoming an investigative journalist. Jill Wolfson, a former staff writer at The San Jose Mercury News, is now a freelance writer. They are co-authors of "Somebody Else's Children—The Courts, The Kids, And The Struggle To Save America's Troubled Families." (Hardcover, Crown, 1997; paperback, 1998.)

The Courts and the Media: Improving the Dialogue

By The Honorable William J. O'Neil

In ancient times, a coin was flipped to assist people in important decisions of life. It was believed the gods would assure that the correct side would land upright.

Like the two sides of a coin, the people who work in the proceedings of the Juvenile Court system and reporters seem like they should be joined together yet, for a variety of reasons, too often they become antagonists. Each side seems incapable of understanding the other's point of view, and these differing perspectives create the feelings of annoyance that seems to thrive between them. There is an inherent lack of trust and increasing lack of respect for the work each tries to do.

Unfortunately, today, people don't believe that the gods can intervene and bring about some resolution. Instead, finding common ground is an enterprise these two parties must enter into together and one in which they must establish rules and create relationships that will build trust.

So far, however, one of the most divisive issues—whether the Juvenile Court should be open to the media—has resulted in more heated argument than clear-headed debate and analysis. Traditionally, Juvenile Courts were closed to the public, including the press. The original concept for this exclusion was a valid one and retains some validity today.

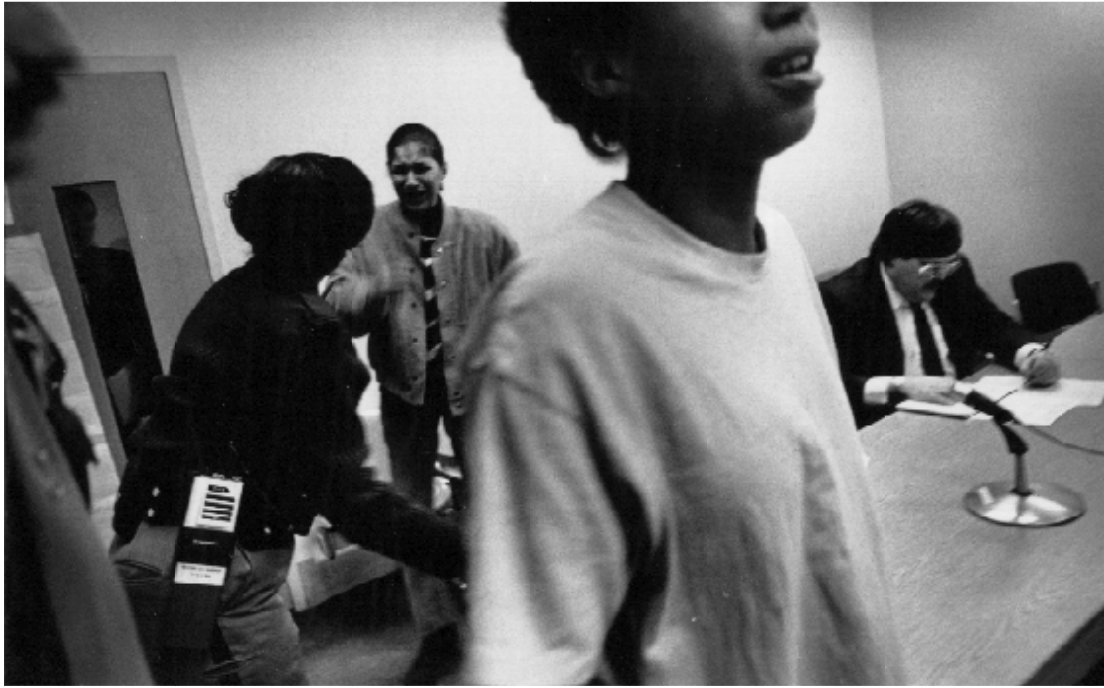
The traditional role of the Juvenile Court is the protection of the public through rehabilitation of the delinquent child. As some sports stars re-

mind us, "Image is everything." If a child's reputation is wrapped in the tight swaddling cloth of "delinquent," he has a nasty habit of living up to such expectation. If that child is to have the chance to be rehabilitated, then granting him the opportunity to not be burdened with that stigmatizing label and damaging publicity becomes imperative.

But as with the coin toss, there are flip sides to this perspective. Should every child—regardless of the severity of their crime or the frequency of their criminal behavior—be given an open-ended opportunity to rehabilitate? Does the public have a right to be informed of what is being done to serve that purpose of rehabilitation? And doesn't the public have the right to be informed of what occurs in a publicly funded court? And if it does, are there ways in which the privacy of youngsters' lives—especially those for whom we hold out the hope of a rehabilitated future—can be protected?

When I became Presiding Juvenile Court Judge, one of my first actions was to open the court to both the media and the public. I am told that I was the first judge to open the Juvenile Court in Arizona to the broadcast and print media. After eight years, I continue to believe my decision was the right one and benefits everyone. I recognize that mine remains a controversial position and that others in my profession disagree. While I hope we can disagree without being disagreeable, what I've learned during these

"Our court system is also in shambles. Two kinds of people have the advantage. They



Youngster at Wayne County Juvenile Justice Center in Detroit. *Photo by Pauline Lubens/The Detroit Free Press.*

eight years might provide valuable guidance both to reporters who want to do their job from inside the courtroom and to judges who hold the keys.

First, maintain open communications. Both the court and the media place a premium on good communication skills. Good communication is hard work; for it to be successful, it must be clear and honest, and its speakers must be willing to expose their vulnerabilities. The deeper the level of communication, the harder the work.

Any candid assessment of the court and media would declare there is virtually no beneficial communication between the two. The ancient fires of disharmony between them seem to rage too hot and too high. It is a simple adage but true, "Old habits die hard." This less than cordial relationship appears to be based more on a habit of practice than meaningful discussion. Any meaningful effort to initiate productive lines of communication must include recognition of a need of at least two things: Thought and time.

One thing that is true about both judges and reporters is that they are rarely undecided. Yet what makes them similar is frequently glossed over or ignored. Judges make decisions. While reporters might view some of their decisions to be in error, they are rarely undecided. Reporters make decisions in the ways they report on stories. While their "slant" on a story may be wrong from my viewpoint, their stories rarely read as though the newspaper is undecided about its viewpoint. It is essential that each of us understand the other's leanings. This can be accomplished by investing time and thought in communicating with each other candidly about even trivial things. If that's done with the little things, then lines of communication will be open when weightier topics come along. Trust builds through communication and communication builds trust.

Secondly, seek to understand and be understood. Relationships begin and end with understanding and seeking to be understood. Judges usually do not have a full appreciation for the

pressure of a deadline that a reporter faces. What happens in a community can send a reporter on a fast-breaking sprint to the front page; if roadblocks are placed in the way, valuable information can become yesterday's news.

Similarly, reporters frequently do not have a clear sense about the basics of the justice system, let alone the key differences between juvenile and adult criminal court. Nor do they understand the original purpose of creating a separate system predicated on "rehabilitating" the offender. I learned this from an unfortunate front-page story.

A teenager was charged with the assault and attempted rape of a senior citizen. The state filed a request that the juvenile be tried as an adult. As a result of the passage of Automatic Transfer laws in Arizona, such a teenager would be tried as an adult today since he was over the age of 13, and the charge against him was "severe." On the day of the hearing the prosecutor admitted that the state had substantial problems with the case. Each of its three witnesses would testify this juvenile was not the one they had seen at the scene of the crime. There was no evidence that conclusively identified the assailant. There had been one piece of physical evidence; the sheriff had made a plaster mold of the assailant's footprints. However, an officer had broken the mold and thrown it away.

To add to this farce, another officer had returned the shoes that might have provided conclusive evidence and, by now, those shoes had been thrown away. To add to the chaos, the police report provided the footprints' measurements and, due to the large size of the defendant's feet, it was impossible

are the celebrities and the police officers." Nichole Guglielmo. "Nowadays teenagers

that the teenager could have made the prints.

Given the weakness of the State's case, the prosecutor made an offer of guaranteed continued probation. (The defendant was on probation for an incident that occurred while in detention on this assault charge.) Because this juvenile did not want to risk being transferred to adult court, he accepted the plea agreement and pled "No Contest," against the advice of his attorney.

Later, when he was charged with the rape of some university students, this juvenile's file, including information about this prior case, was given to the members of the print media upon request. All but one newspaper provided an accurate account based on this file. This one newspaper lambasted the prior release of this juvenile. The paper reported that he "had violently assaulted a senior citizen." Their political cartoonist pictured me as a clown.

This story might have turned out differently if lines of communication had been opened. If that reporter had sought to learn more about what had occurred, and had established an open line of communication with me as other

"The media survive only as long as the public trusts what they say."

reporters had, I might have been able to help him to understand how the plea agreement related to the facts of the case. But there had been no line of communication set up through which I could work with him. As a result, his story turned out to be an inaccurate, and potentially harmful, portrayal.

Another important lesson I've learned is that both sides ought to learn how to not personalize this professional relationship. Instead they

should try to learn about the demands of each other's jobs and, in doing so, work to smooth over some of the rough edges that tend to emerge when tough cases receive coverage. This is not easy to do. Most Americans see themselves as tough individualists, as people who are able to "take a licking and keep on ticking." It just isn't so, especially when it carries a personal edge to it. Criticism stings. It can hit hard and leave you gasping for breath. But if criticism can be offered in constructive and accurate ways, remaining focused on job performance and not on personalities, relationships will work better.

Some of the youngsters who have come before me have reminded me of why my ability to see their lives in their entirety matters so much. One boy who was accused of vandalism had recently found his father in his bedroom, dead because of a self-inflicted shotgun blast. Nightmares and the dark stain of blood that remained on his wall drove this boy to leave his home and go in search of another place to sleep. At several of those places, he stole things. He was sentenced to probation, and while he was on it I wrote him letters. One day his mother told me how well her son was doing and described to me how he had covered that spot on his wall with my notes. All I could think about was how glad I was that his case had never been reported; had his name surfaced in terms of these incidents of vandalism, the publicity might have devastated him and altered forever his ability to find new ways of coping within his small community.

The media survive only as long as the public trusts what they say. Inaccurate storytelling or overly subjective reporting of what should be the presentation of objective facts can foster distrust. Once distrust settles in, the public responds, often by turning away from those who deliver the news.

Whether in issuing judgments or writing stories, each of us has a primary duty of serving the public interest. The

poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote:

"One ship drives east and another drives west

With the selfsame winds that blow
'Tis the set of the sails

And not the gales

Which tells us the way to go."

The different "set of the sails" guiding the journeys of courts and the media should make neither their relationship adversarial nor the product of their labors untrustworthy. They merely hold differing points of view, and these can and should be understood and respected by each. But the hard work involved in making this happen must take place if our two systems are going to bridge our differences and work in ways that benefit society, in general and these juveniles, in particular. Constructing these more effective relationships is too vital for us to accomplish to have either of us insulated within our own worlds and disengaged from building bridges to the other. ■

William J. O'Neil is Presiding Juvenile Judge for the Superior Court, hearing all juvenile matters in Pinal County, Arizona. The Governor of Arizona appointed him to his Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Council and the Children's Justice Task Force. The Chief Justice of the Arizona's Supreme Court named him to chair the Committee on Juvenile Courts.

get firearms without any problem and end up using them stupidly." Anonymous.

When Juveniles Are Locked Up: A Reporter Uncovers Abuse in a System Few People Know Exists

By Mary Hargrove

“Did the dorm manager ever hit you or threaten you?”

“Yes. He threatened me. He was talking about if I ever tell them [staff] what they can’t do—then I’m gonna have to deal with him. And if I have to deal with him, then something bad’s gonna happen.”—Sixteen-year-old boy in Arkansas’ serious offender program.

What does happen to children who commit serious crimes and are sent to state-run juvenile facilities instead of adult prisons?

That was a question I posed in April 1997 after a 14-year-old boy shot another teenager to death on a school bus. The shooter was transferred to adult court. He was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to 46 years in prison.

So how would that same boy have been treated in the juvenile system? How does the state deal with child murderers, rapists and chronic delinquents? Could they be reformed? Are they being rehabilitated?

The answer would shock Arkansans who were generally unsympathetic to young murderers in the wake of the March 24, 1998 shooting deaths of four students and a teacher at Westside Middle School near Jonesboro by 13-year-old Mitchell Johnson and 11-year-old Andrew Golden.

Our six-part series published in June 1998 revealed physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children 11 to 17 years old by untrained workers, some of whom had criminal records. Boys were hog-tied; forced to sleep outside



Six inmates hang out in a cell designed for four in North Little Rock’s Observation and Assessment Center. Two youths are forced to sleep on the floor a few feet from the communal commode. *Photo by Stephen B. Thornton/The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.*

on the ground in freezing weather; slugged in the face and denied medical attention despite gaping, bloody wounds; stripped of their clothes and placed in cells after the air conditioning was turned down, and threatened with death if they reported the abuse.

The first stopping point in the system, the Observation and Assessment Center [O&A] in North Little Rock, was a former jail built for 84 inmates. It often housed more than 140 children. Six boys were assigned to a windowless cell built for three. The toilets regularly overflowed raw sewage which the kids were forced to clean up. The three “extra” boys in the cell slept on

that same floor on thin blue mattresses, inches away from the toilet.

The handling of juveniles held in detention is an issue that can be reported in every state, despite the confidentiality hurdles. It is an overlooked but important story at a time when the public wonders why juvenile offenders aren’t reformed and some go on to commit horrible crimes as adults.

Being able to find and verify information was the key to reporting our story. The state Freedom of Information Act [FOI] also became a critical tool for us—but only after some employees risked their jobs to supply me with names and documents. Arkansas

“Man, I hate watching the cell door close every night. Be locked in like some animal.”

law prohibits releasing the name of a juvenile in state custody. The employees are even better protected. Once fired, a worker's name and the reason are not released until he has exhausted his appeals, which can take two years. One file outlining numerous abuse incidents at O&A was renamed as a personnel file to keep it from being released under the FOI.

After months of repeatedly interviewing employees and being escorted through the various institutions, I began to get calls from personnel alerting me to abuse incidents. When the abuses had not been reported to anyone but me, I alerted Arkansas' Department of Human Services. In turn, DHS gave me some access to incident reports and investigators, checking out the allegations I had passed along. Former employees also supplied me with year-old incidents that should have been investigated but often hadn't been. In fact, many abuse reports had been destroyed. I received tips about alleged abuse by community providers who worked with the boys after they were released. During the six months we were reporting this story, a DHS memo complained that the staff was not reporting all abuse incidents to the main office, and the administration didn't "want to learn of it from the press (especially Mary Hargrove)."

Once I had the names of children allegedly abused and the staffer involved, I filed FOI's on follow-up investigations by the state police and the DHS investigative unit. This allowed me to review the quality, or mishandling, of state investigations and get outside independent verification of the abuses.

Our photo editor allowed photographer Stephen Thornton to go with me to the facilities at all hours. We made an agreement with DHS to mask the kids' faces. The pictures were critical to the success of the series. These kids needed to be seen as teenagers, not abstract monsters who should be hidden away and forgotten. The pictures also documented the stark reality of their living



Youth Service Worker Debra Rouse yells into an isolation cell for quiet after lights out at North Little Rock's Observation and Assessment Facility. *Photo by Stephen B. Thornton/ The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette.*

“The handling of juveniles held in detention is an issue that can be reported in every state, despite the confidentiality hurdles.”

conditions in a manner words could not fully convey. I insisted we use two photo pages to display them.

In my 25 years career as a newspaper journalist, I have written more than 40 series, but this project took some unprecedented ethical and journalistic twists before it was published. In April 1998 I met with DHS Director Lee Frazier for four hours, outlining the abuses I'd uncovered. His response: "I don't believe you." That same night, a mother who said her son had been beaten and raped a few days earlier at the O&A Center telephoned me. A

woman employee, angry because the boy had called her "a bitch," had placed him in a cell with four older boys and ignored his tearful cries to be let out. Three of the four boys later admitted to tormenting the boy whom I called Chris. Two of them said the fourth boy had attempted to force Chris to have oral sex.

Chris was not taken to a doctor for two days and was not allowed to call his parents or his lawyer, although he repeatedly asked to do so. Soon after that, a group of boys rioted at O&A and demanded to be taken to the city jail. One boy was attacked by guards at another state facility in nearby Alexander. He needed five staples to close the wound in his head. None of this was being reported by the media. In fact, few people were aware of O&A's very existence.

The abuses I was uncovering were so bad that I became concerned that I could not write the series fast enough to prevent more children from being hurt. I have a heart condition, and there were days when I could not work

I ain't no animal. . . . (on the other hand) It's a relief though to have this door closed

or could only work for a few hours. After talking with Executive Editor Griffin Smith jr. and Managing Editor Bob Lutgen, I briefed DHS Chief Counsel Jonann Coniglio and asked her to take some action to protect the boys while I was writing.

Coniglio toured O&A with me and checked into the new allegations of abuse I had detailed. Alarmed, she

“The pictures were critical to the success of the series. The kids needed to be seen as teenagers, not abstract monsters who should be hidden away and forgotten.”

called Governor Mike Huckabee’s legal counsel. The governor, in what staff memos termed a “preemptive strike” to head off bad publicity, held a press conference April 24 announcing I had uncovered serious incidents of abuse. He did not provide details, but he did vow to correct the problems immediately.

Reporters descended on DHS trying to scoop me. They could do little without names. The pressure was on to print right away. My editors supported me when I insisted we wait for the completed series and not be panicked into breaking stories out. I feared that would dilute the impact. Any single abuse story could be explained away as an isolated, but unfortunate, incident. But a series detailing dozens of vicious incidents, often by the same employees, left no doubt that these problems had been covered up for years, that the abuse was rampant, and that the system needed a drastic overhaul.

The writing also had to be carefully thought out. I was well aware that

some of the boys were dangerous and difficult to deal with. I took pains to highlight the courage of teachers and staff who were helping them, even though they had been physically attacked by these boys. Yet I saw many of these kids as troubled teens who were vulnerable and might have been helped if the state had an adequate system. That was important to portray because our readers, outraged by juvenile crimes, were predisposed not to care about this population. But in many cases, these boys who were being abused weren’t in the system because of dangerous crimes they’d committed.

For example, the boy I called Chris had been declared delinquent for stealing two packs of cigarettes. He didn’t belong in a serious offender program. Another boy, David G., was emotionally disturbed and difficult to be around. He needed psychiatric care. He, too, was placed in a cell with older boys who were there because of violent acts they’d committed. The employees who put him in there suggested, “Beat him up and do him good. Don’t leave any marks.” One worker threatened to kill the boys if they crossed him. He warned them he could come into their rooms at night while they slept, strangle them, dump their bodies in the pond behind the facility, then claim they died trying to escape. And no one would care enough to ask questions.

Because of the length and the graphic nature of the stories, we decided to publish only on Sundays and Mondays for three weeks. We ran an overview box on the series indicating the content of the stories to come. It was a gamble. We wondered if readers would lose interest. Fortunately, our first two stories generated strong reaction follow-up stories each day. And on Friday of our first week, the governor announced that O&A would be closed within 60 days.

As our series ended, DHS Director Frazier resigned, citing pressure from the series. The Legislature has held hearings based on our series, and sev-

eral lawmakers are drafting bills to correct problems we identified.

While conditions are improving at the facilities, calls still come in alerting us to incidents. The state’s only lockdown facility for juveniles in its custody is the Alexander Youth Services Center, located about 15 miles from Little Rock. When O&A was closed, all the boys were transferred there. We have since reported a variety of related stories including the escape of a 17-year-old boy from the Alexander Center, a staff member at Alexander who was stabbed in the face five times by a 15-year-old with a history of violence, and a Texas man who innocently wandered onto the Alexander campus and actually got into the unit where the Jonesboro boys are kept, despite extra security.

All of these are stories our readers would not have been aware of in the past. ■

Mary Hargrove has been Associate Editor for The Arkansas Democrat-Gazette for four years. She was Managing Editor/Projects for The Tulsa Tribune, where she worked for 18 years before it closed in 1992. She is past-President and Chairman of Investigative Reporters & Editors, a nonprofit educational organization which has 4,000 print and broadcast members. This series (referred to in this article) by Hargrove and reporters Patrick Henry and Linda Satter, tied for first place with The Washington Post in the Daily Newspapers over 100,000 Circulation category of the 1998 Casey Medals for Meritorious Journalism. This award recognizes distinguished coverage of disadvantaged and at-risk children and their families.

behind me. At least I know I’m safe. Ain’t no razor cutting through that.” José.

Girls and Juvenile Violence: Stories Rarely Told

By Elizabeth Mehren

Recently I clipped another small article buried deep inside yet another regional newspaper. I added it to a bulging file I keep of such stories. “Girl, 15, Given 45 Years for Murder,” it read, and then recounted a highly abbreviated tale of the youngest person ever convicted of murder in this young woman’s home state, Rhode Island. Jessica Gonzalez was just 13 when she shot a 23-year-old single mother in the head in a dispute over a man. I couldn’t help wondering where the “youngest killer” story would have been played if the murderer had been male.

This is no feminist tract: The sad, simple truth is that female juvenile violence is on the upswing. But in terms of news—and in terms of national policy—it has no credibility. Scholars, law enforcement specialists and, I am sad to say, journalists, just don’t take this issue seriously.

Recent figures from the National Center for Juvenile Justice show a 23 percent increase over four years in the number of arrests for girls under 18. For boys, the figure is 11 percent. While the percentage of females under age 18 who break the law is growing, the number still remains relatively small. Also, while killers like Gonzalez are more common than ever, girls tend to be arrested for less serious offenses than boys. Nearly three-quarters of the 678,500 girls arrested in 1994—the most recent year for which FBI statistics are complete—were charged with nonviolent offenses. In short, the girls are bad, and there are more of them. But they’re not bad enough, and there’s not enough of them to draw the media’s attention to their stories in any consis-

“The gangs, I loved them. The people in them were always laughing. Nobody ever told them what to do. I got like that too. Nobody could tell me nothing. ...Every bad thing, I did it good. I was real good at being bad,” Nancy, 17 years old.

*“Girl Trouble: America’s Overlooked Crime Problem,”
Elizabeth Mehren, The Los Angeles Times, 1996.*

tent way. How’s that for a weird twist on equality?

I am fortunate to work for a newspaper, The Los Angeles Times, that often gives reporters large chunks of time to research major projects. Two years ago I spent nearly six months looking into the subject of girls in the juvenile justice system—or “bad girls,” as the project became known for short. (Truth in disclosure requires that I mention a recurring mantra I heard in reporting what became a prize-winning seven-part series was “There are no bad girls, just girls who do bad things.”) I traveled to half-a-dozen states and made contact with people in a dozen more. I was shocked at the dearth of academic specialists who knew much about this subject, in contrast to the virtual cottage industry of experts that has developed around boys. But I was thrilled to meet some amazing people in the trenches, those working directly with young women who violate the law. These people became excellent sources in helping me to understand why these girls were where they are. In fact, most of them were dying to talk. They were all too aware of—and troubled by—the simultaneous severity and obscurity of

the issue. Sometimes, I felt as though they’d been waiting for my call, waiting for someone from the media to show some interest.

I also spent time with girls in jail, in residential treatment facilities and in a variety of probation programs. I met with parents, boyfriends, victims, public defenders, district attorneys, school officials, psychotherapists and social workers, politicians, and—yes—the Girl Scouts. That hardy organization has an active program for girls and women in prison.

One of my first important encounters came following a session in Baltimore’s juvenile court. Inside and out, the building has a Dickensian quality. A waiting room that lacks magazines, playthings for young children, wall decorations or even a drinking fountain is always filled to overflow capacity, so families are seen splayed around hallways, often holding hasty, way-too-public conferences with lawyers or probation officers. Kids in shackles are marched through hallways en route to court hearings. The mother I met with looked like a star saleswoman for Century 21, and in fact that’s what she was. A single mother of two daugh-

“Being with people who do bad things...the only way I fit in when I’m with them is

ters, she'd worked her way up from part-time receptionist. She told me that when the call came at four in the morning telling her that her younger daughter—the “good” daughter, the model-student daughter, the daughter who never even had a boyfriend, or anyway, not one that her mother knew about—was in custody for stealing a car, she was speechless. “Juvenile delinquency,” she remembered thinking. “I thought that meant boys.”

That, of course, is the prevailing opinion of most policymakers, not to mention most of us in the media. It is true that from time to time we go

more likely to commit crimes in the course of running away, generally from abusive homes. That's the real story, the under-reported story, the one we too often miss altogether. The Baltimore real estate mother told me the trouble must have started when her daughter, then 11, was molested by an uncle. Then, in tears, she confided that she, too, was molested as a child—by her own mother. Intake studies in juvenile facilities show that 50 percent to 70 percent say they have been emotionally, physically or sexually abused—high end on sexual. Anecdotally, wardens and others inside girls prison

offenders. As with their male counterparts, their first jail sentence is seldom their last. This is why, parenthetically, the number of adult female offenders is also skyrocketing.

But girls come equipped with another set of complexities: their ovaries. When an incarcerated juvenile gives birth, almost universally, she is immediately separated from her child. Young mothers seldom receive special breaks when it comes to jail terms—nor, necessarily, should they. Still, the implications for yet another generation are daunting and, as reporters, our stories about these girls ought to occasionally explore the impact all of this will likely have on their children.

Some girls I interviewed boasted that they were just as bad as the boy next door. Some boys I talked to admitted they were afraid of girls who practiced the art of “banking”—walking in a tight little row and methodically taking down anyone who gets in the way. Boys also expressed admiration at how tough and bloodless girls were getting to be these days. These perspectives tear apart some of our gender stereotypes and they can provide leads to more nuanced coverage of juvenile violence today.

I heard many people within the juvenile justice system refer to girls as afterthoughts or “throwaways”: invisible delinquents who are in the system—albeit a system that doesn't really know what to do with them. The sad fact is that, in terms of public awareness, they are all but invisible, too. I'm not trying to paint an alarmist picture, but today juvenile violence is, unfortunately, an increasingly equal opportunity experience. When we report about crime, it's important that we remember the young ladies. ■

Elizabeth Mehren is National Correspondent for The Los Angeles Times, based in New England, and the author of three books.

“When her real mother was alive, she used to write letters to Ashley from jail. ‘See,’ says 15-year-old Ashley, ‘I’m doing the same things my mom was doing.’”

“Girl Trouble: America’s Overlooked Crime Problem,” Elizabeth Mehren, The Los Angeles Times, 1996.

through a brief period of frenzied coverage about “the girl gang problem,” as if bands of marauding females with tattoos and scary hair were about to take over the universe. Not likely. Gangster girls do make good copy and provide great pictures, but my research suggested that girl gangs are largely overrated. For the most part they represent a companionate activity—a way for girls to earn points with their gangbanger boyfriends—kind of like old-fashioned ladies’ auxiliaries. Sure, they sometimes slice each other up, often relying on the razor blades they carry under their tongues or in their big hairdos. One teenager rolled up her T-shirt to reveal a midriff scarred like a patchwork quilt, the handiwork of an enemy who was at that moment confined to the same work camp, albeit not for that particular offense. With some pride, that girl told me she used a screwdriver, not a knife or a razor.

But the truth is that girls are even

units and the few female-specific facilities that exist for juveniles believe the figure to be far higher.

Efforts at rehabilitation generally follow a one-size-fits-all (or in this case, none) model. The juvenile justice system was, after all, designed for boys. Gender-specific treatment is rare. Not surprisingly, justice is meted out in a decidedly jagged fashion. Following the ever-popular theory that girls who commit crimes must be “crazy,” middle- and upper-class girls are often shipped off to private mental health facilities—usually compliments of their parents’ insurance policies. Some bureaucratic genius who was presumably paid by the syllable dreamed up the term “transinstitutionalization” to describe this process. The rest of the girls who commit crimes such as assault and/or battery, grand theft or robbery, drug infractions or murder are shunted off to the same kind of dismal, revolving-door youth facilities that house male

if I do something bad. In order to earn respect, you got to do it too.” Tamara.

Media and Juvenile Violence: The Connecting Threads

By David Doi

There are some important lessons we've learned about how the coverage of violence—especially juvenile violence—influences the way many of us think about teenagers and crime.

- We've learned that coverage of crime stories on television news has gone up dramatically while actual crime has remained relatively constant, or even gone down during the same time periods.
- We've learned that during the 1990's, crime has become the number one story covered by network nightly news. In 1993, 1994, 1995 and 1997, crime stories ranked first among network stories. In local markets, crime stories consume one-quarter to one-third of total news time.
- We've learned from surveys that the public believes crime is rampant, except in their own neighborhoods and communities, primarily because of the way the media present this "news."
- We've learned that media portrayals of youth violence, especially visual images, are dominated by pictures of African-Americans or Latino youngsters.
- We've learned from one large-scale analysis of local TV that more than two-thirds of coverage of violent crime was focused on juveniles while youth were actually responsible for less than 15 percent of the violence.
- We've learned that when the media focus on youth violence and juvenile delinquency, they report disproportionately on homicide, which is the least common antisocial behavior of teenagers.

- We've learned, from one analysis, that 40 percent of stories newspapers do about children are related to violence (compared with 25 percent that are related to education).

In "false images? The News Media and Juvenile Crime," a report we issued last year, we examined in-depth the question of whether the news media "accurately portrayed the reality of juvenile crime." With some notable exceptions, our findings suggest that "while juvenile delinquency and violence are often treated as epidemic by the news media, this is not supported by the facts....this media firestorm has either created or reinforced a public impression that juvenile crime is rampant and a major threat to the safety of the community....(and) slight increases in juvenile crime have been blown out of proportion....while reductions in juvenile violence have frequently gone unreported."

Alfred Blumstein, a criminologist at Carnegie Mellon University, summed up our findings with the following observation: "Most of us have the sense that crime has been moving up incessantly. That's because a crime-increase story is a page one story, and a crime-decrease story is a page 23 story."

The impact of inaccurate reporting or inappropriate placement of stories is that public perception and, consequently, political reaction often becomes misguided. As our report concluded, "The media have contributed to and fueled the superficiality of the discourse and the hysterical tone of the political debate."

Part of the sensationalizing that our report highlights is illustrated by a few examples of headlines from the covers of national newsmagazines when they

have devoted coverage to these topics. "Teen Violence: Wild in the Streets," Newsweek declared on its August 2, 1992 cover. A year later, U.S. News & World Report chose for its cover line the following: "Guns in the Schools: When Killers Come to Class—Even Suburban Parents Now Fear the Rising Tide of Violence," and in 1996, this same magazine revisited this topic with a cover story entitled "Teenage Time Bombs." Time visited this issue, too, in a cover story calling these violent youngsters "Children Without Pity."

Certainly not all media coverage of juvenile crime has been either misleading or blown out of proportion when compared with the real and difficult challenges it presents to families, communities and public officials. And it is important to understand the common threads that connect the kind of reporting that helps readers and viewers to understand the threat posed by teenage violence, the reasons why it is occurring, and what might be done to prevent it from happening in the future.

Our report spotlights what we call "good media practices" that have emerged out of media outlets' deliberate efforts to establish policies and develop new approaches to coverage of crime and delinquency. Several common factors emerge, regardless of whether the medium is print or broadcast.

- Traditional episodic coverage of homicides and other violent crimes is replaced by beginning reporting with a basic question: "What is news in the coverage of crime?" At one local TV station, KVUE-TV in Austin, Texas, since January 1996, a crime story has had to meet one or more of

five criteria for details of it to be reported.

- Does action need to be taken?
- Is there an immediate threat to safety?
- Is there a threat to children?
- Does the crime have significant community impact?
- Does the story lend itself to crime-prevention efforts?
- Violent crimes are not reported prominently without accompanying in-depth analysis, setting it in a broader human and policy context. When reporting a homicide or violent crime, for example, certain questions will be addressed in the story.
- Did the victim and perpetrator know each other or were they related?
- Was there a history of domestic violence related to this crime?
- Was alcohol or other substances involved?
- If a shooting involves a young person, can the gun used be traced back to its point of origin and intermediate transfers?

In other words, our report noted, "The violence story is dealt with in the context of more of a public health orientation and perspective."

We've learned a lot about what doesn't work well in reporting crime. But along the way we've also found some splendid examples of how much better coverage can be when facts and context about juvenile crime and violence—no matter how their presence might dampen sensational aspects of these stories—are given the kind of attention we believe they merit. ■

David Doi is Executive Director of the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, the national coalition for State Juvenile Justice Advisory Groups.

Information for this article came from the Coalition for Juvenile Justice's November 1997 report "false images?" Copies are available by calling 202-467-0864.

What Numbers Can Tell Us

336% = the percentage increase in coverage of homicide on NBC, ABC, and CBS nightly news between 1990 and 1995. During this time, homicide arrests dropped by 13%.

99% = the percent of violent deaths of children that occurred outside of school grounds (1992-94).

90% = the percentage of murdered children under the age of 12 who are killed by adults (1996).

85% = the percentage of communities that recorded no juvenile homicides (1995).

75% = the percentage of murdered youths between the ages of 12-17 who are killed by adults (1996).

Homicides committed by children under the age of 13 occur less frequently today than they did in 1965 (1965, 1996).

31% = the decrease in arrests of children for homicide (1994-1996).

Kids are killed in gun accidents at 23 times the rate they are killed in schools (1995).

4.9% = the percentage of children arrested who were held for a violent or serious act [homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault] (1996).

200,000–65,000 = the estimated numbers (high and low) of children passing through adult jails each year (1997).

3,024 = the number of children who died from gunfire (1994).

3,000 = the number of children estimated to be held in the prison population (1998).

2,172 = the number of children arrested for homicide (1996).

43 = the number of states which lowered the age by which children can be tried as adults for certain crimes (1992-1995).

40 = the number of people, including adults, shot and killed in schools (academic year 1997-98).

11 = the number of children shot and killed in Pearl, Miss.; West Paducah, Ky; Jonesboro, Ark; Edinboro, Penn; and Springfield, Oregon (1997-98).

11 = the number of children who die in two days of family violence at the hands of parents/guardians (1994).

8 = the number of children who die from gunfire every day (1994). ■

The Violence Reporting Project: A New Approach to Covering Crime

In 1995, Jane Ellen Stevens, a science writer, embarked on a collaborative project with Dr. Lori Dorfman, Director of the Berkeley Media Studies Group, a public health research organization, and Dr. Esther Thorson, a statistician and Associate Dean at the University of Missouri School of Journalism in Columbia. This year they brought in Brant Houston, Director of the National Institute for Computer Assisted Reporting, from Missouri's School of Journalism.

Called the Violence Reporting Project, it is designed to educate journalists about the need to incorporate a public health perspective in their reporting about violence and to demonstrate effective ways for newspapers to do this.

With funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the California Wellness Foundation, Stevens wrote "Reporting on Violence: A Handbook for Journalists." The California Wellness Foundation then funded the development of one-day workshops for California newspapers that indicate interest in changing how they report violence.

To date, Stevens, Dorfman and Thorson and Houston have done workshops at five newspapers: The San Francisco Examiner, Sacramento Bee, San Jose Mercury News, Los Angeles Times and Philadelphia Inquirer. Stevens has also presented information about the project to television and newspaper journalists at a Knight Specialized Journalism Fellowship workshop on health care and at a Poynter Institute workshop on crime and public safety reporting.

What follows are two articles describing aspects of this project. In her article, Stevens describes specific steps newspapers can take to transform their coverage of violence. Dorfman and Thorson then explain the tools this project uses to measure the effect of such editorial changes. ■

Integrating the Public Health Perspective into Reporting on Violence

By Jane Ellen Stevens

In 1977 a group of physicians in the U.S. Public Health Service met to draw up a list of steps to prevent premature deaths in the United States—those that occur before age 65. To their surprise, among the top five at that time were violent injuries, homicide and suicide. More than two decades later, these are still among the top 10, and the highest rates of violent death and injury occur among children and adolescents.

Out of this meeting emerged a new medical and scientific specialty that studies violence as an epidemic. Specialists in this new discipline put violence in the same category and apply the same tools as those that are being used to reduce and control other epidemics, such as lung cancer and heart disease. They study the interaction among the victim, the agent of injury or death, and the environment; define risk factors, and develop methods to prevent injury or death.

Few would deny that violence in the United States is epidemic. In 1984, U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop declared that violence was as much a public health issue for today's physicians as smallpox was for the medical community in previous generations. Even with the recent decrease in homicide, the United States still ranks first among industrialized nations in its rate of violent deaths.

I began reporting on violence epidemiology in 1993. Among the stories I wrote was one that dispelled some myths of violence. When my editors expressed surprise at what the data showed—that most women who are murdered die at the hands of someone they know, that most male homicide victims are killed by strangers, that children are at greater risk of death

caused by abusive family members than from disease, that teenagers are at greater risk of crime than the elderly—an alarm went off in my mind. If news organizations were reporting crime on a regular basis, why were these facts a surprise to journalists?

I discovered that the answer lies in the way journalists report crime. We do so only from a law enforcement and criminal justice standpoint. With the emergence of violence epidemiology, it became clear to me that there is a third—and essential—part of the violence story that we are missing, not because the information isn't available, but because most reporters don't know it exists.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention initiated a program on violence prevention in 1983, and since then hundreds of states and city public health departments have established offices of violence prevention. For more than 15 years, epidemiologists have been identifying violence risk factors. Among those they now track regularly are the availability of firearms and alcohol, racial discrimination, unemployment, violence in the media, lack of education, abuse as a child, witnessing violent acts in the home or neighborhood, isolation of the nuclear family, and belief in male dominance over females.

But, so far, the journalism community has not taken full advantage of this knowledge.

Traditionally, news organizations report many fewer violent incidents than occur in their communities. The violent incidents are thus treated, and regarded by readers, as isolated, random events instead of predictable and preventable problems.

But few violent incidents are isolated or random. Each violent incident that occurs in a community has more of the characteristics of a deadly communicable disease than of an isolated event involving the individual participants. Furthermore, each incident reverberates through the families of perpetrator and victim with long-term economic consequences (loss of job, loss of home, loss of income, medical bills, attorney bills) and psychological consequences (sense of loss, fear, alienation, hopelessness, repeated violence). The incident also affects the community with economic consequences (cost of medical treatment, rehabilitation, incarceration, trial, welfare, reduction in property values, business flight) and long-term psychological consequences (feelings of fear for personal safety, mistrust of members of community).

From reading or viewing reports of violence and crime, the public is learning little about the public health approach to preventing violence. That is because, in reporting violence and crime, news organizations, generally speaking, do not regularly inform readers or viewers about the status of the different types of violence in their communities. Nor do they provide readers or viewers with information about the economic and psychological consequences of the different types of violence in their communities. Readers and viewers are rarely given enough information to put reported violent incidents into context to know what violence is "usual" and able to be prevented, and what is unusual and thus unlikely to be preventable. Information about the methods being developed by the public health community (or not being developed, as the case

may be) to prevent violence, is rarely reported. This means that readers and viewers don't find out about whether their local communities are implementing these preventive approaches and, if they are, whether these approaches are successful.

To report violence in a way that includes a public health or prevention approach poses three major challenges:

- How does a news organization regularly report the status of violence?
- How does a news organization add a public health perspective to daily reporting?
- How does a news organization link public health, law enforcement and criminal justice in its violence coverage?

Most news organizations' coverage of violence emphasizes unusual violent incidents, such as a kidnapping, rape and murder of a middle-aged woman by a stranger; violent incidents in which many people are killed by one person, such as the school murders in Oregon and Alabama; and more common violent incidents in which famous people are involved, such as the O.J. Simpson spousal murder case and the Pamela Lee spousal abuse case. The media give much less attention and space to common violent incidents, those that involve people who are not famous, or those in which only one person is killed or injured by an acquaintance or relative.

News organizations occasionally do excellent features or projects on violence issues, often as the result of a follow-up to a story to which much attention and space has been given. But months, sometimes years, go by without an investigative report or in-depth feature story about the status of a particular type of violence.

In March 1998, there were at least 67 murders, 175 rapes and 4,042 aggravated assaults in Los Angeles County (Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and Los Angeles Police Department reports only). During that same time, The Los Angeles Times reported on 24 murders, three rapes and 39 aggravated assaults. In San Francisco, over a three-month period in 1997,

there were 19 murders, 955 aggravated assaults and 55 rapes. The Examiner covered eight homicides, seven aggravated assaults, and none (0) of the rapes. Our analysis of newspapers' content compared with actual crime statistics found comparable disparities in Philadelphia, San Jose and Sacramento.

Most journalists respond to the presentation of such findings by saying: "That's what we do. We report the unusual." But that's only a part of what journalists do when we report on other topics. Newspapers regularly report in-depth the status of sports, business, political campaigns, weather and local entertainment. By not reporting on the status of violence, we are missing the most important story about the bulk of "ordinary" violent incidents that are actually doing the greatest harm to a community. And by not including a public health approach in our violence reporting, we don't offer readers and viewers enough of the kind of information they need to work toward preventing violent incidents that are causing them and their community the greatest harm.

Clearly no news organizations can cover each individual act of violence. However, a newspaper can report on violent incidents in a way that doesn't get rid of the traditional "good crime stories," often the unusual, but transforms "the usual" into "good stories" that give readers and viewers enough information to reduce violence in their communities.

These are some suggested changes in reporting violence that several newspapers are in the process of instituting. Most of these suggestions apply to large organizations simply because of staffing and expense. But the principle of linking crime coverage to its public health dimensions is a key one that can be integrated into stories regardless of the size of the news organization.

- Create a local violence database that lists violent incidents accumulated from a variety of sources, including law enforcement (police reports), criminal justice (coroner reports, restraining orders) and public health (hospital discharge data, emergency room data). Link this to a geographic

information system component so that reporters and editors can more easily identify crime trends. Include a story-mapping component in the database so that reporters and editors can see, at a glance, what stories have been published in which categories.

- Hire a violence reporter who is trained in computer-assisted reporting, has a science or medical reporting background, and is familiar with epidemiological methods.
- Establish a violence-prevention reporting team with an editor, violence reporter, police reporter and features reporter. Assign part-time to this team a medical/health reporter, science/technology reporter, education reporter, political reporter, business reporter and graphics editor.
- Organize the team around the violence-prevention reporter who monitors the local, state and national databases as well as public health research. This reporter presents the information to the team, which decides on how to develop stories based on the data. The police and court reporters continue to do their traditional coverage, augmented by what they can retrieve from the database with the help of the violence reporter.
- Eliminate short briefs. They offer no context or useful information.
- For every violent incident reported (high-profile or common), add information as text or a graphic to put each reported violent incident in the context of local violent incidents. Include relevant risk factors, such as the type of weapon, relationship of victim to perpetrator, whether alcohol or other drugs were involved, whether the perpetrator and victim have families. Include as much initial information about consequences as possible: What happens to the families? What is the cost of incarceration?
- For each violent incident reported, do follow-up stories to address the consequences of the violent inci-

dent that affect the immediate families and the community. Include stories and information drawn from public health resources, in addition to law enforcement and criminal justice sources. Add information about economic and psychological consequences of crime to family and community as well as information about public health research into particular violence issues. These stories would appear in the weekly violence newspaper section, or as a feature on television news.

- Newspapers can publish a weekly page that focuses on solutions to crime and violence. This weekly page would include:
 - 1.) A column about the week's most prominent violent incidents, placing them in perspective and explaining why they received the most attention. This can be written by the newspaper's ombudsman or violence reporter, and in it the writer can also explain how the community is working to prevent such crimes, if they are preventable, or why they are not. If the community is not working to reduce preventable crimes, find a community that has had success doing so.
 - 2.) A graphic status report on violent crime within the community and how this compares with the national goals set by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services or local goals set by the community.
 - 3.) A feature written by the violence, medical/health, science/technology, political, education or social services reporters that focuses on one aspect of a particular type of violence. The story would include solutions, attempted solutions, or the status of previously reported attempted solutions to prevent violence in the community.
- Design a local morbidity and mortality section for the news organization's Web site. Make the newspaper's local violence database available. Report deaths and injuries from all causes. Include obituaries. This becomes not only a vehicle

for reporting on violence, but the data reviewed and included in this section would also enable reporters to spot trends in other types of death, including diseases such as hepatitis, AIDS, cancer, stroke, etc., and to do stories if the changes are statistically significant.

- Publish an annual report on "health of the community" to compare rates of violence in the community with national goals to reduce rates of violence in "Healthy People 2000," published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

With an expanded approach to reporting violence, a news organization provides readers and viewers with more information on the context and consequences of crime. It covers violence from an investigative standpoint, strengthening its role as a community watchdog. It reports violent incidents, but does not wait for them to occur to report to readers on that particular type of violence. In this way, readers and viewers obtain knowledge of the ongoing status of violence in their communities, the toll taken on families and the community, and the success or failure of measures taken to prevent it. Through its Web site's morbidity and mortality section, a news organization can serve as a community's repository of information about statistics that are vital for them to know as well as the interpreter of changes in those statistics. Readers will be able to access enough information to know when it is appropriate to take personal action and when and how they can influence their communities and governing bodies to prevent violence. ■

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Rewriting a Story of Juvenile Crime

On the following page is an example of an article that has been rewritten to incorporate some of the guidance offered by The Violence Reporting Project. The original article appeared in a major metropolitan daily newspaper. It has now been rewritten to put coverage of this juvenile crime into a broader perspective. The highlighted sections show where additional information was placed. These sections help the reader to identify risk factors and consequences that often are not normally a part of daily coverage.

As the authors of the "Reporting on Violence" report acknowledge, "There is no right way to do this." However, this revised story exemplifies one way of incorporating the public health context.

The "Reporting on Violence" handbook suggests accompanying sidebars and follow-up stories. For example, gang violence trends: how the change in the choice of weapons—the increased availability of firearms—has increased the rate of homicide; and how former gang members are joining together to prevent guns from getting into the hands of gang members.

Also offered are possible graphs to illustrate key points: U.S. victimization by age group, race, sex per 1,000; victim/offender relationship in solved homicides. (All the information for these graphs is contained in the handbook, which is available through the Berkeley Media Studies Group.) ■

Tearful Teen Gets 15 Years to Life for 1993 Slaying

John Henry Vasquez was 16 when he killed another teenager at a party over a momentary insult. At his sentencing Wednesday in Sacramento Superior Court, Vasquez pleaded for the family of the victim to forgive him. They were unforgiving.

"I made a mistake. There are no excuses," said a tearful Vasquez, who was given a 15-years-to-life sentence for the second-degree murder of Robert Maisonet, 19.

Maisonet was shot dead in an apartment living room in the early morning of July 24, 1993. Vasquez is 2 1/2 years older now, but appearing in court with his round face and brass-rimmed glasses, he still looked like a boy. A boy dressed in jail-issued sweats.

Maisonet's death is typical of a growing trend in California and across the nation. One of the record-breaking 97 homicides that occurred in Sacramento County in 1993, this one featured a victim and a killer who knew each other. That's the case in 78.3 percent of all homicides nationally.

Their ages are also typical in California, where juvenile homicide rates have exceeded adult rates since 1989 and where almost 20 percent of alleged killers are 11 to 17 years old. Nationally, death by homicide ranks as the second leading killer among juveniles, right behind motor vehicle accidents.

"I know you said I will burn in hell. Please forgive me. That's all I want is for you to forgive me," Vasquez said in a quivering voice to the Maisonet family.

Though Maisonet's girlfriend, Veronica Bursiga, and her sister,

Ana Rodriguez, sat only 20 feet away, neither Vasquez's words nor his tears touched the angry young women.

"You had no right to take the life of the father of my kids," Bursiga said. "I am grateful the jury came back the way they did, but the ultimate price which you will pay will be something between you and God," she shouted.

While Rodriguez was speaking, Vasquez turned away to avoid her glare. "Why did you take my brother?" Rodriguez yelled at Vasquez. "You still have your life. You can still see your family. All we can see is a headstone."

According to testimony in August, Vasquez and two companions went to a party on 24th Avenue. At the door they were rebuked by party participants, including members of a rival street gang.

Vasquez and a friend returned to the party 15 minutes later, and as his friend pushed open the door, Vasquez pulled out a gun and fired multiple shots. Two bullets struck Maisonet, one piercing his aorta.

Three of every four homicides in California involve guns, 88 percent of which are handguns. Gang activity, for which Vasquez received a special sentence enhancement of at least 15 years in prison, also featured prominently in this case, as it does in one of every four homicides in California, according to the Legislative Analyst's Office. Nationwide, the figure is about six percent, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. Defense Attorney James Carroll asked the judge to run the gang penalty concurrently so that Vasquez could be

considered for release in about seven years.

Vasquez' companion at the time of the shooting, "who was equally if not more culpable," is now walking the streets as a result of his plea bargain in the case, Carroll said.

While in custody over the past 960 days, Vasquez continued his high school studies and now has a high school diploma, the defense attorney added.

Deputy District Attorney Natalie Luna said the jury convicted Vasquez as the gunman, no one else.

"He wants absolution. He wants people to forgive him and make things OK. He has no remorse," Luna said as Vasquez' family and friends sat in the audience.

Judge Jack Sapunor said he agreed with a study done in the case from the California Youth Authority that found Vasquez unsuitable for the treatment and rehabilitation of a youth correction facility.

"This offense occurred for no reason at all. In this gang lifestyle, this brief moment of humiliation became a catalyst for violence. This gang lifestyle leads to nowhere except prison, and Mr. Vasquez, that is where you are bound," Sapunor said.

It will cost taxpayers \$20,000 to \$22,000 a year to keep Vasquez in prison in California, where juvenile incarceration is expected to increase more than 29 percent in the next decade. Risk factors identified with juvenile crime include failure in school, family problems, substance abuse, conduct problems, gang membership and gun possession. ■

Measuring the Effects of Changing the Way Violence Is Reported

By Lori Dorfman and Esther Thorson

Reporting on crime and violence has been a staple in the newspaper diet since before the penny press. In that time, one by-product of this coverage has remained consistent: readers have been presented with a distorted picture of the world. For example, today nearly seven in ten Americans tell pollsters that violent crime in the United States is on the rise; only a quarter say that the United States is making progress in battling crime. Yet violent crime has been decreasing steadily over the past three years. Although some people might get information about violence from personal experience as victims or witnesses, most do not experience crime and violence personally. Instead, much of their information or perceptions about crime come from the news. And recent research confirms that people react to reading and hearing news about crime and violence by fearing their world and remaining ambivalent about the best course of preventive action.

Testing a Newspaper's Effects on Readers: The Old-Fashioned Way

A survey of American newspaper editors found that 95 percent of the responding papers have conducted readership research to "guide editorial decision-making." But such research usually is focused on what readers like and read the most. Rarely does it investigate what readers believe or know as a function of the news they are reading.

How news affects people has been studied, but this information is seldom utilized by those whose job it is to report and edit the news. Unfortunately, too, this research seldom identifies specific stories or news outlets.

Instead it tends to focus on the relationship between general knowledge, such as people's ability to name political candidates, and their daily use of a newspaper. But if we fail to study directly the ways in which newspaper readers understand and integrate specific reporting into their own lives, how can reporters and editors know how best to gather and present information or be able to better assess its impact?

Surveys can be used to help newspapers understand the ways in which the presentation of news influences readers' perceptions of the world in which they live and whether it empowers them or creates inappropriate fear, helplessness and cynicism. By using different tools of discovery, newspapers can find out what their readers do know about particular topics, where their knowledge is lacking, and how their knowledge compares to others who rely more heavily on other news sources.

Having this kind of information at hand can help editors and reporters with decisions about coverage that they must make every day. Such an analysis can identify possible areas for in-depth reporting. For example, it could show that sensationalistic crime stories have a much greater impact on fear and helplessness than such crimes would warrant. It might show that the misrepresentation of crime patterns in news is reflected in erroneous reader beliefs about where or to whom crime happens. Or it might show that the dearth of solution stories is associated with the common belief that in America a high crime rate is inevitable.

Testing a Newspaper's Effects on Readers: A New Approach

Content analysis of the papers themselves, as well as appropriate readership studies, are necessary to understand how readers interpret crime and violence news. For this reason The Violence Reporting Project uses both. In our readership studies we compare heavy-, light- and non-newspaper readers. After a newspaper changes its reporting of violence, we can go back to measure the effects. We'd expect to find the most significant changes to have occurred among heavy readers. We also filter out effects of alternative sources of news, especially television. Another important control in our research involves asking about crime and violence information that is known not to have been present in their newspaper. Clearly, this knowledge should be less likely to show change than that which the newspaper reported.

In our content analysis, we catalog and examine the kinds of articles that a newspaper publishes as well as what it omits in its coverage of crime and violence. We are also interested in more complex features of individual stories as well as any patterns we locate across stories. Does the reporting illuminate possible precipitating reasons for the violence or was it apparently random? Were violations of social norms, such as desecration of the dead, involved and, if so, how sensationalized is the reporting of them? How much crime reporting is there relative to other news? Is a particular area of the city or the whole urban region regarded as criminal in an exaggerated and repetitious way? How often are crime patterns rather than single incidents the focus

of coverage? How often are possible solutions reported in comparison to the individual occurrences of crime? Are these community-wide prevention policies discussed as well as precautions individuals can take? Is there information about the consequences of the crime?

Our next step is to compare actual crime and violence statistics with the pattern in which these crimes are being reported. Recent analyses reveal over-reporting of homicide and underreporting of assaults, domestic violence, burglaries and robberies. For example, an extensive recent analysis of The Los Angeles Times by researchers at UCLA found that certain crimes were more likely to be reported than their relative occurrence would suggest. These crimes involve homicides of women, children and the elderly, as well as cases with multiple victims, with suspects who were strangers to the victims, and those that occur in wealthier neighborhoods. Homicides of African-Americans, Hispanics, the less educated, and those involving a weapon other than a firearm received less coverage than their relative frequency would lead us to expect.

In our work with newspapers we do two readership surveys, one before any changes in coverage are made and one after so we can measure their effect. Does covering crime and violence differently result in readers acquiring new beliefs, attitudes and knowledge about these issues, including deeper understanding of risk factors for violence and possible methods of prevention? This is the kind of information we try to elicit by how we question readers.

The Center for Advanced Social Research, a research unit in the School of Journalism at the University of Missouri, conducts these surveys. Questions we ask probe in some depth what people know and believe about the occurrence of crime and violence, particularly in their own city. We try to learn what readers know about causal influences on violence patterns, what the impact of violence is in their city, and what solutions have been conceptualized or tried. These surveys also measure how fearful people are and

what they've done to keep themselves safe. Both before and after we do the initial survey, we discuss with editors and reporters what will be asked and how to interpret results. Readers' responses are evaluated within the context of the attention the newspaper has paid to coverage of various crimes and violence. In the analysis we factor out exposure to other media news and violence-based entertainment.

The second readership survey is conducted about two to four months after a newspaper initiates its editorial changes. This survey will give us indications of whether these changes are achieving the newspaper's desired results. Our project is so new that we have not yet completed this cycle of surveying with any particular newspaper, but when we do, what we learn about the effects of violence reporting will be shared with any interested newspaper or researcher. [Dorfman's E-mail address is dorfman@bmsg.org]

The workshops we've done with newspapers, and conversations we've had with editors and reporters since then, have produced some exciting ideas for improving coverage of violence. However, while we think the ideas make sense, because this experiment is a first of its kind, we don't yet have empirical evidence that these ideas, once they are put into practice, will help readers arrive at a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of these topics. But as we gather evidence of their effectiveness, this research can become an enormously valuable tool in explaining to other newspaper editors the value of rethinking their coverage of violence. ■

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Youth and Race on Local TV News

By Katie Woodruff

Picture these scenes from two local TV news stories:

- A young pilot accepts the cheers of well-wishers as she completes a solo cross-country flight, becoming the youngest person ever to do this.
- A distraught young woman describes how a sniper picked off children at play in the courtyard of her apartment building.

If your mind conjured up a white face for the first speaker and a darker face for the second, chances are good that you are a regular viewer of TV news, and that you are experiencing what some call "media bias," something that is particularly evident in the portrayal of violence among young people and in communities of color. Yet journalists, when confronted with this charge, ardently protest that they are merely reporting what happened, not creating a misrepresentation of the news.

To try to better understand this dynamic, we, at the Berkeley Media Studies Group, set out to document how youth and violence are portrayed on local television newscasts. We analyzed 214 hours of local news coverage on 26 stations throughout California. Since public perceptions of young people and violence are often influenced by how the news media portrays these stories, our findings point to some disturbing implications that arise out of the way in which journalists cover this story.

- Violence dominates local television news coverage. The overwhelming number of stories (77 percent) did not concern youth or violence. However, more news stories were devoted to violent crime than any other

single topic.

- Violence appears to be particularly newsworthy when it involves children or youth. More than two-thirds (68 percent) of violence stories involved youth.
- The reverse is true as well: When youth appeared on the news, it was most often as the victim or perpetrator of violence. Fifty-three percent of all youth stories involved violence.
- Youth are rarely portrayed in positive circumstances. A youth had to perform an extraordinary feat—fly solo across the country or win a national beauty contest—in order to appear on local television news in positive circumstances. Overall, only six percent of all stories about youth featured youth accomplishments.

When Youth Speak On the News

We now knew what the pictures showed. What we wanted to learn more about was whether young people spoke in these stories and, if they did, to examine what they said. This interested us because of our belief that the video shots in which youngsters spoke were likely to be the images that left the most lasting impression on viewers.

We soon discovered that the speaking roles provided to youth of color and those offered to white youth differed. To start with, more white youth were given opportunities to speak in local news stories. However, in every violence-related role where youth did speak—either as a victim, a witness of violence, a criminal or suspect—youth of color were heard in these roles in higher proportions than their white counterparts. By contrast, a higher percentage of white youth spoke in the role of victim of unintentional injury, where their status is likely to engender sympathy. The most common role for youth of any race was as “person on the street,” interviewed for their perspectives or comments on an issue or event. However, a review of such stories in which youth spoke in this capacity once again showed some key differences by

race. While youth of all races were interviewed for stories about street fairs and Halloween events, white youth appeared more often as “person on the street” in stories about children’s emotional response to the wildfires, fitness, video games and a protest over the filming of “Beverly Hills 90210” on Hermosa Beach.

By contrast, when youth of color were interviewed as “person on the street,” it was more often as neighbors of crime victims and in stories on cruising and crime threatening local businesses, drug dealing and gang initiations. Even when they were not portrayed as direct participants in these social problems, youth of color were still affiliated in the public’s mind with such circumstances in news coverage.

Similarly, the youth “achievers” also displayed the color gap. White achievers in our sample included the young pilot, college students who built a solar car, young magicians and musicians auditioning for a show, a college swimmer making her comeback after severe injury, and a blind track star. Achievers of color were the 18-year-old Miss America, high school football players, an undocumented immigrant who was valedictorian of his class, former gang members trying to turn their lives around, and inner-city kids who won a chance to play golf with the pros for a day. However, even when youth of color were shown in such positive circumstances, the tendency was still to depict their lives within the confines of stereotypical story lines.

Why These Findings Matter

Despite the fact that most young people are not violent, local television news draws a direct link between youth and violence, and this likely contributes to cementing negative views in the minds of viewers. The coverage we observed in California suggests that stories about productive, nonviolent youth are the exception rather than the rule. Since journalists tend to report on what is unusual rather than what is expected, this finding isn’t surprising. What is more worrisome is that the public face of youth of color is being

distorted by an association with violence that does not reflect reality. And there is evidence that what people see on television affects their impressions of other races, especially when direct contact with people of that race are lacking. Our analysis shows that youth of color are being relegated to a news formula that could result in public derision of them as a group.

Our findings also revealed a paradox: The perspectives of those who are concerned about the presence of “media bias” and journalists trying accurately to report the daily news may both have merit. We found no single news story that stood out as an example of what could be labeled “racist” coverage; reason for concern emerges only in the cumulative patterns that can be seen when one looks at a collection of news stories over time.

The consistent patterns we uncovered do have the power to negatively and inaccurately shape public perception. By doing this kind of analysis we can now offer this knowledge to journalists in their decision-making and give them the opportunity to use this awareness in a proactive way to improve the fairness of their coverage.

If lessons from this study can be applied to daily coverage, then journalists can use their reporting skills to depict the full range of young people’s experience. Yes, sadly, violence plays a role in too many of their lives, and it must be covered. And, yes, violence does take a disproportionate toll on those who are poor and are of color, and when violence occurs it will be covered. But awareness, too, of the impact that journalists’ coverage has on public perception—both in the selection of images they use and the voices they invite into the conversation—will go a long way toward improving coverage of children’s lives. ■

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The Superpredator Script

By Franklin D. Gilliam Jr. and Shanto Iyengar

There is little doubt that television coverage contributes to the public hysteria about youth crime. In particular, local television news plays a primary role in shaping what the public believes it knows about juveniles and the justice system. There are several reasons why TV stories about specific crimes—especially involving young suspects—are so ubiquitous. They are cheap to produce, often come camera-ready with gripping images, and are easy to report because they fit easily into a journalistic formula that has at its core human drama.

The increasing visibility of juveniles set in the context of crime lends credence to some people's view that today's youth are a new breed of "superpredators"—violent, remorseless and impulsive pre-adults responsible for widespread mayhem. Of course, the clear but unspoken subtext of the superpredator thesis is that a disproportionate number of criminal youth are from racial minority groups. To be sure, minority youth offenders are arrested for violent crimes at rates exceeding their population sizes. But those who analyze the role of TV news—as we do—find that the overwhelming focus on violent crime adds to this distortion because the dominant message is consistent with the widely held public perception that young people of color commit violent crime.

Recently we set out to examine in a novel way the connections between what people see in local newscasts and what they think about juvenile crime. We designed an experiment to assess the impact of the "superpredator news frame" in which the only difference between what groups of viewers saw in a news story involved the race of the



The funeral of a Boston youth. *Photo by Stan Grossfeld.*

alleged youth perpetrator.

Those who were part of this experiment were presented with a 15-minute videotaped local newscast, including commercials. It was described to them as having been selected at random from news programs broadcast that week. The report on crime was inserted into the middle of the newscast, following the first commercial break. The participants—who were found while shopping in a mall in Los Angeles—were assigned at random to one of the following groups:

- Some participants watched a news story—with a "superpredator script"—in which the close-up photo of the alleged murderer showed a young African-American or Hispanic male.
- Other participants watched the same newscast and story, except that the

race of the murder suspect was white or Asian.

- A third set of viewers watched the same newscast, but this time the story did not contain any information concerning the racial identity of the accused.
- Finally, a control group did not see a crime story in the newscast.

Prior to watching the various newscasts, each participant filled out a short questionnaire. Information about their social and economic backgrounds, political beliefs, level of interest and involvement in political affairs and customary media habits was gathered. After they viewed the newscasts, a lengthier questionnaire was given, probing in more detail their social and political views. Only then was the method and purpose of the experi-



Nathaniel Abraham, 12, is being charged as an adult in a homicide case. He looks around as Sheriff's deputies move in to re-cuff him during a break in his hearing to determine if the trial charging him as an adult will proceed. *Photo by Pauline Lubens/The Detroit Free Press.*

ment explained to them.

Here's what we discovered. A mere five-second exposure to a mug shot of African-American and Hispanic youth offenders (in a 15-minute newscast) raises levels of fear among viewers, increases their support for "get-tough" crime policies, and promotes racial stereotyping. However, we also found that these effects vary a great deal by the race of the viewer.

Exposure to the "superpredator news frame" increases fear of crime—measured as concern for random street violence and expectations about victimization—among all viewers.

The increase for white and Asian viewers is about 10 percent. The effect is more pronounced among African-Americans and Hispanics, with a 38 percent rise.

This, by itself, is not a surprising finding. After all, these two groups are most likely to be victimized and violent crime typically involves people from the same racial and ethnic backgrounds. The more pertinent question is how these fears translate into opinions about crime. We measured this by asking an open-ended question about "solutions

to the crime problem" on our follow-up survey. Here is what we found.

Exposure to the "superpredator news frame" increases a desire for harsher punitive action among whites and Asians by about 11 percent.

Exposure to the "superpredator news frame" decreases support for this type of solution by 25 percent among African-Americans and Hispanics.

It is interesting that while the "superpredator script" heightens fear among all viewers, this anxiety translates into a demand for harsher and swifter punishment only among whites and Asians. Among African-Americans and Hispanics, these stories remind them of injustice and prejudice.

This finding appears consistent with the historic opposition minority groups have shown toward punitive policies such as the death penalty. Media depictions of "superpredators" remind minority viewers of this fact, while similar news images and stories strengthen the belief among whites and Asians that crime remedies for young offenders need to be harsher, in part as a result of what they've seen.

A similar pattern holds for how these

stories affect racial stereotyping. Exposure to the image of a minority "superpredator" increases the percentage of whites and Asians who subscribe to negative stereotypes about African-Americans and Hispanics. However, among viewers from these minority groups, the tendency to attribute negative characteristics decreases by 20 percent after viewing these stories.

The "superpredator frame," therefore, widens the racial divide among members of the viewing public. From our perspective as media analysts, we believe this study suggests why and how the practice of journalism—especially when it comes to reporting youth crime on television—should be revised. Without commenting on intent, it is enough to say that "body-bag" journalism, particularly as it focuses on young people, has a corrosive influence. There are more constructive ways of reporting these stories. Organizations such as The Berkeley Media Studies Group and television stations like KVUE in Austin, Texas have developed alternative approaches that work well in reporting the story of youth crime *and* reduce the racially polarizing effect that otherwise emerges.

Right now, in the minds of the viewing public, youth crime is as much about race as it is about crime. Many experts believe that efforts to curb youth violence must ultimately deal with the vexing social problems facing young people of color. If this is so, reporters ought to look at developing stories about the nature of these problems and effects they have on community safety. Unless these broader contexts are examined, and the "superpredator script" is revised, then the behavior of the troubled "eight percent" of youth will define an entire nation's understanding of these issues. ■

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Riding the Crime Wave: Why Words We Use Matter So Much

By Jerome Miller

Garrison Keillor had it right. “Every murder,” he said, “turns into 50 episodes. It’s as bloody as Shakespeare but without the intelligence and the poetry. If you watch television news you know less about the world than if you drank gin from a bottle.” Unfortunately, Keillor’s comment increasingly characterizes much of the reporting—both print and electronic—that we find today in the media’s coverage of violence and juvenile crime.

Admittedly, it comes out of a well-established tradition. From Plato to William Golding, the young seem always to be vested with a potential for dissolution and violence. But what accounts for this consistent, historic pattern? Clearly, it is not juvenile crime.

A quarter century ago, the great American sociologist Herbert Blumer noted that the way we define “social problems” has less to do with their seriousness or frequency than with the role political figures and powerful organizations play in fomenting concern about them, while ignoring other issues. Blumer held that it’s therefore as important to plumb the process of how something gets to be viewed as a problem as it is to study the “problem.”

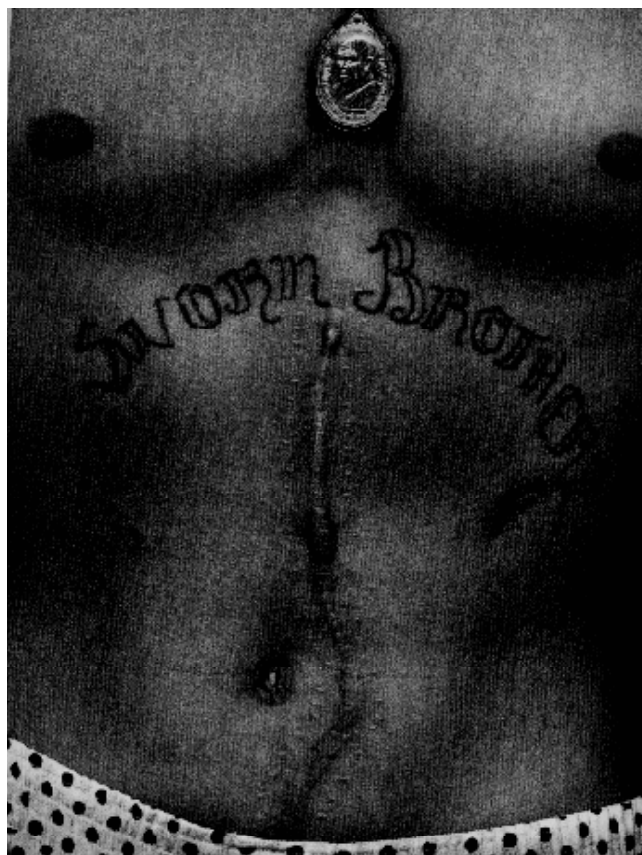
In a rare early application of this idea, Brooklyn College sociologist Mark Fishman described how the New York City media (the three largest daily newspapers and the five major local television stations), created the perception that there was a “crime wave” of juvenile attacks on the elderly in the early 1970’s. At the time, no objective evidence backed up the premise of this reporting.

Fishman discovered that journalists and reporters had set “a crime wave dynamic” in motion as they noticed

one another reporting on the same theme of “crimes against the elderly.” Those news organizations that began “wave” reporting found support as other news outlets joined in thereby confirming the judgment that “this thing really is a type of crime happening now.” Indeed, isolated incidents fed the crime wave theme as the press followed a juvenile from arrest, to interrogation, arraignment, trial, sentencing, and finally incarceration. This was paired with periodic interviews of victims, “potential” victims, and interested others. Usually this meant people involved in law enforcement.

Each variation on the theme justified another. Soon the average viewer had the impression that there was a growing “juvenile crime wave.” In the wake of this reporting, bills were introduced into the New York state legislature mandating long prison sentences for youthful offenders and making juvenile records available.

Now, with the proliferation of the Internet, the blurring of entertainment and news, and the availability of Nexis



Kitt Philaphandeth, 19, of Lowell, Massachusetts, a member of the Sworn Brotherz gang: “If I was never in it, I’d be the coolest kid...if I leave, I’d get jumped out.” *Stan Grossfeld, from “Lost Futures: Our Forgotten Children,” Aperture.*

(giving journalists the ability to create national “waves” of juvenile crime with the entry of a search word), the potential for “ride the wave reporting” has increased exponentially. And this time around, as it is happening, the process has resulted in the introduction of some of the most misguided juvenile crime legislation in recent memory.

How has the media covered violent juvenile crime recently? The latest

“theme” was prompted by Northeastern University criminologist James Fox in 1995. Noting a rise in arrests of juveniles for violent crimes in the late 1980’s, Fox combined this observation with the expectation of a substantial growth in the teenaged population during the next 15 years. Unless things changed, so the thesis went, an influx of violent and predatory youth would

number that many in the media were looking for. As University of California criminologist Franklin Zimring commented at the time, DiIulio didn’t address the implication of six percent of all juveniles being superpredators, nor did he help to unravel the mystery of what it meant to already have almost two million of them among us. This, after all, is twice as many kids as are

than adult criminals.” The writers of the article went on to describe an Ohio case involving two boys, ages six and 10, who had killed a two-1/2-year-old girl as further evidence of this new breed of kid killer. As is usually the case, the politicians weren’t far behind.

By June, The New York Times was reporting that Republicans in Congress were moving “to overturn what has been a fundamental principle of the American juvenile justice system for more than 150 years: the strict separation of jailed young offenders from hardened adult criminals.” In his campaign for President, Bob Dole borrowed both DiIulio’s dire predictions and his language—“superpredators”—for use in a national radio address on crime and juvenile justice.

Representative Bill McCollum (R-Florida), Chairman of the House subcommittee, introduced “The Violent Youth Predator Act of 1996.” In a background statement entitled “The Coming Storm of Violent Juvenile Crime,” McCollum described the youth predator as a juvenile who is likely to come from a fatherless home and reflect a “sharp turn for the worse in drug use.” “Brace yourself,” warned McCollum in his statement, “for the coming generation of ‘superpredators.’”

One might think that in stemming an onslaught of the teenaged superpredators in 2010, we might see legislation directed at diverting these who were then two- and three-year-old toddlers from a life of violent crime. No such luck! Indeed, legislative proposals focused instead on fingerprinting juveniles, photographing them, housing them in adult jails, meting out mandatory sentences, “escalating sanc-

“By March of 1996, the theme of the feral juvenile was in full gear.... As is usually the case, the politicians weren’t far behind.”

plague the country shortly after the turn of the century. Accompanying his demographic scenario, Fox recommended a set of shifts in national policy to stem the approaching catastrophe, such things as early childhood intervention, better education, alternative programs and employment assistance.

Although Fox’s premise was shaky at best (arrests of juveniles for violent crime began falling shortly after his dire predictions), the suggestion that the nation would shortly be inundated with a new breed of predatory teenager touched a “hot” button in the press. For a while, Fox became something of a fixture on news programs and talk shows and an oft-quoted expert in major newspapers such as The New York Times and USA Today.

Unfortunately, Fox’s thesis was irresistible, too, to policymakers. Barely had the words “three strikes and you’re out!” been applied to the field of criminal justice and put into the media’s feeding chain when a new, powerful sound bite, one which seemed capable of quintessentially defining this new social plague, emerged—the juvenile “superpredator!”

Conservative writer John DiIulio parsed Fox’s thesis by predicting that 270,000 additional “superpredators” would pour into the streets by 2010. He based this conclusion on the premise that six percent of all juveniles would become “superpredators.” With the under-18 population burgeoning from 32 million to 36.5 million by 2010, DiIulio came up with just the

referred annually to all the juvenile courts in the country.

Using DiIulio’s formula, Zimring calculated that even in 2010, among the 270,000 “newly arrived” superpredators, more would be under age six than over the age of 13. “If politicians and analysts can believe in ‘superpredator’ toddlers,” said Zimring, “they can believe in anything.” And indeed, they could, and members of the press were first among the true believers.

“Superpredators Arrive” trumpeted Newsweek in January of 1996, along with the question, “Should we cage the new breed of vicious kids?” Newsweek noted that fear of this new child psychopath had begun to spawn harsh legislative proposals. They cited Arizona’s then law-and-order-governor Fife Symington’s (now in federal prison himself) drive to abolish the juvenile court. “It’s ‘Lord of the Flies’ on a massive scale,” added Cook County State’s Attorney Jack O’Malley.

By March of 1996, the theme of the feral juvenile was in full gear. In a cover

“It’s as though our society had bred a new genetic strain,” he wrote, “the child murderer who feels no remorse.”

article headlined “Teenage Time Bombs,” U.S. News & World Report wrote: “Victims of underage felons [are] challenging the long-standing belief that youngsters who kill, rob and rape should be treated in a different way

tions,” and imposing sanctions on states that shy from prosecuting 13-year-olds in adult courts. Things weren’t much better on the Senate side. Senators Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), powerful Chair of the Judiciary Committee, and Jeff

Sessions (R-Alabama) introduced legislation that would jail runaways with adult prisoners and expel kids from school up to six months for smoking cigarettes.

States also took up the gauntlet with vigor. For example, in Texas, legislation was introduced to make 12-year-olds eligible for the death penalty—although they wouldn't actually be executed until their 17th birthday. Each of these bills all but ignored preventive and treatment programs.

As this term "superpredator" was taking on added political significance, it also assumed not very subtle racial implications—incorporating elements of what Lani Guinier once termed the "rhetorical wink"—whereby code phrases communicate a well-understood but implicit meaning while al-

“More children under the age of 13 were arrested for murder in 1965 (25) than in 1996 (16).”

lowing the speaker to deny any such meaning. The word "superpredators" carried minimal political risk when used in the context of getting "tough" on juvenile crime. Again, this wasn't particularly new.

In a 1975 cover story on violent juveniles in *The New York Times* magazine, after describing in gruesome detail the torture and rape of two 10-year-old white youngsters by two African-American youths ages 14 and 15, the author summed up the thesis for that decade. "It's as though our society had bred a new genetic strain," he wrote, "the child murderer who feels no remorse." Though no one explicitly said so, everyone knew to whom the writer referred and in whom this "genetic strain" resided. Conjuring up the specter of a growing breed of feral inner-city children, this article foreshadowed much of the contemporary reporting on violent juveniles, arriving as it so often does with a word that comes packaged with a "wink."

Probably as much due to the preoc-

cupation in Washington with Monica Lewinsky as anything else, the Senate and House subcommittees never quite got around to reconciling their superpredator crime bills before it was time to adjourn. Senator Hatch blamed liberals in Congress for "failing to protect the public...and [walking] away from negotiations" at the last moment. He vowed to make this juvenile crime bill a top priority in the 106th Congress.

Hatch's promise is a warning that we can expect another round of putative "waves" of violent juvenile crime in the near future. If the process drags on, it's possible that the "superpredator" panic will be replaced by another theme as some juvenile somewhere does something that gives rise to another new characterization. Given the current political milieu, it is as likely to arise out of political opportunity as out of any new reality.

Consider the FBI statistics on violent juvenile crime. Arrests of juveniles for "violent crimes" (which measure "crime rates") seldom reveal the actual behavior. No one is touched in 80 percent of these "violent" crimes. The violent crime can be a threat or perceived threat. Of the 239,700 violent crimes processed by the nation's juvenile courts between 1985 and 1990, fully 84 percent (202,300) were dismissed, handled informally or "non-adjudicated" as relatively insignificant.

Only slightly more than 900 of the 20,000-plus murders recorded annually in the United States are eventually proven to have been committed by juveniles. Most involve altercations between friends and relatives. One in ten involves a teenager killing a parent or parents—and when that does happen it is usually within the context of an abusive relationship. Each year, fewer than 300 juveniles are convicted of killing a stranger.

Even the apparent rash of tragic school shootings this past year did not foreshadow a new "wave" of such events. School shootings have been on the decline—55 such deaths in the 1992-93 school year vs. 40 during the 1997-98 school year. Moreover, a significant number of "school shootings"

involve domestic or personal squabbles among teachers, husbands, maintenance workers and others while on school grounds.

And what about the very young "predators"—those 7-, 10- and 12-year-olds, who are said to be rising Omen-like among us? Unfortunately, homicides by very young children are nothing new. In reviewing 975 homicides that happened 30 years ago in and around that city, Cleveland's deputy coroner found that five—some of which were unusually brutal—were committed by children age eight or younger. Nationally, the number of children under age 13 arrested for homicide has not changed appreciably for 32 years. More children under age 13 were arrested for murder in 1965 (25) than in 1996 (16).

Where does all this leave reporting on juvenile crime and violence? On some days, I prefer to believe that by understanding more about the traps the media can fall into in covering this topic, the mistakes of the past won't plague future reporting. But then, I intersect with someone in the media again, and my hope that knowledge might transform the process quickly fades. On various occasions during the hype over "superpredators," I've been interviewed by news personalities as diverse as Diane Sawyer and Bill Moyers. May I say that I'd consider it progress if they'd been able to wipe the look of disappointment from their faces when I declined to join the pack in pursuit of superpredators. By God, they might even air my interviews someday! Not likely. I'd best drink gin from a bottle. ■

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Parents' Warning: Remember the Children.

By Nigel Wade

One of the first books I read when I was getting to know Chicago was Alex Kotlowitz's "There Are No Children Here," a vivid portrayal of the desperate lives of children growing up amid the violence of the city's West Side housing projects. Indeed, the murder of children is all too common for us to report. Twenty-three children under the age of 10 were murdered in Chicago in 1997 as were 223 youngsters between the ages of 11 and 20—246 young victims out of a total of 759 murders in Chicago that year.

The most shocking of these crimes keep violence against children in the headlines. However, gang shootings are now so frequent that many are routinely played in news briefs. Far from demanding more thorough reporting of every such incident, readers tell us they feel surfeited with gory crime stories. Many say they prefer in-depth reporting about the root causes of crime to continuous police-blotter coverage.

We are also aware that many suburban readers regard crime as one of the inner city problems they are glad to have left behind. Yet it is in the suburbs also that we now find stories about children touched by violence, drugs and gangs. We've carried numerous reports of gang activity spreading

"Readers [tell] us they are sometimes afraid of the newspaper coming into their homes."

to the suburbs. Violence and crime, in short, are everywhere.

When an Oregon schoolboy opened fire in his school cafeteria in May, news of it reached the Midwest about noon and was all over radio and television that night. The Oregon incident was the fifth in a nationwide sequence of schoolyard murders. I decided that *The Sun-Times* would carry the Oregon story fully the next morning but not on the front page as we had previous shootings. We put this story on pages two and three with a note to readers on page one. We explained that we did not want to risk copycat action by some troubled teenager or frighten younger children.

I went home worrying that readers would complain about not finding the story on the front page. Exactly the opposite happened. In weeks following that decision we received hundreds of approving phone calls and E-mails. These messages left me with no doubt that many parents and teachers believe—as I do—that children are influenced by what they read and see of violence in the news media. Repeatedly parents made clear that they often felt afraid to

let their children see the newspaper or the television news. Many used the word "relief" to describe their reaction to how we treated the Oregon story. A librarian at Wellesley College commended our decision while describing her reaction to how her hometown paper handled the same story: "I read *The Boston Globe* and was so troubled by the photo of the bloody boy on the front page I threw the section in the trash before my two sons, aged nine and 11, could see it...[such photos] are not a necessary part of that coverage. I hope other newspapers...will reconsider the effect their presentation of the news has on their communities."

In doing this *The Sun-Times* was neither "taking a stand," nor telling others how to cover news, nor intent on becoming a "good news" newspaper. Had a similar incident happened near Chicago, we explained in the front-page note, we'd have felt compelled to give that story page one treatment. But I'd weigh carefully the possible impact on children before approving the headline and deciding whether we'd use photos on the front page.

Reader reaction to our decision in the Oregon case warrants reflection. If readers are telling us that they are sometimes afraid of the newspaper coming into their homes, what does that imply for our future sales? I believe we should be looking for ways to present the news in full while, through judicious placement and sensitive signposts, giving parents a chance to protect their children from such reports. Unless we can do this, parents may view newspapers as threatening their family values, and newspapers may have difficulty in retaining readers who don't want their children exposed to our "news values."

This will call for judgment and innovation, a keen sense of proportion and a readiness to recognize that acceptability in the home can be as much a spur to future sales as today's dramatic headlines on page one. If this means playing certain stories where children are less likely to see them, we may be surprised by how positively readers respond. The editorial judgment this will require shouldn't be confused with outright censorship.

In these times, when the boundaries of what is deemed "fit to print" are being pushed to new limits, editors must apply their judgment more carefully and explore new ways of reporting the details of modern events in full, while keeping the newspaper family-friendly. ■

Nigel Wade is Editor in Chief of The Chicago Sun Times and is a 1983 Nieman Fellow.

Editors' Question: Do We Fail Our Children?

By Robert Blau

A street sign bearing his name stands near the pavement where he was slain, a monument to the seven-year-old boy who started a revolution in our newsroom.

On the morning of October 13, 1992, Dantrell Davis was holding his mother's hand, on his way to school, when he was fatally shot by a sniper in the Cabrini-Green housing project. Although just yards away, every institution designed to protect him—family, school, police—had failed.

It soon became clear that we had failed him as well.

For years, we attended to the issues that hovered around Dantrell's world, those loaded nouns—Poverty, Crime, Drugs—upon which lengthy newspaper series are based. But we had somehow forgotten the youngest victims, those children like Dantrell who were caught in a crossfire as unforgiving as wartime Sarajevo.

In 1993, we set out to correct our own indifference with "Killing Our Children," a yearlong series that reported on page one the murder of every child under the age of 15 in our metropolitan area. When the year was over we'd written more than 200 stories detailing homicides of 62 children, an effort that engaged virtually every reporter on our local staff.

As then Editor Jack Fuller wrote in the project's introduction: "A society can be fairly judged by how it treats its children. Caring for and guiding them to maturity is its most essential work, for they are the means by which it survives. By this measure, something has gone terribly wrong in our own community."

Something had gone terribly wrong in Chicago. Children were dying violent deaths yet, in important ways, newspapers were retreating from reporting on them. Crime stories were shunned on page one, where they were viewed as irrelevant and distasteful to a growing suburban readership. By the time crack helped turn street violence into a populist movement, our coverage was marked not so much by what we reported as by what we held back.

We abided by the police department's wish not to include the names of gangs in our reporting, buying their theory that it would only feed the egos of gang leaders and enhance their reputations. We minimized the carnage. In the month before the shooting of Dantrell Davis, not a single Chicago murder appeared on the front page of *The Tribune*. Did this self-censorship end the shooting? Save a life? Not one.

It was time to stop running away from the story and, as events would have it, "Killing Our Children" served as important training for what was to follow. During the past five years, the tragic national highlight reel of child violence

has found too many of its featured victims in Chicago.

It is no longer enough to showcase these crimes on page one as though the mere revelation will interest or outrage the public. Reporters must dig deeper. The detail must be richer. Tragedy must not be polemical, but precisely explained. Since "Killing Our Children," we have produced three other projects about the violence confronting children, its root causes and its possible solutions. In 1994 we published "Saving Our Children," an examination of the conditions that place children at risk and what could be done to save lives.

In 1995, "Gambling With Life" tackled a question at the center of so many of the fractured families we had encountered: Why did parents have children who were seemingly doomed from the start? This year we are investigating what happens to cases involving children when they wind through the courts. Our evolving policy on naming juvenile offenders is a small move in the direction of full disclosure. The paternalistic custom of withholding names of underage suspects was designed to protect the reputations of youngsters accused of crimes no more serious than stealing cars for joy rides. But when eight- or nine-year-olds are accused of premeditated murder, who are we protecting? When their

"Crime stories...were viewed as irrelevant and distasteful to a growing suburban readership."

names have been widely circulated by CNN, what privacy are we safeguarding? Our policy still calls for a case by case consideration, but we will increasingly weigh factors such as the viciousness of a crime and the extent to which a child's name has been publicized.

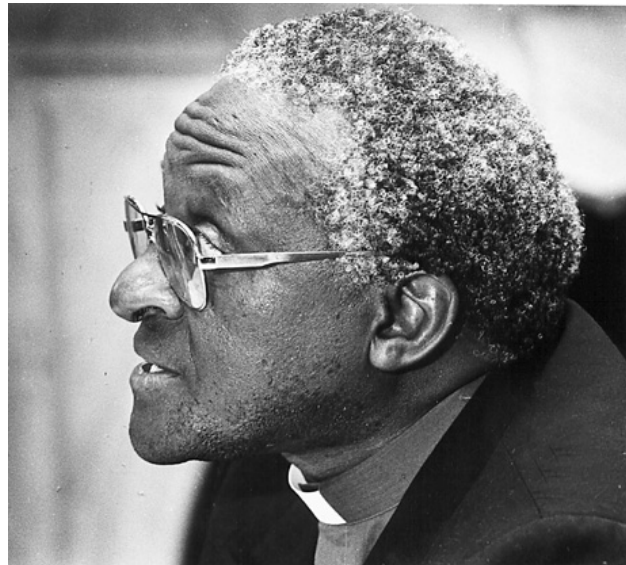
The revolution that began with Davis's death is not done. We will investigate the institutions that collapsed under the weight of greater responsibility: the juvenile courts, public housing, the child welfare agencies, welfare itself.

More old-fashioned newspaper crusades are called for, more stories on page one, not fewer. More stories that provide insight into the crimes that test our assumptions about childhood and innocence, about the cost citizens must bear. More stories about the families. More stories about the weapons used to kill. More stories about who these children are and what they might become, before they become stories about who they were. ■

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Truth and Reconciliation: Reporting the Horrors of Apartheid

How Journalists
Tell These Stories
Depends on Who
They Are and
Where They Work



Archbishop Desmond Tutu, head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *Photo by Joanne Rathe/The Boston Globe.*

Once the Truth and Reconciliation Commission began its work in 1996, South Africa lived through a wrenching and sometimes bitter attempt to understand, explain and even try to make peace with the gruesome realities of apartheid and the media's role in reporting events that took place under apartheid.

We asked four South African journalists—one from the black press, one from the Afrikaans press, one from the English-language press, and one from the South African Broadcasting Corporation—two questions: How has the Truth Commission been covered by your section of the South African media? What, if anything, did the TRC discover about the attitudes and practices of the media in South Africa during apartheid?

No one we asked from the English-language press agreed to take on these questions. Instead, to reflect that view, we asked Pippa Green, a current Nieman Fellow from South Africa, to adapt an article she wrote about her reporting experiences and observations during apartheid.

Their reports follow. ■

Showing Faces, Hearing Voices, Tugging at Emotions: Televising the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

By Joe Thloloe

Early in 1996 it became clear that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings were going to happen, and the nation was finally going to get the full horror story of apartheid. The team I was leading at the South African Broadcasting Corporation's Television News was unanimous on our choice of an executive producer to tell the story. We chose Max du Preez, who was working in our current affairs department and had joined the SABC after the closure of his campaigning newspaper *Vrye Weekblad*. It had been shut down after it lost a lawsuit filed against it by General Lothar Neethling of the South African Security Police, who it had accused of supplying the poison used in some assassinations.

The actual reason why *Vrye Weekblad* collapsed was because of the work du Preez and his colleagues on the newspapers, like Jacques Pauw, had put into exposing apartheid's murderers. Given his knowledge about many of the cases that would come before the Commission, du Preez had a head start on any other candidate to lead our coverage. As Executive Producer, du Preez was asked to put a small team together to report on the Commission's hearings live for a week and thereafter to put together a weekly one-hour special report on the Commission. The costs of such coverage were enormous, so we had to find an affordable way of covering the Commission's hearings. Initially, du Preez assembled a team of five producers, including himself. (Although the racial composition was not an important consideration, the team was made up of three blacks and two whites.)

That first week in April 1996, South Africans sat spellbound as we broadcast seven hours a day of the hearings. "The Truth Commission hearings were perfect for television journalism," du Preez says. "It was not a story about politicians—it was about the way ordinary men, women and children felt about the horrors of apartheid. The TV cameras could take the close-ups of these feelings into every living room in the country."

During those first five days of continuous coverage, from Monday to Friday, we carried the testimony of the widows of the Pebco Three and the Cradock Four, community leaders who had been abducted by security police and brutally killed. Nomhle Mohapi, whose young husband Mapetla, a friend of Steve Biko's, was killed in police detention, also told her story, and the Commission also heard the other side, from relatives of the victims of the Azanian (People's) Liberation Army's attacks on a church and on a clubhouse.

What finally wrenched emotions during that remarkable week was the special report broadcast on Sunday night in which a former security policeman, Joe Mamasela, who had defected from the ANC, confessed on camera to killing more than 30 people. Many a stomach turned as he told, sometimes with a smile playing on his face, how he and his colleagues had butchered a well-known lawyer on a soccer field and how they had kidnapped and killed the Cradock Four.

"For the first time, the nation acknowledged the victims," du Preez says. "They told us that when they gave their evidence, they knew they

"We went beyond just telling the story: we actively encouraged the process of reconciliation.... We brought victims and perpetrators together in a way that the Commission couldn't do."

were not talking just to the commissioners, but they were talking to the whole nation. That was the impact of the TV coverage."

The first week we used a full outside broadcast team with a technical team of about 12 and the five producers. This cost us R24 000 (U.S. \$4,495) a day. We had to find a less costly way of doing it if we were going to be able to continue relaying these pictures and testimony to distant viewers. Du Preez and his team suggested that we scale down to two cameras and a switcher and recorder for each hearing. The producer would sit behind the monitor, directing the cameras and recording what he wanted from the hearing. The costs came down to less than R4 000 (U.S. \$749) a day.

Our material costs were cut, but the human toll was huge.

On a Sunday, the producers flew out of Johannesburg to the place where the hearings were taking place. All week they would sit through hour upon hour of emotional exchanges, then return to Johannesburg on Friday night and on

Saturday work deep into the night editing material to broadcast the special report on Sunday. Then they'd fly out again to begin the cycle anew. It was punishing work, physically and emotionally.

The first team disintegrated after three weeks. One of the producers actually left TV work altogether. The second team lasted through to the end, a total of 14 months, from April 1996 to June 1998.

Very early in the process, I met with the team and suggested that we employ a therapist to help them deal with the torrent of emotions to which they would be exposed at the hearings. In hindsight, du Preez regrets that they did not take up the offer: "We played macho and had to pay for it." He had two heart attacks this year, and another member of the team has broken down and is getting therapy now.

It would have been better if we could have had a bigger team that worked two weeks on and a week off. Unfortunately, we could not raise extra funding, so we had to do our best with the limited resources. The SABC raises most of its income from advertising, but there was no advertising around the programs we did of the hearings. No business wanted to see its name sandwiched between vivid descriptions of torture and murder. The government, which was very keen on the coverage and hopes for reconciliation at the end of the process, would not subsidize our broadcasts. We were also unable to raise international donations in the manner in which SABC Radio did. Their live broadcasts of the hearings on Radio 2000 were subsidized by international donors.

"We were driven by our commitment to the story," du Preez says. "Most of the team were young and inexperienced in television journalism. But they felt they owed it to South Africa to tell the story. This is where our roles as journalists were blurred into our roles as citizens. We felt it was a massive privilege to record our history for our children and grandchildren." He remembers a conversation with a BBC producer who was brought in as a consultant to the hearings: "He couldn't

believe that only the five of us and two camera people produced the one-hour program every Sunday. He said the BBC would use between 25 and 40 people to produce such a program."

The team encountered serious ethical issues during the two years it covered the hearings. As du Preez explains, "We could have sensationalized our coverage. We were very close to the Commission, so we could have done stories on the conflicts among the commissioners. We decided early on that our responsibility was to popularize

"We were making the truth a South African burden and taking it into people's homes."

the process and to accept that the Commission was more important than the commissioners. We thus ignored stories about the huge fights among the commissioners and concentrated on telling the stories of the victims of human rights violations.

"We also went beyond just telling the story: we actively encouraged the process of reconciliation started by the Commission. We brought victims and perpetrators together in a way that the Commission couldn't do. In one instance, for example, we brought a boy face to face with the policeman who murdered his parents. Security policeman Paul van Vuuren, who has confessed to scores of murders, shot Tshidiso Motase's parents dead in front of him when he was only four. Tshidiso was 14 when we did the program.

"First we spoke to the TRC psychologists and asked for advice before the encounter. We then took van Vuuren to meet the boy in the village of Hammanskraal.

"The boy told van Vuuren: 'You don't expect me to forgive you.'

"Van Vuuren replied: 'Don't ask me to say I'm sorry.'

"The cameras captured the tense moments. It all ended with Tshidiso telling van Vuuren that he now lived

with his grandmother and if she died, he would come live with him as he would then be truly an orphan. Van Vuuren's response was, 'Okay, you come live with me as my son.'"

As du Preez reminds us, "We were making the truth a South African burden and taking it into people's homes."

The economics of covering this story have won. Even though the human rights hearings are over and the report released, the amnesty hearings are continuing. However, SABC Television News has scaled back to the point of a minute and a half a night in the news bulletins. But it still records every hearing with the intent of donating the footage to the National Archives in Pretoria. The hope is that in the years to come, our children and their grandchildren will be able to get to the archives and call up the evidence and truly understand what it was like for previous generations to live under apartheid.

The SABC is proud of its contribution. "We've won a few awards because of our coverage, but that is not important. What is important is that this has been the greatest moment in our journalistic career," says du Preez.

But there were some moments of personal discovery, as well. In covering the hearings, du Preez learned that the man who had sued his publication and managed to shut it down was in fact one of those responsible for the poisoning and killing of anti-apartheid activists. "At first I felt angry. But then I felt a chapter that was incomplete in my life came to a close. All these years I was not a rebellious Afrikaner who opposed my tribe. I now feel a sense of satisfaction because I have been vindicated." ■

Joe Thloloe is former Editor in Chief of SABC Television News. He was a 1988 Nieman Fellow and was for many years Managing Editor of The Sowetan, South Africa's largest circulation daily newspaper. He is now Executive Director of MountainTop Experience (Pty) Ltd, a management and training consultancy in Johannesburg.

Newspaper Management Keeps Quiet About Its Role in Apartheid:

In the Afrikaans Press, Some Reporters Decide to Testify

By Tim du Plessis

South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) did not discover any new truths about the role of the Afrikaans press in the apartheid era because everything about its role was well-known and well-documented. Throughout its history, the Afrikaans press had been open about its support for the National Party (NP) and its apartheid policies.

But being open about its leanings did not translate into a willingness to be open with the Commission. Neither the Afrikaans spokesmen nor its leaders would agree to appear and talk about any of this.

To fully understand this silence, one needs to briefly look at history. The roots of the four existing Afrikaans newspapers in South Africa—Die

gerial control. At certain points in history, the papers sharply differed from the party, but the underlying relationship remained firm.

For a time, the editor of *Die Burger*, for example, regularly attended meetings of the parliamentary caucus of the National Party. This practice was terminated during the 1950's by the legendary Piet Cillie, then Editor of *Die Burger* and a highly respected and influential thinker in National Party—and Afrikaner—circles. Editors of *Die Burger* continued to attend meetings of the head council of the National Party in the Cape province as non-voting members until well into the 1980's. *Beeld* (est. 1974) and *Rapport* (est. 1970) had less close ties with the NP than *Die Burger* and *Die Volksblad*.

the then NP prime minister, stripped the Cape coloreds (people of mixed origin) of their voting rights, *Die Burger* under Piet Cillie openly clashed with Verwoerd and the NP. And then in the late 1980's, *Beeld* urged the government to release Nelson Mandela from prison and to scrap petty apartheid laws on segregated residential areas, public amenities and relations across the color bar. All the while, the newspaper's support for the party in elections remained firm.

Against this backdrop, it should have been no surprise that the Afrikaans press leaders would view the TRC with much trepidation and apprehension. However, in the news columns of the Afrikaans papers, coverage of TRC's proceedings was extensive and generally fair. Many readers of the Afrikaans newspapers despised the TRC and its Chairperson, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, but they generally read the stories about the atrocities, the death squads and other abuses of the apartheid era.

Editorial comment in the majority of the Afrikaans papers was highly critical of the TRC, especially in *Die Burger* and *Rapport*. They accused the TRC in emotional language of a lack of balance and of severe prejudice against the Afrikaners and their institutions. On the editorial pages, the Commission was scathingly referred to as "Tutu se bieg en liegkommissie" (Tutu's Commission of confessing and lying).

Editorials and political columns branded the Commission a "witch hunt" against Afrikaners. Allegations of undue sympathy for the ruling African National Congress (ANC) were leveled at the Commission which, according to

“It should have been no surprise that the Afrikaans press leaders would view the Commission with trepidation and apprehension....”

Burger in Cape Town, *Die Volksblad* in Bloemfontein, *Beeld* in Johannesburg and *Rapport* (national Sunday)—go back to the second decade of this century when the Afrikaner nationalists who formed the National Party were instrumental in starting *Die Burger* to provide a mouthpiece for the new party.

A holding company, *Nasionale Pers*, was formed. The company and the newspapers and magazines they created were, from the outset, financially independent from the party. Although there were close ideological ties, the party at no stage held editorial or mana-

They nevertheless supported the NP in all elections.

Other Afrikaans newspapers and press companies existed and their relationship with the National Party was not dissimilar to that of the *Nasionale Pers* papers. However, these newspapers folded and *Perskor*, the Afrikaans company that owned them, went bankrupt in 1998.

Towards the late 1950's and early 1960's, the papers in the *Nasionale Pers* stable started to question aspects of the NP's apartheid policy. When in the early 1960's Hendrik F. Verwoerd,

these papers, resulted in a lack of will by the TRC to investigate abuses of human rights in ANC ranks. Beeld was the only Afrikaans newspaper that supported the TRC process. Although critical of some controversial TRC actions, it urged Afrikaner institutions to participate in Commission proceedings.

In September 1997, when the TRC invited the media and media companies to testify at special TRC hearings on the role of the media in the period under investigation, Naspers, as Nasionale Pers had become known by then, refused. Instead, they handed the Commission two published books, extensively documenting the history of the company over nearly nine decades, as well as a written submission on the origins and nature of the relationship between Naspers and the NP.

The decision by the Naspers management not to appear led to a disagreement between management and certain journalists in the group. After lengthy internal deliberations, management granted permission to journalists to make submissions to the Commission "in their individual capacities." A group of some 130 current and former Naspers journalists presented the Commission with a statement in which they, "in their individual capacities," acknowledged the close ties between their newspapers and the NP. They stated that although they themselves

were never party to human rights abuses, they acknowledged the role of the papers in creating a climate and a political dispensation which made such abuses possible.

The statement also acknowledged neglect in that the journalists too readily believed the denials of the apartheid government and did not thoroughly pursue allegations when they surfaced. The statement conceded that the Afrikaans press played a significant role in softening apartheid and in efforts to change the system from within. But they acknowledged that recognition should be sought at a different forum.

Tutu welcomed the action of the 130 Naspers journalists while, in a public statement, the management of Naspers denounced the content of the journalist's submission. No one, however, was fired.

It is well known that Tutu and other ranking members of the Commission were disappointed by the hostility shown towards the Commission by papers such as *Die Burger* and *Rapport*. Tutu also expressed disappointment at the attitude of certain other Afrikaner institutions towards the Commission.

His disappointment is understandable. Participation by significant Afrikaner institutions would have enhanced the Commission's legitimacy (as well as that of its findings) in the Afrikaans community. Their absence of

participation did not, however, derail the process or significantly alter the impact the report is having.

The TRC process largely succeeded to lay bare South Africa's apartheid past to many ordinary Afrikaners who, for a very long time, had no idea what was done by agents of the apartheid government to maintain white minority rule. The testimonies before the TRC of ordinary black South Africans who were victims of the system were extensively covered in the Afrikaans papers, especially in the early phases.

Had it not been for the TRC, many Afrikaners (and other white South Africans) would never have known about the misdeeds and, perhaps more significantly, would never have heard a victim of apartheid telling his or her story. Afrikaners and some of their newspapers may not have liked the TRC but, like it or not, reporters at these papers told them the stories and many of their readers read them. What this means is that as the Truth and Reconciliation hearings come to an end, few in South Africa can truthfully say: I did not know. ■

Tim du Plessis, Nieman Fellow 1993, is Deputy Editor of Beeld. He was one of the Naspers journalists who made a statement to the TRC.

Questioning If Guilt Without Punishment Will Lead to Reconciliation:

The Black Press Relives Its Own Horrors and Seeks Justice

By Mathatha Tsedu

In South Africa, the black press is essentially two newspapers, *The Sowetan* and *The City Press*. Unlike their counterparts in the white media, these newspapers supported the truth-seeking aspects of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But they bit-

terly criticized the clause in the document creating the Commission which granted amnesty to killers who testified before it.

Many black journalists had themselves been victims and/or survivors of apartheid's killing machine. They had

been victimized in the same way as political activists and had languished in jail just as the others had. So their interest in covering these hearings was more than just a passing fad or a "good story" needing to be written. They brought to their jobs passion, concern,

anger and true understanding of the tears that flowed freely once testimony started.

Members of the black press saw the TRC as an institution designed to vindicate their former stories of the horrors of apartheid and an avenue to expose lies of the white press, which either scorned those press revelations or simply trashed them as propaganda. After the media hearing, in which Commission members heard about various roles the press played in propping up apartheid, the editorial staff of *The City Press* wrote the following:

“Claims by representatives of the

could not be bothered by the niceties of political arrangements between Mandela and de Klerk and who felt that the law of natural justice should be followed.

Many black journalists who followed the TRC hearings also felt this way, and the reporters’ personal feelings spilled over into their coverage of the proceedings, making it distinctly different from what appeared in the white press.

After the first few days of hearings, *The Sowetan’s* TRC reporter, Mzimasi Ngudle, wrote with great eloquence of those who had appeared and of the pain they’d suffered, the indignities

peace at all costs.”

When victims went before the TRC and asked for justice, the black press highlighted their stories, as they did the efforts by the Black Consciousness Movement’s Azanian (People’s) Organization (AZAPO) to challenge the legality of the TRC in the Constitutional Court. This court challenge, arguing that the TRC should not be allowed to grant amnesty to people who committed gross human rights violations, received front page treatment in *The Sowetan*. While the black press argued that justice was the only foundation for a lasting reconciliation, the white press rallied around the theme that forgiveness was the beginning of reconciliation.

When there became the possibility that the killers of prominent blacks such as Pretoria’s Dr. Fabian Ribeiro, who was gunned down outside his house by a covert group of police, could be granted amnesty through this process, *The Sowetan* ran headlines such as “Victims say ANC has sold them out.” Chris Ribeiro, Fabian’s son, was extensively quoted in the op-ed that this headline accompanied. “Prosecution will go a long way to compensate for our injured feelings,” Ribeiro said. “There should first be court cases and only thereafter can they apply for amnesty. Even then I must still have the right as a victim to have the last say on their amnesty. If it is just a matter of truth revelations there will be no justice.”

But these differing racial perspectives among various papers did not emerge only during the hearings; arguments raged even before the hearings began about the composition of the commissioners. *The Sowetan*, the

“While the black press argued that justice was the only foundation for a lasting reconciliation, the white press rallied around the theme that forgiveness was the beginning of reconciliation.”

English-language press that they could have done more to oppose the evils of apartheid must ring hollow in the light of what happened in their newsrooms. Stories by black journalists of police brutality were routinely rejected—simply because there was an unwritten rule that these black writers could not be trusted with telling the truth. On the other hand, police versions justifying the killings of students and other political activists was most of the time accepted without question.”

Following the 1994 elections, many in the black community wanted to see the killers of their children tried and sentenced. They wanted to see the political leadership of F.W. de Klerk declared a criminal activity for which he should be tried. But it was not to be. President Nelson Mandela agreed with de Klerk that there would be no retribution. Some understood this and accepted it, but many more did not.

So as the hearings started, survivors or relatives of victims of criminal activity of the apartheid regime appeared before the TRC and asked Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Chairman, for justice. Many were ordinary people who

they’d endured and the rawness of current emotion. “The dignity and modesty of the victims brought to the fore the indelible virtues of ubuntu (humanity). All they asked for was a better education for their children, the erection of tombstones, and other basic needs. However ubuntu cannot be stretched too far. It would simply be presumptuous and reckless to incise old wounds in pursuance of lofty hopes....there is no proven link between confession on the one hand and forgiveness on the other. The whole exercise could simply end up as little more than a religious ritual...in which a people who are ignorant of their rights will be converted to embrace

“Many black journalists had themselves been victims and/or survivors of apartheid’s killing machine.... Reporters’ personal feelings spilled over into their coverage, making it distinctly different from what appeared in the white press.”

country's biggest black-owned and biggest daily with a readership of more than 1.4 million (99 percent of whom are black) wrote on October 10, 1995: "We cast no doubt about the credibility of the Truth Commission nominees but we must express serious worry about the low number of blacks nominated.... This Commission will be dealing with an important part of our past that affects, by and large, more blacks than whites. As blacks we will be shirking our responsibility if we do not ensure that our views feature more prominently in the Commission...." Similar concerns were not evidenced in the white press.

Condemnation in the black press also followed the nomination of white right-wing people such as Chris De Jager, who blacks viewed as racist and who had no record of a human rights culture. He became a commissioner and later resigned, claiming that the TRC was biased against whites and Afrikaners in particular. Also, when right-wing whites who were either in prison or coming forward to confess to crimes in which blacks had been cruelly killed, the black media argued against the granting of amnesty.

The case of ANC leader and South African Communist Party General Secretary Chris Hani, who was shot dead outside his home in Johannesburg, amply illustrates what happened. The City Press, the black weekly, wrote: "Granting amnesty to Hani's killers would also not go down well with the ANC's grassroots supporters. The ANC must make a decision and soon. It cannot afford to alienate its grassroots support and cause divisions within its members of Parliament while trying to curry favor with a spent force like the ultra-right. Politically, amnesty for the right-wingers would not seem to have any obvious benefits. At their trial, [Clive] Derby-Lewis and [Janus] Walus—the two convicted killers of Hani—were defiant and unrepentant to the end. Thus, even from a moral point it would be difficult to make a case for them. Reconciliation is a noble ideal, but the line must be drawn somewhere."

Even when some of the white perpetrators of gross human rights violations were prepared to admit to their wrongs, their motive was scrutinized. In the black press the question was asked: Had they come forward out of a

genuine wish to apologize, or did they do so merely as a way to either get out of jail or to avoid being put in? Often, even when their testimonies had ended, the answer to this question had not been revealed. ■

Mathatha Tsedu is the Acting Deputy Editor of The Sunday Independent of Sowetan and a 1997 Nieman Fellow. Now 46, he has been a journalist since 1978 but spent nearly six years, from 1981 to 1986, under a banning order that prohibited him from practicing as a journalist. Tsedu is a staunch member of the Media Workers Association of South Africa (Mwasa), the biggest media union in the country. He is also a member of several journalist organizations in the country.

'Struggling for Memory Against Forgetting': English-Language Newspapers May Have Been Too Timid, Even Collaborated

By Pippa Green

During apartheid, black journalists at many mainstream newspapers felt humiliated and saw themselves as being at the mercy of white editors, many of whom unwittingly collaborated with the regime. When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission tried to unearth some of what happened to journalists, stories they heard told of a newsroom environment that in many ways mirrored what was happening in the cities and towns these reporters were covering.

Don Mattera sits at the wooden table addressing the truth commissioners, in an ebony dashiki with white embroidery. He spreads his large hands and cites the Czech novelist Milan Kundera. The struggle in South Africa, he says, is also the "struggle for memory against forgetting." Mattera is a poet and was once a journalist; banned from that profession by the government and placed under house arrest, he describes himself now as a wordsmith. But today he speaks of the time he spent as a journalist.

"I found at The Star, you had to be a white person to mean something," he tells the commissioners. "I saw myself [at The Star] helping to open up columns for black people but there was no place for me."

This tall, gray-haired man spreads his hands again, denying with his body the bitterness in his words. Freedom lost, a career denied. He is here to tell the midwife of memory: the Truth Commission. "I saw the media as just another terrain of struggle," Mattera says,

divided, as the country is, between and within itself.

Indeed, a mainstream newspaper could provide a home for Moegsien Williams, now Editor of *The Cape Argus*. Classified “colored,” or mixed-race in apartheid South Africa, Williams says he entered his job “with anger in his heart to write about the evil of apartheid.” And another mainstream newspaper provided a home for a spy with the security police, the still shameless Craig Kotze, who saw his mission as being “to balance an inherent bias in the English liberal media against the police.”

This same mainstream media provided a home for a whole generation of young journalists in the eighties, including myself, who, like Moegsien, believed we could do good by exposing evil. I think, for a time, we were defeated.

As a labor reporter in 1982 on a Cape Town English-language daily, *The*

“If the police didn’t confirm it, it didn’t really happen.”

Argus, my first story made the front page. It was about striking milk delivery workers, African migrants in the then hostile Western Cape. The next story—about a strike in a steel factory—was placed inside, heavily edited. “Ah,” explained the news editor, “when readers don’t get their milk delivered, that’s a big story, but they aren’t interested in other strikes.” This brought home to me the realization that the reference point for most English newspapers was how whites were affected by what we were reporting; black reporters understood this, too, but for them, it was an even more bitter reality to endure.

“When I arrived at *The Star*,” Mattera told the Truth Commission, “I found fawning, cringing black people. They sat in a separate corner of the newsroom and ate in a separate canteen.” I do not remember a separate canteen at *The Argus*, but I do remember the

white editors regarded our one black reporter with suspicion. He was bound to be biased, they said, especially in covering “black” stories such as squatter raids.

White editors, of course, regarded themselves as devoid of ideology. One former *Argus* editor says in the Independent group’s submission to the Truth Commission that they “[adhered] to independent, honest and responsible standards that [did] not pander to personal or sectional interests, but [were] concerned solely with the public interest.”

There were, however, some editors who practiced the kind of journalism about which others only preached. For instance, my first editor at *The Argus*, John O’Malley, seemed to have a keen sense of natural justice and carried with him a continuing outrage at the racial injustice in South Africa. He encouraged our coverage of the sprawling, beleaguered squatter camps around Cape Town that were a direct result of the cruel, unworkable pass laws that Africans were subject to.

After O’Malley retired, these stories were no longer given priority status. Reporters would sometimes return from squatter raids after they had seen sobbing mothers arrested and separated from their children and poor people fleeing in terror from large khaki-clad men. The chief sub-editor would ask pleasantly, “Anyone dead?”

Sensing failure, we’d answer no, knowing what his response would be. “Not a big story then,” he’d reply.

“The reference point for most English newspapers was how whites were affected by what we were reporting.”

Sometimes, we didn’t even try to get our stories into our newspaper, but sent them to the journalistic godsend the “alternative” *Weekly Mail*, an anti-apartheid newspaper set up and owned by journalists of *Sparks*’s defunct *Rand Daily Mail*, a paper closed down by its owners, one of the major mining and industrial monopolies of South Africa.

Arrie de Beer, a former journalist from the Afrikaans press, told members of the Truth Commission during its special hearing on the media, “Our history was not only one of pain, but also of ignorance.” Pain was all too apparent, especially among black journalists. Pain, accompanied by anger.

My then colleague, Denis Cruywagen, now Deputy Editor of *The Pretoria News*, and Willie de Klerk, an *Argus* photographer, both of whom were classified “colored” under apartheid, were the only local journalists who witnessed the notorious Trojan Horse shooting in the middle class colored suburb of Athlone in Cape Town. A South African Railways truck had crawled slowly up and down the length of a suburban street at the height of the 1985 unrest. Once, twice, a third time. Defiant children stoned it. Armed policemen leapt out, opening fire, killing three: a teenager, a young man, and a boy of eight.

My newspaper had the story. We had the pictures. After a long, impassioned argument, the then editor agreed to use the picture, postage-stamp size, on page three. The lead story that day was about soldiers who had been injured when their military vehicle overturned in a township.

Mike Tissong, now Editor of *The* (mainly African-read) *Sowetan*, recalled in his submission to the Truth Commission how he and correspondent Rich Mkhondo had covered the gruesome death of six youngsters in Duduza, an African township southeast of

Johannesburg. The children were blown apart by booby-trapped hand grenades. “Our contacts were adamant that a security policeman had infiltrated the group...and given them grenades which were set to explode as soon as the pins were pulled,” he testified. A white reporter was asked to get the police version, and the story even-

tually ran as one of “mystery blasts.”

Now, more than a decade later, former police operative Joe Mamasela, who, although black, was one of apartheid’s most deadly and efficient assassins, has admitted publicly that he had given the youths the grenades.

Generally, the rule during the state of emergency imposed by the government in the 1980’s and internalized by many newspapers “was that if the police didn’t confirm it, it didn’t really happen.” In part, this rule worked because enforcers of it had embedded themselves in various media outlets.

Viv McPherson, a security policeman, was perhaps the most informative person to appear before the Truth Commission. He recalled how the police infiltrated and manipulated the media. The most blatant example was The Sunday Times story that ran the day after the army had killed ANC refugees and other civilians in Botswana.

“The Guns of Gaborone,” its headline trumpeted. It was all planned beforehand, McPherson told the Commission.

“You knew beforehand, everyone knew beforehand, that people were going to be killed?” Truth Commissioner Hugh Lewin asked McPherson. Lewin, a journalist and writer of note and a former political prisoner and exile, now runs the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism in South Africa. Yes, even the story was planned beforehand, McPherson replied. His budget for fighting apartheid’s battle on media terrain was R50,000 (in 1980’s exchange rates, about \$25,000). “It was quite cheap,” he said. It might have been inexpensive then, but we’re paying now.

In a telling interchange at the Commission, Lewin read Kotze the ex-spy one of his own stories, in which he’d quoted then police minister Adriaan Vlok, who attacked Archbishop Desmond Tutu, now the Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, then the Anglican Archbishop. Tutu was afforded no right of reply.

“All your stories,” said Lewin, “follow exactly the same pattern. “They quote the police, they quote Vlok, they quote intelligence sources and they

quote nobody else.” And the editors published them.

Perhaps they trusted Kotze because he was more like them. He drank in the same bars, laughed at the same jokes. I left the mainstream press in despair in

“How many lives might have been saved if the public had known the truth earlier?”

1986 and joined an “alternative” pro-black trade union publication, The Labour Bulletin. I spent much of that year monitoring the detention of black workers under the emergency regulations, asking companies whether they were paying them while they were jailed without trial.

Most were not. “Whites get paid when they go to the army,” one worker told me indignantly. “Why not us when we go into detention?”

Jail was, after all, a kind of “national service for black people.” This was echoed by Thami Mazwai, who complained that black journalists were not allowed to belong to banned organizations, while white reporters fought in the South African Defense Force “and even went to vote,” as though exercising a racially exclusive franchise was worse than killing people.

White editors were, in my mind, not inherently bad people but allowed themselves to be shielded from all this by blinkers. They simply didn’t see this world. Today, the struggle for all of us in South Africa is not only to remember what we lived through, but also to try to rekindle a sense of idealism that we felt when we tried to expose the wrongs of apartheid. Perhaps Max du Preez, former editor of The Vrye Weekblad (the brave alternative Afrikaans newspaper bled to death by lawsuits) and now a pioneering television journalist, offers us the best example of how that can be done. Dirk Coetzee, a key member of the South African death squads which operated with government sanction, approached The Sunday Times and Rapport, an Afrikaans Sunday paper, almost two years before Vrye Weekblad published its series of terri-

fying stories about the number of political activists and others secretly murdered by apartheid’s operatives. But those newspapers “chased him away” and closed their ears to his unpalatable ideas.

How many lives might have been saved if the public had known the truth earlier, du Preez wondered.

Earlier at the Commission hearing on the media, a former television news producer who’d worked for the state broadcaster when it was little more than a mouthpiece of the ruling party gave a half-hearted apology for not following up on the death squad stories. His staff had tried, he said, but couldn’t confirm the stories.

“I should tell him,” said du Preez, who, an Afrikaner himself, was excoriated by powerful Afrikaners for the journalism he practiced, “that if you want information on police death squads, then you don’t go to the government’s minister.” Basic lessons in basic journalism. If these are heeded, then perhaps du Preez’s plea to “restore the public image and public status of journalists” will be realized and we will be able to do our jobs with undiluted pride. And in Mattera’s words, we will then “all be free to be ourselves.” ■

Pippa Green is Deputy Editor of The Sunday Independent, Johannesburg, and a 1999 Nieman Fellow.

Hey Newsboys & Girls—Getting Injured Without Workers' Compensation Builds Character!

By Marc Linder

My local newspaper, The Iowa City Press-Citizen, advertises: "Paper carriers are independent businesspersons, buying newspapers at wholesale, selling them at retail and pocketing the profits. And...the profits can be substantial." To make sure kids don't pass up this lucrative offer, it adds: "All ages from 10 to 99 can be a carrier." However, the ad doesn't mention that these carriers, not the newspaper, assume the full risk for any injury that might occur while they are delivering the paper. These injuries can be substantial, as can the medical bills.

The fate of 13-year-old Stephen Johnson, who was gravely injured by a car while delivering The Dubois (Penn.) Courier, illustrates the danger this job can entail and what can happen when accidents occur. Even though The Courier paid Stephen five cents for each paper he delivered and the subscribers wrote their checks to The Dubois Courier directly—which meant that Stephen handled no money—Pennsylvania's appellate court held in 1993 that as a "self-employed businessman" Stephen was, as the paper argued in court, unprotected by workers' compensation. The court's legal finding rested on the assertion that the boy "was essentially acting as a delivery service such as UPS or Federal Express."

Children as Carriers: Working Without a Safety Net

Lack of workers' compensation coverage means some injured carriers, including children, don't receive the medical or rehabilitative treatment they need. In other cases, they or their parents confront large hospital bills that injured employees in other sectors

Wanted

Newspaper delivery specialists.

Earn \$200 to \$300 per month working only
1 to 1 1/2 hours per day, Monday through
Saturday.

Deliver the Press-Citizen to paid subscribers.

No collecting required.

Be your own boss and manage your business
as an independent contractor.

Iowa City Press-Citizen

An example of an ad newspapers commonly use to recruit carriers.

never do because they are paid for by the industry and consumers.

The same year as Stephen's lawsuit, a judge in another case rendered a very different opinion. In this case a 12-year-old girl was struck by a car while she was delivering The Fremont (Neb.) Tribune and put into a permanent vegetative state. This judge, who was the first to review the workers' compensation claim, wrote (in regard to The Tribune's policy of using young children to deliver papers): "It is beyond sophistry and closer to outright dishonesty to characterize a 10-year-old party to a contract as a 'little merchant' and thus an independent contractor."

This judicial reasoning didn't stop The Fremont Tribune from continuing to litigate this case, arguing that it should not be held responsible for the medical expenses related to this girl's accident. The Tribune took the case up

to the Nebraska Supreme Court, and three publishing associations and two newspapers supported its cause by submitting friends of the court briefs. And as the case worked its way through the courts, the Nebraska Press Association prevailed upon the state legislature three times to kill proposed amendments to the workers' compensation statute to extend benefits to carriers.

Evidence in this court case showed that The Tribune told carriers when to deliver the paper, how to band and "porch" it, how to deal with customers who stopped subscribing, and prescribed collection methods and appearance standards. Despite this obvious control, the paper claimed that Larson and carriers as young as 10 were "merely subscribers of the newspaper" who happened to resell it. When I asked about this apparent contradiction, Mary Sepucha, Director of Employee Relations at the Newspaper Association of America, chanted the mantra that publishers have rehearsed for a century: "But they're not our employees, they're independent contractors, and we're not responsible for them." More brazen still was the response of Sandra George, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association: George justified The Tribune's litigation by contending that the paper simply "had nothing to do with" Larson's injury.

These kinds of self-exculpatory statements from newspaper publishers result from their decades-long, successful campaign to exclude newspaper carriers—even children—from coverage under their workers' compensation plans. And members of the community are rarely brought face-to-face with these child labor issues because the parties with the most to gain by public ignorance—the newspapers—

have the ability to control whether this news is considered fit to print. For example, when publishers contest workers' compensation coverage for seriously injured child carriers, no public relations disaster results because those who read their newspaper rarely know that such a case is going on. Nor are most people likely to be aware that from 1992 to 1997, 99 news vendors were killed on the job, 11 of them under 18 years old. Non-fatal injury rates among the nation's 405,000 carriers, nearly half of whom are youngsters, are not even tracked.

Workers' Compensation: The Publishers' Perspective

Workers' compensation rests on the principle that job-related injuries represent part of the cost of production and distribution of products; employers insure workers against such economic losses and recoup the insurance cost from consumers. Since the turn of the century, the movement to ensure that employers provide workers' compensation has highlighted the need for run-of-the-mill workers to have such coverage since they lack the ability to charge consumers directly for the cost of their job-related injuries. But newspaper publishers have also been working hard to persuade legislatures and courts to exclude carriers whom they prefer to describe—and mythologize—as rugged-individualists and self-employed business boys and girls. By doing so, they have chiseled away protections that these workers should have.

Why have legislatures and courts been able to deprive child (and adult) carriers of the protections that most workers in other industries enjoy? The answer is surprisingly simple: The newspaper industry has been extraordinarily effective in perpetuating the myth of the "Little Merchant." Publishers have made the public believe that distribution to subscribers is an entirely separate business dominated by prepubescent entrepreneurs going through a rite of passage, which the government should not regulate.

Using this same line of argument has also enabled publishers to escape

child labor statutes. However, it is curious that the same people who define a 10-year-old as "an independent business person" do not hesitate to encroach on this entrepreneur's independence by dictating to carriers rules under which they operate, as my local paper does: "If you collect from your customers, NEVER enter the home of someone who is not a personal friend of your family."

This instruction—along with training videos that some papers provide to carriers—is obviously meant to protect the child. But publishers shouldn't be allowed to have it both ways. The kind of verbal gymnastics that they use to get around these laws are an attempt to keep costs down while getting the job done. A 1988 article in *Editor & Publisher* framed the situation well and the author's analysis holds up a decade later. Mark Fitzgerald wrote that the publishers' stance illustrates their strategy to devise a "solution to the enduring newspaper circulation dilemma: the desire to control subscription lists, home delivery prices, and carrier performance standards while at the same time avoiding the taxes, salaries and benefits involved in actually employing the carriers."

The rates that are charged for workers' compensation insurance underscore the potential dangers of newspaper delivery work. In California, for example, an industrial accident insurance carrier charges \$9.14 per \$100 of payroll for this group, a rate that is considerably higher than rates for many manufacturing industries. Some newspapers do enable carriers to buy accident insurance at group rates and carriers must pay for it. Precisely because such insurance is optional, unlike workers' compensation, many workers, given their low earnings, do not buy it. And workers' compensation, unlike accident insurance policies, places no limit on coverage for medical treatment needed to cure or relieve the effects of work-related injuries. In some states—notably Wisconsin, Maryland, and Kentucky—workers' compensation laws do cover all carriers, and in New York child carriers are included by statute. In contrast, in Arkansas,

Montana, Oregon and Washington, publishers have persuaded state legislatures to exclude carriers from their laws, and in Georgia, Mississippi and North Dakota, the exclusion takes place merely because of the way publishers write their agreements with carriers.

Industry executives lobby policymakers by trying to convince them that this is a "bottom line" issue. Clyde Northrop, President of the American Association of Independent Newspaper Distributors, was quoted as saying that because profit margins are so thin "managers cannot be forced into operating an employee work force when heretofore it was independent contractors." However, a 1993 study by Robert Picard, Professor of Communication at California State University at Fullerton, found that the industry "continues to be one of the most profitable." Publicly traded newspaper companies, according to *Editor & Publisher*, yielded an average operating profit margin of 13.9 percent in 1993; by 1997 operating profit margins swelled to 20.2 percent. At newspapers where carriers are treated as employees, they perform up to publishers' standards without sending owners into bankruptcy. The *Wall Street Journal's* subsidiary, National Delivery Service, for example, provides workers' compensation for its carriers, and in 1997 the paper "enjoyed a record year," according to *Editor & Publisher*.

Only when these issues of child labor and workers' compensation receive a fair hearing in the court of public opinion—a court that is largely controlled by information the media make available—are they likely to be resolved in ways that could ensure worker protections for newspaper carriers. Until then, many children's first job experience will teach them an invaluable lesson: Some employers are chiselers. ■

Marc Linder is a law professor at the University of Iowa. A graduate of Harvard Law School, he represents migrant farm workers through Texas Rural Legal Aid and has written many books and articles on labor law and economic history.

Two Years of Living Electronically: Covering Breaking Foreign News for the Internet

By Kari Huus

I thought it fairly glamorous when in a recent Los Angeles Times article about foreign correspondents I was pictured next to Mel Gibson. But times have changed since “The Year of Living Dangerously,” as the writer of the article pointed out. When I was in Indonesia this spring, as the film character had been during the unrest of the 1960’s, the political drama was only part of my challenge. As a reporter for the Internet site MSNBC-Interactive (MSNBC.com) I had the additional curse and blessing of technology.

It was May, when thousands of student protesters were camped inside Jakarta’s parliament complex. The protests had already led President Suharto to step down after 32 years. Still, the heavily armed military presence outside the compound remained in place, and the protests persisted, now targeting newly named president B.J. Habibie. Students raised new banners outside the buildings, screaming with slogans like “Go to hell Habibie and Suharto and all your cronies,” and chanted “Hang Habibie!”

Finally, it seemed, the military authorities had lost their patience, and late one afternoon the troops that had remained outside the gates started to move in large formations onto the parliament grounds. This change seemed sure to portend a face-off and possibly violence with the students, but when?

Had I been a newspaper or magazine reporter, I would have been taking notes and planning to go back to the hotel to write only when my weekly or daily print deadline was upon me. Had I been working in television or radio, I would have been shooting with a particular news slot in mind. But writing for the Internet, making the usual editorial calls—when and how much to file—is more complicated.

The medium’s strongest suits—speed and versatility—mean that the scope of choices is enormous.

In covering this Jakarta story, I was carrying a digital recorder, digital camera, regular SLR camera and a cell phone. My options as the troops arrived were many. I could use the cell phone to call in periodic updates to the story so that MSNBC news editors could publish bare-bones text stories within minutes. Or I could use the time to instead record digital sound and still pictures. Then I could jump on a motorcycle taxi to return to the hotel, process the sound and images, and send them by E-mail for immediate publication. This process is amazingly quick compared to sending it by Federal Express to the United States, but still comes at the risk of missing important moments in the story. Or I could use some combination of the above.

The content of the story varies depending on my decisions, along with editors, graphic designers, “interactive application editors” and media editors back at MSNBC-Interactive headquarters in Redmond, Washington.

Had I been carrying a digital video camera, which is becoming more common for reporters now, I would also have had the option of producing and sending video segments through the phone line. The result is a pretty cool feature for the Internet user—just click and play. But the process—even for our media editors who are trained to do it—is time-consuming and costly through international phone lines.

For background pieces, we drew on work I had done well before the crisis. For instance, as I was leaving for Jakarta, we revived a package outlining the political and social problems, reported on a previous trip. As a standing feature to go with political analysis, we

published an interactive application to help untangle the web of Suharto family privilege and business interests. By clicking on individuals pictured in a family photograph, the reader could call up a summary of special deals, taxes and family-held monopolies.

Then, as the crisis unfolded, we stayed to a relatively fast, pared-down approach. When the troops later moved students out of the parliament I called in the story from the parliament so MSNBC could publish it immediately, then recorded natural sound and comment for a fuller version to come later. As President Suharto resigned, MSNBC published a banner with the news immediately. I then did a phone interview with MSNBC television and an analysis for publication shortly after.

The technology doesn’t always come through. When my digital camera gobbles up its battery, it leaves me to describe powerful scenes in the old fashioned way—with words.

Internet news reporting can be rich and timely. However, the results can also be confusing, incomplete or overwhelming. It may be gratuitous to point out that those of us who report news for the Internet are still working on the formula.

The discussions with editors at MSNBC revolve around how we can best use our time and the “space” on our site (which, by the way, is not unlimited). Where is the most value—speed or depth? And, even on breaking stories, how can we use the features of the Internet to tell the story in a better way? It’s a compelling challenge to get the right combination. And for me, personally, it is a way to bring together skills that I acquired working in radio, print and photography.

The Internet is not always a superior tool. After all, I still love to pick up a

copy of *The Economist* and sit on a park bench. And there are definitely things about it that worry me as a journalist. On the Internet, readership can be tracked better than any other medium—down to how many readers visit a given page and for how long. Marketing people love this, but for journalists, the risk of writing market-driven stories instead of important stories has never been greater.

But if you can ignore the numbers—and some of us go out of our way to do so—there is something compelling about the immediacy of the medium that I never experienced while working in magazines or radio. For readers, I am now only a click away.

So, for instance, while watching the drama unfold in Indonesia I had dozens of readers writing to me every day—many of them Indonesians in Jakarta or living abroad. Human rights groups were sending statements. Individuals were sending accounts of looting in other towns around the country. People wrote from abroad for advice about getting their family members out. Some were foreign business executives asking for information, or passing on their own experience.

Not all of these comments are useful, or can be verified, but some lead to story ideas, angles or contacts. Above all, they are reminders that the subjects of the stories and the readers—who are sometimes one and the same—are real people. That is a point that Mel Gibson's character—Guy Hamilton in Jakarta—didn't figure out until very late in the movie. ■

Kari Huus, International correspondent, came to MSNBC from Hong Kong, where she was a business writer and editor for The Far Eastern Economic Review. She was also a correspondent for Newsweek in Beijing. Her old media allegiance is to radio, having worked for NPR and Minnesota Public Radio as a writer and producer.

Dancing to a Different Tune: Can Traditional Media Compete With the New Kids on the Block?

By Caitlin Anderson

Before there were Internet news providers, newspapers rarely published the reporting they gathered more than twice a day. Before 24-hour cable news channels, even extraordinary footage usually had to wait for nightly network programming. But today, so much about the practice and business of journalism is changing that those who still report news using the old-fashioned vehicles of newspapers, magazines, network and local television and radio are finding themselves forced to react to changes not of their own making.

"With all these new technologies comes the speedup of news, and the rest of us just tap-dance really, really fast to keep up," is how National Public Radio correspondent Cheryl Devall described the new pace of news reporting into which she's been thrust.

Devall and six other Radcliffe College alumnae addressed the issues involved in this catch-up tap dance now being practiced by members of the traditional media. This conference, entitled "Shaping the Message: News and Entertainment in the Age of New Media," which was part of the annual Alumnae Council, brought together graduates whose careers span an eclectic range of journalism and entertainment media.

The panelists described a world in which the rules of the game are changing, and traditional media are groping for ways to define what they do in this new, ever-expanding territory of news coverage. Although only a small fraction of journalists work for cable news channels and Internet news outlets,

the ability of those media to break stories at any hour of the day or night has created shock waves whose effects reverberate in every corner of the industry.

Soma Golden Behr, Assistant Managing Editor of *The New York Times*, said the recent speedup of news cycles has changed the ways in which daily journalism is practiced more than any other single factor she's seen during the past 30 years. "We used to get competition from a handful of top papers that came out once a day. The network news was a kind of competition, but it wasn't all day. Now I have to keep an eye on dozens of 24 hour news providers.... I still don't worry about getting beaten on a story by a supermarket tabloid, but I do worry about what Matt Drudge is putting on his nasty Web site...[he] is a master of the sport of Web-based tabloid journalism, but he misses the bull's eye regularly.... [But] every time he is right, he grows an instant audience," Behr observed.

Truth, accuracy and fairness in reporting take time. It's as simple as that, Behr told the audience. The electronic world, on the other hand, moves so quickly that there are doubts that it will be able to maintain the essential values that hold in place the foundation of the best of traditional journalism.

The effects of the accelerated news cycle have not been confined to print journalism. Cable news channels and Internet news sites have raised blood pressures in broadcast journalism, too. Nightly news broadcasts and radio newsmagazines like NPR's "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered"

usually operate on a schedule roughly similar to daily newspapers. They, too, now feel the 24-hour news outlets nipping at their heels, reported Devall.

Before joining NPR's Miami bureau in 1988, Devall was a city hall and general assignment reporter for The Chicago Tribune. "When I started at NPR and a story broke, we'd usually broadcast our report 24 hours later and call it analysis," Devall said. "Increasingly, though, our listeners expect us to be there when the plane crashes, when the fighting breaks out, when the verdict is read. It means a lot of work and a lot of moving around for all of us." Consequently, she added, "our broadcasts just sound different than they used to.... We still try to do a lot of analysis, but that becomes shorter because we have to cover more."

Are newspapers, nightly news programs, and radio newsmagazines waging a losing battle to keep their pages and minutes filled with timely straight news? Traditional news media are far from obsolete, but as CNN or The Drudge Report breaks the news, fewer fresh stories make the front page of The New York Times. "Given what we have to work with, we sometimes wonder if we wouldn't do well to refocus," Devall said.

Should venerable, respected publications even attempt the catch-up tap dance with the new media? Or should traditional media refocus, perhaps by replacing straight news reporting with a stronger emphasis on analysis? Should they, as Devall put it, become "the gourmet food section of the news supermarket?" Moving in this direction, however, would mean admitting defeat, and panelists seemed to agree that this is not the time to overreact since the future does not look so bleak for traditional media.

Behr pointed out that The New York Times has already shifted its focus slightly, including much more news analysis in the past few years. Closely scrutinized news events like the Monica Lewinsky scandal made analysis a necessary part of the coverage, she said. Because reports of every minor development spread rapidly through the Internet and cable channels, breaking

news seemed like yesterday's news before the paper could even reach the newsstands.

Former presidential speechwriter Lissa Muscatine pointed out that the increasing emphasis on commentary over straight news could be dangerous, however. Muscatine worked in the White House from 1993 to January 1998 after spending 12 years as a reporter and editor at The Washington Post. News reporters are becoming news analysts, she said, shedding the cloak of objectivity that once gave the public confidence in their coverage.

"Reporters no longer just report the news; they are hired as 'experts' and 'consultants' who are paid hefty fees to give their instant opinions on television. They are celebrities who enjoy lucrative speaking engagements, some even paid for by organizations they cover," Muscatine said.

Arefocus on analysis might also make sound business sense for traditional media falling behind in a competitive journalism world. The news market has become what Devall called a "news supermarket"—a bewildering array of news products all aggressively marketed by large news conglomerates whose managers keep a very watchful eye on profits. Muscatine pointed out that only about a dozen giant corporations own the vast majority of influential news outlets in the United States. [They] have become less and less accountable to readers and consumers and more accountable to Wall Street analysts and stockholders," she said.

Panel moderator A'Lelia Bundles, Deputy Bureau Chief of ABC News in Washington, expressed nostalgia for the journalism world she entered after graduating from Radcliffe in 1974. "Back then...it was okay for a news division to use money if it brought pride and dignity and bragging rights to the network executives," Bundles said.

But as Muscatine reminded her colleagues on the panel, it is more costly and difficult to report a complicated public policy story than to load up the front page or the nightly news with violence, sex and scandal. "[T]he 24-hour news cycle has increased the pres-

sure on journalists to produce 'news' even when nothing newsworthy has happened. One of my former editors used to describe the process as 'feeding the goat.' And, as we know, a goat will eat anything," Muscatine said.

The job of journalists is no longer simply to inform their audiences, panelists agreed. In order to maintain a grasp on an increasingly restless viewing population faced with dozens of news options, even traditional news providers must appeal to the scandal and titillation that arrest attention. In effect, news becomes a mixture of entertainment and information.

Devall traced the movement of celebrity journalism into mainstream news to journalists' need to "hook" the elusive and impatient viewer. NPR's coverage of the killing of Gianni Versace in the summer of 1997 was a case in point. "What we would have done 10 years ago was what we did the first day: call people in the fashion industry and have them talk on the air about Versace's influence on 20th Century fashion. And that would have been it," Devall said. "Instead, we were on that story for the nine days it took to reach conclusion, and I'm still shaking my head about it. These emergent news values of celebrity and titillation make me a little nervous."

The journalists on this panel concluded that if competition with the new 24-hour corporate news outlets means that traditional media must further saturate the public with titillating details of Monica Lewinsky's past, they want to get out of the race. Confronting a disadvantage because of the speed-up of the news cycle, their salvation might not come from tap dancing faster but in changing the music and dancing to a different tune of their own making. ■

Caitlin Anderson is a junior at Harvard College, concentrating in History and Literature. She is currently a News Editor at the Harvard Crimson and will be an Executive Editor during the 1999 calendar year.

BOOKS

Deploring the State of Beltway Journalism

Spin Cycle:

How the White House and the Media Manipulate the News

Howard Kurtz

Touchstone. 327 Pages. \$14 pb.

By John Herbers

Those looking for a balanced, critical appraisal of press performance in the Monica Lewinsky and related affairs need not read this book.

God knows, Howard Kurtz tries in "Spin Cycle: How the White House and the Media Manipulate the News." In an updated edition to include late developments of this year, he faithfully reports the sins, as he sees them, on both sides. Part of the problem is that he starts with a built-in conflict of interest: He works as media reporter for The Washington Post, which has followed the common practice of seldom identifying sources and keeping the story prominently on the front page even when there is no significant new development. This is an old device in investigative journalism to keep the story alive when significant new facts are not available.

As a reporter of various developments in the news media Kurtz is first rate. But as a member of the Washington press corps, he is surrounded by so many Clinton haters it is a wonder he can sort out the facts as well as he does. One cannot expect to get a proper account from the center of a dogfight. What is needed is an impartial observer from the outside to bring the facts into focus and tell what they mean, such as the critics which are found in the universities and impartial think tanks.

Not that Kurtz is easy on the press. "There was a time," he writes, "when a commander-in-chief was graded on the traditional measures of his relations

with Congress, his dealings with foreign leaders, his ability to keep the economy moving and the nation at peace. Now the increasingly opinionated mass media had somehow become the arbiter of political success and the distiller of conventional wisdom. A president's words were endlessly sliced and diced by the self-appointed pundits, his every move filtered through someone else's ideological lens."

Kurtz, of course, blames chiefly "the White House strategy of deflection and delay" to prevent the truth from coming out. "Eventually there comes a point when even the President of the United States cannot hide behind his spokesmen. Eventually the questions of the scandal-seeking reporters have to be answered."

This is true and Clinton has paid dearly. But take the process a step further. To the surprise of "scandal-seeking reporters," Americans turn on their television sets day after day to see reporters trained to be neutral investigators and observers performing like hostile prosecutors and decide in large numbers to take the side of the White House, even as they condemn the President's behavior. The leap from the press being accused over many years as being overly liberal to now seemingly being in league with right-wing extremists out to dump at any cost a President who is a Democrat is too great for many to find credible.

This, of course, is not the only cause



for Clinton's survival at this writing. But it is a troubling phenomenon that Kurtz deals with only superficially. He seems to justify the media's prosecutorial stance as an acceptable reaction to official obfuscation, denials and delay coming from the White House. With every round reporters become more skeptical and "at some point, even a reelected president dogged by endless scandal can no longer defy the laws of political gravity," he writes.

Kurtz makes little effort to define the enormous, historical differences between the White House and the press, almost treating them as equals: "For all

the animosity, the White House spinners and their cynical chroniclers were ultimately joined at the hip in a strangely symbiotic relationship. Both thrived on the frenetic pace of life at the center of the political universe.” The White House “needed the press to peddle their message to the public, and the journalists needed an action-packed presidency on which to build their reputations and name recognition. Yet fireworks were inevitable when the two sides got in each other’s way.”

Some reporters and editors would find that an odd definition of a journalist’s need. There was a time when it was widely believed that opinions and efforts to shape the course of government and politics should be left to the columnists and editorial writers. Here, Kurtz is clearly including reporters and editors.

Presidents have always tried to manipulate the press in one way or the other. Jimmy Carter’s 1976 pledge that “I will never lie to you” notwithstanding, all Presidents have. That the Clinton White House went to extremes is no excuse for the media to give every reporter and editor a hunting license to go after suspect officials.

The line between reporting and editorializing has been eroding ever since the Watergate days of the early 1970’s. White House press conferences and briefings are used by many journalists as more of a display of hostility and confrontation than a search for the truth. It will not do simply to blame evasive, lying officials for what many now consider the deplorable state of Washington journalism. ■

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. Before his retirement, Herbers also was the paper’s national correspondent based in Washington.

Cataloging Journalism’s Concerns

What the People Know

Richard Reeves

Harvard University Press. 149 Pages. 19.95 pb.

By Thomas Winship

Richard Reeves, old tad reporter of the finest kind, tells us in salty, joyous prose exactly how and why journalism has metamorphosed. No fooling around.

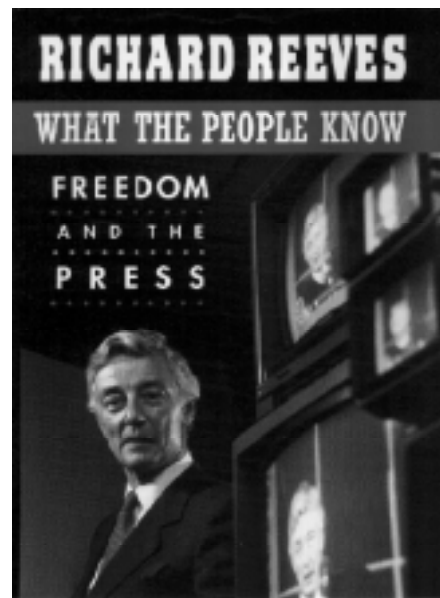
And guess what, this former New York Timesman does not despair as much as one might expect over what he sees and reads these days. Reeves is a philosophical realist if there ever was one.

This latest Reeves book is based upon his Joanna Jackson Goodman Memorial Lecture on American Civilization and Government at the Library of Congress. “We the press may be going the way of blacksmiths,” he tells us. “Same job: punching out old stuff with useful but old-fashioned forms, like horse-shoes. Or we could end up as bank tellers pushed aside for the automatic teller machines—ATM journalism with slots to deposit or withdraw news.” Yet, “we cannot stop the march of technology. It is a force of nature.”

Reeves cites the enormity of today’s technology companies—more than 10 times the size of the biggest media companies. Intel has 41,000 employees and 16 billion in revenues, while The New York Times and The Washington Post have a combined total of 19,000 employees and combined revenue of about four billion.

“The next changes could hit folks like me where it hurts, right in the old occupation. If the word goes audible, as I think it will, a lot of people, younger ones, may dictate better than I can write.

“My own worries about the technology have less to do with how I get my news than with how it is gathered and prepared for transmission. I worry



about the future of writing—if it has a future. I exaggerate, of course. But I do see troubling portents in Windows 95, Microsoft’s pictographic and thus universal language, using icons and mice rather than letters and key stroking.”

So relax, old timers, a very new media is here, and we old tribesmen might as well stop grouching about it. We cannot do much about our owners—except to “Yell About It,” Reeves says.

This little gem of a book covers, with great gusto, the catalogue of current concerns in the news community.

Leaks: “No government is safe from leaks, no people are safe without them... (they) are the wild cards of governance. What the people know and when they know it are the engines of democracy. Leaks change the timing.”

He takes his measure, too, of celebrity journalism and news as entertainment. He notes that Tom Friedman of The New York Times today is considered in Washington as more influential

in the formation of foreign policy than the old bulls of the foreign policy establishment. Not exactly a revelation to anyone.

As for the value of news in television front offices, Reeves wonders when the new network owners will have the confidence to rename their news shows the Westinghouse Evening News, the G.E. Nightly News, or the Disney World News.

"Where we *can* do something about it is truth telling," Brother Reeves sermonizes. "That is where we, our rowdy tribe has to fight or die—or both."

He drives on with more red meat. "Being persistent and consistent, we should be a little obnoxious in exposing again and again what is probably not true and real...to survive and serve, we have to make our corner the one to which men and women of good will can repair, can come to find or verify truth and accuracy in a society under siege."

The ever-cheerful Reeves concludes on this positive note: "Perhaps our Humpty Dumpty rise and fall during the past couple of decades will teach us something. We are best as outsiders, trying to function as an early warning system, given the privilege of reporting back to a free nation.

"In fact we are most effective when we are insecure, doubting our inflated importance and self-importance and anybody's ability to catch truth and history on the fly. We deserve to be and should be outsiders looking in—that's all we are."

For any young, middle-aged or the slow-footed, the sayings of Dick Reeves is the greatest feel-good elixir you will find. Only 130 pages long and a fresh and lusty nugget of wisdom appears on every one of them.

Dick Reeves, this icon of the old—and the new—journalism, will make working stiff think twice if they are thinking of calling it quits. ■

Thomas Winship is former Editor of The Boston Globe and Chairman of The International Center for Journalists based in Washington, D.C.

Locating the Citizens' Pulse

Assessing Public Journalism

Edited by Edmund B. Lambeth, Philip E. Meyer and Esther Thorson
University of Missouri Press. 284 Pages. \$22.50.

By Seth Effron

If the 1998 elections represented the maturation of "public journalism," then pre-election news coverage should have reflected more astutely the concerns and motivations of voters rather than the spin of professional image-makers and pundits. In North Carolina, where I work, coverage of the major races (U.S. Senate, congressional and state legislative seats) did not include a single news story that provided insight about what would become the major factors that voters would cite in explaining why they cast their ballots as they did.

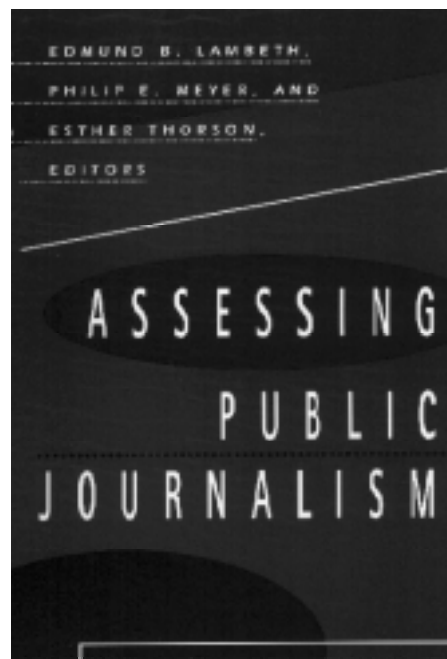
Some key results of our state's election—incumbent Republican U.S. Senator D.M. "Lauch" Faircloth being defeated and Democrats taking control of the state House of Representatives—were portrayed after the election as surprises in the state's major newspapers. Despite the state's larger newspa-

pers and television stations forming a "public journalism" coalition for coverage of elections, no clear illumination of the voters' mood or their concerns emerged.

In fact, after four elections cycles: (1992, 1994, 1996 and 1998) of the expanding "public journalism" trend—developed out of a recognition by many newspaper editors that they lacked a grasp of their readers' concerns—news during this election cycle was dominated by, what else, Monica Lewinsky. Journalists from Capitol Hill to the county courthouse saw that issue as a focal point in the 1998 elections. But as the election results showed, the Lewinsky matter was not the driving force for voters. The "surprise" journalists expressed in the results showed, despite the "public journalism" effort, that news organizations had failed to garner a clearer understanding of what was on the minds of the electorate.

In "Assessing Public Journalism," Meyer explains as well as I've heard it explained why this disconnect still exists. "The effects of public journalism are likely to be slow and incremental," Meyer writes. "The costs, on the other hand, are visible and immediate."

The book offers a thorough look at the growth of the public journalism movement. It provides various views about it and assessments of it, but out of these opinions arrives at no clear conclusion as to its success or value. More than two-thirds of this book is comprised of academic analyses, whereas chapters written by Lambeth and Meyer—with sections by Davis "Buzz" Merritt, Rick Thames, Jennie Buckner and Michael Gartner—give journalists what they need, a hands-on look at experiences and consequences of trying "public journalism."



John Bare, Director of Evaluation for the Knight Foundation, seeks to gauge how the “beliefs” of reporters and editors who engage in public journalism change. “Instead of following the ideological fault lines separating fans and critics, public journalism research should employ scientific measures to assess public journalism and its potential impact,” Bare writes. “In examining newspapers, researchers should measure the impact of public journalism in three ways. One, public journalism can manifest itself in editorial content. Two, public journalism can change the practices and behaviors newspaper staff members use to gather and report news. Three, public journalism can affect the attitude and beliefs of the reporters and editors.”

When such measures are applied, some of the results turn out to be inconsequential. For example, an examination of the number of staff-generated stories compared with wire service stories used by The Wichita Eagle, the first newspaper to embrace the public journalism label, doesn’t tell us much about what actually changed at the paper. Since the late 1970’s, The Eagle, the largest newspaper in the state, has sought to be a primary source of news when it comes to political coverage. In the pre-public journalism time of 1986, 95.4 percent of its political news stories were produced by staff reporting. A jump in 1994 to 100 percent seems insignificant.

While the book offers a forum to those who practice public journalism, criticize it and look for ways to improve it, what is noticeably missing is an exploration of what might be its central issue, the one that probably has more to do with public journalism’s success or failure. To what extent has an emphasis on public journalism replaced or taken away from other elements of election, government and civic affairs coverage?

Davis “Buzz” Merritt, the former Editor of The Wichita Eagle and one of public journalism’s chief evangelists, writes that the customary practice of journalistic detachment “encourages us to ignore or demean outside criticism which in turn means that we lose

the potential benefit of outside help and advice.” However, Merritt, as well as other editors, recognized before the “public journalism” label became trendy that involving “outsiders” in the reporting can be crucial in producing solid coverage on civic affairs.

The Kansas City Star employed such outside help, using experts in architecture and design, when it investigated the tragic collapse of a hotel balcony. Those articles were awarded a Pulitzer Prize in 1982 for local spot news reporting for its thorough coverage of the Hyatt Regency Hotel disaster. In 1982 The Eagle worked with a college professor, community leaders and key executives in the local real estate business in Wichita to investigate inequities in local residential property taxation. The stories resulted in a change in the state constitution and passage of other state laws. These individuals who worked with the paper were not simply sources for stories, but were directly engaged in developing the coverage for the series.

Today these efforts would likely be called “public journalism.” But these two examples, a few of many that can be found in newspapers around the nation for decades, are at their core simply good reporting. They represent what the best newspapers can do when they look in different ways at their communities and are able to identify fresh issues and perspectives that need exploration.

While this book tries to measure public journalism’s impact, it does not dig deeply enough into the emergent broader trends in how journalists are covering civic affairs and public institutions in general. “Depleted Capitals,” the recent examination of news coverage of state governments from the Pew Charitable Trust’s “Project for Excellence in Journalism,” revealed that most state capital press corps (27) are smaller now than in the mid-1980’s, nine are the same size and 14 are larger. This diminished attention paid to state government arrives at precisely the time when dramatic changes in Washington are shifting many key decisions—from utility regulation (telephone and electricity most notably) to aid for the less

fortunate, affirmative action and environmental protection—to the states.

“Assessing Public Journalism” does a good job at looking narrowly at this new reporting trend. But when it fails to explore these other related reporting issues in depth, the book becomes less than a comprehensive examination of the current coverage of civic affairs. It might have been more informative for journalists if the book had documented to what extent “public journalism” has supplemented basic civic coverage or replaced it and what has resulted out of each strategy. ■

Seth Effron, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, is Founding Editor of “the insider,” a state government news service in North Carolina. In its pre-public journalism days, Effron worked for The Wichita Eagle. The McClatchy Company, which owns The News & Observer of Raleigh, a newspaper that practices public journalism, also owns “the insider,” which is operated as a completely separate publication.

Books About Journalism

“The Little Book of Campaign Etiquette: For Everyone with a Stake in Politicians and Journalists.” Stephen Hess. Brookings Institution Press. 159 Pages. \$14.95.

“The Decade That Shaped Television News: CBS in the 1950s.” Sig Mickelson. Praeger. 242 Pages. \$39.95.

“Reporting Vietnam. Part One: American Journalism 1959-1969.” The Library of America. 858 Pages. \$35.

“Forgive Us Our Press Passes: Selected Works by Daniel Schorr, 1972-1998.” O’Brien Center for Scholarly Publications, Hastings College of the Law, University of California. \$14.95. ■

LETTERS

October 6, 1998
New York City

To the Editor:

The question asked in your review [Fall 1998] of the Robert D. Richards' book "Freedom's Choice" about the right of the editor vs. that of the publisher of a newspaper to publish a story concerns a private business—the newspaper. But rulings of the Supreme Court and lower federal courts regarding student editors' rights in *state-supported* schools pose different legal issues.

Since taxpayers support these schools, not a private owner as in the case of The New York Times, different rules apply. A long line of decisions restricts the right of a university president to censor a college publication or to fire the editor. After Tinker (the case of two Des Moines students who wore black armbands to protest the Vietnam War and were suspended) the same freedom was applied to public high schools. But then Justice Bryon White came along in the Hazelwood case and changed that, so high school publications now can be censored except in a few states where legislatures have passed laws freeing public high school publications from censorship.

The Supreme Court decisions apply to taxpayer-supported schools, which means that Yale and Hood College can indeed censor—if they wish—their publications. The logic is that taxpayer money finances these publications, whereas the private sector schools finances theirs. Thus the public, not the university president, is the publisher. At Harvard, the Crimson is, I believe, a private corporation and thus not reached by these decisions. The Crimson is closer to The New York Times example you cite than The Daily Kansan at the University of Kansas.

Melvin Mencher
Nieman Fellow 1953

August 25, 1998
Washington, D.C.

To the Editor:

David Hall ["Watchdog," Spring 1998] could not be more correct in stating that journalists need to pay more attention to foundations. As a former newspaper reporter, editor and publisher, I can attest that the media have long paid too little attention to philanthropy in this country. The payoff for reporters will not, however, lie in uncovering cabals to hijack public policy, as Mr. Hall seems to fear. They will find instead an amazing trove of stories about people helping people, about the countless ways private philanthropy works to make our public life better. ...

As institutions endowed, governed and staffed by citizens, existing to achieve an immense variety of charitable goals, foundations are integral to our democracy. Their voices should be heard. While foundations should avoid at all costs being co-opted by any politician's agenda, many politicians might radically improve their programs by making use of the knowledge and research that foundations have available. Foundations can, and do, interact with policymakers in beneficial ways that have nothing to do with political gain.

The public interest indeed requires that "foundations get regular, more sophisticated coverage from local, regional and national newspapers." I hate to disappoint Mr. Hall, but I don't think such examination will cause as much "wounded consternation" among foundations as he foresees. While stronger relationships between foundations and the media will take time to build, responsible grantmakers are ready to try. They know the public has little understanding of the role of foundations and the value of philanthropy in American life. They are more than ready to tell their stories.

Dorothy S. Ridings
President and CEO
Council on Foundations

Correction

The fourth paragraph in Cecilia Alvear's "No Chicanos on TV" article, in The Journalist's Trade section of the Fall 1998 Nieman Reports, should have read as follows:

"Stories originated primarily in the West Coast and Southwest states of the U.S. In addition, some markets with significant Latino populations (New York, Miami, Chicago) were underrepresented. In 1996, NBC aired the most stories on Hispanics (50 stories). ABC aired 45 stories and CBS trailed with 44 stories. However, in 1997 CBS had the most stories (47); ABC aired 38 and NBC trailed with 27. ■

October, 1998

To the Editor:

Contrary to the remarks of Philip Cunningham in the discussion on non-profit organizations [Fall 1998], Human Rights Watch and Human Rights in China are separate organizations, separately incorporated, separately funded, and separately staffed. Human Rights in China rented space from Human Rights Watch through the end of 1997; even that tie no longer exists. Mr. Bernstein is the founder, former chair, and current board member of Human Rights Watch; he sits on the board of Human Rights in China, but has no other relationship to it.

Sidney Jones
Executive Director, Asia Division
Human Rights Watch

October 1998
New York

To the Editor:

I am disturbed by the deceptive information published about Human Rights in China by the Nieman Reports, Fall 1998, p. 43, in an interview with Mr. Philip Cunningham.

Allow me to point out several factual errors.

Since its inception in March 1989, Human Rights in China has been an independent organization. It is not and has never been part of Human Rights Watch.

Mr. Robert Bernstein is one of the board members of Human Rights in China, along with 42 other Chinese and non-Chinese scholars and human rights advocates. Human Rights in China is chaired by Mr. Liu Qing, a former prisoner of conscience who spent 10 years in Chinese prisons for advocating democracy and human rights.

In spite of these factual errors, Mr. Cunningham is very familiar with our organization. He visited the offices of Human Rights in China four years ago and even published an interview in our quarterly journal China Rights Forum. Most recently, in 1997, he attended a press conference jointly organized by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and Human Rights in China. It is not the first time that Mr. Cunningham deliberately circulates inaccurate information about Human Rights in China, he has already done so through the Internet. In my view, his comments are closer to libel than objective journalism, and they should not have a place in a publication like the Nieman Reports.

We would be happy to provide you with further information about our organization and our work.

Thank you for publishing this letter in your next issue of the Nieman Reports.

Xiao Qiang
Executive Director
Human Rights in China

Philip Cunningham responds:

November 1998
Beijing

Human Rights in China (HRIC), as Sydney Jones admits, until very recently shared office space in the Fifth Avenue office of Human Rights Watch (HRW). It was also created under the supervision of founder and funder Bob Bernstein, the former CEO of Random House and a prominent anti-Communist activist, who was also HRW's key founding patron.

In HRIC's promotional materials, the organization refers to itself as a "Chinese organization...founded by Chinese," however, two of the four names that appear on their tax record are not Chinese; its nonprofit tax filing also makes the incredible claim that the lion's share of their operating income comes from China Rights Forum, a quarterly publication they produce and distribute largely for free. I received a free copy for years.

Xiao Qiang's letter mystifies me: What inaccuracy is he talking about? He never mentions one.

Jones's letter is helpful in that it confirms Mr. Bernstein's funding and founding involvement: That was one of the points I was trying to make. She asserts that HRIC is independent, but that is a judgment call, and certainly is not supported by their Form 990 tax documents. HRW is the more respectable of the two organizations, so it makes sense for a respected human rights advocate like Jones to distance herself from HRIC. But to say a HRW board member Bernstein has "no other relationship" to an organization he funded and founded makes little sense. Former political prisoner Liu Qing himself told me that Bernstein paid his expenses when I visited him at the HRW-HRIC joint office in April 1994 and I have no reason to doubt his word on this. ■

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NIEMAN NOTES

Compiled by Lois Fiore

The Scandal: Coverage from the Heartland

By Kenneth Freed

After spending nearly 30 years encased in the self-absorption of Washington and international reporting as a diplomatic reporter for the Associated Press and foreign correspondent for The Los Angeles Times, there was something refreshing about being in a part of the country where newspapers weren't so tightly focused on the arcane machinations of the East Coast establishment and caught up in the self-importance of the national media. This has been particularly true of the sordid Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky affair, coverage that I played a part in writing while I was working for my hometown paper, The Omaha World-Herald. (I left this job in mid-October after the executive editor who hired me was removed and the job I thought I was hired to do wasn't there any longer.)

The World-Herald, a two-cycle paper with four editions, a daily circulation of a quarter-million and the nation's highest readership penetration, certainly hasn't ignored the story. But for the most part it has provided a restrained, balanced account of the affair and its related issues that has kept readers reasonably well informed without titillating or inflaming them.

In fact, if the letters to the editor—called the Public Pulse here—are any indication, the single-minded intensity of the national media's coverage of the Clinton-Lewinsky matter has puzzled if not angered many Midwesterners, an emotion that includes members of the local press.

When Doyle McManus, the Wash-

ington Bureau Chief for The Los Angeles Times, was in Omaha recently, he met with a dozen or so World-Herald reporters and editors to discuss the coverage. After his amusing yet determined explanation of the pressures, conflicts and guesses that drove The Times' often dense coverage of the story with its unrelenting attention to sexual details and inside political manipulations, McManus was questioned with something less than understanding and acceptance of his position.

"What, have you guys gone nuts?" was the way McManus summed up our questions. "I was dumbfounded," he said later, "to find that reporters were acting just like Nebraskans."

The World-Herald is a conservative newspaper, largely reflecting its readership and the region, highly suspicious of all things Washington and reluctant to expand its role beyond that of a community-oriented newspaper. It is seriously understaffed, still runs routine "local boy makes good" stories on the front page, and its publisher openly involves himself in controversial policy issues, including injecting himself into political campaigns.

At the same time, Nebraska's economy is heavily involved in international trade, and the paper makes good if limited use of The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post and Knight-Ridder news services. The front page usually carries the major national and international developments of the day, though many of what other papers might judge as important stories are reduced to inside briefs.

Editorially, The World-Herald is adamantly and often angrily opposed to the President, again reflecting that in this state the vote twice went heavily against Clinton, giving him only 29 percent support in 1992. Still, while expressing disgust over Clinton's involvement with Lewinsky and condemning his evasions and lies in dealing with the affair, the editorial board declined to join several of the state's more liberal papers in calling for his resignation or removal. Instead it argued that his fate should be decided by the impeachment process.

With the exception of the truly important turns in the coverage, The World-Herald's editors generally have limited front page coverage to a single story about this topic, usually a down-the-middle AP account, and then only if the coverage actually moved events along or marked an obviously serious development. "We decided early on not to put every turn of the screw on page one every day," said Jeffrey Gauger, The World-Herald's Assistant Managing Editor for News.

As to the sometimes prurient content of the national reporting, "the decision was that we would not print things that went over the barrier of good taste," Gauger said, although acknowledging that making this decision was often a matter "of knowing it when we saw it" rather than going by some objective standard.

The only time the question of taste versus reporting was an issue, Gauger said, was in deciding what to publish from the Starr report itself on Satur-

day, September 12th. Our main front-page story was picked up from The Washington Post with a Los Angeles Times Clinton reaction piece accompanying it. Other sidebars and excerpts from the report, along with spillover from our front page stories, took up five pages inside. Words or descriptions deemed unnecessarily coarse were excised or substituted for “less offensive” phrases, Gauger said. While the paper itself used only excerpts, the full text of the report was carried by The World-Herald’s new Web site. The newspaper moved up the site’s formal debut to display Starr’s findings.

In an effort to balance coverage against Saturday’s focus on the Starr report, on Sunday we led with a New York Times story about Clinton’s plans to fight back. The front page also carried a story I wrote on the impeachment process and an item from The World-Herald’s Washington bureau on Senator Bob Kerrey’s views. Other related stories took up two inside pages.

If The World-Herald generally showed restraint and avoided much of the speculative punditry and questionable taste of some other media outlets, it also experienced a few lapses. The editors were very interested in children’s reaction to both the Clinton-Lewinsky situation and the language used in the coverage. Two front page stories—one of which I wrote—were assigned to explain oral sex and its various euphemisms to youngsters.

It is difficult to generalize about The World-Herald’s Clinton-Lewinsky coverage. Part of it certainly reflects a conservative society that perceives itself as preserving traditions of civility and modesty in a nation increasingly driven by crassness and vulgarity. There also is a sense that the Washington-New York based media are far too self-absorbed and have lost track of the economic, political and cultural issues that matter in what Nebraskans like to call the heartland. All in all, McManus was probably right—The World-Herald editors and reporters “were acting just like Nebraskans.” ■

Kenneth Freed is a 1978 Nieman Fellow.

—1952—

Robert P. Martin, a longtime foreign editor of U.S. News & World Report, died of natural causes on November 5, 1993, at his home on Vashon Island, Washington. Nieman Notes recently found out about Martin’s death through his Nieman classmate **John Harrison**. Martin grew up in Washington state and attended the University of Washington. Shortly after receiving his bachelor’s degree he took a job with The United Press, which sent him to China to cover the Sino-Japanese war. Martin was detained in Shanghai when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, but he escaped and returned to the area controlled by Chinese Nationalists. He subsequently covered both the war in the Pacific and the Chinese civil war. After leaving The United Press, Martin worked for Time-Life, The New York Post and CBS News before joining U.S. News & World Report in 1953 as Tokyo Bureau Chief. Martin was Foreign Editor at the magazine’s Washington headquarters from 1966 to 1979, when he became chief of the Moscow Bureau. He retired in 1984. Martin is survived by two daughters, one son, and three grandchildren.

— 1959 —

Perry Morgan gave a very generous donation to the Nieman Foundation this fall. In giving the donation, he said that “it is a pleasure to help give others the opportunity that was given to me.” Morgan is retired Executive Editor of The Virginian-Pilot who writes a Sunday column for the newspaper. The donation will become part of the Foundation’s general endowment.

—1965—

Jim Doyle retired as Vice President and Executive Editor of Army Times Publishing Company on October 1, 1998. His future plans include volunteering, traveling more, and learning to write better. His first activity was to become project supervisor for a study conducted by the Committee of Concerned Journalists entitled “The Clinton/Lewinsky Story: How Accurate?

How Fair?” The study concluded that while reporters didn’t pass on false leaks and fabrications, they distorted the coverage by “leaning on the suspicions of investigators that did not hold up....”

—1972—

John Kifner, a reporter for The New York Times, won the 1998 John Chancellor Award for Excellence in Journalism. The award, which comes with a \$25,000 prize, was presented by The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania at a dinner in Philadelphia. The Annenberg Center is based in Washington, D.C.

—1974—

Ellen Goodman, a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for The Boston Globe, received the Elijah Paris Lovejoy Award for her “persistent voice appealing to reason,” and for her “integrity, craftsmanship and character.” The award was presented to Goodman at Colby College, Maine, in November. She is the 46th recipient of the journalism award.

—1975—

Michael Ruby has signed on at The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel as Deputy Editor, a new position. His duties include supervision of project, enterprise and investigative work at the paper, as well as principal writing coach for reporters and editors. He reports to Martin Kaiser, Journal Sentinel Editor. Ruby left U.S. News & World Report, where he had been Co-Editor for seven years, in September 1996 and had been editing and ghostwriting books for Random House.

—Class of 1982 Reunion—

Anita Harris writes: “Our class reunion in New York at the end of October drew a group of 15 fellows and spouses who came from as far away as India (**Ramindar Singh**) and Italy (**Piero Benetazzo** and **Sylvia Poggioli**)—as well as Arkansas (**Gerald** and **Liz Jordan**), California (**Steve**

Oney and Madeline Stuart), Kentucky (**Judy Rosenfield**) and Washington, D.C. (**Ed and Michelle Walsh**). We were graciously hosted in the homes of New Yorkers **Alex Jones** and **Susan Tift** and **Margot Adler** and **John Gliedman**. We missed those of our group who could not make it—but were glad to be able to share our feelings about the recent loss of our South African classmate **Ameen Akhalwaya**, who died this year of cancer. We're planning to get together again this August in Tuscany—and, of course, will be in Cambridge for the year 2000 celebration. Curator Bill Kovach will be glad to know that this has all come about as a direct result of his request for a list of our E-mail addresses!"

—1989—

Julio Godoy writes: "**Barbara [Schulte, Godoy's wife]** will be the Paris correspondent of ARD-radio stations in Saarbrücken, Bremen, Berlin and Potsdam. In addition she will be working for all of ARD's other radio stations. I will be on leave from the University of Bremen. I will work as a freelancer. We already have an ongoing project: Germany's new government has decided to [try to] stop the use of nuclear power stations. The concern about nuclear wastes was always strong in Germany—in recent times this concern grew, especially as a result of several transport and safety malfunctions in the German nuclear deposits. France, strongly dependent on nuclear power plants, has for years confronted repeated accidents in its facilities. In the plant in La Hague, where nuclear fuels from all over the world are recycled, accidents occur every other week."

"In addition, nobody, either in France or in Germany, has a consistent answer for the deposit of nuclear wastes. Some months ago German politicians did consider the creation of an international deposit in an island in the South Pacific—or in Southern Africa. Barbara and I will be researching the perspectives of nuclear power in France and Germany—from the economic and the environmental perspective. But the

problem of property rights—the states have signed long term contracts with the nuclear industry—should also be of concern. It should be a 60-minute feature for German radio and television."

—1991—

Rui Araujo was honored with another national journalism award (his first was the Premio Bordala Pinheiro award, received in 1993). He writes, "The Clube Portugues de Imprensa (Portuguese Press Club) announced on October 13 the list of the 1998 national journalism awards. On the list for television best report: Rui Araujo and Antonio Louca (an historian) with "The War of Gold," a 52-minute investigation on Portugal's involvement in the Nazi gold scandal. The report concerned five countries and thousands of documents over a six-month period. We are doing another investigation, right now, on the same issue: the Jews, the Nazis plus the government and the central bank of Portugal. To be more specific: the 'robbery' of the Jewish private assets (Jewish people living in the Netherlands). We have good reasons to think that Portugal—at that time—helped the Nazis."

Luis Alberto Moreno arrived in Washington, D.C. on September 17, 1998 as Colombia's Ambassador to the United States. On arriving, Moreno stated that "With the election of President Pastrana a new era has begun in U.S.-Columbia relations. At this stage we must, above all, diversify the agenda, while continuing on with our common fight against narcotics trafficking." In the 1980's, Moreno and Pastrana worked together on the award-winning daily news program "TVHoy," with Moreno as General Manager and Pastrana as Director and anchor. Moreno also served as Colombia's Minister of Development in the Gaviria administration in the early 1990's and as General Manager of Pastrana's 1994 campaign, in which he lost to Ernesto Samper in an extremely close and controversial election.

Kevin Noblet has been The Associated Press' Deputy International Editor for News for five years. Now he is moving into a newly created position as Deputy International Editor for Training. He will be responsible for identifying prospective foreign correspondents, helping them develop the skills they need to work overseas, and then tracking their progress in the field.

"It's a brand-new position, part of the AP's push for finer reporting and writing. I'm defining it and creating a structure for it as I go along," Noblet says. "That's both exciting and highly anxiety-producing."

"One of the most rewarding aspects of my old job was working with young, talented reporters, helping them develop and getting them assignments where they would be challenged and flourish. Now I can focus more on that. But I'll stay very close to the AP's news report, because that's the best place to be working with reporters and editors on their skills and because I don't think I can survive without the adrenaline."

—1992—

Mark Seibel, Assistant Managing Editor at The Miami Herald, has taken on responsibilities for all state and local coverage, including the City Desk, the paper's seven suburban "Neighbors" sections in Dade County, the state reporting staff, and the investigative team. Previously, he had been in charge of the paper's copy desks and page one news selection. After his Nieman year, which he came to after seven years as the paper's Foreign Editor, Seibel became The Herald's Director of International Operations, founding an international "shopper" that circulates in four South American countries and developing the satellite printing network that publishes The Herald's international edition in the Caribbean and Central and South America.

—1994—

Maria Henson became Deputy Editorial Page Editor of The Austin American-Statesman in rockin' Austin, Texas in November. She previously had been

an associate editor, writing editorials and columns, for The Charlotte Observer. She welcomes visits from music lovers and Tex-Mex food fans. Her address: 6506 Santolina Cove, Austin, 78731 and phone number 512-343-2295; work: 305 S. Congress Ave., Austin, 78767, henson@statesman.com and phone 512-445-3965.

—1995—

Chem-Chemi Che-Mponda Kadete was married this summer to the **Rev. Douglas Gregory Whitlow** in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Kadete, who was a reporter for Tanzania Standard Newspapers Ltd. in Dar es Salaam at the time of her Nieman Fellowship, now works for the Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates in Somerville. Kadete reports that she recently earned her orange belt in karate and came in in third place in sparring at a recent karate tournament in Binghamton, New York.

Lisa Getter has joined The Los Angeles Times as an investigative reporter in the Washington bureau after more than 16 years at The Miami Herald. As soon as Getter got to town, she relates, fellow classmate Mike Riley fled.

Mike Riley left Time/CNN's AllPolitics.com in Washington, where he was Executive Producer, in May. Here is what he's been up to since then: "I went over to Congressional Quarterly as Editorial Director (as a short-term consultant) for their new media division. In September, I accepted a job as the Editor of The Roanoke (Virginia) Times. (My wife, **Arline**, tells me that I told her on one of our first dates that I'd love to edit a newspaper someday, and now I've gotten what I wished for long ago.) The paper is owned by Landmark Communications, and it's got a daily circulation of 105,000 and a Sunday circulation of 120,000. Roanoke, whose metro area is about 250,000 people, is located in the lovely Blue Ridge Mountains of western Virginia.

"I started the job about two weeks ago, so I'm spending my time as a human sponge, trying to soak up ev-

erything I can about the paper, its employees and the region. The paper serves about 19 counties in western and southwestern Virginia. The move from new media to traditional media is not that wild a leap, and I'm hoping to find ways to develop a smart and effective cross-media strategy.

"My new address is c/o The Roanoke Times, 201 West Campbell Avenue, Box 2491, Roanoke, Vir., 24010; work: 540-981-3227; home: 540-857-0187; E-mail: mikeri@roanoke.com"

—1997—

Dragan Cicic is enrolled at the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. He is currently in the first-year core curricular program and plans to concentrate on the business side of media transformation. At the time of his Nieman year Cicic was a reporter for NIN in Belgrade, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

—1998—

Cara DeVito writes: "After 17 years of working for NBC News, I have left to return to the world of an independent documentarian. The Nieman year changed my life irrevocably, it seems.

"My first day back to NBC, post-Nieman, I walked into an edit room and saw the front page of The New York Post dated July 28, 1998, bragging in boldface: NBC Reports Monica Drops Bombshell: 'I had sex with Bill.' The queasiness I felt was the first sign that it was time to move on.

"The next marker was a conversation with a Dateline senior producer concerning a proposed hour investigative story about foster kids in Los Angeles County. The producer explained to me that successful Dateline hour stories were most closely compared to the "movie of the week." Court TV hours, it was explained, were the best. The audience is completely riveted. Convinced of one side of the story, they hang in suspense through the commercials only to be completely persuaded of the legitimacy of the opposing side. Ratings are great for these.

"When I tried to be persuasive that a

Reminder

*Nieman Reunion
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Cambridge, Massachusetts

story on foster kids could also be riveting and would associate Dateline with quality journalism, the producer said that the Network has only one concern—ratings.

"I made my decision. My production company, 'Hey Hey Pictures,' is challenging the notion that compelling TV and quality journalism are incompatible."

Carlos Puig writes that he has left Proceso, after working at that magazine for 10 years, and switched from print to television journalism: "I am the news director of a new and independent TV network. Yes TV! CNI (Corporacion de Noticias e Informacion) is a TV operation completely dedicated to news. It has been on the air for five years. Because of lack of resources the last five years they broadcast news programs and documentaries from around the globe. Their own production was limited to a couple of series, one of them an award-winning series like Frontline, and a couple of news talk shows. But this summer they formed an alliance with outside investors which will allow us to do a daily news broadcast, and that is what I got hired to do. It is great because we are doing it all. Right now, we are designing what we want to do. The model we have been working on is something between The Lehrer

NewsHour and the BBC daily broadcast. We will try to prove that you can do intelligent, in-depth daily journalism. It is great because there was nothing done and everything to do. I am building my own team from scratch. We have to be on the air April 1999. At the same time, I am also involved in deciding the stories to do in our hour-long news documentaries. And I am helping **Raymundo Riva Palacio** (Nieman Fellow '92), who is preparing a Sunday magazine-like program (besides his daily job at El Financiero). I am also involved in our on-line product (www.cnienlinea.com.mx). Well, as you can imagine, I have my hands full. But above all I wanted to say how much I miss Lippmann House and how invaluable the experience has been now that I am working. Every situation, every problem takes me to some moment, some discussion during my Nieman year."

—1999—

Yu Sun won the bronze prize for best coverage of the United Nations and its agencies at the United Nations Correspondents Association awards dinner, held in New York on October 23. The prize was awarded for her "comprehensive and incisive coverage of the Kyoto Conference on emissions" for China Economic News.

Two Niemans Honored

Nieman Fellows **Gustavo Gorriti** (1986) and **Goenawan Mohamad** (1990) were among a group of five journalists who received the 1998 Committee to Protect Journalists International Press Freedom Awards in ceremonies in New York in November. The awards honor journalists "who have bravely provided news coverage and viewpoints in the face of arrest, imprisonment, violence against them and their families, and threats of death."

Gustavo Gorriti, of La Prensa, Panama, is one of Latin America's top investigative reporters. An uncompromising advocate for press freedom, "Gorriti has survived abduction by armed commandos in his native Peru and continual legal harassment in Panama, where he has lived since 1996." The CPJ statement continues, "Gorriti's reporting on Colombian drug traffickers' close ties to the Panamanian government nearly resulted in his expulsion from Panama in 1997. The threat of international condemnation forced the Panamanian government to extend his work visa for a year, but it has not put an end to the legal harassment."

Goenawan Mohamad, Founder and Editor of Tempo newsmagazine in Indonesia, "is a lifelong crusader for press

freedom who has sought to hold government accountable to the public.... Tempo, the independent weekly he founded in 1971, was the country's largest, most respected news magazine. It was silenced in 1994 at the beginning of Suharto's clampdown on Indonesian media. Now, with Suharto gone and a new government pledging a commitment to press freedom, Mohamad and a group of former staffers relaunched Tempo on October 6, with a dramatic lead article investigating the reported rapes of Chinese women during the rioting that preceded Suharto's resignation in May."

The awards ceremony marked the Committee to Protect Journalists' 17th year working for press freedom worldwide. ■

The Murrey and Frances Marder Fund

The Murrey and Frances Marder Fund has provided the Nieman Foundation with a total income of \$132,288 since it was established in November 1996. The Fund provided financial support for the Foundation's May 2, 1998 Watchdog Journalism Conference at Harvard University. It also paid for the costs related to publishing excerpts of the conference and articles on watchdog journalism in three 1998 issues of Nieman Reports. An accounting as of 10/15/98 follows:

Income: \$132,288

\$26,542	FY'96-97 income from endowment (11/96-6/30/97)
1,592	Interest on unused income at 6/30/97
49,168	FY'97-98 income from endowment (7/1/97-6/30/98)
1,889	Interest on unused income at 6/30/98
53,097	FY'98-99 income from endowment (7/1/98-6/30/99)

Expenses: \$58,138

\$25,061	Watchdog Journalism Conference
18,725	Nieman Reports/Spring 1998*
3,422	Nieman Reports/Summer 1998*
10,930	Nieman Reports/Fall 1998*

*Represents the portion of costs for each issue devoted to Watchdog Journalism.

Fund Balance: \$74,150

Lasting Connections of a Nieman Year

By Patricia Guthrie

In the end, the Nieman year is always about people.

The people who share that magical title of “fellow,” and those whom we meet along the route of our nine-month carriage ride through Harvard. It is about connections and conversations and being given the luxury of time to indulge in them.

By the end of 1996, five months after I returned from Cambridge to my job at The Albuquerque Tribune in New Mexico, I had given up trying to describe the classes, seminars, lectures and extracurricular activities of my fellowship and fellow fellows. Instead, I explained the influences of three people who framed my Harvard year:

Prof. Robert Coles. The Rev. Peter Gomes.

And Dr. Jonathan Mann.

Dr. Mann was one of 229 people killed aboard Swissair Flight 111 that plunged into the Atlantic Ocean September 2 on a flight from New York to Geneva. Mann died alongside his wife of two years, Dr. Mary Lou Clements-Mann, a vaccine expert and director of immunization research at Johns Hopkins University School of Hygiene and Public Health. She was working on an AIDS vaccine. Both were 51 years old.

I audited Mann’s General Education class, “AIDS, Health and Human Rights,” and we became friends. We had New Mexico in common and the dual sense of awe and injustice it inspires. It was the poverty, ruralness and other challenges of that state that sparked his interest in contributing to developing nations.

In 1984, he left his post as state epidemiologist and Chief Medical Officer at New Mexico’s Department of Public Health and worked in Zaire on a fairly new disease called AIDS for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention. Within two years, Mann was named to head the World Health Organization’s first Global Program on AIDS, a position he resigned in 1990 over a philosophical clash with WHO’s new top executive.

Mann then returned to Boston, his hometown, and Harvard University. Always looking for his next challenge, Mann merged his two passions—public health and human rights—into a foundation and new center within Harvard’s School of Public Health.

Mann used this new stage to re-charge the global fight against AIDS, a battle he viewed as backsliding into the usual fragmented mess of feuding bureaucrats and territorial organizations after an unprecedented decade of solidarity. He organized the first international conference on health and human rights, held at Harvard in the fall of 1964. And it was Jonathan Mann who foresaw the need to protect people with AIDS and HIV against employer, insurance and other discrimination.

But in my world in that brief moment of time, he was one of the most unassuming, down-to-earth professors I encountered. From the very first time I walked into his 16-week class, Mann exuded enthusiasm. “Consider human rights violators as pathogens in the world,” he told the class of 300. “Dignity impacts on health. When indignities happen, the emotional scars are deep and long lasting.”

In the final section of the semester, he explained the response to AIDS (or lack thereof) and the need to learn from the mistakes for the next pandemic. “AIDS is not just a disease but it involves a host of social issues,” he reminded us again and again. “Why spend so much time and effort trying to get a young black man in the city to use condoms if we don’t also work at assuring him he has a future?”

I don’t know when I actually last spoke to Mann. I had spoken to him a few times after he became Dean of Allegheny University’s new public health school in Philadelphia, a job he took in part to be closer to his wife. (This was the second marriage for both.) His last E-mail to me joked about the frustration of wanting to connect to say “hello” either in person or on the phone. We never did.

As I read through the pile of tributes read at worldwide memorial services, it was this comment from Swiss President Flavio Cotti that tapped my heart. “The tragedy reminds us painfully how fragile our lives are, how absurd our daily running around often seems.”

The husband and wife team were on their way to the WHO Geneva headquarters for a series of global strategy sessions on AIDS when the jet crashed. Since departing on bitter terms, this was Jonathan Mann’s first step back into the fold of WHO where he hoped his message would be better received.

Obstinate, tenacious, passionate, a pioneer, slayer of the status quo and a crusader against public enemy number one: complacency. So very few people leave such an imprint on the world, a classroom, a casual acquaintance. A projected image of the earth taken from the heavens dominated Mann’s last class in May 1996. He ended the semester with this challenge: “Learn to see the world in need of change. Hear the silence. Have the courage to speak truth to power. We are all travelers on this planet. We must learn how to be human together on earth. With whom you make a stand and when you stand will be decided with your mind linked to your heart.” ■

Patricia Guthrie is a health reporter for The Atlanta Journal-Constitution and a 1996 Nieman Fellow.

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

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

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