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How Can America's Newspapers Be Saved?

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Five Ideas for Covering the Campaign

By Bill Kovach

Curator's Corner

It was already clear in January that the resolutions to reform campaign coverage made by journalists after the 1988 presidential election had faltered in the face of the political reality embodied in the motto of Tammany Hall: "To Hell with reform."

Maybe George Washington Plunkitt of Tammany was right when he said: "The fact is that a reformer can't last in politics. He can make a show for awhile, but he always comes down like a rocket. Politics is as much a regular business as the grocery or the dry-goods or the drug business. You've got to be trained up to it or you're sure to fail." Part of the problem, of course, is the economic depression, which has severely restricted press coverage in many areas. Whatever the reason, the early trends of coverage of the 1992 campaign make it clear that any change in traditional political coverage this year is at the margins. The most noticeable innovation so far is the ubiquitous box grading the political commercials which candidates are running--and it isn't really new, just more common.

Overall it has been a disheartening beginning for students of political journalism in an already depressing winter of serious economic depression, of Beijing flu and of the absence of that dependable menace, the Soviet Union. Disappointing because of exciting possibilities for change in political reporting that surfaced in reassessments of the 1988 experience over the last four years. For those of you open to possible new ways of covering the remainder of the campaign, here are a few of the ideas for reform that have been discussed.

1. Cover whole campaign.

Direct mail, cable television (which is in 65% homes), local television affiliate news via satellite, neighborhood parties built around campaign VCRs. Taken together, all of these outlets have created a system in which thousands of semi-private campaigns are being conducted across the country at the same time. Many of them are different from the single national campaign on which we focus virtually all of our attention. Locate retired journalists, journalism students or political science teachers who can report on the mail and monitor the television. Real people who have the background and knowledge to gather the material and present it. If you are running a television program this approach has the added benefit of a "best home video" approach to coverage of the fragmented campaign.

2. Replace the experts.

We are relentlessly closing the circle. Politics increasingly belongs to an elite with its own jargon and its own world view. The people--the of, by and for whom it is all done--are left outside. The "experts" who design campaigns will only give the same take on the story. Find analysts who help bring the people into the loop--not keep them out. There are students of politics, political science and political affairs at colleges, universities and institutions around the country who could be used. There are also--at the philanthropic institutions--experts working in programs in the field that touch almost every issue. These people who have little or no political orientation and the programs they run could provide much raw material for issues discussions. For example, the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation has more solid information based on real life experience on alternative sentencing and other prison related issues than any political expert. In 1988 they might have helped put Willie Horton in a different context.

3. Who's running?

Help voters come to know about the candidates in ways that are important to them as potential voters. Detailed campaign biographies, articles that answer questions about character; experience; how the candidate thinks, works

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A Challenge to Journalists for Help

Instead of Being Isolationists, Reporters and Editors Should Help Shape Plans to Save Newspapers

By Michael R. Fancher
in collaboration with
Kathleen Criner and
James Lessersohn

The time has come for newsrooms to stop being isolationist in the war to save newspapers. As newspapers struggle to keep readers and advertisers, publishers increasingly will point a finger at journalists and say, "We need you." Those who don't enlist and contribute to creating the battle plan will find their options limited and many choices made for them.

The reason is simple — competing for readers and advertisers in the old ways won't work. Just putting out a better newspaper probably won't be enough to overcome the market forces that are eroding the industry's economic position. To succeed, newspapers must develop new strategies, with a clearer sense of which readers and advertisers they are trying to attract.

Journalists must be active participants in that process because every choice the newspaper makes has profound implications in the newsroom. Defining the newspaper's target audience has implications for the mix of content, voice and tone of the newspaper, as well as for the kind of journalistic skills the newspaper needs. More than ever before, the strategic choices newspapers make will define what reporters, editors and photographers do.

Likewise, news people must be engaged if they are to argue effectively for the values of accuracy, fairness, balance, perspective and public accountability. These values must be preserved regardless of the strategic choices a newspaper makes.

Old Formula No Longer Effective

It is clear the newspapers must make some critical choices. Here's why:

Newspapers have thrived for decades on a single basic strategy: they assembled a package of news, entertainment and useful information that attracted a large number of readers — consumers that advertisers were willing to pay to reach. This traditional formula, labeled the "media triangle" by the American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA), remains the foundation of today's successful newspaper business.

Despite competitive challenges in the 1950's and 1960's from other media — chiefly television — which followed similar ad-subsidized business formulas, newspapers found they could grow and prosper. By the mid 80's, most newspapers had achieved profit margins of 20 per cent or more, a business position many others envied. Even in the current economic slump, profit margins for most newspapers remain in the teens. This is two or three times as high as the margins for direct marketers, who are currently the hottest competitors to newspapers for advertising. This is significant because advertising makes up 80 per cent of the revenue for most newspapers.

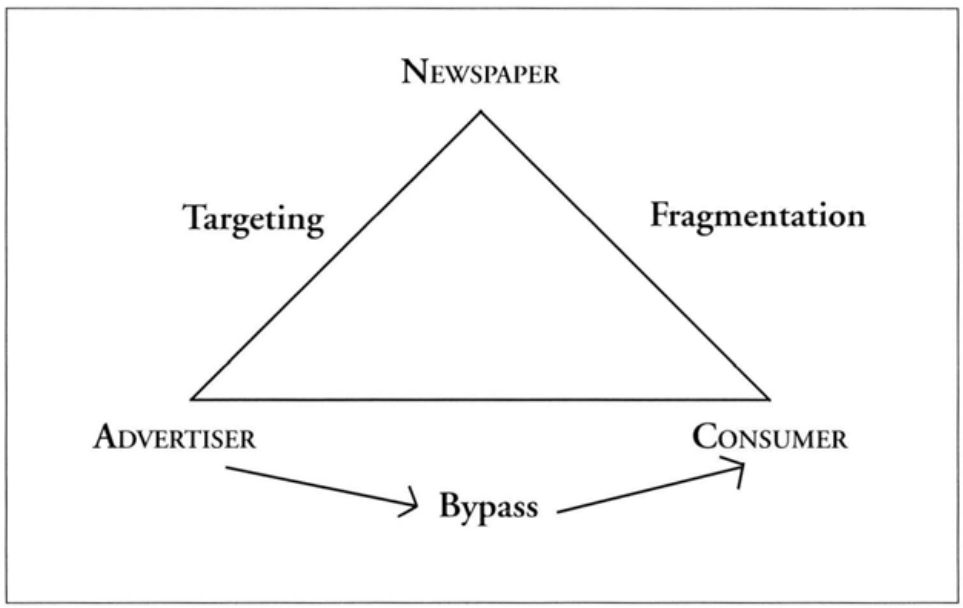
However, while newspapers have been succeeding as a business they've been declining as a medium. Consider these numbers. Daily newspaper circulation in the United States rose slightly during the 1980's, from 62.2 million in 1980 to 62.3 million in 1990. However, the United States grew by roughly 12 million households over the same 10 years. And, while Sunday circulation increases have been larger, those gains have just kept pace with household growth. Meanwhile, average weekday adult readership has declined from 78 per cent in 1970 to 62 per cent in 1990. Finally, newspapers' share of advertising dollars has dropped 4.4 percentage points since 1975, representing $5.7 billion in lost revenue.

Why did this decline occur? The combination of less circulation penetration and rapidly rising ad rates reduced the value of newspaper advertising. At the same time, computer technology allowed direct mailers and telemarketers to target advertising audiences with ever increasing precision. So newspapers were becoming a less efficient ad medium while direct marketers were becoming more efficient.

Fragmentation, Targeting and Bypass

This shift in efficiency eroded the media triangle — the basic economic structure of the industry — in three basic ways: through fragmentation, targeting and bypass.

Fragmentation is the market's response to fundamental shifts in the way consumers use all media and products. It was brought on by such changes as



the aging of the baby boomers, the increase in two-income families, and the growth of ethnic and minority populations. With less leisure time and more diverse tastes, consumers want specialized, targeted information.

Targeting is advertisers' response to fragmentation. Development of new products has exploded. Marketing budgets have expanded, but per-product marketing expenditures have declined. So, advertisers want more efficiency, less waste. Targeted media — special interest magazines, zoned editions in newspapers and narrowcasting on cable television — have evolved in response to advertisers' demands.

Bypass is targeting taken to the extreme: it rejects traditional media in favor of media ad strategies that reach individuals by name and household — not neighborhoods or demographic groups. Direct mail, telemarketing, even new electronic services such as Prodigy's computer service, help advertisers reach only the consumers most likely to buy their products.

Backed by increasingly sophisticated computer data bases and telephones, companies are tracking responses to media campaigns to develop detailed profiles of consumers' habits, interests and purchasing patterns. With this information, they can refine their use of all media to reach only the consumers they want to reach. They are shifting advertising dollars away from traditional mass media, such as network TV and newspapers, to promotion and newer target media.

Bypass is newspapers' greatest advertising threat, since it successfully attacks a newspaper's economic structure by creating direct links between buyers and sellers, dealing out the middleman.

Newspapers At a Crossroads

Fragmentation, targeting and bypass are producing permanent structural changes in the marketplace, reshaping the media landscape and newspapers' role in it. The impact of these changes is real — newspapers face increased competition, and competitors like cable television and direct marketing are growing faster than newspapers. There is no reason to believe those trends will suddenly stop, which is why newspapers' troubles won't disappear when the recession ends.

So, like it or not, newspapers have reached a crossroads. Recognizing this, the American Newspaper Publishers Association commissioned the Competitive Analysis Project (CAP), which pulled together a diverse team of newspaper executives to analyze the strategic and financial implications of some choices facing the industry.

Specifically, the team developed four strategies for dealing with the problems of fragmentation, targeting and bypass. The first strategy followed a traditional approach by trying to maintain Mass Appeal. The second took the path of least resistance, targeting a smaller upscale audience through Class Appeal. The third sought to maintain broad reach through more Individual Appeal by creating a collection of targeted print products to complement the basic newspaper. And the fourth gave the newspaper its own bypass by adding a separate direct-marketing function for Direct Appeal.

A few things became clear in the team's analysis. For one, there is no single prescription for success. Different strategies, or some hybrid combination of strategies, will work best depending on a newspaper's size and competitive situation. For another, given the structural changes shaping today's competitive media markets, it seems unlikely that newspapers will regain the level of profit margins they enjoyed in the past.

The CAP team urged every newspaper to experiment — persistently and creatively — to find strategic formulas that will work for them. And to start that experimentation now.

Journalists Should Face Up to Challenge

Clearly, the effort must cross traditional boundaries and barriers within the newspaper company, a prospect that many journalists find horrifying.

Why shouldn't they? To many journalists the notion suggests the same mindset that has afflicted television news and electoral politics — a combination of happy talk and sound bites. Find the lowest common denominator among readers and give them whatever they want, regardless of whether it contributes anything to the greater good of the community.

Indeed, all of the strategies pose some risks for traditional journalistic values. But the risk is greater if journalists don't recognize the absolute necessity for change and refuse to take part in a newspaperwide defining of that change.

To be successful in achieving its mission, any newspaper must have internally consistent ethical standards, pric-

ing strategies, promotional appeals, content policies, resource allocations and service orientation.

Therefore, news staff members shouldn't make content changes to serve readers in isolation from the interests, concerns and strategies of people in advertising, marketing, circulation and production. Conversely, people on the business side must respect the journalistic implications of the strategic choices they propose.

For example, the following is an examination of some possible journalistic consequences of the four CAP scenarios:

Mass Appeal, Traditional Strategy

To maintain the largest possible household penetration in their markets and remain a competitive mass advertising vehicle, newspapers following the Mass Appeal strategy must strive to be as many things as possible to as many people as possible.

Journalistically, this would require content emphasizing the newspaper's traditional role as a community forum and style/design that makes the paper inviting and easy to read.

Success will not come easily. The goals of the Mass Appeal are to arrest the slide in readership that is now a quarter of a century old. In America during the 1990's, obstacles to consistent daily newspaper readership include illiteracy, language barriers, a video generation alienated from print, busy dual-income households with no time to read, a mobile society with weak community roots, and possibly above all, an apathetic or even cynical attitude toward the subject newspapers cover best: public affairs.

To reach the broadest possible audience, the Mass Appeal editor would have no choice but to concentrate on subjects with broad, but not necessarily deep, appeal: local news, sports, service features and guides (news you can use), television coverage — anything that helps the "average Joe and Josephine" get more out of their everyday lives.

Stylistically, the paper would need to be well-indexed to satisfy impatient and busy readers. Graphics, headlines, photos and color would be used extensively to add clarity. To reach as diverse an audience as possible, stories would probably grow shorter so the newspaper could pack as many different topics into the news coverage as possible each day without expanding the newshole.

In reaching a mass audience, the Sunday edition of the paper would be critically important. Sunday is not only the day on which the newspaper reading habit remains strongest, but it is also the day on which the paper is big enough to offer even more things to even more people. In the future, true Mass Appeal may only be possible one day a week. But Sunday already accounts for half of the total advertising revenue at many newspapers. Keeping Sunday circulation strong is indeed a key to satisfying most retail and classified advertisers.

If the newspaper defines itself as a local reporting and editing organization rather than a producer of daily written news and advertising, the promise of electronic products — especially voice information systems — becomes obvious.

By offering a free local telephone information system with sports scores, stock prices, weather forecasts, soap opera updates, and other popular features, the Mass Appeal could reach out to groups of citizens, many of whom are young adults who just have not developed a newspaper reading habit. Even if they ultimately fail to subscribe, these consumers would learn to think of the newspaper company as an important local information source.

Because the Mass Appeal strategy reflects the traditional mission of local newspapers in America, it is the strategy that demands journalistic skills most similar to those found in newsrooms today. Most reporters would be gener-

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Kathleen Criner joined the American Newspaper Publishers Association in 1980 to establish the Telecommunications Department. She is a Vice President. The department seeks to identify opportunities for newspapers in the media market and helps newspaper use new technologies to improve their strategic position and operations. Previously Criner was with the U.S. Department of Commerce and earlier in the Office of Telecommunications Policy in the Executive Office of the President. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Massachusetts and a master's degree from Catholic University.

James C. Lessersohn is Director, Corporate Planning, for The New York Times Company. He is Chairman of the ANPA's Competitive Analysis Subcommittee. In 1982, after three years as a planning analyst and Planning/Projects Manager at The Daily News in New York, Lessersohn returned to The Boston Globe, where he had been an intern, as Manager of Market Research Services. In 1984 he became Corporate Planning Manager for Affiliated Publications, the Globe's parent company, and in 1987 he joined The Times. Lessersohn holds a bachelor's degree from Harvard College and an MBA from the Harvard Business School.

What Some Newspapers Are Doing

Are any real-life newspapers actively pursuing strategies like those examined by the ANPA Competitive Analysis Project? For starters, most newspapers probably think they are seeking Mass Appeal, but declining penetration and aggressive circulation pricing suggest more and more newspapers may be moving closer to the Class Appeal.

Mass Appeal

Examples of the true Mass Appeal are increasingly hard to find. Some newspapers that have held down price increases seeking increased circulation are:

- The Star-Ledger, Newark, NJ
- Daily News, Duluth, GA

Class Appeal

The clearest examples of the Class Appeal strategy are The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times, both of which aim for the top end of the markets in which they circulate.

Individual Appeal

Several newspapers illustrate aspects of the Individual Appeal:

- The Tampa Tribune offers special sections including "Real Estate Plus," a free-advertising tabloid, which is distributed on racks and in stores every other week; "Employment Plus," an ad-only tabloid, which is subscriber supported at $1.50 a copy and includes a partial reprint of Sunday ads, distributed every other week at newsstands, and "Upscale Tampa," a mix of news, features and ads aimed at high-income trendsetters and is distributed in certain zip codes with the Saturday paper with limited distribution in selected stores.
- The Cedar Rapids Gazette produces several publications targeted to the agriculture community, including the "Iowa Farmer Today," a weekly; "Iowa Pork Today," a monthly and "Iowa Beef Today," an annual. The Gazette also distributes "Equipment Connections," a monthly advertising supplement. All publications are ad-supported tabloids and are distributed statewide by second class mail. "Livestock Option," an interactive voice service, offers current pricing and market information.
- The Toronto Star offers two specialized publications: "Eye," a free ad-supported entertainment weekly tab aimed at 18-to-40-year olds, distributed in special boxes around the city, and "Wheels Exchange/Home Search," a combined automotive and real estate trader is published every two weeks and sold at newsstands for $1.40.
- The Sun Sentinel, Fort Lauderdale, FL offers "S/X" a free, ad-supported weekly, aimed at 18-44-year olds and "Exito," a weekly ad-supported tab aimed at 25-54 year old Hispanics.
- The Wenatchee (WA) World is attempting to establish links to the Hispanic community with "El Mundo," a free ad-supported tab, with a strong focus on international news. It is distributed twice monthly.

Direct Appeal

Numerous newspapers currently use their circulation databases for direct marketing efforts. In addition, newspapers are selectively exploring some of the Direct Appeal strategies. For example:

More than 100 newspapers have alternative delivery programs to deliver magazines and product-related information to individual households. Examples include The Sacramento Bee, The Tampa Tribune, Newsday, The Norfolk Virginia Pilot/The Ledger-Star, and The Herald in Everett, WA.

Newspapers producing merchandize catalogues include The Atlanta Journal and Constitution and The Herald-Times in Bloomington, Indiana.

Many newspapers have direct mail programs for advertisers. Three examples are The Chicago Tribune, Newsday and The Washington Post.

Newspapers offering list management services include The Spokesman-Review/The Spokane Chronicle, Spokane, WA; The Atlanta Constitution, and The Cedar Rapids Gazette in Iowa. ■

alists. A premium would be placed on simple, concise writing for a broad audience. Graphic artists would continue to grow in importance as the presentation of the news becomes even more important in encouraging marginal readers to continue to read.

One journalistic risk in this strategy is that newspapers might simply pander to readers and abdicate their role, strongly implied by the First Amendment, of being a watchdog of government and public affairs. However, one must ask what kind of watchdog newspapers can be if fewer and fewer people pay attention to their barking.

Another risk is that newspapers, facing declining profit margins, might be unable or unwilling to invest in content improvements that could arrest the ongoing erosion of readership. The strategy could be seen as too little, too late.

In sum, the Mass Appeal strategy chooses breadth and universality over depth and specialization. Ironically, the strategy probably would require editors to spend far too much of their time thinking about appealing to those readers who are least committed to the paper. In most communities, committed readers have few other choices if they want to be genuinely informed.

Class Appeal, Least Resistance

In contrast to the Mass Appeal, the Class Appeal strategy might be considered the path of least resistance. By focusing primary editorial attention on readers who are most likely to remain readers under any circumstances — the most affluent and educated third of the population — the Class Appeal wagers that high circulation prices and an advertising sales strategy based on the demographic profile of readers, rather than the mass coverage of market households, will generate enough revenue to maintain current profit margins. It works for The New York Times. Can it work for Gannett?

With a narrower target to shoot at, the Class Appeal editor would have an easier task than the editor of the Mass

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What Readers Really Want

It's Not More News—They Can Get That for Free —It's Helping People Interact With Others

By Reid Ashe

The problem with newspapers is that we've grown too good at the wrong things, and neglected the things our readers and society value most. We've honed the art of compiling and delivering information — and convinced ourselves that's our principal function — at a time when information has grown cheap and abundant.

For many people, news has become something you get by turning a faucet. Check the weather channel, CNN, Financial News Network. Listen to news radio on the way home. When the newspaper comes along offering more information in greater depth — at a price in time and money — lots of people don't buy. I already have more than I need, they reason. Why should I pay to have more?

Newspapers are ignoring — at our peril — the reader's hierarchy of values. Things that are abundant, such as air and water, are cheap, even though they're vitally important. But if something's scarce, such as diamonds, we value it highly even if it's only marginally useful.

General news is cheap because it's available for free all around us. What's become scarce in our society — and therefore potentially valuable — is meaningful social interaction.

Fostering a Sense Of Community

In the journalistic sense, that means help in relating to the people around us, help in fostering a sense of community, help in bringing the political process within the reach of the individual and the control of the electorate. It means orienting the reader within a community of humans, not just a system of institutions.

In the commercial sense, it means organizing a marketplace, presenting advertising in a way that facilitates shopping. It means lots of prices and items and opportunities for comparisons. It means advertising that educates and empowers the buyer, and therefore attracts a uniquely receptive audience. When you bring buyers and sellers together, you create tremendous value, for which people will readily pay.

News and Ads Not Enough

To say our role is to deliver information, or to deliver news and advertising, is too limiting. It shackles us to the low-value aspects of what we do. Anybody can parrot the headline news that most people consider sufficient. And everybody from the post office to the electric utility can deliver an advertising message. If we hope for secure jobs and a comfortable retirement, we need to stake a claim on something more valuable, less abundant and more difficult for competitors to duplicate. We must declare that our mission is not just to deliver information, but rather to bring people together.

This is not to say we should neglect news. News can help to bring us together. It gives us something to talk about, and gives us reasons to seek each other out and work together to improve things.

Most readers don't think about it, but if they did, they'd conclude that news has little intrinsic value. Its value is in the ways it stimulates and facilitates interaction with other people. If you believe this, it's of more than theoretical interest. It's a concept that can guide everything from story selection to ad pricing.

This doesn't mean stories have to be short or "dumbed down." But it certainly means they need to go beyond what was on CNN last night. We have to recognize that raw information is cheap, understanding is valuable and something you can act on is precious.

Reid Ashe is president and publisher of The Wichita Eagle. His background is unusual for a newspaper executive. He received an S.B. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1971. After college he became assistant editor of Technology Review, the MIT alumni magazine. Enjoying print so much, he became a reporter on The Jackson (TN) Sun in 1973 and worked himself up to editor and publisher in 1978. Ashe joined Knight-Ridder Newspapers as a general executive in 1984 and was in charge of the experimental videotex system known as Viewtron during its final months. He and his wife, Lisa, a former reporter, have two sons.

Too often, stories that are pure information, that the reader can't do anything about and that won't change his or her life in any identifiable way, win the competition for space and display in our newspapers. Certainly those stories have a place. But the other kind of story, the ones that grab the reader and let the reader grab back, deserve more of our scarce resources.

This is no formula for salvation by itself, but it should at least make more useful and interesting newspapers — and in the long run, more successful transitions into emerging media and more intelligent defenses against new kinds of competitors.

Newspapers' Fate Linked to Community

Several lines of thought point independently to this conclusion. The first is best expressed by John Gardner, who laments our declining sense of connection with the community around us:

> Under the powerful disintegrative forces of contemporary life, communities and the sense of community are breaking down. Families fall apart. People lose connection with one another. More and more rootless people drift through life without a sense of belonging or allegiance to anything.

Gardner connects this declining sense of community with low voter turnout, with moral decay on every level from street crime to Wall Street fraud — and with declining newspaper readership. He concludes:

> Newspaper readership is unlikely to turn upward as long as the sense of community continues downward. I believe their fate is linked. Newspapers have a stake in the sense of community.

A second line of thinking that points to the same conclusion was stimulated by our experience with Viewtron, Knight-Ridder's mid-1980's experiment in on-line news for the home. Remarkably similar to today's Prodigy, Viewtron was touted as the successor to newspapers — more timely, more detailed and more personal. Moreover, it promised to bring the bank, the department store, the post office and even the classroom into Everyman's living room.

Alas, it didn't work — and not because of the cost or hardware barriers that conventional wisdom would suggest. We had a chance to observe several thousand customers for whom cost and hardware were no problem. What we found was consistent and discouraging. From the beginning, Viewtron customers reported high satisfaction but showed rapid attrition. After they played with it a while, most of them quit using it.

Then we looked specifically at the minority who remained loyal, regular users beyond the time when most new customers lost interest. We found a remarkably small portion of their time was spent retrieving news. Mostly, they were communicating with each other. There was a fundamental disparity between, on the one hand, what we offered and customers bought, and on the other hand, what people actually wanted and were willing to use.

What we sold them was information on demand — a Mighty Wurlitzer of knowledge. Want to know what's happening in Uruguay today? Just pull this stop. What does the encyclopedia say about Archimedes? How's the weather in Dar es Salaam? What's the price of pork bellies in Chicago? It's all at your fingertips.

What Viewtron Customers Wanted

We sold it. People bought it. We delivered. They were satisfied. But they quit using it, because they didn't really want it.

What a minority of them did want, and were willing to keep using, was something else. It wasn't information. It was communication — interaction not with a machine, but with each other. We were neither the first nor the last to discover that. CompuServe, arguably the most successful consumer on-line service, and the French Minitel system, the world's largest in customer count, have discovered the same phenomenon.

Connect somebody up to an on-line computer system. Give him access to a world of data, to the hottest news, to the most complete reports. And he'll ignore it, preferring instead to fool around with other users. These people are telling us there's minimal value in "more news," "more knowledge" or "more information." The value, defined by their willingness to spend time and money on it, is in the new ways they find to interact with other people.

The third line of thought suggesting the value of human interaction comes from The Wichita Eagle's recent efforts to redirect political campaign coverage. We think we found clear support for the notion that newspapers can add value by moving beyond traditional reporting.

The Eagle Set Campaign Agenda

We started with the idea that part of the blame for declining voter turnout must lie with the diminishing intellectual content of political campaigns. Attack ads, targeted mailings, sound bites and 30-second spots have displaced meaningful debate and, we suspected, alienated voters. So beginning with the 1990 gubernatorial campaign, The Eagle aggressively asserted control over the campaign agenda and insisted candidates speak to issues the newspaper identified.

At the same time, The Eagle led a campaign to promote voter registration and mailed an "easy reader" tabloid explaining the campaign and the electoral process to non-subscribing households. With extensive polling before, during and after the campaign, we found that Eagle readers reported a much higher understanding of the issues in the campaign — and a much greater improvement in their understanding — than readers elsewhere in the state.

Every Sunday, we summarized the key issues and the candidates' stands, highlighting any changes during the week. Necessarily, much went un-

changed from week to week. Readers found the repetition not at all annoying. In fact, they applauded it.

Voter turnout did not rise measurably. In fact, turnout declined slightly from the previous election. However, there were several factors that made the 1986 election anomalous — the presence of a local candidate, plus high-interest referendums on liquor by the drink, pari-mutuel gambling and a state lottery. Viewed against the long-term trends in voter turnout, it does appear the long slide in turnout leveled off.

If the statistical results were subtle, the comments we received from readers were clear. They liked it a lot when we insisted the candidates respond to issues. We seized control of the campaign agenda, made the process more accessible and comprehensible and readers approved.

More recently, we have been conducting 250 open-ended, face-to-face interviews with randomly selected voters, trying to determine what issues are important to our readers' lives. This is forming the basis for the campaign agenda we are attempting to set in the 1992 elections.

Voters Feel Shut Out

The fourth line of thinking comes from a project the Kettering Foundation was conducting at about the same time the Eagle was trying to redirect its campaign coverage. The foundation sponsored a series of focus groups in 13 cities around the country, exploring ordinary people's attitudes toward politics and government. The researchers concluded that John Gardner wasn't quite right. The report said:

> Americans are not apathetic. Citizens want to participate in politics, but they say they are shut out of the political process. They feel cut off from political debate.
>
> Americans assert that politics has evolved into a "system," a leviathan made up of all-too-powerful special interests, lobbyists, and political action committees that act as the real power brokers in politics; expensive and negative campaigns that turn people away from the political process; and media that seem to promote controversy and sound bites over substance. Americans have not turned their backs on civic duty. Citizens do engage in specific areas of public life — mostly in their neighborhoods and communities — but only when they believe they can make a difference and help bring about change. By and large, citizens do not believe that this opportunity is present in most areas of political action today.

No wonder people responded so warmly when The Wichita Eagle tried to bring the gubernatorial campaign back within people's reach.

Lack of Time Not the Problem

The fifth line of thinking comes from a study conducted last year at seven Knight-Ridder newspapers. The point was to look for clues to explain the sex-reversal we've seen in newspaper readership in the last 20 years. While women used to be more likely than men to read newspapers, now the opposite is true.

Researchers conducted a total of 154 one-on-one, hour-long interviews with women readers and non-readers. The women were chosen as representative, though not strictly as a random sample. They were asked to talk in an open-ended fashion about their lives, their concerns and how they get information.

When the researchers compared notes, they discovered, unanimously, that time poverty was not the fundamental problem. Everybody's short of time, but people will make time for the things they consider important. One woman said she had "no time to read" but watched soap operas religiously. Another had two jobs and young children, but rose at 5 a.m. every day to read her newspaper.

As earlier, more rigorous studies confirmed, the best readers were the ones who cared the most about their communities. If they read the paper, they tend to be plugged in. If they don't like the town where they live, they almost certainly don't read its newspaper.

Asked what they wanted to read about that wasn't adequately covered in the newspaper, the women offered a familiar list: learning, child-rearing, saving time and money, health, safety, careers, hobbies, religion, the environment — topics that absorb lots of personal energy but that newspapers tend to cover only superficially.

They said they like to understand things by internalizing and emulating: "I can't get a grip on events until I know the players as people."

None of this is new, and if you asked men the same questions, you'd probably get many of the same answers. Editors have known this stuff for years — so why haven't we done more about it?

We're inhibited by our journalistic tradition and mindset. Intellectually, we may know readers want more than information, that they want guidance through a complicated society. But instinctively, we keep retreating to our safe, familiar definition of news. Here's an example:

We know that a majority of the population is involved in some sort of volunteer activity. Readers tell us they like stories that celebrate volunteers. But suggest in a roomful of journalists that we need more stories about exemplary volunteers, and somebody will object, "That's not news!" Indeed. Perhaps it's something more valuable.

Smaller Papers Write About People

The sixth and final line of thinking comes from the consistent observation that America's most successful newspapers, the ones with the greatest reader acceptance as measured in market penetration, are the ones in the smallest cities.

These are the newspapers with the most meager resources and the least sophistication. Their appearance is often bland and colorless, their photography pedestrian and their prose devoid of grace. They often ignore major world and national news altogether. Yet nearly everyone reads them.

That's because of the powerful advantage they enjoy over their larger brethren: They write about people we

know. We're compelled to read them because they satisfy the social animal's craving to stay in touch. We're compelled even to read what we already know. As a friend back in Jackson, Tennessee, once observed, "This town is small enough that people pretty well know what everyone else is doing. But they have to buy the paper to find out who got caught!"

We journalists are like the people who make drills. We forget that people don't buy drills because they want drills. They buy drills because they want holes. Neither the drill maker nor the buyer thinks much about the difference. In the long run, though, the most successful drill maker will be the one who concentrates on the benefit — the hole — more than on the irrelevant qualities of the tool. Moreover, he'll be less likely to be taken by surprise when someone invents a new way to make a hole.

We think we're selling information, and most of our readers probably think that's what they're buying. The value of what we do, though, lies not in the knowledge per se, but in the way it promotes human interaction.

Don't just tell me Wichita had another gang-related shooting last night. That's information. Tell me how the city is reacting —how people in poor neighborhoods are shuttering their windows, how the well-to-do are snapping up burglar alarms, how intelligent people are spreading and believing irrational rumors, how social agencies and police are mobilizing. Explain how young people fall into gangs, and how others rise above their disadvantages. Put real people in those stories, and show me their faces. Tell me how all this will affect me, and what the people I know are thinking about it. That gratifies my social needs.

Newspapers Offer Commercial Market

Along with our journalistic mission, newspapers have a commercial one — and it, too, can benefit from attention to human interaction.

Back in the fabled good-old days, when newspapers made more money every year without much thought or effort, the advertising department's mission was simple: sell space. Then things got tougher. Profit growth slowed while competitors grew more aggressive. Customers grew to resent our prices, our policies and our attitude. So we redefined the advertising department's mission. Now we're the advertiser's partner, advising on marketing strategy and designing more eye-catching ads.

We've improved our competitive stance, but not enough. Even though we've made ourselves easier to use, we're still selling ourselves as a conduit — as an alternative, albeit a superior one, to television, billboards or mail.

We ignore our greatest competitive advantage of all. Virtually alone among our competitors, we create not just a conduit, but a marketplace — a place where buyers and sellers come looking for each other. It's not enough to understand the advertisers. We also need to understand their customers — and bring buyers and sellers together.

The marketplace is a tradition that's as old as civilization, and its dynamics have a lot in common with the forces at work in newspapers.

Central Markets Go Way Back

Think of a town in an early civilization or in a developing country where literacy is not yet widespread. There's an open place near the center of town where people gather to trade and visit. Buyers come to the marketplace because that's where they find the broadest array of sellers — the most choices and the most competitive prices. Sellers come because they know that's where people are looking to buy.

Economists can identify important advantages of a central marketplace. It optimizes prices and clears the market. That is, it avoids left-over goods and misallocated resources. It promotes the community's economic efficiency.

The experience of going to the marketplace is as much social as economic. People with similar interests meet each other and swap stories and ideas. While shopping for beans, a fellow shopper might tell you a new recipe. If it's a free society, you'll probably hear from politicians and religious proselytizers. There's entertainment, too, in the form of musicians, magicians, snake charmers and medicine shows.

Our modern communities don't have a central marketplace, but they do have newspapers. Consciously or not, newspapers have replaced the physical market — and improved on it, because we've removed the constraints of time and space. We offer the social and economic benefits of the marketplace without the need to gather physically. We replicate the traditional marketplace most clearly in our classified sections. But all price-and-item advertising builds a marketplace.

After 500 years, print remains the best technology for the purpose. You can't browse a broadcast; audiotex is too slow and clumsy and on-line database systems, while clearly more capable, still haven't won widespread acceptance.

Medium of Choice Remains Print

Someday we may have virtual-reality machines that re-create at home the sights and sounds of the marketplace, that let us hear the competing blandishments of the vendors, let us touch and smell their merchandise, perhaps even try on shoes. Before we get to that level of perfection, there may be intermediate improvements. But today, the medium of choice is print.

If we concentrate on the benefit, on the role of organizing a marketplace, we should be able to choose our technology rationally and not emotionally — selecting the best available means to suit our ends.

The newspaper parallels the traditional marketplace in three other important ways:

First, it's centripetal. Normally there's only one marketplace in a town, not one on every corner. If there were two, then buyers and sellers alike would find it advantageous to go to the larger. The greater the disparity, the greater the attraction, until the smaller inevitably would wither to nothing. This is one of the reasons that two-newspaper towns are so rare.

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The Tyranny of the Apathetic

How Uncaring Readers and Viewers Influence News Content— The Answer: Appeal to a Class Audience

JIM WILLIS

Today, if you had Watergate, you would have to check with the marketing department.

— David Burgin, Editor,
The Houston Post

DAVID BURGIN'S WARNING conjures up a familiar yet foreboding theme to many journalists. As Time magazine reported a couple years ago, that theme is the question of who is running the newsroom these days and whether editors and publishers agree on the best road to take to achieve success. Some, like former Christian Science Monitor editor Katherine Fanning, have left their newspapers in disputes over what kind of profile the editorial product should show. What upset Fanning the most was that a new editorial philosophy and format were handed down to her from upper management. As she told a reporter after her resignation: "The business side seems to be calling the shots." Fanning was not alone in resigning; her two top assistants left with her.

In defense of The Monitor's management, industry observers point out that the paper has been struggling for years to build a large enough subscriber list with sufficient demographic quality to allow it to remain a viable daily. In fact, however, Fanning seemed to be improving the paper in content as well as visually.

The number of editors speaking out for more independence from the business side is increasing. William Woestendiek, editor turned journalism professor, says the situation is ominous. The University of Southern California professor has noted that, "Finances are taking over the newsroom.... Some publishers let their business manager run the show because he controls the bottom line."

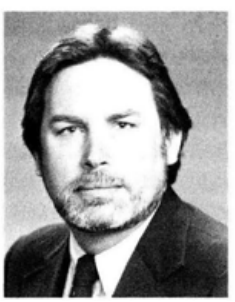
Articles in Time, the APME News and Washington Journalism Review have addressed this subject in recent years. In addition, William Winter, executive director of the American Press Institute, has alerted journalists to the different operational goals of many editors and publishers and of the need for editorial integrity. And last year, Tim Kelly, editor of The Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader, told journalism educators that the kind of journalism that wins Pulitzer Prizes is not necessarily the kind of journalism that pleases corporate management, unless it results in more readers. Referring to the heyday of serious, in-depth journalism, Kelly concluded, "The salad days of American newspapers are behind us."

Many Newspapers Forgetting Their Role

The cacophony of voices suggests that many editors may be losing editorial control. It also suggests that many newspapers may be losing sight of their traditional reason for existence.

There is an old saying among journalists that the job of the news media is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. Sadly this is a mission statement that has seen better days. One wonders if it will ever again become the overarching reason for publishing or airing the news at all. If not, non-journalists as well as journalists should be concerned.

It is not that this mission has been forgotten entirely, nor that we are denied some good examples of hard-hitting journalism. Newspapers like The Philadelphia Inquirer, St. Louis Post Dispatch, and Boston Globe are still churning out a fair amount of investigative/enterprise reporting that breaks important ground every year. The Inquirer's nine-part investigative series on America's shrinking middle class and the financial squeeze thrust upon it by Wall Street and the federal government, is a prime example of what a newspaper committed to in-depth reporting can accomplish. It took reporters Don Barlett and Jim Steele two years to research and write that series, and they did so with the blessing of executive



Jim Willis is the author of three books on the news media: "Surviving in the Newspaper Business," "Journalism: State of the Art" and "The Shadow World: Life Between the News Media and Reality." A fourth book, "New Directions in Media Management"— which he co-authored with Diane Willis— will be published next year by Allyn & Bacon. Willis is a former assistant city editor with The Dallas Morning News and he holds the Ph.D. in journalism from the University of Missouri. He coordinates the news-editorial program in the Ball State University Department of Journalism, where he is an associate professor of journalism. He lives in Indianapolis with his wife, Diane, and two sons, Min and Kao.

editor James Naughton, who opened up 21 pages for the series.

However, there are not that many Philadelphia Inquirers around these days when it comes to allowing reporters that much time to work on a story or opening such space for a series. Instead, it seems fair to suggest that the dominant trend in the news media today is to reverse the afflicting-the-comfortable mission statement. Many media companies have so sold out to the concept of marketing the news that it is now the job of the media to *comfort the comfortable and afflict the afflicted.*

Although such an assertion might seem alarmist, there is mounting evidence that it is true. For example, much depth reporting on newspapers around the country results from painstaking and time-consuming investigative work on the part of reporters and supervising editors, like The Inquirer series. But newspapers across America are either trimming their investigative reporting staffs or eliminating that particular category of full-time reporting.

Roberts's Formula Facing Pressures

Writer Mark Fitzgerald noted that Eugene Roberts was retiring from The Inquirer "at a time when the formula that made his Inquirer so successful — building circulation by publishing aggressive, investigative articles that may be complex or long but win top journalism prizes — is increasingly struggling against a bottom-line financial orientation that believes readers want a quicker and breezier editorial product."

Andy Scott, executive director of the Investigative Reporters & Editors, Inc. (IRE), has expressed concern about investigative reporting. Scott says there is a definite drop-off in attendance at IRE conferences and seminars. This trend is mostly indicative, he says, of the way factors like the recession are causing editors to make hard choices and that — more and more — many editors are having their reporters stay home and forego IRE's investigative training.

One Year Too Long For Malpractice Story

One 1991 Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for The Indianapolis Star told a group of journalists of a cutback in investigative reporting. Susan Headden said the medical malpractice series she had co-authored was termed by an editor at the paper "the worst piece of reporting this paper has done." Asked why the editor felt this way, Headden replied that the researching and writing of the series had taken her and colleague Joseph Hallinan a year and that type of reporting was deemed inefficient for the newspaper. After the story was published, the investigative team was dissolved. Management decided, she said, that the newspaper could not spare reporters for such a long period of time to do such in-depth work, however important its results might be. The day-to-day spot coverage was seen as more important; more involved issues would be dealt with on an ad-hoc basis.

Star Managing Editor Frank Caperton acknowledged that the Headden/Hallinan team was dissolved as a full-time investigative reporting unit, but was quick to point out that the decision came long after the story was published and had nothing to do with the series. He pointed out that the paper still fields two full-time investigative reporters and two senior writers assigned to investigative projects. Caperton said he could see how some editors might have been upset with the length of time it took to produce the malpractice series, noting that a year's worth or reporting time is "unusual" for Star investigative stories. Still, he said, The Star has a long commitment to investigative reporting and doesn't intend to stop now. Regardless of the timing of the decision to dissolve the Headden/Hallinan team, Headden is now working on daily projects while Hallinan has left the paper for a wire service job.

Naughton explained that many of the investigations at The Inquirer originated from enterprise reporting done by beat reporters who negotiate time with editors to work on the project exclusively. Unlike Caperton, Naughton said a year is not an unusually long time for Inquirer investigative pieces. He said the paper's two full-time investigative reporters, Barlett and Steele, are only in print every 18 months.

"It's unusual for investigative reporting around here to take less than a year," Naughton said. He added, however, "There is no question that the inability to keep pace in hiring with the size of the staff over the past two years has put a crimp on the ability of editors all over our structure to free people up for longer term projects."

Naughton and Caperton believe there is still a market for long pieces. "People like a good read," Caperton says. Naughton says The Inquirer reprinted 200,000 copies of the middle-class series. Readership surveys, however, do not lend much support to these opinions. In a 1990 presentation at Ball State University, the Poynter Institute's Mario Garcia presented findings of a readership study he conducted that showed most readers are turned off by long, in-depth stories. Many readers, in fact, don't read beyond the fourth or fifth paragraph of these page-length stories. Creating multiple points of entry, quote boxes and color screens— and designing attractive art to accompany the stories — can help. But they can also take the reader's attention away from the body of the story and spin it out onto the pleasing — but less substantive — peripherals.

Issue Orientation Value Is Doubted

As a result of such findings, a lot of publishers and marketing directors are questioning the readership value of issue-oriented reporting itself. For instance, speaker after speaker at a 1990 American Press Institute Seminar on the status of journalism emphasized how important graphics, calendar items, news briefs and short stories dealing with "news you can use" are in this day of falling newspaper readership. In fact, during the five-day session, it was not until day four that an investigative reporter appeared on the program to discuss his craft. He came three days after the graphics editor for USA Today

discussed the importance of "infographics," and two days after a consultant discussed how the new technologies would replace several editing and reporting bodies in the newsroom.

One reason that issue-oriented stories are unpopular to some editors is that so many issues cannot be tied up into neat packages with identifiable beginnings, middles and ends. Issues continue to evolve and go through different stages. Many issues refuse to be neatly defined and most refuse to die so the reporter can write a conclusion to them. It is no coincidence that the kind of stories that, year after year, wind up on the list of most underreported stories of Sonoma State University's Project Censored are issue-oriented stories.

On the other hand, the stories reporters cite as the biggest stories of the year are often event-oriented or ones that at least revolve around a major identifiable event. An example would be sexual harassment. Why is it that we saw so few stories on this issue until it surfaced at the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings into the confirmation of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court? Most issues usually take a big event to catapult them into the media's spotlight. In and of themselves, these issues are often deemed too boring for readers, and they don't get covered. Much of the reason, however, is that editors are too focused on individual news events, which can be covered quickly and wrapped up neatly, and not focused enough on issue stories.

The same kind of criticism comes from newspeople like Pamela Hill, vice president of CNN, who was hired to head an expanded investigative unit for the all-news network. Hill feels the majority of journalists — both broadcast and print — are not heeding the implied mandate of the First Amendment to keep Americans informed on the truly important issues of the day.

"The fact is, the public does need to know," she told a college audience recently. "Only then are people going to be able to act in concert and possibly, just possibly, seek out leadership that will give a new light to the American dream."

Libel Suits Pose Threat to Papers

There is yet another reason why some media are growing leery of investigative reporting: the threat of libel suits. For example, a 20-year veteran of The Dallas Morning News said that when a controversial story is in the works there is as much — or more — discussion "about whether the paper can afford the libel suits which may come out of this as to whether the story is a sound one or not. And some good stories just don't pass the test."

Referring to a $50 million libel judgment over an investigative story that The News lost in District Court to a Waco man but which was settled out of court for an undisclosed sum, the newsman said the expense of defending those kinds of suits — won or lost — represented a definite chilling effect on future investigative stories. He pointed out that the judgment was greater than that against Exxon for the Alaska oil spill.

His assertions of libel's chilling effect are supported by a study done in the mid 1980's by professors from the University of Washington and Penn State University. Richard E. Labunski and John V. Pavlik discovered that plaintiffs were winning 83 per cent of the libel cases decided by juries at the district court level. However, 70 per cent of these were overturned by appeals courts, although the expense of appeals was considerable. The study also revealed that the average award was higher than in cases involving medical malpractice or product liability. From 1980 to 1983, the average jury award in a libel suit was $2.2 million, compared with $785,651 in product liability suits and $665,764 in medical malpractice cases.

Surveying some 80 reporters belonging to IRE, the two researchers found almost two-thirds agreeing with Richard Salant, former president of CBS News, who wrote that in newsrooms across the country, stories were not being covered that ought to have been covered because of recent libel judgments. In addition, one out of five of the reporters surveyed indicated there had been at least one occasion in which their readers or viewers were not informed about something important because the reporter or his or her organization was worried about being sued. Finally, more than half said that the fear of libel had had some effect on their decision to cover certain stories, or present them in a particular manner.

So who cares if the press does shy away from important stories? Congress? The President?

Arthur Liman, who served as lead counsel for the congressional committee probing the Iran-Contra Affair, was asked recently how much Congress really knows about the CIA's covert operations.

"Very little," Liman replied. "Many in Congress don't even want to know, because knowledge can be an uncomfortable thing. If you know something, it often requires you to act."

So, he said, many don't try very hard to discover what is really going on at the CIA, even though Congress is mandated by law to stay abreast of covert operations carried out by the U.S. government.

Is it really hard to believe Liman's assertion? How many times have we seen leading government officials deny any knowledge of wrongdoing, or knowledge that situations which they should have known about were going badly? Lyndon Johnson said he didn't know how bad things were in Vietnam; Richard Nixon said he didn't know anything about a secret war in Cambodia or the break-in at the Democratic National Headquarters; Ronald Reagan insisted he knew nothing about selling arms to Iran for hostages and sending the proceeds from those arms sales to Nicaragua. And George Bush, even though he was a former head of the CIA and Vice President at the time of the Iran-Contra affair, insists he knew nothing about it either.

Public Prefers Comfort Zone, Too

In short, the comfort zone is found in the safe haven of ignorance. Being ignorant of situations of which you should have been aware is so much more palatable to the public than ad-

mitting knowledge and making mistakes. After all, a large percentage of the American public understands the comfort zone found in staying uninformed themselves. They, too, understand that knowledge often requires action and many fear having to act. Others, if they don't fear it, are just too lazy to act. These people would much rather have others act for them.

If people only want the news that is comfortable to live with, then that's the news they will probably see the most of. If ignorance is bliss then, by God, a lot of media companies will do their best to dispense it to the American people. In looking back on the rise of Adolf Hitler in the1930's, for instance, William L. Shirer noted that the American media didn't seem to want the news about Hitler and his atrocities in those years because it was so upsetting. After all, the U.S. economy was showing signs of coming apart and more Americans were concerned about the depression than international affairs.

Today there are other threats around the world that deserve the public's attention, and yet interest in foreign news appears to be waning. The same is true for depressing domestic news. Many publishers and general managers want their readers and viewers to be comfortable, so the response is more market studies on what news fare the people want. If it is less international news, then so be it. If it is shorter stories, so be it. If it is less governmental news, so be it.

So we comfort the comfortable. We worry immensely about being user-friendly; we talk about the necessity of quick-reads, color or tint boxes, multiple points of page entry, and appealing to short audience attention spans . We heed the advice of media consultants who tell us that — since so few readers stay with a story past the fourth or fifth paragraph — we shouldn't let our stories run much longer than that. And we worry about upsetting the audience too much. Bill Skroko, assistant news director at WRTV in Indianapolis, recently told his reporters prior to the fall sweeps period: "I only have one major rule about this upcoming round of news series: I don't want any that depress the audience; I don't want any downers. They must be upbeat."

It's not enough that reporters must acknowledge that so many in their audiences live in a perpetual comfort zone of ignorance and prefer the fantasy to the real. Journalists are now called upon to add more accoutrements to this fantasy world and to help keep the customers happy by keeping them partially informed at best or to distract their attention entirely to something more comfortable; something that demands no action.

Youths Are Bored And Don't Read

A study in Journalism Quarterly found that a sizeable portion of high school juniors and seniors don't read newspapers at all because they perceive the experience as being too tedious, dull and irrelevant. Does that mean most newspapers don't print news which should be of significance to people who care what's happening in the world? No. It just means that, to these teenagers, reading is a boring experience — especially when there isn't enough color on the page or enough stories about Jon Bon Jovi.

The response of many newspapers? Print more color, more graphics, fewer words and more stories about rockers and other celebrities. Avoid devoting too much of the news hole to the complicated stories about BCCI or CIA activities in countries many Americans have never heard of. The response is to enhance the reader's comfort zone. Hang a picture here, a picture there, paint a wall mural in the living room of the reader's brain. The response of television? "MTV News," "Inside Edition" and "A Current Affair." And these aren't even the extreme responses. In some major television markets around the country, network affiliates have scrapped their 6 p.m. newscasts and replaced them with shows like Jeopardy or Wheel of Fortune.

The response is to comfort the comfortable. Why? Because it is designed to bring in more viewers or readers. That gain should translate into more advertising and larger profits for media companies.

It could be argued that the logical extension of comforting the comfortable is afflicting the afflicted. How so? Because if the media do not spotlight the problems of the unemployed, the homeless, the victims of the S&L scandal, the victims of authoritarian regimes in countries the United States befriends, the disenfranchised in general — then nothing will get done about them. If knowledge demands public action, then ignorance requires none. In this vacuum exists the comfort zone for many Americans to which media companies target their products.

The Press Chases Pseudo-Events

Historian Daniel Boorstin had something to say about all this. In his book, "The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America," Boorstin notes that America is searching for the image — for something more bizarre, more unique, and more titillating than they've seen since yesterday — and the news media are rushing to provide it for them. The media do it, he says, by chasing pseudo-events and producing pseudo-news stories. Pseudo-news is that which is designed to be dramatic and that which has no real significance to people's lives. Most celebrity news is pseudo-news. So are press conferences called by politicians who have nothing to say but who need the exposure anyway. So are the countless number of events that are staged by public relations people who are trying to foist off an image as reality to the American public. The San Diego Chicken is pseudo-news and so is George Bush or Michael Dukakis reciting the pledge of allegiance in a flag factory.

Now a new dimension has been added to Boorstin's assertion. Now much of the news media is hard at work in providing people what they seem to want: a news spectrum which ranges from a full view of reality to total, blind ignorance about important news of the day. In anybody's lexicon, this must be defined as comforting the comfortable

which, in turn, afflicts the afflicted. It is taking the marketing concept to the extreme, and relinquishing editorial control to a public that largely seems desirous of staying uninformed.

How uninformed? The average American adult who even reads newspapers spends less than 20 minutes a day doing that and almost seven hours watching television. Newspaper circulation is the same as it was 20 years ago, while the population has grown larger. Meanwhile, household penetration of daily newspapers has dropped from 102 per cent in 1962 to about 65 per cent in 1990 — and that's in strong newspaper markets, too. Surveys continually show most Americans prefer television as their primary — and often only — source of news. Yet you could read only two-thirds of the front page of The New York Times on a 60-minute newscast, and nearly all prime-time newscasts today run only 30 minutes. A 30-minute local newscast devotes only 10 minutes to serious news. The rest is taken up with commercial spots, weather, sports and usually a lighthearted "kicker."

We may live in an information age, but much of the American public is doing its best to avoid as much of that information as it can unless it benefits them in some way, right now. Immediate-reward news is what the communication theorists call it. News you can use is what media managers and consultants call it. The market is shrinking fast for newspapers and television stations that want to provide information that consumers can and should use later — like election time.

It's as if another drastic shift has taken place. Whereas William Small once authored a book entitled, "To Kill a Messenger," today that book would probably be entitled, "To Ignore a Messenger." To a television station — or even a newspaper — the worst response the public could register is not to hate it, but to ignore it. Maybe that's why we see stations that have built long-standing images as being community-minded and family-oriented air during the 6 p.m. hour multiple teasers of lurid sex stories featured on "A Current Affair" immediately following the news.

Television Offers Little News

By nature and by virtue of their economic structure television stations feel required to produce newscasts that have mass appeal. There is so little time to present the news and relatively so few television reporters. Newspapers shouldn't feel so restrained. In fact, it is the newspaper, which markets its news product to both the interested and the disinterested, the concerned and apathetic, that is most vulnerable to producing a distorted view of reality. Wasn't it television that gave us the least objectionable program standard for successful programming instead of something like the best quality-based standard? And isn't it newspapers that are desperately trying to offer something for everyone, even though it means depleting the reservoir of talent needed to produce in-depth, significant stories as well as the space required to publish those stories?

It's as if a large part of the news media is intent on sacrificing the segment of the population that truly is concerned about the news of the day and reaching with more urgency toward those who are either mildly concerned or flat-out apathetic. That was what the vice-president of marketing of The Dallas Morning News seemed to say recently when he noted that the growth potential for newspapers lies in capturing the infrequent reader and in gearing portions of the paper to them.

While that seems to make good business sense, it can pose problems for the newspaper that feels — from a strictly journalistic standpoint — that its existing definition of news is the correct one. If flirting with the infrequent reader to court his/her subscription is a situation that gets out of hand, this can become a troublesome tendency. Its danger might be seen in using a parallel situation:

Suppose you had scrimped and saved to send your child off to a good university for a solid education. It isn't long, however, before you realize that several of your son's or daughter's professors have decided to gear their classroom teaching toward the students in the bottom third of the class rather than the upper third. The thinking is that these less motivated or slower students need more attention, and the smarter ones can move ahead on their own if they want. Would you be likely to leave your son at this university instead of seeking out one that focused instruction on the better equipped students who want to expand their horizons of knowledge?

Going Upscale Is the Answer

If not, then why accept a newspaper or a television station that panders to the masses and winds up aiming at the occasionally interested as its target audience? Why not purchase a newspaper or watch a newscast that doesn't talk down to you and doesn't assume you want to stay only partially informed — or focused on pseudo-events — for the rest of your life?

The logical response from the newspaper industry would be for more publishers to focus more on those consumers who do want to be informed. It makes sound sense in a number of ways, not the least of which is economically. After all, if you're talking about concerned, educated and involved people you are usually talking about the demographics that most advertisers themselves would like to reach. Why not make them the target audience instead of the apathetic?

One reason is that the news media somehow feel responsible for those who choose to stay apathetic instead of feeling responsible for informing those who wish to be informed. It is not the news media's fault that people would rather read pseudo-news than legitimate news stories. That fault lies with the apathetic themselves. But it is the media's fault if they feed people — who want real news — a steady dose of non-news.

This is not a call to arms for the media, especially newspapers, to return to the dull and boring days of decades past and put out uninspired and unattractive newspapers. There is no virtue in publishing a newspaper that on sight alone produces somnolence in its readers, just as there is no virtue in producing a pretty package

filled with cheap content. The experimentation and daring that have taken place in the newspaper world over the past decade alone have been magnificent and long overdue in an industry that has long been resistant to change. Even before newspapers began feeling the heavy competition of television, design and readability changes were badly needed. What is needed most is a carefully crafted balance of content and aesthetics. Many newspaper publishers realize this, and are trying to produce a product that satisfies both demands. Others have veered too far one way or the other, either choosing to stay with the bland paper they've always produced or turning to quick-fix, wholesale overhauls that have stripped the paper of most legitimate content. This has been done in their haste to turn their papers into clones of USA Today, and often the results have been less noteworthy than the model.

One example of a newspaper that is trying hard to produce a legitimate mix of design and content is Knight-Ridder's Boca Raton News, which has undergone an overhaul to make it more user-friendly while trying to hold onto some solid, in-depth coverage of important news. Time will tell if it is able to walk the tightrope without falling. Larger dailies like The Dallas Morning News also seem on the right track in balancing the realities of the newspaper business with the mandate implied in the First Amendment. Again, however, time will become the test of management's willingness to leave editorial control in the hands of the editor.

Admittedly, there is something off-putting and elitist in the advice of producing a class-appeal rather than a mass-appeal newspaper. It's as if newspaper publishers are being asked to elevate their product to a higher plane than the kind of newspaper evoked by the standards set in the 19th Century penny press era when James Gordon Bennett was pulling out all stops to draw in millions of readers, or later when William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer were staging the yellow journalism wars. Latter-day Bennetts, like Rupert Murdoch, seem to be doing the same. Yet, if you were to examine the content of some of these mass-appeal newspapers, then the idea of putting a newspaper on a higher plane doesn't sound so bad. After all, haven't broadsheet newspapers always prided themselves in being more serious and deeper than tabloids and nearly all television news?

Staff Assignments Can Be Improved

True, from a strictly bottom-line standpoint, structuring an attractive, class-appeal newspaper poses problems. From the outset, you have to divert your gaze from a large potential source of infrequent readers and focus instead on those who read you at least two or three days a week or more. But, in doing that, you also can divert staff from peripheral content areas that you've been using to draw in those infrequent customers and use those reporters and editors to produce more in-depth content favored by the more frequent readers. You can also begin structuring ad rates based as much on quality of demographics as quantity of subscribers. It works for magazines, most of which don't require large readerships to be successful. Why won't it work for newspapers? Yes, some economies of scale might be needed, and that might mean cutting back the costs associated with producing a smorgasbord newspaper to producing a more focused one. That is the down side of this option, because no one in the journalistic community wants to see more reporting and editing jobs lost. However, most newspapers have never been known as large users of frequent freelance talent (except for Sunday editions) and that might provide a source for obtaining the number of reporters needed while producing less strain on the bottom line.

Newspapers also need to once again commit time and resources to researching and developing ways of moving toward alternative delivery systems of the information they sell. It is no secret that the current delivery systems newspapers use are inefficient, costly and outdated.

The most viable alternative delivery method is videotex. The research people in places like MIT's Media Laboratory are experimenting with interesting and attractive forms of electronic delivery.

If newspaper publishers don't believe there is a future in electronic information dissemination, why are they waging an expensive lobbying campaign to keep the telephone companies out of that business? If videotex is going to be a losing proposition, why not let the regional telephone companies go ahead and enter the business and lose their shirts? If there is a future in some kind of videotex, why not get into the business ahead of the phone companies or at least join forces with them as some dailies, like The St. Louis Post-Dispatch, are doing now?

In short, it may take some creativity, but ways do exist for newspapers to return to their role as the premier information providers of the day. Newspapers must find ways of serving up old wine in new skins: of retaining their legitimate function of informing readers while embracing new forms of packaging that would allow this function to be implemented.

In doing this sensibly and in a balanced way, newspapers can go a long way toward ending the tyranny that the apathetic and comfortable readers have exercised over them in recent decades. Only by accepting responsibility for the concerned can the news media loosen the deathgrip that the chronically unconcerned have applied.

Finally, it is worth noting a closing comment Bill Moyers made in one of the PBS Public Mind installments in 1989. In the program, which he called "The Truth About Lies," Moyers noted, "Americans are filled with an erroneous vision of an America where the vending machines are alwyas full. ... and the bills never come due." Why? Because the truth is too uncomfortable, many people substitute a lie, which is more comfortable, in its place.

Today a key mission of the news media, particularly newspapers, is to show the public the fallacy and danger that are inherent in living lies. ■

For a New Nation, a New Press

To Survive, Newspapers Must Learn to Innovate And Adapt to Changes in Society

By Jean Gaddy Wilson

Peter Drucker, who asserts that innovation and entrepreneurship can be learned, systematized and practiced, talks about the United States going from a managerial to an entrepreneurial economy. Systematic innovation, the search for and the exploitation of new opportunities for satisfying humans wants and human needs, he says, is a new application of management. More than 600,000 new businesses each year were started in this country in the last decade. Even in today's economic downturn, small corporations continue to spring up, the majority organized and owned by women.

Innovation and rethinking current journalistic standards are concepts news people should embrace, because widespread use of information for human survival always depends on innovation. For instance, communication of information over long periods of time depended on the innovation of creating symbols to stand for people, events and, eventually, concepts and philosophy. Knowledge could be created, captured and passed along from generation to generation after books were devised.

Information innovation is also political. Before moveable type, religious leaders had a lock on learning. Because they could read the precious words encoded in books, they could impart information to the masses. Once there was moveable type, books went from the hands of the few to the many. Ideas were circulated, the leaders' power was shared and the individual's access to, and participation in, the evolution of ideas increased.

Drucker's studies of innovation sketch out three factors that led to the major entrepreneurial success story at the root of today's newspaper. One factor was financial. Newspapers had to have enough income to be editorially independent; at the same time they had to sell at low enough prices to win a mass circulation. The second factor was new technology -- the telegraph and high-speed presses allowed newspapers to be printed fast enough to be useful to meet the needs of the population they served. The third factor was extension of literacy beyond the intellectuals. Mass literacy made mass circulation possible.

James Gordon Bennett, The New York Herald founder, thought through and used these bases, but his newspaper did not achieve financial security in the 1870's. Twenty years later, in the 1890's, another factor for success was built into newspapers by Joseph Pulitzer, first in St. Louis and then in New York. It was mass advertising to subsidize editorial independence. Pulitzer decided that advertising had to be invented and could be invented. Using the same innovation, Adolph Ochs reshaped the waning New York Times, making it into the country's leading newspaper. William Randolph Hearst built on the same foundation, creating the modern newspaper chain.

Competitors Discuss Death of Newspapers

Today that innovative, century-old, newspaper model is undergoing painful revision at a crossroads of technology and customer disinterest.

In the 1990's, the possible demise of the daily newspaper is discussed regularly by competitors in the United States media mix -- 12,000 magazines and newsletters, 8,500 weeklies, 350 commercial television stations, 500 public service television stations, 10,684 cable television systems, 9,500 radio stations, 2.650 database services. Other competitors -- for instance, fax machines, today's telephone, VCRs, religion, participant sports, work -- pose formidable challenges to the traditional newspaper but don't even live in the world of

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being interested in whether newspapers thrive and survive.

The daily newspaper continues to see its numbers diminish. Nine dailies ceased publication last year: The New York Tribune, Shreveport (La.) Journal, Union City (NJ) Hudson Dispatch, The National, The Manchester (CT) Herald, The Lawton (Okla.) Constitution, The State-Times (Baton Rouge, LA), The Arkansas Gazette, The Dallas Times Herald. Dailies now number 1,575. Since the 1950's, circulation has not grown, but rather still hovers at 61-62 million, while the population has grown 100 million in the intervening 40 years. Penetration today reaches into about two-thirds of U.S. homes, down from more than one newspaper per household (1.24) in 1950.

Recession Stimulates Transformation Talk

The recession provokes a perception of simultaneous need -- and dread -- for transformation. Newspapers not only witness the retail slide (even Macy's, the biggest store in the world, goes into Chapter 11), but also follow the bumpy road down as advertising volume declines. Dailies absorb an explosion in fixed costs -- personnel, delivery, health insurance, supplies, equipment.

So do the citizens they serve, who pay 1990's costs with 1980's dollars. While 30 million Americans hold down two jobs, a tenth of the U.S. households qualify for food stamps. Employment classifieds drop. Images of long employment lines are etched in our collective psyche. And, there's more pain to come as the recession continues to erode.

But, recession could provoke a revitalization process: research, rethinking, realignment, reinventing, followed by reorganization.

Today's economic events may point to the fundamental shifts in individuals' behavior even more than to the institutions Americans devise and abandon.The need to understand the structural change in Americans' activities, values and thinking demands rethinking by all parts of the newspaper. Newspapers, like all other organizations, are not self-sufficient. Dailies depend for survival on the types of relations they establish with the larger systems of which they are a part--community, population, neighborhoods.

The newspaper is an organization over chaos, and the chaos changed. Chaos complete with clanging cymbals. War with body counts and murders are easy to describe and understand because they are so elementary. Perhaps part of the reason newspapers have not caught up with the culture is because they have underestimated the complicated citizen consumer. Some of the change is technology. Some is demography. Technology is easier to grasp. Demography is more important.

Some Technology And Surface Thinking

The invention of a product or process not only solves the need it's intended for, but also reshapes the environment. For instance, the automobile was invented in the first decade of this century, bringing a first-order change: people and goods could be transported more easily. The second-order change was perhaps paved roads. Then a highway system and supermarkets, followed by the mechanization of farming, the shift of the rural population to the cities, the ability to work far from residences, allowing suburbs to be developed, which led not only to the weakening of political parties but also to Steven Spielberg movies celebrating suburbia. What in today's living, from health care to shopping by mall or direct mail, from the lessening of English as the primary language to the quality of air, has not been transformed because of the car?

While all humans may be inclined to think they live in a time unlike any other, current generations certainly have reason to believe in the uniqueness of their circumstances.

Look at Changes Of Last 50 Years

Futurists point out that more change has happened in the last 50 years than in the prior 100,000 years and that the pace is accelerating. A quick look at only five technological products and a little thinking about the first-, second- and third-order level changes that each has shaped lends credence to the futurists' generalization:

- Fifty years ago the jet engine was invented; the speeding up of the transportation of goods, services and people also meant there would be faster interaction of brains from diverse areas of the country, the region, the world; inventions could be distributed fast; modernization could be transplanted; products from one land mass could shift to another land mass in hours--i.e., drugs, money, blueprints, etc.
- Forty-three years ago antibiotics were invented; biology was no longer destiny because humans had the ability to survive disease, grow old, hold on to property, bring about the need for affluent recreational communities, nursing homes, hospices, health care systems, etc.; colleges could grow; antibiotics and the simultaneous baby boom would allow hair color companies to tap huge markets.
- Forty-three years ago television entered residences; homogeneous information could be transferred easily to people of all ages through national networks of animated entertainment, news and views; recreation changed as people watched, rather than participated; slang and fashion slapped both coasts in real time.
- Thirty-one years ago birth control drugs became available; trends of fewer children, more women in the workplace, woman as producer not just consumer, emerged because women's definition changed from mothers to workers when they could choose when, whether or if they were to bear children.
- Twenty-one years ago the telecommunications satellite changed the world; information could travel around the 25,000-mile circumference of the globe in seconds; countries could no longer control information; "E.T.," the movie, could be beamed into countries that viewed the transmission as political

aggressiveness because E.T.'s earth family opened the door to a packed refrigerator.

Just looking at mundane, everyday, technology, here is what a 1992 morning could be in the life of a metropolitan newspaper reporter:

Wake up to electronic music or radio news; watch a three-inch television in the bathroom while getting ready for work; gulp down automatically timed coffee; nuke a roll in the microwave; scan the home computer screen for information gathered through the night; pick up (and ignore) messages on the home phone machine; survey international stock market listings; log on to a computer book-in-progress and add a few graphs; log on to the USA Today's sports line and plan the next chess move in a game with someone in New Zealand; scan high-resolution TV (with images looking as good as color magazine photos) for up-to-the-minute news; electronically lock the door to the housing unit and switch the electronic alarm in motion.

Listen to a compact disk player while driving to work; fax reservations and menu choices to a favorite restaurant via the car cellular phone; pop a second roll into the microwave, this one in the glove box; talk into the car phone microphone, dialing up a number that automatically gives traffic conditions; activate again, by voice, the car phone to get the weather conditions; collect (and ignore) the messages the car phone has taken overnight; call the office, collect (and ignore) messages from the office phone machine; tune in one of hundreds of management/personal growth cassette tapes for a 15-minute "fix" on the way to work; access the office garage via an electronic card.

In the newsroom, correspond with other workers (even in the next cubicle) by electronic mail; leave instructions for the personalized shopper, thereby avoiding venturing out to a store to shop; surreptitiously fax a request to a rock radio station; pick up a fax newspaper; call sources on the phone without ever seeing them; input the news story; zap it by computer to the editor; scan CNN in the newsroom and databases to make sure the most important issues of the day aren't being missed.

By now it's lunch time, and our mythical reporter has not yet had to talk face-to-face with anyone. Is the scenario possible? Only the high-resolution TV is not in full production today.

Most of that sophisticated, convenience machinery can be used to understand, and serve, a very different America from the one the reporter remembers from her/his childhood. But New Directions for News roundtables seem to show that technology for journalists is easier to deal with than the change in the country.

The New U.S.A. And Surface Thinking

No matter how pervasive technology is, it's not nearly so important as the structural change in us, you and me, the people. There is vast, fast social change in this country which technology will serve. Social shift is more important to newspapers than the change in technology.

The first sign of structural change is in the smallest unit we organize ourselves around: the household, which is smaller and not just a shrunken version of the 1980 or 1970 version. There are four key households, demonstrating the structural, unparalleled change in U.S. citizens during the last 15 years.

In 1970, a full 40 per cent of Americans lived in households of two adults with a child or children. Today, a mere 26 per cent live that way, which includes 7 per cent in the traditional "nuclear family" where the mother works at home, the father is employed outside the home and two children attend school. The preponderance of U.S. citizens live in other kinds of households.

The largest proportion lives in households of two adults--30 per cent. The couple is the most common household. That's never happened before. A unit most of us don't think of as household is at almost the same level as the two adults with kids: the single . The one-adult household is 25 per cent of us. The household most reporters think is large, the single parent with child or children, is only 8 per cent. The assumption that the single parent household is larger stems from too much coverage for too little phenomenon. The remaining 11 per cent live as boarders/roommates (i.e., college students). The average age of marriage today is 25 for women, 26 for men.

Today's new family configuration has restructured food, transportation, education.The trend extends through all ethnic groups as society shifts: a gradual decline of married couples, a gradual decline of households with children.

Why did this structural change occur in the way we live? The second shift: women moved out of the home and into the paid employment ranks. For 30 years women have marched resolutely into the workforce, into universities and out of grocery stores (40 per cent of grocery shoppers are men). She moved up on the insurance actuarial charts. A look at the average American is mind-expanding. The average Joe is a Jane. She's 5'4" tall, weighs 143 pounds, wears a size 7 1/2 shoe, drives a blue car, makes less than $20,000 in annual income, carries $104 in her purse because she can't afford a bank account. Jane Doe, the Average American, probably accounts for Roseanne's popularity on television -- she's more like the U.S.

Advertisers are more interested in the woman than anyone else. She buys 51 per cent of all the new cars. She's what the RAND Corporation calls the vanishing homemaker. She's the major reason we talk about time poverty. In 1966, one-fourth of all people said they were busy all the time. In 1985, the University of Maryland showed that close to half the women and over one-third the men said they were rushed all the time.

Why? Americans no longer have that extra set of hands around the home called the full-time homemaker. Thus, Saturday becomes just another work day. Shopping is a chore. Teens join men in grocery stores. Retail shrinks. Middle-class men and women buy more

services that save time. Many take on a second job. Women in their 20's and 30's do not leave the paid labor force when or if they have children. Women began outnumbering men in college in 1979. They earned more degrees in 1986. They are 66 per cent of journalism graduates, close to half the business school, law and medical students.

Another Crest Coming In Immigration

The third major change is thoroughly American: immigration and ethnic change. One-fourth the growth in the past decade is in immigration. Another crest is coming. Children of different cultures, different values, different insights, different intuitions will change the mix of this country. Huge waves of immigration have changed us before; this time the immigrants come with many differing languages, which they will not always abandon. A mosaic is coalescing in this country rather than a melting pot.

When will "minorities" outnumber the majority? It's a moving target -- but it is coming sooner rather than later. In New York City where there are 119 languages spoken, it happened this year. In Los Angeles, where 56 languages are spoken in the classroom, the first grade classrooms have more non-European descendants than European descendants. In Houston, with 98 languages in its schools, the change is coming as well.

The fourth large change is the elderly era. The baby boom changed everything as it went through the seasons of life; the boomers will change aging. They're more prosperous than earlier generations because they're couples in dual-earner households. The 45-59-year-old group is up 40 per cent while 18-34-year-olds are a shrinking group. What will happen in a technological age when other countries have youth? Change comes in on the minds of the young. The discoveries in the highest math, the highest physics come about through the eyes, ears and minds of the young. U.S. median age is 33, going up.

Where are newspapers in this set of massive shifts?

Routine Rewarded; Change Blocked

Newspapers currently reward routine and action more than reflection. To be able to bring all the millions of details forward in today's newspaper and put them through the daily press, routine must be rewarded. That's not a structure for change.

The structure of the newspaper as it is currently used is a barrier to innovation. Creatively used, newspapers' structure could be refocused as a huge problem-analyzing apparatus.

Newspapers--and citizens--face vast, fast change, technological, intellectual, sociological, in a world that needs understanding more than it ever has. Newspapers' mission, attitude and aptitude could forge change and better provide the intelligence of information on which democracy depends. What is at stake is more than a set of businesses, or slowing markets or even the institution of the newspaper. It's the opportunity offered newspapers by the Information Age: to help the increasingly diverse international individual on one large land mass to understand the complexities of an evolving social shift and the decisions it will bring with it.

How will these converging forces change basic journalistic standards? As newspapers become more inclusive, that action will demand an increased flexibility.

New Directions for News national roundtables provide creative forums to explore possibilities. Industry leaders gather to consider how to connect with readers, how to respond to the country's changing demography and social fabric. No-holds-barred brainstorming surfaces radical, controversial, speculative thinking, all necessary in re-examining newspapers' role in society.

Participants at NDN's Democracy and Demography Roundtable at Babson College brainstormed ways to connect with today's citizens:

One idea: Of/By/For the People, a daily section going outside traditional journalism to facilitate community news, discussion, problem-solving by and for real people. It would connect the paper directly to readers' concerns and let them participate in story selection and play. The section would have a host instead of an editor and go through three stages:

First, gathering material through innovative techniques: audiotex, lending cameras and tape recorders to citizens, sending satellite newspaper offices in vans out into the community.

Second, packaging the section to facilitate reader-to-reader communication, reader-to-newspaper communication and reader-to-local institution communication.

Third, disseminating information in new ways: enlarged newspaper pages displayed on the sides of vans; audiotex; wall posters in laundromats, restrooms and wherever people queue; malls; newspaper racks.

Aggressiveness in covering the community could join the important, necessary "uncovering" of investigative reporting. The April Democracy and Demography participants brainstormed "Getting to Know You" to reorganize traditional newspaper structures and reporting methods to create newspapers more in synch with the communities they serve; some possibilities that emerged:

- Reporters walk beats -- no longer looking at a community through windshield glass.
- Reporters are required to attend neighborhood gatherings. The term "chicken dinner news" is banned.
- Community coverage is rewarded.
- Reporters, editors and circulation people are required to live in the areas they serve.
- A lobby effort is mounted for a Pulitzer Prize for community news.

Balance Redefined As Relevance

Balance could be redefined as being relevant to people's lives. This idea from NDN's 1989 Reaching Tomorrow's Readers Roundtable at the Rand Corporation asks newspaper staffs and editors to redefine beats according to how important the beats are to people's lives. Beats could be developed according to the ways people spend their time and their money. For example:

- Eating: fast food and convenience food beats
- Working: day care, office politics and workplace conditions beats
- Home buying: mortgage, redlining and property tax beats.

Beats could be based on things people worry about, for example:

- Children's education
- Retirement
- Health problems
- Health insurance
- Sex
- Personal relationships
- Social diseases
- Abortion
- Standard of living
- Self-esteem
- Survival

Core Newspaper Plus Sections

As newspapers strive to meet the needs of new and changing audiences, roundtable participants have suggested offering a core newspaper with premium add-on sections. The value-added newspaper could be an approach to develop the anatomically correct newspaper of the future.

The basic newspaper would consist of one section,with general, business and sports news, living articles and opinions; advertising would be premium-priced and limited. This basic section would be simple and easy to read and provide access to other sections and information.

Add-on sections would cost extra and provide extra information, based on demographics. Ad rates would vary section by section. The basic paper would provide heavy promotion for these sections. Section ideas: Egghead (global, local), Consumer information by income, Investor (tables), Time saver, My Job, Sports junkie, Family, Women's interest, Men's interest, Personal health/fitness, Technology, Contacts, Age-based, Gossip.

When a small group at the April Democracy and Demography Roundtable even tried to list ways traditional standards might change, the discussion was heated. This mind-stretching list evoked intense discussion. Participants could not reach a consensus (for or against) these challenges to traditional journalistic codes:

- Sources should be shown or read stories about them.
- Sources should have the opportunity to offer corrections or submit disagreements.
- Statements of disagreement will be published alongside the story.
- Journalists must be involved in organizations or life of the community.
- Journalists must live in the subcommunities on which they report.
- Journalists should disclose all involvements.
- Fairness and accuracy shall be sacrificed to timeliness or exclusivity.
- Journalists should struggle against political correctness at all times.
- Management should be made up of and hire people reflecting the community, using quotas if necessary.
- The editorial board shall be listed in the newspaper and explained.
- Editorials shall be signed.

Obviously the list could go on and on. Who's to say what will and what won't work? The important point is that the nation is changing and newspapers must try new ideas to adapt to the new world. ■

A Challenge to Journalists

continued from page 6

Appeal. The Class Appeal could afford to grow more sophisticated over time. It could focus away from topics of interest to marginal readers and allot more space and attention to business, the arts, news analysis, and "coping" stories for those with more money than time.

In the Class Appeal newsroom, writers would have more freedom to explore complex issues in depth. The paper also would be likely to carry more opinion pieces than the Mass Appeal. Writing style, in general, would be more lively, varied and personal. Sunday editions would remain larger than their daily counterparts, but the focus could well shift from adding breadth to increasing the depth of coverage.

Electronically, the Class Appeal would focus its efforts on developing voice, computer screen and fax products that increase the depth of the committed reader's relationship to the newspaper rather than reach out to touch non-readers.

Consumers would be expected to pay directly for information of value to them. The delivery mechanism would be far less important than the ability to deliver specific information of interest to specific individuals quickly when those individuals want it.

A more sophisticated newspaper would need a more sophisticated newsroom. More expert and specialist reporters would be required on a Mass Appeal newsroom staff. Editors would face the daily dilemma of publishing stories that are sophisticated enough to satisfy the expert reader yet accessible enough to communicate vital information to the intelligent general reader.

The journalistic risk in this strategy is that newspapers would ignore social problems and issues that do not directly affect their relatively comfortable readers. Homelessness and poverty might be considered irrelevant to an uppercrust readership. And, one wonders how the public would regard First Amendment protections for an even more elitist press.

In sum, the Class Appeal strategy is, in many ways, the Mass Appeal strategy viewed through the opposite end of the telescope. Depth and specialization would win out over breadth and uni-

versality. Editors would have much easier choices to make. But publishers would be left to wonder if the smaller, more homogeneous Class Appeal audience would satisfy enough advertisers to provide the money required to support the newshole.

Individual Appeal, Most Complex

The most complex of the four publishing strategies, the Individual Appeal seeks to achieve the goals of the Mass Appeal by producing many products of interest to somebody rather than one product of interest to everybody.

By publishing not only a daily newspaper but also, in the CAP example, three types of specialized local, weekly and monthly publications, the Individual Appeal publisher would seek to reach every market household at least once a week with publishing packages that offered targeting opportunities for advertisers. This complex strategy would provide a selling challenge for the advertising department, a printing and distribution challenge for the production and circulation departments and a journalistic challenge for the news department.

Unless the news department cedes production of some sections to the business side of the paper, it would be asked to produce not only the daily paper (presumably something like the Mass Appeal) with zoned weekly inserts, but also some complementary targeted sections. In the CAP example these were:

- Four weekly special-interest sections subscribed to separately by readers particularly interested in the arts, sports, local business and news/analysis.
- Three weekly free-distribution lifestyle sections (for subscribers and non-subscribers) edited for and distributed to families with children, seniors and young adults.
- Two monthly traders for automotive and real estate advertisers.

To produce these sections successfully, an editor would have to coordinate four different orientations in a single newsroom. The main paper would need to be written for a broad general audience. The special-interest sections would have to satisfy a demanding audience of specialists comparing them to national magazines addressing the same topics.

The lifestyle sections would be breezy and inviting: their special task would be to draw non-subscribers into a newspaper publication designed primarily to serve advertisers. In all likelihood, the traders would require little editorial attention. For the classified reader, the ads would be the content.

Electronically, the Individual Appeal would probably attempt to combine the strategies of the Mass Appeal and the Class Appeal. Sophisticated readers would use 900 numbers or computer bulletin boards sponsored by the paper to get specialized information of value for an appropriate price. Ordinary readers would have free voice access to general information like sports scores and weather forecasts.

Obviously, the Individual Appeal newsroom must be as diverse as the publications it is expected to produce. Highly trained specialists would co-exist with writers whose copy might resemble the output of advertising copywriters more than traditional journalists. Above all, the editor's task would be to juggle many diverse individuals, standards, and goals in a way that lent legitimacy to all and compromised none.

Journalistically, the Individual Appeal risks encouraging readers to focus more on the sections that address their narrow, personal interests and less on topics of general community interest. Unbundling the basic newspaper could lead readers to demand delivery options that do not include general news.

In total, the Individual Appeal wants every reader to have his or her druthers — breadth and universality for some, depth and specialization for others — all delivered in packages designed to satisfy advertisers' increasingly strident demands for targeted audiences.

Direct Appeal, A New Business

First, the positive news: the Direct Appeal strategy demands nothing more of editors than the Mass Appeal strategy does. Now the negative news: the Direct Appeal strategy redirects the creative energies of the newspaper company away from the newspaper itself and towards a completely new business — direct marketing.

As the publisher concentrates on building marketing databases, direct mail services and alternative delivery capabilities, the editor may be left more or less to his own devices in maintaining the journalistic impact and direction of the newspaper. (Of course, many editors may prefer to be left alone, but benign neglect can turn malignant if newsholes and staffing budgets are cut to support the new direct marketing business.)

From a pure business point of view, the newspaper could even come to be considered something like Reader's Digest magazine: a publication valued more for its ability to generate lists of names categorized for direct mail sales of other products than for its traditional journalistic mission.

For the Direct Appeal to work best, the paper itself would pursue a content and style strategy similar to the Mass Appeal. But the Direct Appeal creates some new complications. As information was gathered, both for journalistic and marketing purposes, an inevitable privacy conflict would arise. Is the newspaper gathering information for the public purpose of assuring an informed citizenry, or is the paper gathering data for the private purpose of building its direct marketing businesses? The public's willingness to cooperate might well hinge on its answer to this question.

Even electronic products could be affected by the advertising-driven goals of the Direct Appeal strategy. Various voice and electronic text products could be offered to the public, but their purpose will inevitably be ambiguous: to inform better the subscribing and non-

subscribing public on the one hand, to collect data for direct marketing appeals on the other.

More than any other strategy, the Direct Appeal would change the entire shape of the newspaper organization. The journalistic risk increases when the editorial product is no longer the driving force in building the audience that advertisers will be offered.

Instead, subscribers and non-subscribers would be segmented in dozens of ways that would be customized to the demands of each advertiser. For many, the newspaper would remain the most efficient means of reaching their target audience. For others, direct marketing programs would make more sense.

In this environment, it would take an enlightened publisher to assure that the newsroom got the encouragement and resources it needed to remain an effective watchdog for the community.

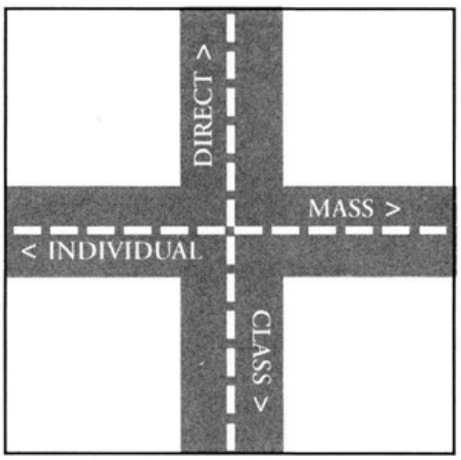
The Final Score Of the 4 Strategies

Any of the four strategies can result in a newspaper that serves its readers, advertisers and community, while remaining profitable. The CAP team's financial analysis found:

The Mass Appeal would be a low-risk approach, but it would ignore structural market trends. It would slow the decline in circulation penetration and advertising market share without requiring major investments. It might buy some time for newspapers to create a new business formula, but it would generate little new revenue.

The Class Appeal would trade market share for immediate profits and generate the lowest total revenue of the four strategies. Almost all competitors would gain at the expense of newspapers under this approach. This shrinking market base would make it difficult for the newspaper to change course and respond to new competition in the future.

The Individual Appeal would produce high revenues, but require heavy investments to launch a complex mix of new products. These added expenses would keep profit growth and margins down. This strategy would position the



newspaper to grow by embracing market trends and building on the newspaper's strengths, provided the niches served by the targeted products proved large enough to make them viable.

The Direct Appeal would maintain ad share and produce the highest revenues of any of the four strategies. But it also would be the most expensive, requiring the newspaper to develop new skills to enter a highly competitive environment. Seeking to hold advertisers by compensating for the decline in penetration, the Direct Appeal should leave the newspaper with the greatest growth potential.

Smaller Papers Face Limited Choice

To examine the financial implications of the various strategies, the CAP team invented a hypothetical monopoly-market newspaper with 50,000 circulation, which is on the borderline between large and small dailies. Any of the strategies seem potentially applicable to a newspaper of this size, but it is questionable whether smaller newspapers can be competitive in direct marketing.

In fact, it's the large metro newspapers that have the competitive incentive and resources to experiment with more aggressive strategies on a grand scale. For advertisers who want to target across a broad area, the geographic scope of the metro could be an advantage over suburban competitors who can reach only part of a market.

Smaller newspapers generally are more nimble and may find it easier to experiment or innovate. Or, they may choose not to make risky moves, but rather to wait to see what works elsewhere.

Although there is no clear financial winner among the four strategies, there is a clear bottom line for journalists. All of the strategies call on journalists to see their work in a broader context than they have in the past, balancing journalistic aspirations with business realities.

Many journalists see any such balancing act as inherently wrong. They believe changes in the industry are forcing them into relationships with readers and advertisers that are, at best, uncomfortable and, at worst, inherently corrupting to their craft. Their sense of victimization ranges from concerns over job security to feelings that tomorrow's newsroom jobs will be so devoid of journalistic merit that they won't be worth having.

Three Basic Questions Must Be Answered

Those journalists need to answer three basic questions about their role as public servants. Who, if not the reading public, should judge the value of a newspaper's service? What quality of service can a newspaper provide if it accepts a long-term decline in financial strength? What action best positions journalists to protect their principles?

The hard truth seems to be that fewer and fewer people feel they need a daily newspaper in their lives. It also seems likely that slow profit growth will leave newspapers with fewer additional dollars to invest in editorial excellence.

So, publishers must make tough strategic choices in the decade ahead. The newsroom cannot stand apart from nor expect to be unaffected by the war for survival. The question facing people in the newsroom is whether to be leaders or followers. ■

What Readers Really Want

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Second, it's self-sustaining. Once established, it requires no further effort by the community (or the newspaper) to keep a marketplace going. In fact, it takes determined mismanagement to kill it.

And third, it's perpetually under challenge by enterprising peddlers. This deserves a bit more explanation.

Imagine again the traditional marketplace. That's where most of the vendors ply their trade, because that's where the buyers are assembled. One of them, though, decides to load up a wagon and carry his merchandise out into the countryside, farmhouse to farmhouse. He becomes a peddler. A peddler probably can't move the volume of goods that he could in the marketplace. And he finds it harder to liquidate excess inventory. The reward for his increased labor is distance from his competitors. That allows higher prices, which customers will sometimes pay in exchange for convenience.

Always Tension In Marketplace

There's a perpetual tension between the peddler and the marketplace. The peddler is drawn to the countryside by the lack of competition and ability to earn higher margins. And the customers are drawn back to the marketplace by the lower prices and better selection. Most of the time, the peddler and the marketplace enjoy a steady, stable rivalry. Most buyers, in fact, buy both ways, and many peddlers will divide their time between the market and the hinterlands. Occasionally, though, something happens that shifts the balance. It doesn't eliminate the marketplace-peddler rivalry, but it can alter its terms as one side gains relative advantage.

The invention of the department store probably shifted the balance. The first department store brought an entire marketplace, or at least a representative sample of one, under a single roof. Customers could browse and buy nearly all their everyday needs without getting dirty or wet. The proprietor had to invest more capital and undertake more expense, but he managed to shelter himself from those pesky competitors, who were left outside on the street.

The Golden Age Of Newspapers

It didn't take long, though, for competition to reappear — in the form of rival department stores. Now the game was to draw customers to your store instead of the other one. The weapon of choice became the newspaper, and thus began journalism's golden age.

Yet another shift must have come with the invention of the computer database and United Parcel Service, giving rise to a generation of "direct merchants" like Lands' End. The business pioneered by Sears, Roebuck and Montgomery Ward has leaped forward in speed and sophistication, and again expanded its turf.

But while the peddler gains ground, the marketplace endures. It has human nature and economic efficiency to sustain it. People like to shop; it's both a social and an economic activity. Moreover, they like the benefits of competition. And vendors appreciate the ability to move volume and to clear their inventory.

Advertising Loss Merely Temporary

This bodes well for newspapers, because it implies that the current decline of advertising is merely an adjustment, and not the beginning of the end. It implies that the world will still want the service we're uniquely capable of providing, if we'll just keep providing it.

While technology has shifted in the economic balance between marketplace and peddler, it's caused a similar tilt in politics. Traditionally in a free society, politicians sell ideas in an open marketplace, where each is vulnerable to competing arguments. But just as the peddler has used technology to escape competition, modern politicians have used mailing lists and 30-second commercials to the same end.

While the economic result is ambiguous, the political result is awful. Politics has been cheapened, debate has been chilled, political parties have grown impotent and the average citizen has been alienated.

Newspaper Mission: Strengthen Marketplace

Both journalistically and commercially, the challenge for newspapers is essentially the same. It's to recognize the ancient tension between the marketplace and the peddler, and to realize we have a stake in it. While the peddler — the direct merchant and the political consultant — constantly seeks to fragment markets and segregate buyers, the marketplace constantly draws them back together.

Our mission is to strengthen the marketplace, and to create it where it doesn't exist. The need is enduring, for neither technological advances nor marketing trends will change human nature. And the value is tremendous, for we can oil the machinery of commerce, strengthen the democratic system and empower our customers.

This shouldn't be hard. We just have to avoid becoming so absorbed in our own work that we lose sight of the benefits our customers gain. We should provide more than a source of news or a conduit for advertising. We should create the modern marketplace, where, for its social, political and economic benefit, a free and enlightened community comes together. ■

Beyond the Games

Sports Reporters Are Digging Deeper Into Professional and Amateur Athletics and Upsetting Fans in the Process

By Tom Witosky

The look was familiar, but this time it came from one of my colleagues in The Des Moines Register newsroom.

"I want you to know something," she said with irritation in her voice. "You have destroyed my son's faith in his hero. I have had to explain to him what this thing was all about. He can hardly believe it."

In February 1989, John Carlson and I reported and wrote several stories disclosing that three members of the University of Iowa Hawkeye men's basketball team -- Ed Horton, Roy Marble and Curtis Cuthpert -- had undergone substance abuse treatment the previous summer for which the school had paid more than $16,000.

My colleague was not happy. Her son had idolized Marble since his arrival on the Iowa campus three years earlier and was having trouble dealing with reality -- his hero was a drug user.

In the days following the disclosure of the treatment for the three players, I had similar conversations with a host of irate Hawkeye fans.

Letters and telephone calls suggested that Carlson and I were troublemakers, racists (the three men are black) or even worse -- fans of the cross-state Iowa State Cyclones. Some suggested that Carlson and I should be fired and one gentle reader even suggested castration as the only appropriate sanction for writing such dastardly stories.

Ironically, a month later, it would be Cyclone fans hot after me and my newspaper. Two Cyclone athletes attempted an armed robbery of a Burger King one night and only a miracle kept both of them from being killed in a shootout with police while trying to escape.

Off-the-field Activities Fair Game as News?

The Burger King holdup was front page news for several days and remained one of the top news stories of the year. Readers blanketed our newspaper with letters protesting the extent of the coverage. One complainant protested that The Register was wasting its time and its readers' patience with such a growing emphasis on the off-the-field exploits of college athletes.

"I am sure there are other things more important to be writing about than this," the writer complained.

My disgruntled newsroom colleague and this letter writer may be well-intentioned, but they miss the point. Clearly, to ignore either story would have been akin to accepting the notion of Watergate as a third-rate burglary.

Since July 1986, I have been the sports projects reporter for The Des Moines Register. When I took the position, newspapers and television stations were in the midst of rediscovering that hard news about sports, and not just scores and cliched quotes, had a place not only on their sports pages or segments, but also on the front page and as the lead story.

That awakening has been complemented by a growing number of media outlets either establishing sports investigative specialists within their sports departments, expanding the scope of their sports beat reporters or including city-side reporters in in-depth coverage of various sports issues.

Second Major Change In Sports Writing

At some papers, sports editors have decided that they no longer need to transfer hard news outside the department immediately. It has meant a second dramatic change in tenor and con-

Tom Witosky, Nieman Fellow 1992, spent 13 years covering politics, the courts, police and education in Chicago, its suburbs and Iowa to prepare himself to become sports project reporter for The Des Moines Register. Immediately prior to going to sports, Witosky was a legislative and political reporter for The Des Moines Tribune and The Register for eight years. Since taking the sports post, Witosky, 40, has written extensively about academic and financial problems in college athletics. Other projects have included award-winning series on illegal sports gambling in Iowa, the social problems facing black athletes at Iowa's mostly white universities and ethical, health and financial problems in Iowas's fledgling greyhound and horse racing industries. Witosky was featured last year in Bill Moyers's PBS special "Sports for Sale." Witosky and his wife, Diane, an editorial writer for The Register, have two children.

tent for most sports sections in the last 25 years -- the first being a shift toward more color coverage of games as television sports, whose main function is to deliver scores, became more pervasive.

Within the sports world, this development has amounted to a sea change in the relationship between sports writers and the institutions and individuals they cover. Unfortunately, if the reaction to the coverage of the recent rape trial of Mike Tyson is any indication, some leaders and many readers outside the sports world do not recognize the changes many sports pages have undergone.

Why have sports sections changed their approach? Why is it that an athlete, a franchise owner or administrator of a professional or amateur sports team is now treated by the media as someone akin to a public official with demands for greater accountability and greater accessability?

Print Press Differs From Television

The reasons range from the growth of sports into big business to the personal impact of athletes on American culture to better trained, more sophisticated sports writers. Newspapers and magazines have embraced the changes more visibily because it provides the reader with a behind-the-scene view of the sports world while the electronic media remains mostly limited to providing contests and scores nightly.

"In a lot of ways, sports writing and reporting has simply readjusted because the realities of professional and college sport have changed so much," said Mark Middlebrook, day metro editor for The Florida Times-Union in Jacksonville and this year's president of Investigative Reporters & Editors. "Traditionally, athletes were never paid as much as they are paid now. Who ever heard of arbitration of salary contracts, player strikes and drug testing?

"The fact that sports has also become such a large business with so much potential influence on individuals and communities has mandated that we change the way we communicate with our readers about those issues."

Sports Affected By Vietnam, Too

Neil Amdur, sports editor of The New York Times, suggested that the change in sports news is also the result of a general change in journalism prompted by the coverage of the civil-rights movement, the Vietnam War and even foreign affairs in general.

"The reality of the sports business has changed just like everything else," Amdur said. "It has been affected by those events out of sports as well as inside the business. The Vietnam War and the Munich Olympics clearly affected attitudes toward sports reporting like it did for every other journalist."

As a result, there has been change to provide in-depth reporting on the legal, social and cultural aspects of sports that only until recently were ignored for incessant reporting on scores and statistics. A random survey of a number of sports publications and broadcasts between between September 1 and December 31, 1991 gives a strong indication that sports sections can never go back to their old ways.

The recent disclosure by former Los Angeles Laker basketball star Earvin "Magic" Johnson that he had contracted the HIV virus through heterosexual contact provides a compelling example.

"The entire question about AIDS and who gets it and why has changed in the matter of an hour," USA Today Sports Editor Gene Policinski said the night of Johnson's disclosure. "There are parents all over the United States talking to their children about AIDS for the first time tonight and it is only because Magic Johnson has contracted the HIV virus."

The response by national and local sports sections across the country the next day was extraordinary. Stories examining the most basic questions about the controversial and complex disease were plentiful as were stories about the reaction to the disclosure not only from the sports establishment, but also from teenagers who idolized the athlete. Much of the coverage began on the front page, then moved to the sports sections.

In its aftermath, the disclosure also prompted stories to be written about the sexual promiscuity of male professional athletes and the double standard society holds generally for the sexual activity of male athletes compared to female athletes.

The disclosures of alleged widespread rule breaking and other chicanery within the AuburnUniversity football program by The Montgomery Advertiser is another example. When The Advertiser decided to print excerpts from transcripts of secretly tape-recorded conversations between a former Auburn player and his coaches, Pat Dye, Auburn football coach and athletic director, responded like any other coach might. He suggested that all faithful Auburn fans should begin an advertising and subscription boycott of the paper.

Disclosure by USA Today of the apparent conflict of interests involving Des Moines lawyer Robert Helmick and his representation of certain clients including the Turner Broadcasting Co. while serving as president of the U.S. Olympic Committee eventually led to Helmick's resignation from the USOC and from the International Olympic Committee.

Many Examples Show the Trend

Other examples were plentiful during the period:

- A top-notch reporting job in The Sporting News explored in detail the factors and the law behind the growing labor troubles within the National Football League and the chaos likely to occur if a federal court ruling allows football players to negotiate contracts with the team of their choice.
- An in-depth review by The Boston Globe of the scandal revolving around University of Nevada-Las Vegas basketball coach Jerry Tarkanian and the apparent organized effort to get rid of him that included claims from a former

sports editor that he was fired after he refused to publish unsubstantiated allegations against Tarkanian.

- An excellent in-depth documentary broadcast by ESPN's staff on steroid abuse within college, professional and Olympic athletics. The documentary provided substantial insight into the long-suspected use by East German Olympic athletes and trainers of anabolic steroids to enhance athletic performance as well as some top-notch investigative reporting involving allegations by a former Baylor basketball player (now afflicted with serious medical problems) that his head coach and his strength coach arranged for him to get steroids from a small town physician.
- An enlightening analysis by Duke University sports law expert John Weistart of the legal arguments behind the push by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service to subject corporate sponsorship of post-season football bowl games such as the Mobil Oil Cotton Bowl or the Federal Express Orange Bowl to taxation.

Not one of the above stories–all of which ran in just a four month period–involved the reporting of a final score or performance statistic. And, those are just a few examples.

Bill Dwyre, sports editor for The Los Angeles Times, said these types of stories are now commonplace in most responsible publications because the nature of sportswriting has changed dramatically over the last 15 years as have editors and reporters.

"First, we have had to develop a healthy cynicism," Dwyre said. "I would imagine sports reporters are lied to as often as political writers and in the very near future we will be first on that list. It isn't enough anymore for us to just accept the word of one person. The sports pages were the last bastion of the one-person story. That isn't true anymore."

At the same time, several editors say the public has come to expect more information from reporters about their teams even if the clubs don't like it.

"Athletes and their organizations are held accountable to a much greater degree," Times sports editor Amdur said. "Many athletes don't like that, but that is the reality today."

Protecting Fans As Consumers

Dwyre gave an example of accountability reporting by citing Times articles when the Los Angeles Dodgers baseball club sent out a letter to season-ticketholders last July offering them a chance to order 1991 playoff tickets early.

"The Dodgers quietly sent out the letter to season ticketholders suggesting that it might be wise for them to buy playoff tickets and avoid the rush," Dwyre said. "They also said they wanted the money by Aug. 15. That was fine, but then they said that if the team didn't make the playoffs, the Dodgers would credit the money toward next year's season tickets."

Dwyre's reporters estimated the impact of the "no refund" policy would provide the Dodgers with an additional $1 million or more in interest income if the team didn't make the playoffs (which they didn't) by banking the money for almost a year.

"We kept asking them when and if they would refund the money and the club kept silent for the longest time," Dwyre said. "They finally sent out a letter offering the ticketholders the option of getting their money back. That is classic example of consumer journalism in sports."

Dwyre and others suggest one reason for the change in coverage is that sports reporters and writers are no longer in chummy with the latest athletic star.

"We are hiring professionals and not old-time sports writers," Dwyre said. "Their egos are bigger than ever, but that is because the story is the big deal and not some association or notoriety because you work with jocks and coaches."

Another reason is that more sports writers are more interested in social issues as well as the role of sport in American culture, said Richard Lapchick, executive director of Northeastern University's Center for Study of Sport in Society.

Lapchick, the son of the legendary New York Knicks and St. John's basketball coach Joe Lapchick, and a critic on sports issues, said his exposure to sports writers for many years left him with negative feelings toward most sports sections.

"There just are a lot more serious reporters who are doing it now," Lapchick said. "In my work and through my father's life, there clearly were a number of writers who were racist, sexist and totally unconcerned about social issues. They were the norm not the exception and it showed. They thought that writing about the game was the most important aspect just like college coaches who thought their job was just to fill arenas and win games or presidents who ignored the social consequences of that kind of attitude."

Another reason is that sports editors and reporters have learned that disclosing the seamy underside of the local sports franchise or college team gets better play than the usual stories on State U in a bowl game.

"Sports reporters want to make their mark in journalism and not just to be some big man around town because he knows some athlete or coach," Dwyre said.

As a result, beat writers and general assignment reporters are more likely to question athletes on their private lives when the opportunity presents itself.

"As a group, we now deal with issues. We went through a long period when beat reporters knew things that they wouldn't write about or even thought might be newsworthy. Most beat reporters are past that," Dwyre said.

But others suggest there has been no real change in sports coverage, just a change in emphasis. They argue that so-called traditional sports writers could be good reporters when the opportunity arose.

Examples going back as far as news reporting of the 1919 Black Sox scandal to more current stories such as The Lexington (Ky.) Herald-Leader's work on the corruption within the University of Kentucky basketball program and

even the eventual disclosure and reporting of Pete Rose's habitual gambling are examples of what happens when newspapers and television decide to cover the news of sports.

"To me, there is a greater effort to present the broader picture of what goes on in sports, but I'm not sure that the soul of sports reporting and writing is all that different," Dick Schaap, longtime sports journalist and author said. "Readers are more likely to get the big picture and less likely to have to put up with any kind of cover-up than was common many years ago."

At the same time, there are some who suggest that sports reporters today are still only picking the ripest stories that are hanging on the vine. And, there is some concern that reporters will only go so far when dealing with the home team or with athletes with whom the reporter becomes acquainted.

"Professional sports reporters kept drug usage quiet and steroid use quiet though they certainly knew about it," Lapchick said. "They also have yet to explore the depths of gambling within the professional sports world and other issues.

"Unfortunately, there is too much waiting for a bubble to burst before writers get involved in the personal side of an athlete's life."

Part of that is understandable, Lapchick said, adding that athletes and writers still can become friends very easily.

"Beat writers get to know athletes, particularly in professional sports, and it gets harder to write something negative about a player," Lapchick said.

Boosterism at Work At Seattle Station

And, unfortunately, there are still some of the troubling examples where unfavorable or unpopular stories concerning the local team or its members get killed by overprotective publishers or station managers. The most recent example was the controversy caused when the president of Seattle station KIRO-TV killed a two-part story on the lackluster graduation rates among University of Washington football players and the existence of outstanding arrest warrants for seven players, prompting the reporter on the story to resign in protest.

After reporter Mark Sauter's resignation, station officials eventually ran the story, according to USA Today, even though the station's president had earlier kept the story from being aired because it would spoil the atmosphere of the Huskies' outstanding national championship winning season.

Lapchick contends that what happened in Seattle does take place elsewhere, but just not as often as it once did. "There is still an aspect of hometown paper coverage in every city that requires some to treat some of the local teams gingerly."

But -- as in the Seattle case -- it is almost impossible for a news outlet to ignore a sports news story of any kind of consequence. "Ten years ago or so it might have happened, but it is almost impossible for it to happen now," Lapchick said.

Tyson Trial Leads To Complaints

Similarly, there remains the insistence by some that serious news apparently has no place in sports sections. Ironically , the most recent example of that claim didn't come from any group of sports fans, but rather from women's group advocates and press critics who contended that the coverage and placement of stories dealing with Mike Tyson's conviction on rape charges was too important to be relegated to the sports section and to sports writers.

The Boston Globe, which said it received more than 100 complaints concerning placement of the trial stories primarily in its sports section, quoted two women's groups group advocates who strongly suggested such a view of modern sports pages.

"This was not a sports event, it was a criminal charge of rape," Sharon Vardaitra, director of the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, told The Globe. "To put it in sports and talk about it in terms of it being a sports event is really to downplay the seriousness of the crime."

Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organiztion for Women, told The Globe she believed that placing the coverage of the trial in sports sections conveyed "almost a feeling of 'well, boys will be boys.'"

John S. Driscoll, editor of The Globe, provided this response: "Tyson's sports celebrity status is what made it news. And we see the sports section as a depository for stories on business, lifestyle, and, yes, inapproriate behavior involving athletes. The day of a sports section simply glorifying athletes has long gone."

Is There a Danger Of Going Too Far?

Just how far should a reporter go into an athlete's life or into a coach's background? Lapchick contends there is a danger some sports writers may go too far and portray the stereotype and not the person.

"If reporters and editors don't seek balance or provide broad in-depth coverage of the good and bad about sport, you really run the risk of terrible distortion. Clearly, not all college athletes are Phi Beta Kappas, but then many of them are true student-athletes and deserve that kind of coverage. There is a risk of stereotyping people if there is not a committment to in-depth, broad and accurate coverage," Lapchick said.

Dwyre has established a four-person investigative unit within the sports department and has a specialist to write about sports business.

"The next big story in sports is going to be money and not just how much is being spent on salaries, though that will continue to be a part of it," Dwyre said. "These stories are never going to go away, so we have taken the steps we think are necessary to cover them adequately."

Others suggest that going to such lengths of specialization isn't all that necessary. Amdur said that The Times insists that all its writers be capable of digging though he acknowledges it may be difficult for them and very time consuming when they have little time.

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The Home-Town Team

It Can Bring People Together, But Media Risk Integrity by Giving In to Boosterism

By Douglas Lederman

One by one, the football players emerge from the dormitory and begin their slow, steady march to the stadium. To the right and left of the walkway, exuberant fans--young and old, male and female, professor and textile worker and bank president--line the sidewalk. Some of their faces are adorned with orange and blue, the team's colors. Others display merely the adoration they feel for the talented young men who are about to entertain them. Welcome to the "Tiger Walk" at Auburn University.

Conventional wisdom has long held that sports teams bind a community in a way that few other things can. A quick look around shows that local sports teams do have that capacity. Major league teams, big time college powers, even--in some smaller towns-- high-school football squads, often play a substantial, even preeminent, role in defining the community's character or its self-image.

That's certainly true of Auburn, Alabama, and the Tiger Walk shows that off to fine effect. This pre-game celebration, which occurs before each of Auburn's home football contests, is one of those distinctly American rituals which bolster the argument that sports can unite a community. For one moment, at least, people of diverse backgrounds and interests are joined in their intensely felt love for the Tiger team, which has as many black as white players. In the heart of the Deep South, where race is rarely overlooked, it is a strong argument for the healing power of sports.

But a few miles away, on a county highway on the outskirts of Auburn, a dramatically different scene is unfolding. Next to a pot of flowers that are wilting slightly, a white cross is driven into a patch of ground, which is raised to look as if there's a body underneath. Beside it is a hand-lettered sign, which reads, in part, "RIP Eric Ramsey."

The mock grave for Ramsey, a former Auburn football player whose charges about illicit payments by the university's coaches and boosters could bring down the Auburn program, makes you think twice about the "healing power" argument.

There is another "body" in the mock cemetery: What the entire sign says is "RIP Eric Ramsey and Montgomery Advertiser," referring to the newspaper that first reported Ramsey's charges. From the first day of football practice every August until the end of the season, The Advertiser details "every nose bleed, every injured toenail" of the Auburn players, as publisher Richard Amberg puts it, dedicating reams of celebratory, favorable coverage to the exploits of the team's coaches and players.

But last fall, the newspaper published stories about Ramsey's charges of racism and rules violations in the Auburn program, and the next thing you knew, mock funerals and boycott threats by Pat Dye, the team's influential coach and a regional hero, were the order of the day.

In the eyes of its critics, The Advertiser's crime was clear: It took on the home team. Auburn fans, prominent businessmen in Montgomery and others attacked the newspaper for writing critically about an entity that they believed did so much to foster community spirit and economic vitality in the area. Such arguments are hardly limited to Auburn. In every town that cares deeply about its sports teams, newspapers and television stations often face heavy pressure to treat their local teams as community treasures, to cheerlead for them and go easy on them.

Advocates for the sports teams contend that they offer significant benefits to the community. Sometimes the arguments are compelling. But newspapers and television stations should disregard those considerations in deciding how to treat their local teams. They should cover them just as they strive to cover everything else, in a fair and bal-

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anced way. If they don't, they risk their own integrity and do more damage than good for their communities.

Fostering a Sense Of Community

Right now, several cities are hot in pursuit of National Football League franchises. When baseball's National League and the National Basketball Association expanded last year and the year before, respectively, dozens of cities stood in line. At any given time, scores of colleges are re-evaluating the size and scope of their football and basketball programs, wondering whether they should crank their programs up to a higher level to try to win their share of the local sports dollar. And in hundreds of smaller towns across the U.S., high school football games are the hottest ticket in town, and the central focus of municipal life, at least on Friday nights. Why? What is it about sports teams that make them so important to their towns? Do they actually foster a sense of community?

Those who believe that sports teams build community typically contend that they do so by (1) providing an easily accessible, common source of entertainment that builds pride in the community and unites citizens who are otherwise divided by class, race, or language; (2) giving a patina of "big-league" quality to cities and towns seeking to establish or improve their identities, and (3) attracting businesses and free-spending consumers to town and, in effect, improving the quality of life in town in visible, financial ways.

The first argument will seem totally reasonable to anyone who has ever high-fived the total stranger in the next seat after a great play by the home team. It's difficult to explain rationally why local sports teams draw us together. But sociologists, cultural anthropologists and other commentators have tried. Scholars who write about the development of cities argue that sports teams help to bring together the disparate elements of a city's population by giving them a common language. In "How Boston Played," his study of the role sports played in that city's development, Stephen Hardy postulates that baseball "offered all classes and ethnic groups a sense of common history in the form of team records and statistics; people who were otherwise alienated could communicate through the language of box scores and batting averages." Some sociologists argue that as American society has become increasingly mechanized, we have become dispassionate, and that sporting events offer us too-rare occasions for emotional outlet. James Michener, in his landmark study, "Sports in America," argues a more basic point: that throughout time, civilizations have always depended on some form of public entertainment, and that in most cases they have turned to sports.

Michener Enjoyed Excitement of Crowd

For Michener personally, the appeal of local teams was mostly psychological, helping to make him feel a part of the large, faceless cities he lived in. "Watching as a member of a large, excited group was spiritually exhilarating," he wrote. "It was much better to be part of a crowd, sharing its enthusiasm, than to sit alone listening to the radio. When my team won I felt psychologically enlarged."

Living in Washington, D.C., I hear taxi drivers, supermarket cashiers and lawyers talking with an equal sense of ownership about "our" Redskins. I've been in college stadiums in communities plagued by town-gown disputes and watched blue-collar workers practically snuggling up to the preppy students they sneer at other times. As American society grows increasingly race-conscious, I think sports teams are one of the rare things that blacks, whites and members of other racial groups can discuss casually without any of the tension that characterizes so many other subjects. People throughout the country tell me the same thing: Sports is the one subject they can raise in any setting, with just about anyone, and have a meaningful discussion about.

H. G. Bissinger, in his book "Friday Night Lights," described the emphasis on high-school football in the small Texas town of Odessa this way: "The value of high-school football was deeply entrenched. It was the way the community had chosen to express itself. The value of high school English was not entrenched. It did not pack the stands with twenty thousand people on a Friday night; it did not evoke any particular feelings of pride one way or another. No one dreamed of being able to write a superb critical analysis of Joyce's 'Finnegan's Wake' from the age of four on."

Yet while he recognized the value of football to Odessa, Bissinger walked away with decidedly mixed feelings about the contribution it made to the town. "It is clear, based on my own personal view, that sports fosters a tremendous sense of community," he says. "The problem is that someone pays a price, and wittingly or unwittingly, the people who pay the price are the athletes. You have 15-, 16-, 17-year old kids holding the hopes and dreams of a town on their shoulders. It can be both wonderful and devastating." Bissinger's book recounts the scene after one particularly disappointing loss, when one of the team's players found several "FOR SALE" signs driven into the lawn at his parent's home.

There are other signs that the bonding power of sports is declining. As ticket prices soar and special corporate luxury boxes proliferate, arenas and stadiums are less and less a gathering place for the masses, as they often have been portrayed. Skyrocketing ticket prices for many professional sporting events threaten to make the games inaccessible for many American families. The best tickets to many big-time college sporting events are reserved for big wigs willing to make thousand-dollar donations to the school. And as Jonathan S. Cohn complained in the December 1991 issue of The Washington Monthly, the "construction of special skybox levels...creates stark physical divisions that endorse the kind of social hierarchies of race and class already so pervasive in nineties America." A spokesman for a Florida bank tells Cohn that his company's boxes at two stadiums in the state are useful because they provide "more control over the surroundings... You know there's not going to be anybody behind you who's really obnox-

ious." A gathering place for the masses, indeed. While television has somewhat offset this problem by taking the games to fans who don't make it to the stadium, economic divisions loom over that medium, as well: more and more events are moving to cable and pay-per-view.

Sports' Ability to Heal Racial Divisions Doubted

Sports' much-ballyhooed ability to overcome racial divisions also is increasingly open to question. I've seen it argued that the integration of the University of Alabama's football team in the early 1970's did more to foster integration than any other single event. But while the football teams at Alabama and Auburn today are heavily black, the fans are overwhelmingly white. "I get the impression that Auburn football games are only a party for certain groups," says Blair Robertson, who covers the town of Auburn for The Montgomery Advertiser. "It may not be intended that way, but a lot of black people in Auburn, particularly poor ones, don't feel that they're invited to that party." During football games at the University of Mississippi, Rebel fans wave the Confederate flag to cheer on their team. It's hard to imagine that either the black players or any black fans who happen to attend the games are likely to feel a part of that community. On many college campuses, black athletes are often isolated and sometimes feel as if they are valued only for their athletic skills.

The problem is not limited to college sports. The Los Angeles Lakers-Boston Celtics rivalry of recent years has been fueled as much by race as by the conflicting loyalties of the team's fans. And a Boston Globe series last summer reported that few blacks attend games at Fenway Park, at least in part because the Red Sox are virtually all white. The current flap over Native American mascots and nicknames is only the latest example of sports' contribution to furthering racial division, not racial healing.

In one other crucial way, I think, sports separates rather than unites us. Female athletes have made many advances on the playing fields in recent years, and opportunities for them to participate in sports have grown substantially. But by and large, women continue to be far less likely than men to be avid spectators of their local teams. And as much as women may admire what athletes do on the field, I would argue that they will always be considered intruders in the overwhelmingly male fraternity of big-time sports.

Sports may help in some ways to diminish the differences and divisions in American society. But much of the time, they are more likely to reflect them.

And as a reflection of American society, sports, more than ever before, today are about money. So it is not surprising that when people, for whatever reasons, feel the need to defend or justify their sports teams, they turn to financial arguments.

Despite Costs, Cities Seek Big-League Status

How many times have you heard this kind of comment from a city that is pursuing a professional franchise: "This town cannot be a major-league city without a major-league team"? Cities like Orlando and Charlotte, two of the country's fastest-growing metropolitan areas, have staked much of their civic identities on the drive for big-league teams. Businessmen and others in these cities have spent huge amounts of time and money attempting to lure teams to town. Increasingly they depend on local-government financing as well. "Baseballs and Billions," a forthcoming book about the economics of baseball by Andrew Zimbalist, notes a stunning trend: In 1950, only one major-league team played in a publicly financed stadium. Today, only five teams play in privately owned venues. The intensive campaigns to woo teams by building new stadiums do not always pay off, and sometimes they go awry in spectacular ways: The Tampa-St. Petersburg area spent $85 million building the Suncoast Dome to attract a National League franchise. The two expansion teams were awarded to Denver and Miami; the new stadium sits empty.

Yet cities around the country believe that the presence of big-league teams will greatly improve their profiles and get them attention that few other attractions can match. Max Muhleman, whose sports-consulting company helps cities recruit professional sports franchises, says sports teams can help a city get on the map, enticing companies and citizens alike. "We think it's the single most eye-catching thing a city can do," says Muhleman. "You'd have to spend millions and millions on advertising in The Wall Street Journal to get the equivalent benefit in terms of attracting business to town. I'm not sure even that would do it, because there's a difference between telling people 'We're good' and being good enough to have been selected into this very small coterie of professional franchises." Muhleman, who helped Charlotte win a National Basketball Association franchise two years ago and is now advising a local group seeking an NFL franchise, believes that sports teams are especially important to regional cities like Charlotte. "There are lots of regional cities out there--Jacksonville, Birmingham, Memphis--and all of them are very similar in their second-level perception. Getting big-league teams puts you across the threshhold and separates you from the others."

Bob Lipsyte, a sports columnist for The New York Times, believes that argument has some merit, but for slightly different reasons. "As surely as real estate and Broadway are intrinsic to the chemistry of [New York City], so are major-league teams , because the only time that cities like New York, Detroit, Chicago and Milwaukee get on the happy news network, get plugged into the feelgood information system, is when they're talking about sports," says Lipsyte. "Otherwise all you know about Detroit and the other places is that 11-year-olds are trying to kill each other."

The "big-league-status" line of thinking is also oft-heard at the college level, where schools frequently decide that their quickest path to public attention is through highly visible sports teams. Colleges like the University of Nevada at Las Vegas and the University of Miami, to name just two, have poured

money and resources into their basketball and football programs, respectively, in an effort to stay in the public eye while undertaking the much more painstaking process of building sound academic programs. The attention has come, but it has been a mixed bag for both schools. Miami's football team, while stunningly successful on the field, has also earned a reputation as a renegade bunch. At UNLV, meanwhile, the high-flying basketball team helped draw the LasVegas community to the institution, and made the school instantly recognizable nationally. But under its controversial coach, Jerry Tarkanian, the team has broken rules constantly, and as the city has matured and decided that UNLV's basketball program has become a liability to the college's desire to build a first-rate academic program, the Las Vegas community has become deeply divided.

Some Experts Doubt Benefits to Cities

At its core, the argument about major-league status is very much about money. Cities believe that having big-league teams will make them more attractive to the male-dominated world of corporate America, and perhaps make them more successful in bringing companies to town. Sports teams may also provide more direct financial benefits for their communities, although the extent of their contributions--and whether they're worth the initial investment usually required--is a subject for some debate. In 1988, for example, the City of New York estimated that the city's two baseball teams contributed almost $150 million to the city's economy. Similar economic-impact studies are whipped out whenever a city is either pursuing a new team or struggling to keep an existing one. But many experts on the subject contend that rarely do the economic-development benefits outweigh the costs, especially if new facilities must be built to accommodate the teams. "The real question is whether the economic contribution is as great as a lot of people argue," says Robert Baade, an economist at Lake Forest College in Illinois. "I'm skeptical about a lot of what I've seen in terms of promises and projections about the impact of sports teams. They are often exaggerated, and usually there are a lot of other economic-development strategies that would be a lot more effective for a city."

Do sports teams contribute to their communities? Socially and psychologically? Yes, in that many of a community's residents are likely to care deeply about its teams and follow them closely. But I don't think sports overcome existing divisions to the extent that many commentators traditionally have suggested. Imagewise? Yes, teams can give towns a measure of attention and respect that they may not be able to get through their school systems or their orchestras. Is it the kind of attention a city truly wants, and is it always positive? Not necessarily. Economically? Again, a mixed picture--but many of the town's most powerful people, at least, are likely to support the teams and benefit from them.

Enough evidence exists about the community-building contributions of sports teams to insure that they are always going to have their passionate, vocal and plentiful advocates. The pressures on newspapers and television stations to treat the teams well come in many forms. Fans of the team want reporters to tell them everything they want to know about the players and coaches, and many don't want to hear a negative word about them. "If sports teams are what binds us, we don't want to have anybody tear that asunder," says Jay Black, a professor of journalism at the University of Alabama. "We don't want to have somebody denigrate these teams that mean so much to us."

The team owners and corporate leaders, believing that the teams make an important economic contribution, also tend to discourage critical coverage that might make the teams, and hence the communities, look bad. Newspapers and television stations themselves are likely to have a financial stake in the teams' continued good fortune, too. All in all, there's a lot of pressure, economic and otherwise. The crucial question is: to what extent does a newspaper or television station let that pressure color its coverage?

Black, a former sportswriter who is also co-editor of The Journal of Mass Media Ethics, believes that sportswriters often fall into the trap of thinking like fans. "Sportswriters have a vested interest in the team's success. If they're not careful, they can find themselves looking at these things more at the human level than at a professional, detached level. They get excited and they want to cheer. And often sportswriters, like fans, get uncomfortable when they're confronted with something rotten in that culture they're immersed in. So they're certainly not very likely to go looking for it."

Teams Important To Media, Too

Even when reporters are not beholden or overly sympathetic to the teams, management might be, because of the newspaper or television station's own economic benefits. "Teams are important to the financial well-being of the community," says Bob Lipsyte. "Let's not forget how important they are to the reflected or direct economic health of the local television station or newspaper."

Sometimes the financial ties are direct: Television stations in almost every city with a National Football League franchise have contracts with the team's coaches and players to appear on weekly shows about the team. "They are almost business partners," says Norman Chad, who has written about sports television for The Washington Post and The National, the now defunct sports daily. And even for those stations that do not have the rights to broadcast the games or host the team-related shows, he says, "it makes good economic sense to get into bed and ride the bandwagon."

When Washington, D.C. pursued a National League franchise last year, the sports anchors of the three network affiliates and the local Fox station co-hosted a half-hour television show the night before the beginning of the speculative season-ticket drive. Practically groveling, the four men urged Washingtonians to "support our team" and ante up for tickets. In a much-publicized incident in Seattle this fall,

the president of a local television station spiked a story about outstanding arrest warrants for University of Washington football players. His explanation? He told a radio station: "Sure, there was somewhat of a story here. But why should we spoil this Huskies fever?"

Chad is philosophical about the bent toward boosterism among television sports reporters and anchors. He is more disturbed, he says, about similar behavior among print journalists--especially at the major newspapers, which he expects to be less susceptible to the financial pressures that may be put upon them. "I would hope that newspapers could distance themselves more," he says. But with newspapers struggling to survive--we spoke just days after The Dallas Times-Herald had folded--even newspaper s aren't immune, Chad contends. "Even if it wasn't a tightening economy, you're going to make more marketing decisions that win out over journalistic ones." Chad notes with some chagrin The Post's own decision one day last December to include a bumpersticker that read "Skins Bandwagon--The Washington Post" in every newspaper.

The basic marketing decision that most television stations and newspapers make about their local teams is to cover the hell out of what they do on the field. That's an understandable decision; most sports fans have a voracious appetite for facts, statistics and opinions about their local teams. To Richard Amberg, publisher of The Montgomery Advertiser, it's just good business. He says circulation for the newspaper is considerably higher during football season than it is the rest of the year. Sunday sales average about 85,000 from August to December, and about 76,000 the rest of the year. And during the season, the newspaper sells 5,000 more copies on Sundays after both Auburn and Alabama win than it does when both teams lose. "Nobody roots harder for Alabama and Auburn than I do," Amberg says.

As a general rule, I don't have any problem with the amount of what might be called "positive" coverage: game stories, personality profiles, columns and the like. There's one exception, however: the proliferation of game coverage about high-school sports, especially with its emphasis on the "best" this and the "best" that. The idea behind expanding a paper's high-school coverage is often well-intended: it's a relatively easy and inexpensive way to get a lot of local names and faces into the newspaper. And as high-school sports programs across the country continue to struggle for funding, any help they get from positive news coverage is beneficial. But Top 25 polls for high-school football and basketball teams, and all-star teams for 8th graders are going way too far. As H. G. Bissinger says, "You have a lot of big-time newspapers dedicating reams of space to very young kids. I think you run the risk of turning these kids, intentionally or not, almost into pro athletes." Bob Lipsyte, typically, is more direct. "I hate things like high-school all-America lists. That kind of professionalization of teenagers is hideous. I wouldn't god them up like that."

The glamorizing coverage of high-school sports aside, the answer to more responsible coverage, I believe, is not less positive coverage but a dramatic increase in more critical coverage about the less-healthy impact of sports on a community. Balance is the key.

"Troubled as the sports world has become, the sports page of the average newspaper is still largely a place for boosterism, where sportswriters are expected to root for the hometown heroes and criticize members of the local sports establishment only when they don't win often enough," Doug Underwood, a professor of journalism at the University of Washington, wrote in the March/April 1990 issue of The Columbia Journalism Review. "Investigative reporting, for the most part, has been left to the hard-nosed news types covering the real world of politics and government."

When I talk about the need for tougher reporting, I'm not talking so much about the police-blotter stories that have come to pass for critical coverage in many newspapers, relating reports of the latest athlete caught in his hotel room with a prostitute or arrested for his role in a bar fight. That stuff is not insignificant; we should expect athletes to be good citizens (as we expect that of each other), and we are happily past the days when players' personal behavior was quietly shoved under the rug by protective college officials or team owners or ignored by reporters. However, I think athletes are held to an impossibly high standard in this regard, and I think journalists have been too quick to let reporting about athletes' personal behavior absolve them of their responsibility to write thoughtfully and critically about more pressing issues in sports.

Schools and Colleges Are Critical Areas

By "critical" coverage I don't necessarily mean "negative"; I mean reporting that is analytical and questioning. There are important questions to be raised about sports at every level, and too often they go unasked. The most serious questions, and those asked least, I believe, are at the high school and college levels. In "Friday Night Lights," Bissinger noted that Permian High School annually spent more on rush-order film prints of football games ($6,400) than it did on teaching materials for the English department ($5,040). In 1988, the school spent about $70,000 for chartered jets for the football team. Would most reporters covering high-school sports seek to put the games in that kind of perspective? I doubt it.

Coverage of college-sports issues has improved greatly in the last 10 years. Many newspapers have investigated possible rules violations in local college programs and the NCAA would be unable to do much of anything in policing college athletics without the help of people like Danny Robbins of The Los Angeles Times, Doug Bedell of The Dallas Morning News, and reporters at places like The Lexington Herald-Leader and The Syracuse Post-Standard. But many sports reporters still virtually ignore another whole set of important issues about big-time intercollegiate sports: whether they are good for the athletes who play them and the colleges that sponsor them. This category includes such issues as whether colleges are putting too much emphasis (finan-

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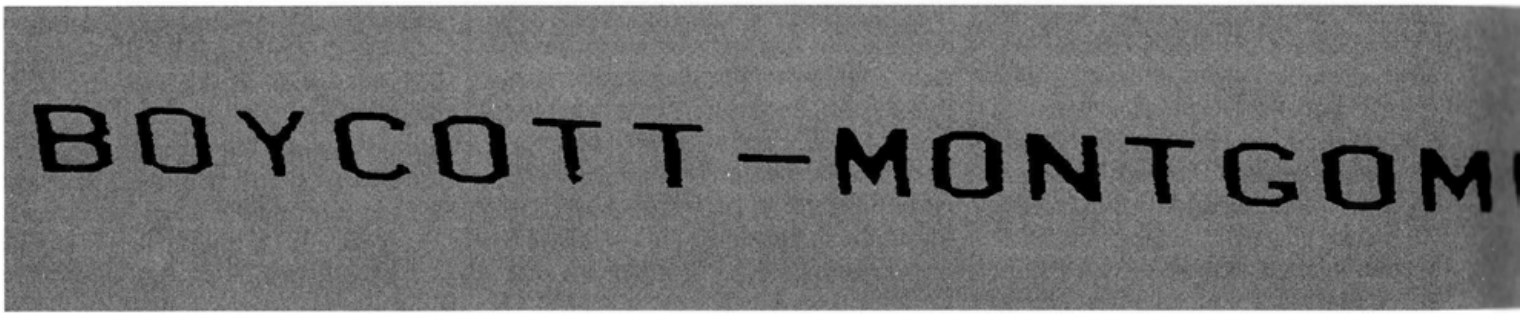


When Auburn Fans Boycotted the Paper

By Jim Tharpe

There are, for journalists anyway, few sacred cows dotting Alabama's fertile landscape.

Write what you will about corruption in the state Legislature -- there's plenty to write about -- and the masses will shake their heads in agreement. Blast the governor on the front page and you can hear shouts of approval from Birmingham to Mobile. Attacking the President and U.S. Congress -- especially our own congressmen -- is considered high sport.

But when it comes to writing about college football, the rules change. In Alabama, and most other Southern states, you are dealing with more than just sport; you are trespassing on some electrically charged territory approaching religion.

Months of Trouble

The Montgomery Advertiser discovered the consequences of such sacrilege in late September 1991. It would be months before things returned to anything approaching normality.

Before it was over, there were bomb threats, subscription cancellations, and a top-ranked head football coach would call for a boycott of the newspaper. In the early going, even some fellow journalists got in a few kicks as The Advertiser struggled to stay on course with the story.

The trouble began Sept. 27 when The Advertiser printed an exclusive story about a former Auburn University cornerback named Eric Ramsey, who secretly had tape-recorded coaches and boosters offering him cash and other incentives disallowed by the NCAA. The reporter in our Auburn bureau, who had written an earlier piece about Ramsey, broke the story after listening to key portions of Ramsey's recordings.

Reader reaction was swift and unforgiving, and it was helped along by local sports commentators who egged on the public during radio talk shows during the height of football season. The newspaper, located only 50 miles from Auburn, was accused of printing the story only to boost circulation, or to ruin the university's highly ranked football program, or both.

The reporter's motives, and those of his editors, were questioned at length--up close and personal. Telephones in our circulation department and the newsroom began ringing off the hook with cancellations.

Just when things seemed as if they couldn't get much worse, Auburn head football coach Pat Dye went on the most popular sports talk show in the area and urged Auburn Tiger fans -- they make up most of the newspaper's readership -- to boycott The Advertiser and any business that dared advertise in its pages. A leading sports columnist for a Birmingham newspaper, upholding the tradition of kicking your journalistic colleagues when they're down, wrote a column attacking the reporter who broke the Ramsey story.

By this time the story, which had been picked up by the wire services and broadcast nationally, began to assume a life of its own.

Advertiser editors made a conscious effort to try to keep the newspaper from becoming the story. But suddenly we were receiving dozens of requests for interviews. We decided early on not to comment directly about the controversy, but to let the initial story and the subsequent articles speak for themselves. The last thing we wanted was to get into a public debate about why we were reporting the story while it was still unfolding.

Our publisher issued a brief statement to The Associated Press in which he said the public outrage seemed to be a classic case of trying to kill the messenger just because readers didn't like the message. The publisher also downplayed Dye's call for a boycott, observing that people often, in moments of passion, say things they really don't mean. That statement left Dye some face-saving room and, after newspapers across the state attacked his boycott stance, the coach backed off.

Dye later said he wasn't encouraging a boycott at all when he said Tiger fans should let The Advertiser "dry up on the vine."

But the battlelines had been drawn.

A group of Auburn fans paid to have a banner pulled behind a plane at the next home game urging from high above a boycott of The Advertiser. There were 80,000 fans in the stadium -- Auburn becomes the fifth largest city in Alabama on game days. Our sports editor became the target of cups, bottles and other projectiles on the sidelines that afternoon. Several members of our circulation department had drinks thrown on them as they hawked papers near the stadium. And in the surrounding

countryside, mock graves bearing the names of The Advertiser and Ramsey popped up in the yards of Tiger fans. The phone continued to ring.

A few mornings later, I walked in the office and a newsroom secretary informed me that we had already had one bomb threat -- firemen swept the building and found nothing -- and two threatening telephone calls. One caller informed our receptionist that he and his friend were on a mission to "burn every Advertiser rack" they could find. It was only 10 a.m.

As things heated up on the harassment front, the newspaper was thrown a serious curve by Ramsey's attorney, retained shortly after Ramsey's story appeared in our paper. The attorney, who has had a stormy relationship with our newspaper, announced he was now controlling all access to Ramsey and the tapes. He would allow reporters -- he called them his "team" -- to hear the full tapes, but those reporters would be from The Birmingham News, not The Advertiser.

Fortunately, Birmingham's published transcripts of the full tapes backed up our initial stories about key segments of those tapes. But these tapes only contained information about an Auburn booster and assistant coaches.

Bigger Story Ahead

The real prize Ramsey's attorney promised -- and it was teased heavily in the Birmingham newspapers -- was a taped conversation between Dye and Ramsey. What Ramsey's attorney didn't know was that our reporter had listened to that tape before the attorney came on the scene. We had not reported about it because it was barely audible -- we could make out only a few vague sentences.

When the attorney continued to tout the Dye-Ramsey tape, we approached him with our version of the recording. We informed him that we planned to print that information and asked to listen to his version of tape. He seemed shocked that we had the information. And he not only declined our request to listen to his tape -- he actually laughed when we asked -- he said that if we printed a story based on what we had he would "embarrass The Advertiser all over the state."

Despite his threat, which we printed, we went with the story. The attorney retaliated by telling wire service reporters we had left out "nine key words" from the tape. He, of course, would not divulge those nine words.

The attorney had promised first shot at the Dye-Ramsey tape to The Birmingham News, but bigger fish came along. The News found itself in the unenviable position of running a story saying the Dye-Ramsey tape would not appear in its pages after all. The tape would be broadcast, it seemed, on the CBS program "60 Minutes."

Advertiser reporters and editors held their collective breath as the tape was played on national television -- we waited for the nine missing words. They never materialized. It was the same tape our reporter heard and we had reported on weeks earlier. There was a real temptation to run a banner headline the next morning reading: "We're Not Embarrassed."

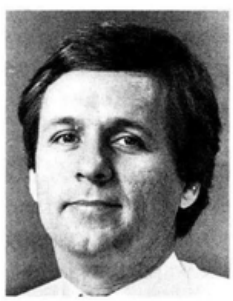
It's difficult to say at this point what all of this has accomplished. The NCAA is taking an initial look. The Auburn trustees have placed more control over the athletic department in the university president's hands, and some corrective state legislation has been proposed.

From the newspaper's standpoint, we lost several hundred subscriptions, but gained single-copy sales because of the publicity surrounding the Ramsey tapes. We initially lost some advertising, but it's difficult to attribute most of that to the Auburn controversy and not the lousy economy.

We did, I think, stand our ground. We attempted to report fairly about the university's problems as well as less-than- heroic moves by Ramsey -- his wife tried to sell the story to Sports Illustrated for big bucks. His attorney says a book deal is in the works.

If we're lucky, some reform will come from this. Already, discussion about the ethics of paying college athletes has been pushed to the forefront of many sports talk shows.

And for awhile at least -- at least at The Advertiser --the telephones have stopped ringing. ■



Jim Tharpe, 37, is the Managing Editor of The Montgomery Advertiser and The Alabama Journal in Alabama's capital city. Tharpe was a Nieman Fellow during the 1988-89 term at Harvard. Prior to becoming an editor in Montgomery, he was a reporter in Florida and South Carolina. In 1988, as Managing Editor of The Alabama Journal, he led his staff to a Pulitzer Prize for a campaign against the state's high infant mortality rate. He became Managing Editor of both papers late last year.

Stop Printing Gambling News

It's an Outrageous Abuse of Public Trust to Publish Material Promoting Illegal Activities

By Dave Kindred

Mr. Editor. Here's an item written for your newspaper by a cityside reporter:

> Dealers on downtown streets today reported the price of crack cocaine to be $18.50 per bag, with prices moving generally upward to reflect the improved quality of crack being delivered overnight from Miami. Dealers on the East Side said they will negotiate prices with their most faithful customers. But on the West Side, where police have made several arrests lately, dealers are edgy. One said, "I'm taking nothing but $20 bills. I'm not letting the cops see me make change." For the latest crack prices, as well as for reports on crack quality, please turn to Page A2.

Ludicrous. An outrageous abuse of the public trust. No newspaper would print such an item. Just as it would be unthinkable for a newspaper to report:

> Some of the city's prostitutes are offering a Christmas special today. For half their usual fees, members of the Assistance to Streetwalkers Society will perform any act described during the recent Clarence Thomas and William Kennedy Smith television shows. On Page A3 are the names, addresses and phone numbers of prostitutes conducting the Christmas season sale.

Degrading as well as ludicrous. If Mr. Editor's newspaper reported such news, readers would cry out in disgust. Why, then, do today's newspapers print information similarly ludicrous, degrading and outrageous? I mean gambling information.

Drugs, prostitution, gambling — all illegal. Drugs, prostitution, gambling — all held by the federal government to be dangers to society because of their intimate connections to organized crime. Yet newspapers that wouldn't whisper advice about drugs and prostitution have no such qualms about gambling. They tell sports-page readers the point spreads and/or the odds on just about any game in the country. They also advise the readers which way to bet, often doing it in jargon that defies understanding by the common household occupant. Such as: "Take the dog with the points away from home out of the division on turf."

For 20 years, I have made a journalistic pest of myself by arguing in my newspapers that those newspapers have no business in the gambling business. I have asked my bosses why they print gambling information when that information condones, legitimizes and promotes an illegal activity. The answer most often has come back thiš way: Everybody gambles. It's no big deal. Readers want to know that stuff. Now leave me alone while I call my bookie. That's when I have said, "Some of our readers want to know what the prostitutes are charging this week, but we don't tell 'em that."

And my bosses have said, "Oh, come on, Kindred. Get real."

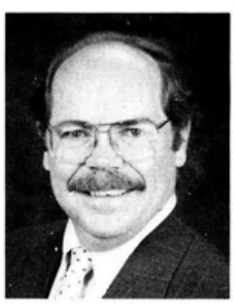
No one pays much attention to me on this topic. I am regarded as an old-fashioned hayseed, naive and unsophisticated to the ways of the late 20th century sports world. If being worldly and wise means understanding the value of gambling, I am happy to plead guilty to hayseediness.

Gambling may or may not be morally wrong. But it is illegal. And as long as it's illegal, I want nothing to do with it and no respectable newspaper should want anything to do with it.

The roster of gambling scandals in sports is very long. Major league baseball uncovered its first fixed games not in the 1919 World Series but in the 1877 regular season. Every decade or so beginning in the late 1940's college basketball has been touched by scandals born of gambling. When CBS-TV hired Jimmy (The Greek) Snyder, an oddsmaker by trade, he became the National Football League's gambling shill. And the press, in complicity, treated The Greek as an entertaining curiosity instead of the pernicious fraud he was.

Have I mentioned Pete Rose?

Pete Rose considered gambling harmless.



Dave Kindred is the 1991 winner of the Red Smith Award for lifetime contribution to sports journalism. He has worked as a sports columnist for 23 years at The Louisville Courier-Journal, The Washington Post, The Atlanta Constitution and The National. A native of Atlanta, Ill., and graduate of Illinois Wesleyan University, Kindred lives in Newnan, Ga., with his wife, Cheryl. Across the street are his son Jeff, daughter-in-law Lynn and their twin boys Jacob and Jared, 3 years old. Kindred has this figured out: he will be a sprightly 83 on that chilly January day in 2029 when the world famous twins are inaugurated as President and Vice-President.

Of the many disappointments created by my dear, dead newspaper, The National, one that bothers me still was our collapse under pressure to report gambling information. The editor, Frank Deford, wanted no gambling trash at all. But sure enough. Advertising pressure became so severe that we began accepting ads from gambling tout services. One executive told me the money was too good to pass up. He said it came to $28,000 a week.

In addition, The National created a stable of experts that included, horrors, a real live gambling shill from the muck of that dark world. Those men picked the NFL games. We listed the point spreads. We listed the over-under as set by the Caesars Palace sports book. We gave bettors advice on who would win and why. Wallowing in muck, we were covered in muck.

And we knew it. Yet we wanted to be respectable. So here's what we did. We picked winners. But we stopped short of predicting the bit of information which all bettors wanted to know, which was: would the winner cover the spread?

So even as we promoted illegal activity, we were dishonest with the readers. Both ways, then, we were losers.

Yes, gambling is illegal. Yes, it leads to corruption. Reasons enough to keep gambling shills out of the paper.

I have another reason I want nothing to do with gambling. Sports can raise us up, even ennoble us, with their contests of skill and will. But gambling distorts that reason for being. With gambling the question is not one of talent and performance. The question becomes: Are the Redskins six points better than the Bills?

I don't care about the point spread. I don't care about numbers. Just give me wonderful athletes doing what only they can do. ■

Beyond Games

continued from page 28

"My inclination is to send my reporters back when I think they don't have it," Amdur said. "We are all dealing with the tough story and it is not glamourous work."

But Amdur said those reporters who challenge their sports institutions are wading into controversies few people want to read about.

"In many ways, there is still the silent code that exists among the fans, athletes and those who run sports," Amdur said. "They want to protect themselves and will bury things to make sure they always are seen in the best possible way."

That is exactly the problem my colleague and her son had with the stories about the three Iowa players undergoing drug treatment. They didn't want to know that these three young men were having problems because that reality intruded on their protected sensibilities.

The legend in Chicago is that after the disclosure that the 1919 World Series had been fixed in a conspiracy by gamblers and members of the Chicago White Sox, a street urchin pleaded with Shoeless Joe Jackson, baseball's best player and one of the conspirators, to say "it ain't so."

Not much has changed in more than 70 years. Today, there are still too many fans, too many parents and too many children making heroes or role models of young men and women who are just barely out of adolescence themselves and don't deserve to be tied with that kind of responsibility.

The only way for that to change is for newspapers and television to continue telling the truth -- good and bad -- about athletes, coaches and franchise owners. Sometimes it will be very uncomfortable, but in the long run everyone will be better off when we stop making talented young athletes into something more than they are or can be.

An exchange written by Bertolt Brecht in his play "Galileo" ought to be mounted and placed on the desks of all sports editors, writers and reporters to remind them daily that, like politics, sports is no longer bean bag.

"Unhappy is the land with no heroes," a friend of Galileo's laments after the scientist has renounced his valid scientific findings under pressure from the papacy.

"Unhappy is the land that needs heroes," Galileo responded. ■

Sexism Still Rampant

Despite Rapid Growth and Success of Female Athletics Women are Underrepresented in Media Reports

By Michele Himmelberg

The numbers in women's sports keep swelling, like figures flowing from a ticker tape. Since 1971, the number of girls participating in high school sports has multiplied more than six times—from nearly 300,000 to almost 2 million. The number of women playing college basketball has jumped so that it nearly equals the number of men. In the 1970's, the richest woman athlete of the day, Billie Jean King, pulled in $1 million for her career. To date, tennis champion Martina Navratilova has earned more than $17 million.

The number of female champions in the U.S. also continues to grow. In team sports alone, the U.S. has risen to world medalist or Olympic contender in nine of its 10 sports. The U.S. women's soccer team won the 1991 World Cup, giving the U.S. a world championship medal or Olympic berth in every team sport but field hockey. And in the 1992 Winter Olympics women won nine of the 11 medals the American team brought home, including all five gold medals.

The tremendous growth and success level of womens' and girls' sports are not always reflected in the U.S. media, however, according to numerous studies. And when a woman's achievements are noted, studies show, they sometimes are tainted with sexism. Recent studies have examined the quantitative differences between coverage of men's and women's sports, and not surprisingly, they show women to be largely underrepresented in both the print and broadcast media. Other studies have judged the qualitative treatment of female athletes and have found gender stereotyping and sexist language to be common, particularly on television.

Newspaper sports editors have acknowledged some of the print media's shortcomings, and some have expressed a desire to improve. Broadcast executives have attended seminars to heighten their sensitivity about women in sport. But sports editors continue to defend many of their coverage decisions based on "reader interest" — a nebulous item sometimes judged by "instinct."

Recognizing how powerful and pervasive the media is in today's society, the leaders in women's sports have issued recommendations for improved coverage. They come based on this premise: No matter the realities for women's and girls' sports, the media's evaluation and presentation of them will greatly influence their development and actualization.

23-to-1 Advantage Found in Male Sports

An examination of four heralded sports sections across the country showed that stories focusing exclusively on men's sports outnumbered stories focusing on women's sports by a ratio of 23 to 1. The Amateur Athletic Foundation, an organization set up with excess funds from the Los Angeles Olympics, concluded that "women's sports are extraordinarily underreported," adding that "there is an entire world of women's sports that is excluded from the sports pages." The AAF, based in Los Angeles, studied sports sections from USA Today, The Boston Globe, The Orange County Register and The Dallas Morning News, in the summer of 1990. In each newspaper, fewer than 5 per cent of all stories were devoted to women only, though USA Today provided more stories and photographs of women than any of the others.

Other findings from the study:

- Photographs of male athletes outnumbered those of female athletes, 13 to 1, and 92 per cent of all photos were of men.
- Men-only stories consumed 79 per cent of the column inches in sports sections, and women-only stories made up less than 3 per cent.

Michele Himmelberg has covered sports since 1974, when she was first hired by a newspaper; her first beat was covering women's and girls' sports for The Riverside Press-Enterprise in California. Since then she has covered the NFL, the NBA, college sports, the NCAA, amateur sports and the Olympics for newspapers in Florida and California. She now works for The Orange County Register as a general assignment sports reporter and columnist. She won an APSE award for a 1980 series on inequities of girls' high school sports in Fort Myers, Fla. Himmelberg competed for the University of Southern California basketball team and rowed for the USC crew. She and her husband, Jim Farmer, have two daughters.

- On the front page, women-only sports stories were the most scarce, comprising 3.2 per cent of page one articles compared to 85.3 per cent for men-only stories.
- Even when the predominantly male sports of baseball and football were eliminated, stories on men still outnumbered stories on women by a margin of 8.7 to 1.

Critics of the study pointed out that it was done in the summer, not the time when sports sections devote a lot of space to women's and girls' sports, even though that is when women's professional golf and tennis are at their peak. The bulk of column inches on girls' and women's sports, sports editors said, appears in the fall and winter, when high school sports are at their peak and when women's college basketball is played.

The AAF also did not analyze Saturday and Sunday sections, though many stories on women's sports appear on Sundays, a day when more space is given to personality pieces and to non-mainstream sports.

Wanted: More Research On Readers' Interests

"I think a lot of us had a hard time with that study," said John Rawlings, executive editor of The Sporting News and former president of The Associated Press Sports Editors. "It didn't tell us anything we didn't already know. If someone had the money to do a study, I'd like to see meaningful research to quantify what readers want to see and read. Ask, for instance, on a scale of 1 to 7, what your interest is in pro basketball, women's basketball, pro football, Olympic figure skating--something that would show comparative interest."

The AAF has called for more research in that area, also. Despite the criticism of the AAF study, the discrepancies were clear. Several previous studies had developed the same conclusions as the AAF study. A similar survey examined the Saturday sections of The Indianapolis Star and The New York Times and found that coverage of women's sports made up 2 per cent of sports coverage in 1989 — a decline since 1981's peak of nearly 4 per cent. That report was made by Judith Jenkins George, of DePauw University.

Much of the growth of women's sports can be attributed to the federal statute Title IX, which mandated equal opportunities for males and females in educational settings, and was passed in 1972. The biggest surge in female participants came from 1971 to 1978, according to numbers from the New York-based Women's Sports Foundation.

But a report by Mary Jo Kane examined media coverage of women's sports in the pre- and post-Title IX eras and found little difference in the amount of coverage. Kane, an assistant professor of health and physical education at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, wrote in the March, 1989, issue of The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance:

> In study after study — whether the focus was newspapers, magazines or television, whether the audience was adolescent or adult — female athletes are so underrepresented in the media that they have been rendered almost absent from the sport world.
>
> The most damaging effect of the media coverage of women's sports is the way female athletes are portrayed. Focusing primarily on her gender role rather than her athletic ability and accomplishments, the media will not let the reader/viewer forget old stereotypes and stigmas. For example, if a female participates in feminine, socially acceptable sports such as figure skating and gymnastics, the media will reward her for her cute, feminine characteristics: she is rewarded precisely because her participation in these types of sports allows her to remain very much the 'lady.'The gross underrepresentation and trivialization of the female athlete that persists in the media produces two very powerful impressions. First, on the whole, women's sport is made to appear unimportant compared to the 'real' sport world of men; second, those sports that do receive coverage are the safe, socially "acceptable" sports ...

That brings us to the qualitative coverage of women's and girls' sports. Prior to the 1990 study, the AAF held a conference on gender stereotyping in the media and found that "subtle stereotyping of women athletes such as 'nice' and 'vulnerable' or 'attractive' can be even more dangerous than blatant, outrageous remarks because they are so easily accepted. No one will call to write or complain, but the comments shape the way we think about these athletes nonetheless."

The conference concluded that although most stereotypical comments in the media are unintentional, the "best remedy is education." A panel on coverage of women's sports at the 1991 APSE convention also stressed the value of heightened sensitivity to sexism.

A follow-up study by the AAF on televised sports news indicated that women's sports were underreported and that many broadcasts tended to trivialize the women's games. While women were missing as athletes, they did appear regularly on the TV sports shows — as the comical targets of newscasters' jokes and/or as sexual objects, such as women spectators in bikinis. The study examined specific televised events in 1988 and 1989.

From Social Outcast To Sex Symbol

Those results were in keeping with Kane's findings that female athletes in the U.S. are most commonly embraced by the media for being "sexy" or attractive. For years, the most photographed women golfers were Jan Stephenson and Laura Baugh, blond, shapely women who didn't win as many titles as less attractive and ultimately less popular champions. From social outcast to sex symbol isn't necessarily progress, said Kane; it's another form of "gender stereotyping."

Rawlings of The Sporting News said:

"Yes, you will read accounts of women's figure skating and women's basketball and you'll see adjectives that would never be applied to men — like pixie or cute. Stories on women athletes will include more information about the woman's body type or figure, and what she was wearing, than stories on men. In golf, you read about how tight Jan Stephenson's clothes were, but in the PGA you never read about

someone's clothes unless they're unusual, like a Payne Stewart [in knickers].

"You can argue the merits of obligation [to print more stories on women] versus the reader interest until you're blue in the face. But on the qualitative issue, there's no argument we should not treat a woman any differently than a man as far as coverage of their athletic achievements."

The photos of Stephenson might appeal to many of the readers of sports sections, but members of the Associated Press Sports Editors group have acknowledged that coverage should be more proportionate to achievement than to looks. Sports Illustrated continues to publish an annual swimsuit issue, however, printing in one issue more photographs of women than they do much of the rest of the year. Publishers have defended it as something that evolved when sports were slow in the dead of winter, and something that it is unrelated to women's sports.

Women Cautioned On Expectations

In response to the AAF study on quantity of coverage, Michael Kelly of The Omaha World-Herald wrote this in his column:

> At The World-Herald, we have greatly increased the space devoted to girls' and women's sports, but our coverage must be more or less in proportion to the interest. There are many great stories in women's sports, and we try to tell them — and must continue to look for ways to highlight stories of interest.
>
> Advocates of women's sports should keep the pressure on. But they should not expect that coverage of major league baseball, major-college men's basketball and college football will be the same as that for girls' and women's sports...
>
> Many in women's sports aren't seeking "equal" coverage — just an increase from what they get. Our coverage of women's sports should be spirited and dignified, never patronizing. Greater opportunities for girls in sports have been a wonderful development in our nation's history and we must reflect that.

As they attempt to meet such goals, sports editors cope with several issues: moral obligations, breaking their habits of routine coverage and determining reader interest.

Generally, participation figures mean little in determining reader interest. The most heavily weighted factors are attendance at events, history of past coverage of the event, and whether or not the event is televised. People may play softball, but that doesn't mean they're inclined to read about the sport. Some of the most zealous readers of sports sections — based on the feedback to sports editors and reporters — are those who follow the sport because they bet on games. Women's games, so far, don't have a line in Las Vegas.

In general, sports sections are put together with the awareness that the audience is diverse, but with a focus on the most avid readership.

"I get maybe five letters a year about women's sports," said Bill Dwyre, sports editor of The Los Angeles Times, "and our letters are a pretty strong indicator of what's going on. So I don't see a wide interest out there in reading about women's sports. Sports sections tend to react rather than act, and we're used to reacting to the men's market. We've got to expand our horizons and get better at doing what's not the norm.

"You make decisions every day based on instinct. But if you don't factor in your moral obligations, you're wrong. We are always reminding ourselves that we've not been as sensitive as we should have been in the past."

It was part obligation and part geography that made Dwyre take a harder look at the women's Final Four basketball tournament this year. It will be played in Los Angeles in April, and he is planning for it by assigning a person to monitor women's basketball nationally for much of the season.

"But it took it to be in this town for us to really look at it," said Dwyre, a past president of APSE. "If it was in Minneapolis, I'd be like every other dunderhead and not pay attention to it until two weeks ahead of time."

Ideally, Dwyre said, he would ponder all these issues during some idle time in his office. But in reality, he said "you get lost in the morass of daily routine and you miss things. You get caught up in the way you've always done things."

An informal poll of sports editors at the 1991 APSE convention indicated that the norms are being broken in women's college basketball, anyway. A large majority of sports editors said they put the women's Final Four on their cover in 1991, something that would have been limited largely to the champion's home city not many years ago.

"One of the most difficult things a section has to do is decide what it covers," said Mark Tomaszewski, sports editor of The Orange County Register, in Southern California. "We're driven by things like attendance and television coverage. But you can't just live in a vacuum, either, and say this is the only thing that goes on.

"Part of our job is to inform [readers] about other events. And then you have to pick your spots. You just can't beat people over the head with something. If we ran UC Irvine women's basket ball on our cover every day for two weeks, I don't think that would make more people go to more games."

There are women's programs that wouldn't mind experimenting with that notion, however. A regular criticism in the coverage of women's sports is the chicken-or-the-egg debate. The general public doesn't attend games, some say, because they're not aware that this is a legitimate event, and they're not aware because they don't see it in the paper. But it's not in the paper because editors don't see enough people attending games.

It's a cycle rarely broken. A major personality or impact player, like Cheryl Miller in basketball in the early '80s, can attract attention. But it was not sustained. At one point in Miller's career, University of Southern California women's games were on the cover of The Register while the men's games were inside. But now the women's games have gone back to shorter stories inside.

"The biggest discrepancy is game coverage," Tomaszewski said. "We are going to cover the [local Division I

men's basketball teams] at all of their games, and I base that on general reader interest. We won't cover every one of the women's games. Is that right? How do you test it? Would you just not cover UC Irvine at home one night and see what happens? I'm not going to do that."

Rawlings also defended the inequity in space as a reflection of reader interest. But he was critical of the enduring sexism in the tone and language of how women's sports are covered.

"I think we are probably still guilty of not being as sensitive as we should be, in how we portray women and girls as athletes," Rawlings said. "But white, middle-class males have a hard time being as sensitive as we should be. And by far, the majority [of sports reporters and editors] are white middle-class males.

"We need to recruit more women and minorities so we have a better mix in the decision-making process. I think having a woman, particularly at the management level, would help a lot with some of the qualitative issues in covering women's sports. They're just more sensitive [to sexism]."

Rawlings quickly conceded that he had "only one" woman in his five management positions.

Only One Woman Of 5 in Management

In his efforts to be "more open," Dwyre said he relies on the input of his assistant editors, particularly one female assistant.

If attitudes are progressing, do sports sections continue to be sexist in their treatment of women athletes? "Absolutely," Dwyre said. "But it's unmalicious sexism. The desire for people like myself to be better and more tuned in, it's there."

Several sports editors and managing editors have pointed out the need to get more women into sports departments and into decision-making roles. That suggestion was also made at the AAF conference on Race and Gender in the Sports Media. The Association for Women in Sports Media estimates that about five per cent of the whole sports media are female, and about 10 per cent of newspaper sports reporters are female.

Given the multitude of studies on discrepancies in coverage of men's and women's sports, the AAF study recommended moving beyond such quantitative research and probing the attitudes and practices of sports editors. The AAF also called for better ways to determine reader interest.

The 1990 study says: "Defenders of the sports media status quo claim that newspapers and other media devote little coverage to women's sports because relatively few people care about them. Even if, for the sake of argument, we accept this premise, the question remains, Why is there a lack of interest? Is it because women's athletics inherently are uninteresting or is it because the media through underreporting have failed to 'legitimize' women's sports? Scholars need to consider ways to test the claim made by traditionalists that women's sports, even when covered and treated seriously by the media, will fail to generate wide spread public interest." ■

Just for Fun

USA Today Finds Wide Interest in Articles About Recreational Activities

By Gene Policinski

Newspapers don't do enough with leisure sports — even as their readers do more.

Most sports sections nationwide have changed mightily in the last 10 years, as the scope of what is considered "sports coverage" came to include drug use, finances and contracts, labor negotiations, AIDS and more.

In the decade, sports staffs changed as well, moving from the exclusive province of white males to include women and minority staffers.

But there's still a gap: Newspapers generally don't do enough, if anything at all, with the very sports their readers actually participate in.

'Hook-and-Bullet' Approach

By tradition, the entire area largely has been confined to the hallowed, traditional, revered Outdoor Page — which most readers pass right by. This "hook-and-bullet" approach has been a great place to plunk down tales from the duck blind or bass boat, the latest advisory on fishing licenses and hunting seasons and — just for fun —large fish caught in a nearby reservoir. Staffing frequently was limited to a local sportsman (read hunter or fisherman) with little or no professional journalism training. Half-hearted editing largely was limited to fitting copy into an anchored spot in the newshole. As for graphics or illustrations — well, Kodak prints of the big fish with Uncle Murray, or Polaroids of a prize trophy plopped on the hood, filled the bill. Aerobics? Athletic wear? Medical news on sports injuries? Best left to the Life (Living, Features, etc.) sections, or occasional Sunday supplement.

Today's sports readers want everything traditional sections have offered — results, news, features and agate and more: Their definition of sports doesn't stop in the end zone.

Current surveys bear this out: A survey by Peter Hart Research Associates of Washington, D.C. done in March, 1991, shows that 77 per cent of adults sampled think outdoor recreation is "very" or "fairly" important in their lives. Other surveys done around the same period show aging boomers are abandoning so-called "high-injury" activities in favor of sports and opportunities for exercises that involve family or recreational aspects — from bikinis to racquetball to hiking with their children.

And then there are those readers who are not the regulars of the section — a great potential growth area.

At Play Since 1989

USA Today's At Play page was started in August, 1989, as a way to satisfy and reach today's readers.

One page each week was reserved for At Play —a compromise title, in part selected because it was as far as possible from a hunting-and-fishing title. We kicked off the page with results of our own nationwise telephone survey. It showed:

- 82 per cent regularly exercise every week. (There was some question in the newsroom about every week, but we chalked that one up to showing, at least, that readers would like to achieve that goal.)
- 64 per cent are maintaining or even working out more than they were five years ago.
- Over half say they are more fit than their parents were at the same age.

Of course we still have our priorities. Those surveyed were given the choice of dream experiences: running the Boston Marathon, climbing Mt. Everest, hiking the Appalachian Trail, a world championship fishing or hunting trophy, or having choice seats for the World Series or Super Bowl. Despite the fitness movement, 45 per cent went for the tickets. Second place: 18 per cent for hiking the Appalachian Trail.

All of this does not mean editors ought to ignore fishing, hunting, camping or other traditional outdoor page topics. For example, 86 per cent in the USA Today survey said they had caught a fish, 63 per cent owned fishing tackle, 40 per cent had fished the previous year.

Fishing came in third place among "regular activities." The third regular At Play page was devoted to fishing. Since

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Gene Policinski, 41, has been managing editor of the USA Today sports section since August 1989. He joined the national newspaper soon after it began, in October 1982 as Washington editor in the news section. Before that he was a correspondent in the Indianapolis and Washington Bureaus of Gannett News Service. Policinski, an Indiana native, is a 1972 graduate of Ball State University. He began his journalism career as a reporter for The Greenfield (Ind.) Daily Reporter, and then was a reporter and state house correspondent for The Marion Chronicle. He and his wife, Kathleen, have two sons, Ryan and David.

The Home-Town Team

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cial or otherwise) on sports, whether they're compromising their academic standards to make room for athletes, whether they're fulfilling their end of the high-stakes bargain they strike with athletes, and whether they're giving equitable treatment to women's sports and female athletes. A number of excellent reporters, like Tom Witosky of The Des Moines Register, Ed Sherman of The Chicago Tribune, Mark Asher of The Washington Post and Doug Bedell and Ivan Maisel of The Dallas Morning News, among others, are tackling these issues. By publishing Eric Ramsey's charges of racism and improper payments in the Auburn program, The Montgomery Advertiser struck a blow for tougher coverage by smaller-market papers, which often face the most pressure to go easy on the local teams. But the aforementioned reporters and newspapers are easily in the minority.

The issues in professional sports are clearer cut and, as such, reporters have done a better job of covering them. The athletes are paid to perform: When they do so well, they are applauded and appreciated as entertainers; when they don't, they are criticized for failing to earn their pay. The press has done a solid job of covering labor disputes, and has performed well when scandal, such as the Pete Rose debacle, has arisen.

Still, some key issues tend to avoid the press microscope, and they are particularly likely to arise when a city is pursuing a team or threatened with losing one. This is a time when a newspaper's or television station's own economic interest is most likely to come into play, and it is where the media tend to fall the shortest. There are tough questions to be asked when public money is used to build new stadiums, when tax concessions are made to keep teams, or when the teams are not being good corporate citizens in areas such as minority hiring.

Here's Lipsyte again: "Covering teams well is more than covering games honestly and fairly. It means covering honestly and fairly what's happening in the community, where funds are diverted from homeless shelters to access roads to lead you into the ballpark, where a neighborhood is leveled to make room for a new arena, where minorities that are displaced don't necessarily get jobs on the workcrews that put up this new edifice."

Tough, sticky issues, and issues that the average sports fan may not want to read about, because they will spoil the fun. Lots of sports editors persuasively explain their disinterest in issues stories this way: Joe Fan doesn't want to hear about it. That may be true in some instances, but I think it condescends to the intelligent, honest sports fan and it ignores the fact that the paper's other readers--who may not turn reflexively to the sports page--may be interested. And besides, newspapers cannot afford to treat their sports sections differently from other sections, with lower standards for news or toughness. "There's no reason to think that if you're going to get a lower level of journalism in the sports section, that it's not going to taint the whole paper," adds Lipsyte.

Jay Black, the Alabama journalism professor, says he believes sportswriters are becoming increasingly able to step back from the games and see the big picture. "We're seeing some signs, I think, of the growing pains of an entire institution that ha s recognized that this little club, this little fraternity of sports has wider ramifications and is not merely a childlike enterprise," he says. "It is an enterprise with a lot of ramifications. Perhaps more and more people will be willing to ask these tougher questions."

Sometimes the tough questions get asked; often they don't. Because local sports teams can benefit the community (including the media) in a variety of ways, newspapers and television stations will also face pressure to go easy on them. It would be unrealistic to expect newspapers and television stations to completely ignore that pressure, especially as the struggle to stay afloat becomes more and more difficult. But is it unreasonable to expect journalists to cover their sports teams the way they try to cover everything else: thoughtfully, honestly, fairly? If they fall short of that goal, can they really claim to be doing what's best for their communities? ■

Just for Fun

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then, we've done centerpieces on gear, salmon fishing, walleye, blue fishing, boating and the "best bass fishing holes in every state."

The weekly page also includes a regional roundup of recreation/outdoor activities and a column of small recreation news stories. We try to include items that are of regional importance, yet of national interest. For example, Maine was considering a law where a certain percentage of the hunter's body had to be covered in orange. That would be interesting to hunters and nonhunters everywhere.

The centerpiece ranges from how-to packages to Walter Mitty-type tales, and can, when warranted, deviate from the short-burst format of the rest of the paper.

Some angles we have taken:

- The diary of a blind hiker on the Appalachian Trail.
- How to take photos outdoors.
- The impact on recreation of the drought in the West.
- The many uses of rollerblading, from commuting to exercise to racing.
- The health club of the 1990's.
- How to go sea kayaking.

You have to keep things in perspective when considering allocation of space to a recreation page in a no doubt tight newshole. But we have been pleased with the reader response to our At Play page. ■

Barbara Geehan, editor of At Play, contributed to this article.

Why The National Failed

Technological, Circulation and Marketing Problems Plus Recession Did In Sports Daily

By Vince Doria

Ten days after The National Sports Daily published its last edition on June 13, 1991, a group of the paper's editors traveled to San Antonio for the Associated Press Sports Editors' annual convention.

It was an opportunity to see old friends, hold a postmortem on The National, and perhaps find a few jobs for some of the 170 now-unemployed staffers.

As we drove into town from the airport, we noticed that The National boxes were still on the street corners, still filled with unsold papers. That alone wasn't surprising. What opened our eyes were the papers in those boxes. A few contained the final edition. But we also found boxes with papers dating from a few days to a few weeks prior to that final edition.

It was an appropriate epilogue for a two-year adventure, where the most oft-heard complaint was, "Gee, I really like your paper, but I can never find it."

The National, the brainchild of Emilio Azcarraga, the Mexican venture capitalist who put up the money, and Peter Price, the paper's first publisher, lasted just 16 months. It was an expensive life, costing Azcarraga and his investors upwards of $125 million.

The idea was to find out if the country would buy a national sports newspaper. We never answered that question, because, in a year and a half, we never quite figured out how to get the paper to people in a timely fashion.

In the end the distribution and production problems, aided by the weakening economy, were too much to overcome. Azcarraga was as bewildered as anyone by our market surveys, which showed product approval ratings over 90 per cent, juxtaposed with circulation figures that got as high as 250,000, but, despite growth in markets, were under 200,000 when we folded.

With his enthusiasm for the product, he likely would have put more money into it, if anyone could have given him any indication that things were going to get better in the foreseeable future. No one could.

Much Money Went To Hiring Talent

Do a word association game with people in the newspaper industry, and the response to "National" would likely be "outrageously high salaries." And for some, our obituary would probably be: "High-priced talent doesn't guarantee a successful product."

There is some truth in that, of course, although those of us involved would like to believe that talent is certainly an important ingredient.

The problem at The National, from an admittedly subjective view, is that so many resources and so much money went toward the hiring of editorial talent, and perhaps not enough planning and forethought into the distribution, production and promotion of the paper.

For most of us, the first indication of the problems we would face came in October of 1989, when Price called us together for a meeting with Tim Lasker, the assistant publisher, who came from Newsday to put together our systems and production plan.

The editorial people who signed on with The National had been presented with a plan for a paper that would be both local and national in content, with anywhere from eight to 12 local pages, out of a 40-to-48-page book, changing in each market. Because the press runs in each market would be relatively small compared to most metro dailies -- circulation goals were 100,000 for New York, 50,000 each for Chicago and Los Angeles, the first three markets -- we would be able to start the presses much later than most papers. The expectation was that we would make all the late-night news, all the West Coast games and scores in all editions.

But it was clear in this meeting that Lasker was under a different impression. He wondered if editorial needs would be met with two or three pages after 10 p.m. Not two or three per market, but two or three total. Not

Vince Doria , a former president of The Associated Press Sports Editors,was executive editor of The National . He has conducted numerous seminars for APSE, the Poynter Institute and the American Press Institute. While attending Ohio State University, he worked on The Columbus Citizen Journal. On graduation.. he became sports editor of The Ashtabula (OH) Star-Beacon, then jumped up to The Philadelphia Inqurer as assistant sports editor After three years he went to The Boston Globe, where he eventually became assistant managing editor for sports. He lives in New Canaan, CT, with his wife, Suzanne, and three pre-teeners.

surprisingly, this proposal was met with great opposition from editors at the meeting.

We had a surprising ally in Pete Spina, the advertising director. Spina made an impassioned plea based on his meetings with ad agencies. He said the question he and his people were most often asked was, "Will you have late scores in all your editions?" He felt it was a vital component in attracting advertisers.

Newspaper-Magazine Issue Unresolved

Price finally cooled things off, assuring editors they would get the time they needed to put out a first-rate product. But he ended that assurance by suggesting that perhaps, given the focus of our product, late scores were not as important as we considered them to be.

This was a time, some four months before publication, when we were still formulating just what that focus would be. We were an amalgam of newspaper and magazine people, and each of us carried our own biases. Some thought we should be a daily newsmagazine, not locked into a predictable cover of the day's biggest story or game. Others, of course, felt the opposite. And there were a number of positions in between.

In 16 months, we never really resolved that issue. But what we all did agree on in October was that if we didn't at least have the technology to provide late scores and news, regardless of how dominant a role they might play in the paper, we were going to have trouble attracting readers.

Lasker had contracted with two companies to supply the technology. Cybergraphics was a computer company based in Australia that was on the cutting edge of desktop publishing. Its combination of word-processing and pagination was unmatched in the market.

But it was still a small company in terms of employees, and they were unfamiliar with the needs of an all-sports paper. An early problem was Cybergraphics's lack of understanding about the basic way stories would be transmitted from outside the building, where, of course, most of the copy would be generated.

Writers were finding early on, as we began test runs, that they were unable to file stories into the system by portable computer.

There was a lot of finger-pointing among the people involved as to why this was. But for a while, writers -- all 70 plus out there, covering events all over the world -- were filing into a jury-rigged portable in the office, able to accept just one story at a time. Those stories were then transferred through a complicated process, to the in-house computers.

Problem Solved At $300,000 Cost

Ultimately, with Cybergraphics unable to find a way to make the portables compatible with its system, we scrapped all the portables -- some 100 plus at $3,000 apiece -- and purchased another brand, which eventually solved the problem, at a cost of about $300,000.

A second company, Scitex, was contracted to actually produce the pages and transmit them via satellite around the country. Scitex is an established company, with a reputation for producing first-rate color reproduction in newspapers.

Our problem was we had two good entities that simply did not get along with each other. Cybergraphics felt that in time it could take over the whole operation. Scitex, of course, didn't see it that way.

It would be unfair to lay all our production problems on the technology these two companies supplied. Both were dedicated to the product, and put a lot of man hours into solving those problems. But we had some beauties. Like the night we were unable to transmit because of snow piled up on the satellite atop our building at 666 Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. That required one of the Scitex operatives to climb out on the roof and sweep the satellite with a broom.

On more than one occasion, rainstorms knocked out transmission to various cities. On the night we began publishing in Detroit, a storm caved in the wall of the printing plant.

At the end we were printing the paper in 10 cities, at leased plants, some metro dailies, some commercial facilities not used to the pressure of daily deadlines. And we simply didn't have enough quality control people of our own out in the field to make sure we were getting the product we wanted.

Sometimes the papers weren't produced in time to meet delivery schedules. Sometimes the wrong pages got on the presses. Sometimes the reproduction was below standards. These are all problems that plague every newspaper. Our problem was that we didn't even know when these things happened. People who worked for the various publishing entities had no motivation to tell us about the screwups. Our production people would eventually catch up to some of them, and a system of fines was set up. But the anecdotal evidence that surfaced -- readers sending in papers with duplicate pages or unreadable reproduction -- indicated the incidence of these problems was far greater than we were aware of.

Unable to Offer Local Editions

After four months of publication, it was clear that the technology was never going to allow us to change up to a dozen pages from market to market. But the somewhat balancing news was that market research indicated that what people wanted most from us was expanded national news rather than another dose of local news, already adequately covered by their hometown paper.

Those two factors were enough to convince us to abandon the local concept and publish essentially the same paper everywhere. We put all this in the best light possible, saying publicly that this was a market decision based solely on what the reader was telling us. In truth, the production obstacles were the driving force behind the decision.

As difficult as those production problems were, distribution problems were worse. Dow Jones was contracted

to distribute us in most markets, and we were all pleased that a reputable company had agreed to take us on. The problem, we came to find, was that our deadlines were not compatible with DJ's primary product, The Wall Street Journal. On too many occasions, our presses were unable to get the paper to loading docks on time. And Dow Jones couldn't wait for us. Which meant a lot of papers simply were not delivered.

In markets where we did try some independent distributors, the results were unsatisfying. We had to change distributors in one city, when our two writers there reported that papers never got into boxes before 10 a.m., and that in some boxes, papers were not replaced for several days.

We tried some home delivery with both The Oakland Tribune and The Dallas Times-Herald. Those papers had enough problems of their own, and neither situation bolstered our circulation.

In an effort to sell more papers in markets outside our 10 primary print sites, an idea evolved to print something called the cross-country edition. This would in effect be a day-old paper, printed at the end of the press run each night, sometimes with a new cover, then trucked to cities all over the country and sold a day later. In other words, a paper printed at the end of the Tuesday night press run, would be distributed in secondary markets Thursday morning.

Cross-Country Edition Failed

While it's true that the paper contained some elements that were timely two days later, we were still calling it a daily newspaper, and despite Barnum's theory that there's a sucker born every minute, we couldn't find enough of them to make the cross-country fly.

The cross-country was a signal that these were desperate times, and by the late spring of 1991, a plan was being hatched to put our own distribution system in place, with our own trucks, our own drivers, etc. The problem was, of course, the expense. Our operating costs at the time indicated that we needed to sell 500,000 papers a day to break even. With our own distribution system, the break-even figure projected to 1 million. No one saw that in even the long-range future.

Production and distribution were elements that were, perhaps, beyond solution at any reasonable expense. But the neglected area that left a lot of us scratching our heads was in the marketing and promotion of the paper.

When word of The National started surfacing in the spring of 1989, every newspaper and newsmagazine out there did a story about it. Because of the uniqueness of the idea, because of high-profile people who were being signed on, because of the salaries being paid, it was a hot story. It's likely The National may have received more pre-publication publicity that any print entity in history.

False Sense Of Free Publicity

And perhaps that publicity spawned a false sense that publications would always be writing about us, that we wouldn't have to spend large sums on promotion. Those of us familiar with the editorial processes of newspapers knew that they might still be writing about us, but the nature of the business suggested that much of the writing would be critical. If we wanted to put out good news, we were going to have to pay for it.

Of course there was radio and television advertising, but not nearly enough by the reckoning of most people on the editorial staff. And very little of it was done at a national level. When we did test the national waters, we almost drowned ourselves.

To cite the most ludicrous case in point: We purchased two spots on the Sunday evening CBS show that televised the selection teams for the NCAA basketball tournament, a vehicle sure to attract potential National buyers. Our spot urged readers to run out Monday morning to buy the paper, which included a special preview section on the tournament, assessing all the teams, with tournament pairings, features, selections, etc.

On Tuesday morning, our promotion department sent out a memo that would have done the best White House spin doctors proud. The memo gushed about the success of the national spots, based on the fact that they had received literally thousands of calls on Monday, all from people who had seen the ad, an indication of just how powerful national television ads could be.

Deep into the memo, we learned there was one small problem. The calls had all come from folks living in cross-country edition territory. They all ran out Monday morning to get their special NCAA Tournament preview, only to find empty boxes, or cross-country editions left from Saturday. Those secondary market readers wouldn't see that special edition until Tuesday. It was a direct shot in the foot.

A lack of television advertising was just part of it. All of us had seen how USA Today had papered the country when it first started publishing, giving it away on airplanes and in hotels, passing it out at high profile events like the Super Bowl and Final Four. That may not have generated immediate revenue, but it obviously paid off in the long run.

Our circulation director, Diane Morgenthaler, had worked at USA Today, and had come away questioning some of those theories. She thought all those USA Today boxes were inefficient. And that giveaways might diminish the product. Maybe she was right. Circulation figures might suggest otherwise.

Editors Unaware Of Depth of Problem

Still, most of us, from Editor Frank Deford on down, were unaware of the seriousness of the problems as we continued to publish through the spring and summer of 1990. Oh, we knew it wasn't smooth sailing, that the technology problems had forced a slowdown in our rollouts, from two markets a month beginning in June to one market a month.

But circulation was increasing monthly, the big advertisers, particularly Nike, had stayed with us, and by all accounts we were making progress.

Then in October, Azcarraga sent Jaime Davila, his right-hand man in electronic media ventures, to check on our progress. What he found set off alarms. The paper was losing far more than had been reported to Azcarraga. Bills were simply going unpaid in hopes that at some point revenue would increase and accounts could be squared. Inflated circulation figures had been reported to advertisers, meaning massive givebacks, something that would cut ad revenue in the early part of 1991 to virtually nothing.

Davila moved swiftly. He removed Price as publisher, installing him in an office outside the building. In January, Price left the paper. And Davila immediately fired Lasker, Morgenthaler and chief financial officer Dan Correa. He ordered layoffs (we lost about 15 people from editorial) and we ceased publication on Sunday, a day when little commuter traffic made the paper a tough sell. And he determined that on February 1, we would raise the price from 50¢ to 75¢.

Editorial Support Kept Until End

Davila began running the paper like a business, although, to his credit, the editorial department was still able to operate as it had been, going where we felt we needed to, spending the money where we thought we had to. That support of the editorial department would continue right up until the last day.

But the management firings, the layoffs, killing the Sunday paper, all these things fed the rumors of our demise. Those rumors were something we had lived with from the start. Newspaper people are a skeptical lot, and starting a new venture in the teeth of a soft economy made us a dubious proposition for a lot of people.

But the bad news of October fueled the "going-belly-up" talk. Our writers were hearing constant rumors around the country. And since their contact with the office was almost exclusively a telephone relationship, the rumors from live reporters in press boxes took on added impact.

In late January, Deford felt compelled to put out a memo to everyone which included the following paragraph:

> We are not being sold. We are not being transformed. We are not going out of business. May any of this happen at some time in the future? Oh, sure, possibly. If all the detailed studies indicate that it is impossible ever for our sales to increase to such a point that our revenues can match our expenses, then I would imaging that Mr. Azcarraga would make other plans. But let me tell you: if ever that should come to pass it is most unlikely that some guy you meet at a bar or a buffet is going to be the repository of this privileged information.

He was right about that. Though we stopped opening new markets in February, and circulation fell as we raised the price at the same time, by June the rumors had quieted. We had just hired a new promotion director. We had just moved an ad salesman from San Francisco to New York to become the assistant ad director. We had added several people to the circulation department as plans were developed to start our own distribution system. And we had just received a go-ahead to hire back some of the people we had laid off.

When the news came, it wasn't from a bar or a buffet. It was right after lunch on June 12. Tim Tucker, the deputy managing editor, and I had just returned to the building when Deford asked us to go down to Davila's office. We found the heads of production, circulation, the business operation and personnel already there.

Just Like That It Was Over

Despite all the recent encouraging news, Azcarraga, after looking at the numbers several times, had come to the conclusion that things were not going to turn around in any reasonable amount of time. And just like that the grand experiment in sports journalism was over.

Did we learn anything from the experience?

Well, we learned that when you bring a lot of good people together to start something from scratch that has never been done before, you can have a lot of fun. To a man and a woman, I think everyone involved would agree that it was an exhilarating experience. And, subjective view again, we put out a damn good product.

But we also learned some hard lessons. If somebody tries this again, hopefully in a better economic climate, it should be done by a large media chain, a Knight-Ridder or a Times-Mirror, with printing presses and distribution systems already in place, with quality control people already monitoring them,

USA Today has done it right, with a network of 86 papers to fall back on, and to provide resources. The National was, in effect, a high-wire act without a safety net. We were producing a quality product without production and distribution support needed to make it fly.

Two Questions Unanswered

And, we learned that at least as much money needs to be spent on marketing the product as on the content of the product. An all-sports national daily is never going to be a necessary buy. Of course the product has to be a good one editorially to succeed, but if the promotion and marketing don't match the editorial product, a lot of people will never sample that product. It will be just one more piece of newsprint lying around on an overcrowded news stand.

But there are two things we didn't learn.

Was our product good enough to succeed, given the proper support? Everybody who worked for The National believes the answer is "Yes." But we'll never know for sure.

Is there a market in this country for a national sports daily? It's going to take someone with very deep pockets to find out. ■

China's Press —Forget the Stereotype

Reporters and Editors Use Myriad Ways to Publish A Surprising Variety of Material

By Judy Polumbaum

The closest thing to a universal law of journalism may be the truism "He who pays the piper calls the tune." It is only common sense to suppose that in a country where the state owns and operates news outlets, the state determines the content and presentation of the news. In China, one presumes, the Communist Party and government define what is newsworthy, control how that news gets covered and decide what gets published or aired. And what gets published or aired necessarily reflects the Party and government line.

The problem with this scenario is that it overlooks realities — realities of geography, history, politics and human nature.

True, journalists in China work under many more overt restrictions than journalists in the United States. True, most members of the press corps are technically government functionaries, charged with the mission of publicizing and promoting official programs and policies. True, censorship and self-censorship occur at many stages of the reporting and editing process. True, when a Chinese maverick offends the powerful or transgresses convention, the consequences can be severe.

And true, the high hopes generated during discussions of "journalism reform" in the late 1980's — with much talk about the need to report the bad along with the good, to act as a watchdog over public functionaries, to air diverse opinions and ideas — have dimmed since the night of June 3-4, 1989, when a frightened and out-of-touch core of aging leaders used troops and tanks to reclaim Beijing's Tiananmen Square from student protesters, killing hundreds and perhaps thousands of civilians en route, terrorizing the capital's populace and squelching the political protest movement that had spread across urban China that spring.

Nevertheless, China's media system is far more variegated, more informative and more subject to chance and human whim than the totalitarian model would lead one to suppose. This became clear to me while doing research in China in 1987 and 1988, when I interviewed journalists and media scholars in half a dozen cities and obtained the opinions of some 450 newspaper reporters and editors across the country using mail questionnaires. Fortuitously, this was an especially open time when people felt fairly unconstrained about expressing their views, and when griping about the media was tolerated, and sometimes even encouraged, by elements in China's leadership.

Younger Journalists Most Unhappy

I found dissatisfaction with orthodox propaganda pervasive throughout the press corps. As one might expect, disgruntlement was greatest among younger journalists who had come of age during the tumult of the Cultural Revolution or the openness of the post-Mao era, but even seasoned Party veterans were questioning the methods and premises of their work. Interestingly, desire for change was most marked among news workers employed at the very pinnacle of the propaganda apparatus — at national media such as People's Daily, official voice of the Central Committee.

Perhaps most importantly, I discovered that the most fascinating aspects of journalism in China pertain not to how the political authorities control the press, but rather to the myriad ways, both accidental and deliberate, that people and organizations have of interfering with the controls. For example, one seasoned editor of a daily paper in a city in northeast China got clearance to publish a story on police brutality by

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Professor Merle Goldman, associate of the John K. Fairbank Center for East Asian Research at Harvard University, assisted in editing the three articles on China.

changing the lead to emphasize that an investigation was ongoing, thus making the authorities look good. An editor of a weekly paper planning to run an article by a foreign diplomat fended off bureaucrats who wanted to review the story by convincing them they didn't really want to take the responsibility for a foreigner's prose. Sometimes editors who anticipated that officials would be inclined to censor a certain story would simply forge ahead without bothering to seek authorization. Sometimes reporters would pass on news squelched at the local level to correspondents from national print or broadcast media who were not constrained by local officialdom. National news organizations occasionally exposed press suppression at lower levels, such as an incident in which the party head of a small city, irritated at comments mildly critical of his administration, had confiscated the entire press run of the local newspaper.

About 50,000 Real Journalists

These examples, and many more I collected, belie the stereotype of the enslaved minion in the Communist propaganda machine. Behind the facade erected by our own Cold War politicians and scholars — and admittedly reinforced by China's own official pronouncements about the role and power of the media under socialism — are, as one might expect, real human beings. Although exact figures are hard to come by, perhaps half a million people work in China's news media in various capacities, from managerial to production; probably about 50,000 of them are bona fide journalists in the sense of collecting, writing and editing the news. While it would be stretching things to say that everyone in this press corps is clever or admirable, individuals of intelligence, personality and imagination, including many in positions of responsibility, are not hard to find.

Discarding the totalitarian model is a necessary step toward explaining the dynamics of journalism in China, but only a first step. To even begin to comprehend the nature of journalism anywhere, its rules and standards as well as its vagaries and surprises, one must consider the particular circumstances in which selection, presentation and dissemination of news take place. In the case of China, the context of news work is especially rife with complexities and contradictions.

Mixed Messages In the Provinces

First of all, we should consider the country's physical dimensions. The sheer size and vast population militate against uniformity or exactitude in collection, transmission, and reception of information and ideas. The further one gets from the "center," Beijing, the more distortion, static and mixed messages one is liable to find. Balkanism is not a major dynamic in China; with the exception of Tibet, formal breakup of the sort that occurred in the Soviet Union is highly improbable. However, provincialism in a more general sense is a longstanding theme of Chinese history, and the devolution of economic authority and encouragement of local initiative, which are part and parcel of the post-Mao economic reforms, have accentuated these centrifugal tendencies.

A second, related point is that China's ruling party itself is not a monolith, and even its top leadership has seldom been in total unanimity. News selection and emphasis in provincial papers reveal local interests at work, while factional or policy differences at the highest levels are reflected in contradictory messages emanating from nationally circulated newspapers. This is always evident in times of political strife, and is apparent even amidst the drive for conformity imposed since Tiananmen: Commentaries and editorials in People's Daily since late 1989, for instance, have swung between a shrill insistence on ideological purity and a conciliatory tone with stress on economic reform.

A third consideration is that from a purely descriptive standpoint, media in China are not monolithic. Certainly, the Party tries to maintain central management over the news; all media organizations and employees are expected to know and follow basic policies and guidelines emanating from a working group under the Politburo and further interpreted and disseminated by central party and government bodies such as the Propaganda Department, under the Central Committee, and the State Press and Publications Administration, a ministry-level agency under the State Council. Another force for homogeneity is the official Xinhua News Agency, which from humble origins in the Red China News Press of the 1930's has grown into a behemoth organization employing some 6,000 people. Besides dispensing news in English, Russian, Arabic, French and Spanish for overseas subscribers, Xinhua remains the dominant source of national and international news for China's domestic media, both print and electronic, and the major supplier of news photographs.

Media Expanding At Dizzying Pace

Nevertheless, China's news outlets are surprisingly numerous and offer considerable variety in both type and content. The country had more than 100 newspapers when the Communists came to power in 1949, and their numbers have waxed and waned with economic and political cycles — growing to nearly 1,800 by 1958, all but about 300 shutting down during the famine and hardship of the early 1960's, gradually rising again until the start of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. This ill-fated effort by Mao Zedong to instill perpetual revolutionary fervor saw both anarchic and restrictive extremes: For two years, unofficial Red Guard newspapers proliferated with abandon, while most official publications were either suspended or closed outright. Later, unofficial publication was suppressed, and the few dozen official papers that resumed publication were notable for their uniformity.

Since 1978, however, media outlets and activities have expanded at a dizzying pace. The first few years of the reform period saw the revival of scores of old publications and the founding of hundreds more; for five years running, new newspapers were being started at the rate of one every day and a half. By

1988 the country had more than 1,600 openly circulated newspapers published at least once a week; in addition there were some 4,000 limited-circulation or "internal" papers. Local and small papers accounted for most of the increase, but some newcomers were important on the national scene, among them the English-language China Daily, started in 1981; the Economic Daily, begun in 1983; and the weekly World Economic Herald, a bold tabloid of economic and political analysis put out by a Shanghai research institute, which with a circulation of about 300,000 by the late 1980's attained an influence far disproportionate to its size — gaining even more prominence when it became a casualty of the upheavals of 1989.

This period also saw the founding of thousands of literary and scholarly journals, the revival of the book publishing industry and the emergence of a smorgasbord of genres in print media — not only traditional publications aimed at youth, workers, women and peasants, but also new publications for senior citizens and children, ones devoted to science, economics, travel, or hygiene and health, television and radio guides, digests and in-house factory newspapers.

Chinese Relying More On Television

Radio had been probably the most important mass communication channel in China in the initial decades following the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, especially in the countryside, where 80 per cent of the country's populace live (the latest census, conducted in 1990, puts the total mainland population at 1.13 billion). The radio network developed rapidly from the 1950's on, and by the late 1970's reached all cities, more than 90 per cent of the villages through loudspeaker systems, and about 70 per cent of peasant homes. Broadcasting to provinces and major cities was centrally directed from Beijing; regional services offered programming in dialects aside from the national dialect, Mandarin. In addition, the government built up its equivalent of our Voice of America, Radio Beijing, with shortwave broadcasts in foreign languages directed overseas.

TV Reception Now Nationwide

With the launching of the reforms, radio spun off new stations and offered livelier programming; particularly in southern China, where influences from Hong Kong are strongest, new call-in shows and programs devoted to social and economic affairs vied for listeners. But it was television, begun in 1958 and long in an embryonic state, that really took off. The central television station, broadcasting over two channels, remains dominant, but regional and local operations have proliferated and grown, and both domestic production and importation of television sets have greatly increased. From 1976 to 1987, the nation's television audience grew from 34 million to 590 million, with television set ownership in urban areas doubling and in rural areas rising about 20-fold. Installation of satellites and new receiving and relay stations had made television reception available virtually nationwide by the late 1980's. Surveys of the media audience have found that both urban and rural residents are relying increasingly on television as their main source of news.

In the spirit of diffusing authority, control of both airtime and revenues was greatly decentralized. Along with the introduction of advertising in the print media, radio and television began selling commercial time, spurring the growth of the advertising and public relations industries (from the audience perspective, the novelty soon gave way to the same sort of complaining about commercial breaks that goes on in U.S. homes). Central and local stations extended programming hours, and experimented with new formats and shows. Television began to import entertainment series and other material. In 1979, recently arrived in China to teach journalism, I watched "Man from Atlantis" in the home of farmers on the outskirts of Beijing; when I returned in 1987 I was seeing Disney cartoons, as well as ABC footage with voice-over in Mandarin on the evening news.

The content of print media became more diverse and colorful in the 1980's, in both serious and lighthearted directions. Investigative reporting, tentatively pioneered in the 1950's, made a comeback; numerous high officials in the petroleum industry, commerce, railways, and forestry were shamed into resignation by scandals disclosed in the press — ranging from taking free meals to negligence or bureaucratic bungling resulting in catastrophic loss of life. Greater time and space were devoted to readers' letters, economic affairs and international news. Meanwhile, shrinking state subsidies and the acceptance of long-rejected theories of supply and demand encouraged attention to human interest stories, advice columns for parents or consumers, forums for the despondent and lovelorn and other non-political matters.

Media Stressing Original Material

Although Xinhua continues to set much of the news agenda in China, and to provide the bulk of stories in certain categories, editors have a fair degree of discretion over placement and emphasis. Furthermore, numerous national newspapers and central broadcast units have developed their own net of national and international correspondents over the past decade, and media outlets at all levels have placed greater and greater emphasis on original material.

The most important category of newspaper is still official "party organs," which exist at all administrative levels down to county and municipality and are formally under the auspices of the Communist Party Committee at the corresponding level. These number about 400, represent a larger share of circulation than any other type of paper, and are extremely influential as purveyors of official policy. The circulation of the largest, People's Daily, exceeds three million and has an actual readership that is far higher — although this figure is down from a high of some six million more than decade ago, due to various factors such as competition from other papers and television, subscription rate hikes and probably reader

boredom (People's Daily was very popular for a few years after going through a revamping under new editorial leadership in the late 1970's, but the novelty was wearing off, and since Tiananmen the paper has become more subdued and monotonous).

PM Tabloids Provide Livelier Tone

The significance of lighter fare remains apparent, however, in the evening newspapers, which are usually in tabloid format and have a livelier tone and more entertaining content than conventional morning broadsheets. This category burgeoned after 1979 and evening papers now number about 40, up from 13 prior to the Cultural Revolution, with a combined daily circulation exceeding 10 million.

A marked change in many newspapers over the past decade has been the heightened importance of photographs, and the improved sophistication in their use. Visually oriented journalists used to complain that press pictures were allotted the space of "a square of beancurd." A pioneer in raising photojournalism to new heights was the English-language China Daily, which from its inception in 1981 used pictures prominently on both front and inside pages. People's Daily and other broadsheets soon followed suit. Along with growing popular interest in photography as both hobby and desirable vocation came the development of respect for candid and artistic photography. New publications devoted to photography were founded, and photo contests and exhibitions abound. Stilted shots of leaders and artificially posed pictures of happy workers or peasants are by no means a thing of the past; however, genuine documentary photography is now widespread and tremendously appreciated.

A fourth major point to be made about journalism in China is the existence of numerous supplementary and alternative channels of news. The vast array of internal publications mentioned earlier, which parallels the open information system, is one important channel. These may carry specialized, controversial, critical or investigative material, the main criteria for classifying something as internal being whether its authors or overseers assess it as sensitive. From a Western perspective it may not be the stuff of secrets at all. Internal publications may not be sold on newsstands and technically cannot be shown to foreigners, although scholars have been known to share such materials with foreign colleagues.

Most newspapers regularly publish internal reports with detailed information on subjects considered too touchy for open publication. Often these investigations are initiated by complaints to the "mass work department" — a peculiarly Chinese institution, found in virtually every news organization, which handles readers' letters, visitors and other matters involving the public. The internal reports go to political leaders, and occasionally may be approved for publication in the news columns, or published after the problems they raise are resolved. Xinhua puts out some of the most important internal publications, including detailed reports from the grass-roots and overseas bureaus and daily translations from foreign media for high leaders — a lesser version of which circulates among the general public in the form of the popular daily tabloid called Reference News. Press reformers favor delimiting the realm of this sort of insider journalism, so that more sensitive topics could be dealt with openly and in a timely manner; and this was the direction in which news coverage was going up to Tiananmen.

Another vibrant alternative medium is the rumor mill, or what the Chinese call "small path news," notoriously unreliable but invariably conveying at least some kernels of truth. And one should not forget the information that arrives from beyond China's borders. Voice of America and the British Broadcasting Corporation broadcast to China in both English and several Chinese dialects, and shortwave bands are standard on Chinese radios. Residents of the southern province of Guangzhou have relatively easy access to radio, television and press from Hong Kong. Add to this Chinese adeptness at discerning problems or conflicts between the lines in the official media. As a journalism professor told me gleefully years ago, "The Chinese people really know how to read the newspapers."

Fifth, perhaps the least obvious but possibly the most crucial aspect of journalism in China, press controls are not ironclad. Like most systems of authority, China's political system relies on both informal and formal controls — subtle, unarticulated, quixotic methods as well as expressly stated, institutionalized ones — and the role of informal controls is particularly apparent in the area of mass media. Coercion has always been a factor in keeping the media in line and came to the forefront for a time after Tiananmen; but the system is fluid rather than fixed, with the limits of the permissible largely defined by time, place, and personalities.

Party Apparatus Aims at Contol

This is not to say that formal regulatory and structural constraints are meaningless. In line with the principle that journalism is answerable first and foremost to the party and government, periodicals must be formally registered. After a few lax years when unauthorized publications came and went fairly freely, this licensing system was tightened with the establishment of the State Press and Publications Administration in the spring of 1987. An extensive party apparatus is in place to help assure that media organizations adhere to propaganda guidelines issued by top officials, and that media content reflects policies and programs set at the highest levels. Party committees and party secretaries have authority to hire and fire leading editors of media under their purview, to oversee the broad outlines of the news, to scrutinize what they consider important stories and to review and even to write key editorials and commentaries. Such authority is enshrined in many formal directives as well as in conventional wisdom.

The State Press and Publications Administration has the power to close media outlets for a variety of rationales. The agency carried out its first nation-

wide review of publishing houses, newspapers and other periodicals in 1987-88, and ordered more than 600 publications shut down or merged. It also tightened authorizations for new publications, approving only 50 new newspapers in 1988, along with 35 that switched from internal to open publication. A second consolidation drive was launched in the fall of 1989, resulting in the closing or merger of 190 newspapers, nearly 12 per cent of the nationwide total; some 600 social science journals had to cease publication as well. It is interesting that the agency seldom cites politics as a rationale for closing down a publication; streamlining management or fiscal problems are the most common reasons given. In the first round of inspection, only five newspapers were said to have been closed for political errors, and in the second only eight shutdowns were acknowledged as political. The latter group included the World Economic Herald, whose distribution had been held back and its editor, the late Qin Benli, removed for his obvious sympathy with the student demonstrators; the Beijing-based Economic Weekly, two of whose editors, Chen Zemin and Wang Juntao, were convicted of spreading "counter-revolutionary" propaganda and are now serving prison terms; and the Beijing magazine New Observer.

However, China has no formal prepublication censorship apparatus, and how directives and guidelines are interpreted in practice is largely up to local party committees and news organizations themselves. Decisions about how broad a debate to air on an embarrassing social problem, whether or not to cover a crime, or how to portray a disaster may hinge on the indulgence of a party official, the audacity of a chief editor, or the persistence of a reporter. Naturally, people are more willing to take risks when the political climate seems relaxed. Even in tense times, however, the rules are not fixed. Topics covered at one time may be covered up at another. Propaganda authorities suppressed news of student demonstrations that broke out at the end of 1986 for four days, even though the VOA and BBC had already made the events widely known. Yet rioting in Tibet less than a year later was reported as breaking news. Officials initially tried to limit coverage of the 1989 protests but then lifted restrictions, although even stricter limitations were imposed after martial law was declared in parts of Beijing. Sometimes plane or rail accidents are reported immediately; other times the reports are delayed; some grave incidents are not reported at all, as one only learns serendipitously.

Ideas Old and New: Clash of Traditions

Sixth, the weight of tradition as an influence on Chinese journalism cannot be ignored. The philosophies and practices of journalism in the People's Republic are not simply creations of the Chinese Communists, but rather are hybrids of old and new. It could be argued that, despite all their discontents, Chinese journalists have a culturally inherited propensity to accept news management. The paternalistic and didactic character of modern propaganda has deep roots in the Confucian heritage and most journalists in China, being members of an intellectual elite, subscribe to the role of teacher and guide to at least some degree.

On the other hand, some elements of Chinese tradition are conducive to what we might see as democratic tendencies. It is certainly convenient for the Communists that the liberal Western ideal of an adversarial "fourth estate" is alien to the Chinese tradition. However, the notion of a "loyal opposition" is a familiar and time-honored concept and provides a mantle of legitimacy of sorts for journalists who criticize those in power from a patriotic stance.

Furthermore, China's official rhetoric itself provides some sanction for crusading journalism — justifying it in theory, if not in practice. Under guidelines set down by the Communists in the 1940's and reiterated constantly, the news media are supposed to function as the "eyes, ears and mouthpiece" of the Party and government, to tirelessly propagate current policies and unswervingly support the cause of socialism. At the same time, however, the media also are supposed to be "eyes, ears and mouthpiece" of the people, to expose and criticize wrongdoing and give voice to popular grievances.

The other side of the weight of tradition is, of course, the erosive force of non-traditional thoughts and examples. The rapid infusion of new ideas and practices into virtually all realms of public and private life, brought about by the reforms and open-door policies, has had a profound impact on all aspects of journalism, from intellectual debates on the definition of news and the relationship between journalism and politics, to the content of journalism education and the conduct of news work. One element of this process was exposure to the example of aggressive Western reporters, an example noted by the Chinese media audience as well as Chinese journalists. In the late 1980's, when television began broadcasting press conferences between Chinese officials and foreign correspondents, often live, the sessions were the talk of Chinese offices and living rooms. Other influences came through Chinese translations of foreign works on journalism theory and practice, and through international exchange programs for journalism students, educators and practitioners. Given the ever-expanding reach of modern communications technologies and the ever more porous nature of geographic boundaries, the world's encroachment was no doubt inevitable and no doubt continues.

Compliance may still be the rule within China's press corps, particularly amidst the political chill since Tiananmen, but defiance became a commonplace exception after the beginning of economic reforms and policies of opening up to the outside world in 1978. The experiences accumulated over the decade that followed have lasting significance. Journalists got a good deal of practice in pressing the limits, showing they can be thoughtful, wily, even daring, at the production end of the news. Meanwhile, the media audience got used to seeing greater diversity and controversy in the news, and grew increasingly sophisticated and persnickety at the receiving end.

The inexorable trend toward freedom of expression surfaced most dramatically at the height of the 1989 demonstrations, when for a few days in May news coverage was as abundant and unbridled as demands for political change. This development was not as extraordinary as much of the foreign media portrayed it. Like the demonstrations themselves, the media activism was a logical outgrowth of 10 years of experimentation, an outcome of newfound freedoms combined with mounting frustrations.

After the suppression, the leadership subjected the news media to "rectification," which meant public castigation of the press corps for supposedly fanning the flames of rebellion, arrests of a number of journalists seen as particularly troublesome and reassignment of uncooperative editors. Yet it is obvious that habits of work and mind cultivated over years cannot be erased overnight. When I returned to China for a visit in the spring of 1990, a year after those horrific events, I found friends in the media and academia at once deeply troubled and surprisingly philosophical. "China always works this way," said one scholar. "Two steps forward, one step back. Or maybe three steps forward, two steps back."

Instructed to recriminate against those active in the demonstrations, people at news organizations and research institutes instead have been protecting each other — a situation far different from what occurred in political campaigns under Mao. People continue to voice privately what they were saying publicly a few years ago, even to a foreigner such as myself — also quite different from the paranoia that prevailed in the past. The brutality of what Chinese refer to simply as "six-four," June 4, seems to have deepened the convictions of those predisposed to reform, while greatly unnerving many onetime party stalwarts. The end result of the Tiananmen debacle may be to hasten the progress of change, in journalism and in political life generally. ■

In Beijing's Newsrooms

By Liu Binyan

In the first three decades in the history of the People's Republic of China, the journalists called their newspapers "loudspeakers" and "bulletin boards" of the Communist Party and the government. Newspapers were not newspapers in the Western sense. The foremost demand on journalists, just like the demand on officials, was obedience. Journalists were not supposed to think independently. The only requirement of journalists different from that of officials was the ability to write. Only two or three universities had journalism courses; therefore few journalists had regular training.

Nevertheless, the profession itself made some of the journalists unsubmissive. They had all kinds of contacts with all kinds of people and were always among the first to detect the damages brought to society by the wrong policies of the party. They were among the first group of intellectuals to doubt the party propaganda and to think independently; thus they became very sensitive and sympathetic to people's sufferings. Whenever the political atmosphere became more or less relaxed, some of them would write about the true situation and express the people's complaints and wishes boldly.

In 1956-57, during the period called the Hundred Flowers, Mao Zedong set a trap. At first he called on the people to criticize the mistakes and defects of the party in order to "help the party to rectify itself". Responding to Mao's call, there were many exposés and criticisms in the newspapers for four or five months. Then he began the notorious "Anti-Rightist" campaign in which 15 to 30 per cent of the journalists from various newspapers and broadcasting stations were labelled "bourgeois rightists" and were attacked for "anti-party, anti-socialism crimes". For more than 20 years, these "rightists" were deprived of their right to work and publish and were sent to the countryside to do heavy manual labor as punishment.

Of course there was another kind of journalist -- the pliant tools of the party. Some of them cowered under the pressure and did whatever the party asked them to do, just for the sake of a peaceful life. Some mediocre ones were satisfied with carrying out orders rigidly and made their newspapers typical party organs. The more ambitious were willing to go against their own consciences to accommodate their superiors. In exchange, they were promoted to higher ranks of officialdom. During the "Great Leap Forward" of 1958-59, there were many exaggerated reports of increases in agricultural production in the papers; some described the production as several dozen times the actual amount. Although in the ensuing years millions of people died of man-made famine, not one journalist was punished for writing the false reports of farm achievements. Since then, coverage exaggerating the "achievements in construction" and "good deeds of model workers" to accommodate party officials has flourished.

Three Categories Of Journalists

Even in the post-Mao period, under the reform regime of Deng Xiaoping, Chinese journalists still mainly fall into these three categories: the progressives, who are the real journalists; the mediocre ones, satisfied in being pliant tools of the party, and the ambitious, who are willing to sell their consciences. The difference, however, is that, beginning with the Deng economic reforms in 1978, the ratio of the progressive journalists has increased substantially.

Because the loosening of economic controls also led to the relaxation of press controls,press freedom in China had expanded perceptibly in the 80's as a result of the persistent efforts of the progressive journalists. The party authorities, however, have never acknowledged the legality of press freedom and have exercised every means to limit or crush it. It is very difficult for Chinese journalists to work under such complicated circumstances. China has never had an official censorship system. The regulations

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concerning mass media are vague and inconsistent and vary from time to time. Journalists are able to make use of the vagueness and inconsistencies to expand their freedom. At the same time, however, it also enables the officials in charge of the mass media to act, perhaps to a larger degree, according to their will or whims, because the right to explain the regulations remains in their hands. More significantly, the political standing and personalities of the officials in charge of the mass media -- editors-in-chief, directors of propaganda departments -- play a very important role in determining what goes into a newspaper.

After the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and Mao's death in September 1976, the liberal forces within the party increased dramatically. At the same time, reformist and conservative political leaders were constantly vying with each other for power even in the topmost echelon. Two phenomenons emerged: first, with the development of inner-party struggles, the political atmosphere was constantly changing; sometimes it was tense, sometimes it was relaxed, and the degree of press freedom changed with the changing climate. Second, because of the differences in the political standing and personalities of those in charge of mass media, the journalists working at different papers enjoyed different degrees of press freedom in the same period.

People Encourage Exposes of Errors

Nevertheless, from the late 70's on, the social environment for the journalists has undergone a major change. Back in the 50's, when the majority of the Chinese people followed the Communist Party blindly, journalists attacked by the party would immediately be isolated. Now it is just the opposite. The ordinary people long for journalists to express in their papers their dissatisfaction with authorities. Journalists who are bold enough to criticize the government and are attacked by the authorities always receive support and encouragement from their readers. The readers are often a source of information and inspiration to the journalists, as well as a reliable force to sustain them in the struggle for press freedom.

As a result, the journalists are greatly encouraged to make use of every opportunity to speak out for society and their readers. They try to use their skills and wits to expand their limited freedom to the utmost degree. But they are always very cautious not to go too far in order to protect their right to write in the future. All kinds of skillful protective measures are taken by the journalists. For instance, if a journalist wants to criticize the party's top leadership, he cannot do so directly, but he can do it indirectly by criticizing the obstacles created by conservative leaders in carrying out a laudable project. He can also criticize lower-ranking officials to implicate higher officials who are their patrons. He can expose a minor case of corruption which will not incur opposition from above, but his exposé implies that the cause of the corruption is rooted in the overall corruption of the officialdom. Chinese readers are very clever; they know how to read between the lines and find subtly concealed messages in seemingly harmless articles. After 1985, it was a common practice for columnists to criticize current leaders by telling stories about emperors in the dynasties. Stories about foreign statesmen were also used to this end.

'Literary Reportage' Gets Around Curbs

Since nearly all the mass media are owned and strictly controlled by the state or the party, many articles written by journalists are rejected for various political reasons. The journalists, however, can still find outlets for rejected articles. They are often rewritten in the form of "literary reportage" and sent to magazines where censorship is not so strict. Thus, "literary reportage" has become one of the most influential styles since 1979. It is a form of literature, yet it is nonfiction,strictly based on facts. Unlike investigative reporting in the United States, the author can express his or her opinion freely, in helping readers to analyze facts and in leading them to probe deeply into all kinds of social phenomenons. I myself had been a reporter at People's Daily for seven years, but the majority of my articles could not be published in the paper. They were published instead in literary magazines in the form of "literary reportage".

In the spring of 1989, after 10 years of persistent struggle, press freedom in China reached its peak. Many subjects that had been prohibited were allowed to appear in print. Many journalists openly confronted the government's decision to build the dam at Three Gorges on the Yangtze River, a project which was approved by the highest authorities even though it was damaging to the environment and disruptive to the lives of over a million people. In the democracy movement of the same year, the Chinese newspapers, for a short time in May, 1989, were able to report the true facts about an anti-government movement, which was unprecedented since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. The journalists also were the first among Beijing intellectuals to join the ranks of students in huge demonstrations on the streets.

After the crackdown on the democracy movement on June 4, 1989, a "dark age" once more descended over the mass media in Beijing. Newspapers and broadcasting stations are not allowed any independence. Every article, every broadcast must follow the party line. Many journalists were arrested and sentenced to jail. Many were fired from their jobs and cannot continue to practice journalism any more. Those who still retain their jobs cannot write and edit according to their own judgment, but there are still a few who manage to convey true information to the readers in a subtle, roundabout way, which is difficult and risky.

Nevertheless, it should be stressed that, starting from the early 80's, a new generation of journalists emerged. They had grown up during the Cultural Revolution when, because of factional struggles, the party's control over ideology was considerably weakened. After the Cultural Revolution, they enrolled in colleges when the country was opening up and economic reform was underway. Many of them are college graduates, exposed to Western influence; the party ideology has much less impact on them than on their elders. Therefore they are more courageous in challenging the party's control. An example of this increasing boldness occurred in 1986, when some young journalists at a newspaper in a Special Economic Zone, The Shenzhen Youth News, managed to shake off party control and made the newspaper independent. In the party's chief organ, People's Daily, young reporters and editors made up almost half of the entire editorial staff. They were the main force in pushing for press freedom and liberation of People's Daily. Naturally, they were the most persecuted after the 1989 crackdown.

Because of intensified political pressure after June 4, the readers have become more apolitical. The journalists have become more and more despondent and frustrated. They feel that they cannot truly practice their profession and have turned their attention to their own personal well being and material interests. Some reporters receive payments from various industries for covering their "achievements", a subtle, yet much more efficient, way of advertising. Political pressure and material temptation act together as doses of soul erosion for the journalists. They care less and less about the future of their paper and the future of journalism in China. This is exactly the effect that the Chinese Communist Party hopes for. ■

China and the Foreign Press

Sources' Visceral Fear Gives Way to Ironic Wariness, Although Security Agents Seem Ever Present

By Sarah Lubman

Professor Wu's son opened the door a crack and peered into the concrete hallway with a worried frown. "My father isn't home," he said curtly. As I turned to leave, he added, "Don't bother coming back." Later I wished the professor's son had softened his remark with a plea for understanding, but on that stuffy day in July 1989 he didn't have to.

People's Liberation Army troops had mowed down unarmed demonstrators around Tiananmen Square just weeks earlier. Despite his advanced age, Professor Wu -- who asked that his full name not be used for fear of reprisals -- had spoken out in support of students' demands for a more open political system. The last thing Wu's family wanted was a Western journalist at the door, much less the questioning by undercover police likely to follow.

Reporter's Dilemma Never Changed

In the two and a half years since the crackdown, the visceral fear of foreign reporters expressed by the professor's son and many other Chinese has given way to a calm and often ironic wariness, but my dilemma as a reporter never changed. Should I continue to see Chinese friends and sources when I knew I was being followed? Or did the fact that my contacts were only questioned after our meetings, not arrested, mean I could shrug off the unrelenting presence of security agents?

Armed with clumsily concealed walkie-talkies and hidden cameras, undercover police from China's Ministry of State Security, the country's KGB, have continued to monitor and harass foreign correspondents and their Chinese friends and acquaintances since 1989. Some Chinese have received warnings in person, along with friendly encouragement to inform on their reporter contacts. Others are monitored more subtly, hearing through friends or colleagues of ominous visits by security agents to their work units. Two friends of mine learned from sympathetic co-workers that undercover police had come to inspect their dossiers, or dangan, the personal files kept on every Chinese citizen.

Trip to Sichuan Filmed by Police

Obsessive monitoring of foreign correspondents in China reaches beyond the boundaries of Beijing. Permission to cover outlying regions must be granted by local authorities, who take pains to steer foreign journalists toward showcase villages and enterprises and away from poorer districts. Authorities routinely deny the foreign press access to Tibet and to China's impoverished regions. When local Foreign Affairs bureaus grant permission to visit, the trip may be subject to monitoring by police apparently operating under their own set of orders. Undercover police tailed and videotaped two American reporters during a March 1990 visit to Chongqing, the industrial heart of central Sichuan province, for no discernible reason. A plainclothes policeman even filmed the reporters as they emerged from an innocuous scheduled interview with city officials at Chongqing's light industry bureau.

Within Beijing, constant surveillance has a maddening effect. I was tailed for a year and a half, from June 1990 until my departure in early November 1991. The apparent aim was to thwart the process of gathering news and to silence dissent, and the techniques employed were frustratingly effective.

Sarah Lubman was a graduate student at Beijing University in 1988-89, contemplating but secretly dreading a Ph. D. in comparative literature (Chinese and Japanese, both of which she speaks fluently). What she really wanted to do was sneak into journalism without going to journalism school. She began stringing for The Hong Kong Standard in 1989, then was hired as a freelance by The Washington Post. After the Tiananmen Square suppression UPI hired her full time as a "super stringer," a polite term for doing the work but not getting the pay of a regular correspondent. In two and a half years with UPI she also filed stories to National Public Radio, The Boston Globe, The San Francisco Examiner and The Chronicle of Higher Education. She returned to the United States last November.

I wasn't able to ignore the police, despite the professed indifference of the majority of my Chinese friends. "It's nothing," scoffed one Beijing intellectual after seeing me to the door and discovering two plainclothes police in long leather overcoats lurking outside his apartment block, muttering theatrically into walkie-talkies.

Other acquaintances were less cavalier. Older Chinese who bore the scars of the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution asked with evident embarrassment if we could meet less often. A few people stopped calling altogether.

Some took to using cryptic aliases over the telephone, which clearly was bugged. Over time I came to recognize friends' voices from a simple hello. One friend wryly chose the English name "Tom Sawyer" to identify himself.

"Tom" was on the right track: humor is one of the few plausible antidotes to the insidious workings of China's security machine. What other reaction could there be to the inept security agent who, when confronted, claimed he had been dispatched by a mysterious stranger to follow me and deliver a gift of chocolates? (The candy never materialized.) Men with walkie-talkies followed me shopping and to the health club.

The Mercedes-Benz With Black Windows

State Security goons routinely tail reporters in Beijing by car, motorcycle, bicycle and on foot, with lookouts posted at major overpasses and intersections. After many months of omnipresent and often heavy-handed surveillance, I began to recognize the faces of different agents responsible for various locations.

Some agents were elderly, some young. Most were male, except for a sharp-eyed fiftyish woman posted on an overpass and a young woman who followed a Chinese-speaking Japanese friend to my compound several times. The unwanted company didn't take much observation to detect. Around June 1990, just after the first anniversary of the Beijing massacre, I became aware of the persistent shadow of a Mercedes-Benz sedan in my rear-view mirror. The car changed colors and models, but in the beginning it was always a gleaming Mercedes and the windows were always black. Remembering similar tales from other correspondents who had been followed, I would occasionally conduct a crude test by pulling off to the side of the road.

My followers would do the same, usually hanging back by several car lengths. As I turned back onto the road, so would the Mercedes, nosing slowly but with a deliberate, sharklike motion into my wake. Subtlety was not a priority.

Security to Some Only a Nuisance

On the contrary, conspicuousness appeared to be part of the desired effect. Some correspondents disagreed, viewing China's undercover army as more inept than sinister. Either way, the sum effect of surveillance was a creeping claustrophobia that intensified with time.

At first the monitoring was merely a nuisance. In moments of vanity or the effects of too many spy novels I even tried to take the extra attention as a compliment. In fact, I was a novice reporter, with far less experience and no better contacts than many other resident, Chinese-speaking foreign journalists.

The only distinguishing feature in my resume might have been my chance enrollment at Beijing University from 1988 to 1989, at the height of the student-led democracy movement. It was at that time, when Chinese students and citizens were most receptive to foreign journalists, that I made the transition from student to reporter.

This personal metamorphosis was intensified by the sense of elation shared by many foreign journalists at the time, who were moved and sometimes overwhelmed by the changes they were witnessing. During the 1989 protests, Chinese students and marchers hailed the foreign press as a mouthpiece for their cause. This was only natural in a country where the concepts of press and propaganda are inseparable. Western reporters were instantly welcomed and sometimes literally shoved to the front of crowds.

"Make way for the journalist!" shouted a worker in late May, when a reporter tried to push through crowds to talk to soldiers barred from advancing on Tiananmen Square by incensed citizens. The crowd immediately parted.

The contrast after the crackdown was dramatic. During the demonstrations, foreign journalists were given constant access and frequently summoned to impromptu press conferences. After June 4, 1989, we were not only shut out but feared, lied to and even classified as unfriendly. One Western reporter caught sight of an official form handed out to Chinese interviewees in 1991 -- presumably by the local Foreign Affairs office -- that ranked foreign journalists by name from "friendly" to "prejudiced", with several degrees in between.

To the hardline Chinese government that had crushed the movement, we were no different from spies. To students and liberal officials, we represented risks that many were and are still willing to take. Government repression has had the ironic effect of increasing information leaks by those infuriated with the present regime and undaunted by State Security's watchful glare. Internal policing appeared to have intensified following the collapse of Soviet bloc communism, which internal Chinese propaganda attributed to lax political control.

Surveillance Begins On Leaving Compound

Surveillance brings with it a sequence of tics and gestures that, once learned, will always catch the eye. Leaving one of the walled compounds where all Beijing-based foreign journalists must live would trigger a daily ritual that never failed to infuriate me. The ritual began with the craned necks and outstretched hands of watchers posted at the gate as they reached for the telephone to report my departure.

Next came the gleam of metal on an overpass as a plainclothes agent whipped out a walkie-talkie to report my progress. Avoiding the overpasses

didn't help. At key intersections throughout the city such as Dongdan and Dongsi, a tell-tale bobbing motion identified more plainclothes police as they hunched over to speak into lumpy breast pockets or little black bags.

The monitoring didn't end on the street. For weeks on end, my telephone would ring every time I walked through my front door. No one was ever on the other end. On several occasions, the UPI office telephone line cut out abruptly at the mention of sensitive names or topics.

'Like a Sickness' --Now It's Back

The suffocating paranoia was compounded by frustration that the surveillance was taking effect, causing some contacts to shy away or to ask nervously if I had brought my "tail". One evening I emerged from a government official's home to find a surveillance van parked ostentatiously in the narrow alley outside. The van's dark windows and long directional microphone attached to the roof gave it the look of an alien predator stalking the crumbling back alleys of Beijing. The official nevertheless continued to see me.

One Beijing teacher aptly likened the fear of China's security apparatus to a long-dormant disease. "It's like a sickness," the teacher said on a winter night in 1989. "We all used to have it in the old days, and now it's back."

The moment the teacher finished the sentence, there was a prophetic knock at the door. We both froze as a friend answered the apartment door and fended off an inquisitive building monitor, who had allegedly come to "collect the water bill" -- at 8:30 p.m., after seeing me park outside and walk upstairs.

The harassment experienced by Western journalists naturally pales beside that heaped upon Chinese dissidents and ordinary citizens, who suffer a stream of petty indignities designed to break the spirit. Having the freedom to leave, I was less fatalistic than the Chinese I knew and lacked the sense not to fight back. I never grew accustomed to the idea of being watched, even knowing that the sole purpose of the act was to intimidate and disrupt.

Interview Requests Rejected or Delayed

The most damaging effect of the Chinese government's treatment of foreign journalists is that it breeds the very hostility that authorities assume in the first place. The foreign correspondents I knew in Beijing were experienced professionals who had not traveled to China bent on opposing the government, much less subverting it through "bourgeois liberalism" as Chinese propaganda claims. Since Tiananmen Square, the government has cast Western journalists and Americans in particular in the roles of hostile adversaries. A brewing U.S.-China trade dispute and recent American coverage of the sensitive topic of Chinese prison labor exports has further dampened official willingness to receive American reporters.

The reluctance surfaces in countless petty ways. Interview requests in the capital often are turned down or granted only after delays of weeks or months. One American journalist was unable to get the interviews he wanted even with the intercedence by the Chinese Foreign Ministry, which has become increasingly aware of foreign journalists' frustration. When granted, interviews can be grinding tests of patience, often preceded by a lengthy, prepared "introduction" to which the reporter is expected to listen without interrupting.

No Big Problem, No Small Problem

One typical interview that comes to mind is a 1990 meeting with provincial officials in Anhui, one of China's poorer provinces. I was traveling with Dan Southerland, former Beijing correspondent for The Washington Post, and after much reluctance local bureaucrats had agreed to meet with us to discuss Anhui's economy and other topics. Unlike more urbane bureaucrats in much-visited cities such as Shanghai, the Anhui officials appeared unaccustomed to speaking to foreigners and distinctly ill at ease.

The meeting yielded no useful information, save a heap of unconfirmable statistics on Anhui's economic and agricultural triumphs. At least five senior provincial officials sat around a drab room in stuffed armchairs, staring uneasily into the distance and declining to answer even the most innocuous questions. As the would-be interview succumbed to the pressing inertia in the room, Southerland tried one last desperate question: what was Anhui's greatest social problem?

Silence. An official from the provincial planning commission finally broke it with his reply: "Anhui doesn't have any large social problems." Southerland persisted: what was the largest small social problem? The straight-faced answer was predictable: "We don't have any small social problems." End of interview. The relieved officials were in such a hurry to leave the room that one left his glasses behind on the table.

Same Scenario In Other Places

I spent two and a half years in China plagued by the sense that I wasn't reporting effectively due to scenarios such as the one above, which was to be played out in similar rooms in many other Chinese cities. It is simply not possible to report accurately on the Chinese countryside while under local supervision. The most enlightening trip I made outside Beijing was a 24-hour sojourn to a village in Jiangsu in early 1990, accompanied by a Chinese friend. The Chinese economy was still reeling from an austerity program imposed in 1988. Millions of enterprises had been shut down or were operating at half capacity, but the effect was difficult to gauge under the usual constraints on the foreign press.

On a narrow dirt footpath cutting through the village, we met a retired man who had just withdrawn all his money from the bank and stashed it under his mattress. The reason he gave was that he "didn't trust" the bank, which had recently run out of money. In the center of town, male workers

idled by production halts and rural factory shutdowns sat on their front stoops tending babies.

Turmoil Feared More Than Authority

The peasants in Jiangsu were sarcastic and cynical toward the government, yet by no means on the brink of revolt. Many invoked the traditional Chinese fear of chaos, or luan, saying they preferred authoritarian rule to social turmoil.

Such encounters offered rare and unfettered glimpses of life in a Chinese village that would have been impossible under the required supervision. Official trips to the countryside are always chaperoned, preventing spontaneous conversation. During a visit to a village in Sichuan last March, a local official hurriedly waved me away from the sole peasant who called out a greeting, explaining, "Don't mind her. She's mentally ill."

An Incident Shows Need for Caution

Under the circumstances, how can foreign journalists get stories out without compromising their Chinese sources? There are no ground rules and each correspondent must find his or her own equilibrium. I personally found that some of the best stories I encountered in China could not be written because they risked endangering others.

An incident that occurred toward the end of my stay confirmed that my caution had been warranted. Less than a month before I was to leave Beijing, two men from a research institute under the Ministry of State Security approached both me and James Miles, the BBC correspondent, in what appeared to be an attempted setup. The men claimed at first to be seeking cooperation with "foreign scholars" on a private social survey. A second conversation yielded a persistent interest in the CIA and assertions that "certain Western journalists" were intelligence agents. At the third and final meeting, one of the two


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men became impatient and gestured angrily at a copy of Newsweek that featured a story on Chinese labor camps.

"Don't you understand?" he exploded. "We can get you much better information than that, but we need money." I explained that I had no interest in their "survey" and was unable to help them. Such a heavy-handed attempt to incriminate a journalist seemed almost too obvious to believe.

For all the time spent chafing under the irritation of surveillance, surprises popped up when I least expected them. One of the most unpleasant took place on a cool afternoon last October.

I had the day off, and spent most of it visiting a Chinese family. Undercover police on motorbikes had followed my car on the way to their home, but appeared to have lost me after I took several wrong turns through a bewildering maze of alleys. Perhaps they took my bad sense of direction for deviousness.

No one was in sight when I parked and entered the building. Yet several hours and innumerable cups of tea later, when the family stepped outside to see me off, someone was waiting. A gray-faced man holding a poorly concealed videocamera appeared out of nowhere, pointed it at us and abruptly rounded the corner.

Less than a minute later, I nudged my car around the same corner. The alley was empty. The encounter had been like a hallucination, and yet it had happened -- for a moment, the fisheye lens of a police state had stared us in the face.

"I don't give a damn," my Chinese friend said when I mentioned the security agent. For all his nonchalance, the sudden intrusion had the force of a brutal slap in the face.

Fighting Silence Is Difficult War

Two months later, ensconced in the comfort of home in California, the brutality of that slap came back to me in a passage by Ryszard Kapuciski, a Polish journalist who spent many years in Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. He wrote in "The Soccer War":

> Today one hears about noise pollution, but silence pollution is worse. Noise pollution affects the nerves; silence pollution is a matter of human lives. No one defends the maker of a loud noise, whereas those who establish silence in their own states are protected by an apparatus of repression. That is why the battle against silence is so difficult.
>
> It would be interesting to research the media systems of the world to see how many service information and how many service silence and quiet. Is there more of what is said or of what is not said? One could calculate the number of people working in the publicity industry. What if you could calculate the number of people working in the silence industry? Which number would be greater?

The same applies to China. Until restrictions loosen, foreign journalists in Beijing are in the unenviable position of trying to defy the silence industry without endangering those who choose to speak. It is not an easy task. ■

Dissecting the Crafted Image

The Art of Distinguishing Artifice From Authenticity In the Primal Theater of Presidential Campaigns

By Robert D. Deutsch

All of us as politician watchers — journalists and the American electorate alike — decry the current brand of presidential campaigning. Many blame the current situation on expedient media managers, the decline of political parties and the exigencies of campaign financing. A closer look, however, reveals a more fundamental but heretofore overlooked determinant: the choice of a president is an act of hope that is embedded in a specific cultural context. In America, that context is entertainment — the primary genre that impresses itself upon the voters' consciousness.

In this article, examples from pop culture and political advertising — the contemporary novel, the blockbuster Hollywood movie and the Reagan campaign film "A New Beginning" — are used to explore some of the qualities inherent in the relationship between the visual media and those who watch. Television is examined to reveal how it impinges both on the performance of presidential candidates and the impressions formed by the electorate. In addition, an unlikely resource — the rituals of preliterate societies — is tapped to demonstrate the enduring qualities of human nature that are but simulated in our post-modern political quagmire.

The Transforming Nature of Media

Every four years, editorials offer suggestions regarding the format of presidential debates and how journalists should review political advertisements. Their concern, of course, is with what we need to know as voters to make an informed decision. Now that the early primaries and caucuses are behind us, focus on these matters has intensified. Most pundits tend to opt for a series of issue debates, assuming that such a format would make it more difficult for each candidate to cast himself as "leading man." Talking-head commercials and truth-in-advertising critiques of negative ads are likewise advocated. All well and good. But before assuming these constraints to be even a partial remedy for the ascendancy of image over substance, we must come to terms with the transforming nature of media — especially television.

As Tom Wicker stated during a New Year's Eve interview:

> Television has worked enormous changes, in politics and in the governing of the country, as in life generally. Those changes have been so great that we don't yet fully realize exactly what they are; until we do, we're not really going to know how to cope.

Another group of celebrities whose popularity quite legitimately springs from their rendering of the imaginary will help us in this matter: the American fiction writer. Four contemporary novelists capture something essential about the status of image in America: E.L. Doctorow ("Billy Bathgate"), Walker Percy ("The Movie Goer"), John Irving ("A Prayer For Owen Meany"), and Tom Wolfe ("The Bonfire of the Vanities"). Each dramatizes the enfolding of human nature into American culture, and how this is manifested, especially on TV.

Fiction As Resource In Dissecting Politics

"BILLY BATHGATE": PERFORMANCE OF POWER, POWER OF PERFORMANCE.

"Billy Bathgate," a novel about a young boy's apprenticeship among a band of gangsters led by Dutch Schultz, is a story about the attraction of power unique to the American context where the ability to remake yourself via technique is nothing short of a birthright. Billy's attraction was to Schultz's exag-

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gerated and stylized self-sufficiency in realizing all his motives in unrestrained action. The Dutchman ceaselessly went about improvising something out of his own emotions, using what was at hand, making things up as he went, appropriating everything as a commodity — people, religion, business, anything. Young Bathgate defined his own center-stage by taking on the mannerisms of his hero as if they were moltings fallen from above.

Billy embodied a basic assumption in America. Americans like to think that they are free — free to be who they want to be and free to wipe the slate clean, starting anew any time they desire. The past does not stand between them and the realization of a new self-image. Not only free, but created equal by political doctrine, Americans seek to make themselves different. Performance is their primary means.

In giving us the story of Billy Bathgate, E. L. Doctorow offers a penetrating view of American culture — a culture that creates larger than life expectations. If an experience is not immediately distinct and awesome, it is easily disattended. Unlike any other country, we hear talk of the "American dream." Television, now the predominant medium of presidential campaigns, simply gives a running jump to our basic cultural predispositions.

"THE MOVIE GOER": THE AURA OF A HERO.

In "The Movie Goer," Walker Percy addresses the attractiveness of heroes and their rituals. He defines media as a place "where everything costs so little." Real life can be slow, tentative, and devoid of endpoints that provide structure and sense. In counterpoint, Percy demonstrates how life in the media resembles ritual in that it presents only a series of flashpoints — transmutations of human experience that reimagine the past and impregnate the future with hope. As the main character in "The Movie Goer" is riding on a bus with a woman he wants to ask out for dinner, he imagines that if his life were a movie the bus would get lost and he would find the way back or the city would get bombed and he and his ladyfriend together would attend the wounded. "The Movie Goer" gives us a glimpse of how an aura of heightened reality moves with a ritual hero, and, in turn, the audience responds with what Percy calls a "spasm of sentiment."

Given the aesthetics of broadcast journalism and the strategizing of media consultants, a "spasm" is the most apt way to describe our possible reaction when watching presidential hopefuls on television.

"A PRAYER FOR OWEN MEANY": TELEVISION AND NOSTALGIA.

Just like Billy Bathgate, the country wants a mythic leader. In "A Prayer For Owen Meany", John Irving shows us how Americans can be seduced by powerful men who cast themselves in symbolic roles simply by looking good. Irving makes the point in the extreme by writing:

> what we witnessed with the death of Kennedy was the triumph of television — for television is at its most solemnly self-serving and at its mesmerizing best when it is depicting the untimely deaths of the chosen and the golden. It is as witness to the butchery of heroes in their prime that television achieves its deplorable greatness. TV so shamelessly sentimentalizes and romanticizes death that it makes the living feel they have missed something by staying alive.

A funeral, of course, is a ritual. Moreover, unexpected death, with or without the help of television, provides a fertile ground from which images grow. In this case, TV hyper-ritualized something that is rightfully designed for the symbolic framing of loss and rebirth. The insidiousness of television lies in the many ways it can evoke emotions based on primitive expectations of belonging and feeling powerful, no matter what the nature of the event. TV can make campaign events into something that resembles ritual. Past, present and future are collapsed into one unambiguous and symbolic whole.

Just as a whiff of home-baked bread can transport us back to an idealized childhood, our reaction to a moment on TV can become dominated by nostalgia. Ritual serves to dull critical facilities, not arouse them.

"THE BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES": BREAKING THE TIES THAT BIND.

In "The Bonfire of the Vanities," Tom Wolfe serves up an essential image for understanding how TV sets us up for the knee-jerk response: the TV camera as predator. In his depiction of the media frenzy surrounding a fallen Wall Street junk-bond trader, he artfully captures the inevitable obliteration of any human link between us — the audience — and whatever the TV viewfinder encapsulates in a frame. And who is the audience's self-appointed advocate? Wolfe tells us it is "the TV cameraman with camera coming out of his head like horns." A predator stalking its prey, without its natural context. This is the medium of TV; a medium that sets the stage for the arena-like presidential campaign behavior that it anoints with top billing.

The Real World Of Presidential Campaigns

During the 1984 presidential campaign, a woman was quoted in Time magazine, saying "I like how decisive Ronald Reagan was during that crisis...I forgot which one." This statement demonstrates what the novelists cited above describe as the power of media: personality becomes a performance, time is obliterated through ritual, context is further fragmented by television.

Everything on television is represented up close and personal, making it look and feel like our everyday world of face-to-face relations. Beyond that, no behavior, no feeling, no aesthetic is allowed to mature. Everything we see is foreshortened and pumiced; television works its alchemy and eliminates nuance and abstraction. We are left only with expressions and gestures that are managed. The small screen boxes us in, seeing to it that our emotional responses are pat. Pure and simple!

Despite the transforming nature of media, many pundits pretend it does not exist. Regardless of the external constraints pundits try to impose on candidates' self-presentation, television changes the nature of the game; that cannot be denied. False hopes of set-

ting aside our cultural nature and the nature of the medium of television itself will not suffice.

What Then Should Journalists Focus On?

Our best hope lies in providing the electorate with a means for deciphering the visual and aural rhetoric that now characterize presidential campaigns. For this, the media — both print and broadcast journalism — must go beyond analyzing the overt content of campaign communications or giving us an insider's view of all the campaign back-stabbing and maneuvering. The focus needs to be on the imagery and narrative structures campaigns employ to influence voter decisions.

Playing to mass markets, presidential candidates today have become storytellers, while they portray symbolized characters in the very stories they tell. In scripting these tales, they employ visual displays as well as rhetorical and ritual enactments that can momentarily seize the attention and emotions of mass publics. To gain a persuasive edge, candidates cast themselves in larger than life archetypal roles and metaphorically merge into more wholly inclusive and pre-established stories or dramas. Good and evil are personified. Heros, villains, comics and fools are offered up to us on a silver platter. Mystery and adventure are dramatized.

Presidential candidates going head-to-head try to take on the image of mythic hero and savior in a just cause, of being destined to play this role in a ritual joust with evil; their mission and duty is to sacrifice and overcome. They seek to appear optimistic, confident, and committed, but not immune to danger (excitement is provided for by the combination of risk and hope). Their posings aspire to create an impression of invincibility, not invulnerability. A popular embodiment of this type of personage is Luke Skywalker in "Star Wars."

How Does A Voter Experience Campaigns?

Every four years, from the beginning of primary season up until Election Day, the American electorate sees the outcome of planned political advertisements. Farm hands, factory workers and office personnel give testimonials. Babies are dealt with, pictures of national monuments flashed and scenes from daily life are romanticized. Candidates create "photo opportunities" by going fishing, riding into town on horseback or visiting a Goya food factory to woo the Latino vote. Debates are offered. Campaign songs are sung and the word "future" is uttered repeatedly. Sometimes there is name-calling. Places and events from our nation's history and everyday scenes are mythologized; they roll across the television screen in such a way that an illusion of participating in a familiar past is subjectively possible. Candidates reassure us that with them in the White House our future is secure, while issues are glossed over with short, attention-getting slogans. For those who watch, immediate feelings of hope, trust, and comfort are evoked. In the case of negative statements, anger and fear are whipped up. Messages resulting in deep, if brief, feelings are conveyed softly, subtly in simplistic dreamlike images and subtexts.

To decipher this fantasy of fact and transform ourselves from passive onlookers to knowing politician-watchers, we must regain and again trust our gut-knowledge regarding our emotional response to those vying for leadership. The building-blocks of interpersonal attachment have not changed since time immemorial. What has changed is television's ability to simulate these constituents of human bonding. The result is that the American electorate is left high and dry. The more our world becomes mediated, solitary and anonymous, the more we quest after these age-old and ageless scenes of human belonging and benevolent leadership. But with nothing behind these simulated lookalikes, our spasm of sentiment can be short-lived. We come crashing down from a momentary high. Cynicism is the result, and the numbers of Americans who vote declines with each passing election. The cause is in the TV image itself.

How Does a Voter Make Choices?

In America, we want our leaders to be more than us and be like us, simultaneously. Those who seek the highest office in the land strive to balance their projection of power (knowing what needs to be done and the ability to get that accomplished) with a sense of appeasement (being responsive to "the people" who need to believe they are understood, cared about and valued). Candidates must also balance an appeal based on familiarity (being easily identifiable and seeming accessible) while being mythic (larger than life and remote). As Walker Percy notes, a felt sense of familiarity with the one who is the center of attention helps us defend against becoming an "anyone" while his power makes us feel we are prepared to act.

We know from past presidential campaigns dating back to Andrew Jackson how pervasive symbols of familiarity can be. A candidate is presented as "a man of the people," "a common man." Pictures are flashed: a log cabin, the flag, the candidate with rolled-up shirt sleeves, on street corners, and nowadays with show business celebrities (something we all share).

Along with inserting themselves into images that tap communal remembrances, presidential hopefuls seek to appease. Appeasement allows us to affirm our positive image of self, thus satisfying our need for a sense of control. Ronald Reagan was exceptionally good at this. Rarely did he take credit for an achievement. Whatever we accomplished, he would say, was due solely to the hard work and moral stature of the American people. And we all can recall his many State of the Union messages, where the common man as hero was ever-present.

Leaders also strategize to project a sense of power, of being more than any one of us: the one who keeps the lid on all the chaotic and catastrophic possibilities of life and who knows some-

thing about the future. Power, together with familiarity, allows the leader as mythic hero to still maintain a common touch. The presence of a leader makes us feel less alone, part of something bigger than we are, something invincible, powerful and enduring. And paradoxically, believing that the leader knows the way, knows the labyrinth, we are able to feel more independent, autonomous and confident to manage our own little world; we feel empowered. The leader's power provides us with a feeling that with his help we can be more than we are now. In this way, power is linked back to familiarity in terms of hope.

The balanced amalgamation of familiarity, appeasement and power provides a behavioral definition of "looking presidential." That's what we go for; that and wanting to feel euphoric.

Helping the Public Read Between the Lines

We need to come to know how our objective consideration of campaign messages can interact with our more deep-seated emotional responses to images and stories whose subtexts incorporate designs on familiarity, appeasement, and power. This would allow the public to read between the lines. Television, in spite of itself, is best suited to initiate this task. Even the words of a presidential campaign are interpreted in the visual mode.

A network news special or PBS documentary can begin a concerted effort to disentangle the the blue smoke and mirrors of presidential campaigning and the theater.of "primal politics." As one suggestion, perhaps part of the funding that was earmarked for the now aborted "Voter's Channel/Election Project" can be resurrected to support such an undertaking. Other funding sources can be sought. After airing, copies of such a program can be made available to community groups. Town meetings can then be organized around the program viewing. Print journalism can follow through, covering the day-to-day of the campaign, applying the perceptual prism developed in the TV special.

The centerpiece of such a program could be a deciphering of Ronald Reagan's 18-minute campaign film, "A New Beginning." This film demonstrates many, if not all, of the strategies of persuasion that can bypass viewers' rational processing (especially those who were already inclined to vote for Reagan). Made by the so-called Tuesday Team and shown for the first time at the Republican National Convention, in Dallas, August 23, 1984, "A New Beginning" marked the coming-of-age of modern political communication. This film is a visual rendering of a rebirth myth. It is made up of 15 "chapters," in which Reagan, recovering after Hinckley's assassination attempt, is equated with America and its recovery. The emotional result is powerful: a vote against Ronald Reagan is a vote against America itself.

The film combines archival and news footage, travelogue footage of foreign places, voice-over narration, still photographs and testimonials. The song "God Bless the USA," sung by Lee Greenwood, is interspersed throughout. Part documentary, part advertisement, the film presents Ronald Reagan, the leader, as larger than life and a man of the people; he is both narrator and leading man in a mythological story so powerful in its fit with primal human longings that even a Democratic media consultant, after viewing the film, was quoted as saying, "I knew what they were doing, and I still cried."

The film begins in the past, with what is familiar on a mass scale. Reagan's 1980 Inaugural Address and symbolic images of an idealized America (e.g., the family farm, cowboys breaking wild horses, the old homestead; all signifying both self-reliance and communality) are intercut with one another, wrapped in a common musical theme. Reagan's voice-over recites the oath of office. Halfway through this sequence, more contemporary scenes are presented as visual metaphors of each phrase in the oath. For example, the words "... and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend ..." are heard while workers entering the grounds of a factory walk past a security guard. The equation, REAGAN = ME (THE VIEWER) = AMERICA has already begun and we are only 20 seconds into the film. Although in a very unsophisticated way, Nixon's Checkers Speech accomplished the same identification using symbols of familiarity.

We also see the same strategies in primitive societies, but their intent and the pervasiveness of their unified belief system make such an enactment anything but a simulation. In the Amazon, the Yanomamo partake in a "wayamou" ceremony when a visiting tribe enters another group's territory. The leaders of the two groups crouch next to each other, alternately reciting descriptions of past events, people and situations, until they find commonalities they retroactively agree upon. Only with this done, can the visit proper begin.

Product advertising also appropriates the attraction of familiarity. One of the most popular commercials recently on TV was a Pepsi ad featuring Ray Charles together with a litany of other highly idiosyncratic and well-known performers such as Jerry Lewis and Tiny Tim. One after the other, each celebrity presented a parody of himself while singing the Pepsi motto: "You got the right one, baby. Uh-huh!" The popularity of this ad is largely due to its stylized depiction of behavior that is already easily identifiable. Here, familiarity is itself made into an image.

Comparisons between public diplomacy during international crises and examples from popular culture and preliterate tribes can also be used in the kind of news special advocated here. For instance, throughout the first few months of the Persian Gulf crisis Saddam Hussein pleaded for dialogue while warning of his willingness to go to war. George Bush issued equally harsh rhetoric in parallel with gestures of restraint. This was not inconsistency of intent, but an expression of an intent to be inconsistent. Signals of power and appeasement together send a message that is purposefully inexact, offering its audience no objective basis for easy prediction and so allowing meaning to be generated according to the needs of each individual. Early in December 1990, Saddam's proclamation of a 50-50 chance of war was precise.

We can see this strategy unadorned in the greeting ritual Yanomamo tribesmen exhibit when a representative from an enemy group enters their territory for peace talks. A dominant male from the host village struts with spears held high over his head while a small female child offers a wreath of flowers. The same principle is present in modern day visits by heads of state. A 21-gun salute is offered and the wife of the visiting leader is given a bouquet of flowers.Some of our most popular movie stars — Jack Nicholson, Gene Hackman, Bruce Willis and Harrison Ford — embody this dualism of power and appeasement as their basic screen persona. Perhaps the actor most successful at riding the cusp between familiarity, appeasement and power, and incorporating these ways of behaving into his screen image, was Humphrey Bogart.

If broadcast and print journalism can demonstrate how campaign communication uses performances of familiarity, appeasement and power, then the American electorate can begin to regain its gut-knowledge to distinguish between archetype authentically rendered and its simulation. Armed once again with this native literacy, we can begin to short-circuit the spasm of sentiment that technologized behavior is designed to elicit. This does not mean we should seek to eliminate emotion from the voting process, but that we should recognize that emotion is inextricably bound up with our choice of a leader and bring that aspect of the candidate-voter relationship under conscious reflection.

In doing so, we will be eliminating a crucial factor responsible for our cynicism as would-be voters: what E. L. Doctorow describes as the "self-erasing" nature of images to be awe-inspiring while leaving you empty. With this accomplished, only those who present a natural fit between their intent and performance will we deem fit to lead.

If newspaper circulation and TV ratings are main considerations of media, so be it. There is nothing that can ensure audience attachment and loyalty more than to give people (1) the wherewithal to understand what they already know but that is inchoate and not easily articulated; (2) the ability and certainty that comes from knowing through their own experience; and (3) the means to act on that knowledge. In fact, this is the essence, the beauty and the majesty of primitive group life.

What is being suggested here need not consist of dry descriptions that bore TV viewers or newspaper readers . Print and broadcast journalism are both still industries that are increasingly focused on their respective bottom lines. Still, an accounting of the tactics and techniques of political communication during presidential campaigns that provides the electorate with a visual and aural literacy based on examples from pop culture and pre-history would bring with it its own human interest angle.

There is still time in the 1992 campaign to provide the voters with a context within which to make more informed decisions. The media resources exist; what is required is the will and courage to use them.The optimism and energy Americans want to bring to the exercise of their franchise is intact, but it is submerged under feelings of powerlessness. Issue debates and other suggestions of a similar ilk will not help voters retrieve a sense of self-empowerment; exposing the tacit design of campaign imagery will.

Educating the public about the ways presidential campaign communication seeks to be seductive while still being chaste, and doing this within a framework that stretches from Hollywood to Madison Avenue to the primeval forest, would be a responsible and exciting undertaking serving both civic obligations and private desires. Since television is the prime source through which politicians become known to us, we now must come to know it as the "primal screen." The paradox is that once this is accomplished, the only course open to the candidates is to present themselves as if we did live in a primal group — they would have to relate to us as real people known directly, in an unmediated way. We turn now to the world of cinema to bring this transformation into clearer focus.

Hooked and Stoned On Entertainment

Earlier this year, journalistic airways were buzzing with commentary on the way in which Oliver Stone's "JFK" depicted a most sorrowful event in our nation's past. What has been missed is that, when considered together with another recently released film, "Hook," these two cinematic offerings shed some light on a future event important to us all — the 1992 presidential election. "Hook" and "JFK" reveal a basic element in the relationship between media and the audience: entertainment vehicles — particularly the primarily visual media of film and television — possess a unique potential to manhandle the viewer's imagination. Viewers can become hooked and stoned on the illusory world offered up on a silver platter by film and television. As we enter the presidential primary season, the American electorate would do well to keep this in mind.

Entertainment provides a world within which we can play with our emotions and fantasies without intervention from the demands of routine existence. Each of these films is excessive in the sense that they drive this process into one of two extremes: "Hook" annihilates the imagination; "JFK" gorges it.

Through a string of plot concoctions and special effects, coupled with the director's grab bag of cinematic sleight–of–hand, and the luminosity of superstars, the story of Peter Pan is made into something so ingenious it becomes disingenuous. "Hook" gives its audience no leeway to insert itself into what was once an ode to childhood. Everything in this movie — every scene, every utterance, every gesture — is so stylized and so blown out of proportion as to become absolute.

Record–breaking box office successes are usually reserved for spectacles that give the moviegoer room to maneuver in his own imagination. Personal associations are evoked, instead of diluted mass responses. Such movies live in our minds; they intercut with each viewer's idiosyncratic remembrances and intimate hopes. A case in point is Spielberg's own "E.T.". "Hook" on the other hand is

such a perfected commodity that it turns in on itself, casting the audience as a herd of popcorn–eating bystanders. We are momentarily caught up, but nothing enduring remains. A similar situation occurs when we watch political advertising.

The assault on imagination that "JFK" accomplishes comes from a different direction. Oliver Stone's film conjures up the myth of a shadow government's conspiracy in the assassination of President Kennedy. The problem is that this myth is laid upon what is already a myth — President Kennedy himself. "JFK" carries myth to the second power.

The untimely death of a president who so seamlessly merged persona and performance is the archetypal soil from which myth grows. This process is prone to hyperactivity as the human mind, seeking after closure and comfort, does not want to believe that one sole individual, Lee Harvey Oswald, can shatter the hope of an entire generation. That possibility is too random, too uncontrollable, and therefore too frightening, to accept. A shadow government conspiracy is a more comforting explanation; it assumes some organizational structure, a plan that takes time to evolve, and multiple opportunities for the expression of human fallibility. At least in retrospect, conspiracy permits us to entertain the notion that if we had been clever enough, such an evil deed could have been stymied. A self–perception lacking cleverness is more easily accepted than one that defines itself as impotent.

In the case of President Kennedy's assassination, Oliver Stone takes the hyper–mythification process already in place and excites it with dramatic intensity. He combines the interweaving of documentary footage, docudrama–like re–enactments, and scenes he himself creates to present simplifications, half–truths, and distortions which effortlessly combine with fact in the alchemy of the director's lens. The result is an audience ushered down a maze of never–ending conjectures that set the stage for a reverie of self–indulgent imaginings unimpeded by the press of any reality–testing.

"Hook" and "JFK" reveal two extreme ways entertainment can dull our critical facilities rather than arouse them. Spielberg and Stone each present a world — one completely ready–made, the other completely made ready by nostalgia and hope — that can be addictive in the effortless "high" they can create. But in both cases, each individual member of the audience as real person is excluded in advance, ruled out of the game, made invisible. The same possibility exists when watching a presidential campaign on television.

Can Presidential Candidates Be Real on Television?

As novelists and film–makers demonstrate, cinema and television have the power to sentimentalize and romanticize everything. Nowadays on TV, entertainment and news are both presented in the same format. Even weather reports are presented as comic operas. Similarly, the exaggeration and condensation of real life that TV inherently demands can make events such as a presidential debate or a political "spot" into something chimeric.

As one watches all this it is normal for the viewer to engage in a silent dialogue with himself using the TV as mediator. This can be very relaxing; it lacks external demands. We are left to our own devices to take what we see on TV and make it into something self–affirming and self–assertive. Television allows us to manipulate our own reality in order to feel safe, secure and comfortable. That's fine for entertainment, but politics is about real events with real consequences. Perhaps accordingly, presidential candidates might try breaking out of the format of entertainment and be real people — be themselves, be human.

At present, the predominant campaign aesthetic is the avoidance of risk. Hence, the ascendancy of polls and the crafting of messages that elicit only pat responses by the audience. Candidates take on a mass–produced aura; the electorate is related to as a consumer market. Real people are nowhere to be found.

In contrast, real life is surging, lacking in closure, often ironic and largely unplanned. We know that real people are flawed and inconsistent, but that they can also be trustworthy, intelligent and capable of great love and commitment. In the mundane exists the apotheosis of "everyman." We tolerate the paradoxes of motivation and personal flaws of judgment in others if we "believe" in them; we call it trust. We know that presidential candidates are human like ourselves, but we also know they will not allow us to experience them that way.

As an entertainer or politician, there are two ways to get a majority of the audience to "buy" into what you are "selling": (1) go for the dazzling spectacle, like most of entertainment, or (2) make a moment of existence as exceptional as it is ordinary, similar to how we each experience our own life. By making novel the familiar, without props or embellishment, a candidate enables the viewer to identify with him while at the same time contributing to the impression that he, the candidate, is something more.

By making the "smaller moments" of their own experience a parable for all of us, candidates can embody in the particulars what is universal. By showing us that in their own lives there lies a heroic and epic journey, politicians can allow viewers a renewed encounter with their own self–image. It is in this way that a candidate can be both authentic and symbolic; each citizen could then metaphorically "press the flesh" with a candidate and more optimistically engage in that act of hope called voting. The revelation to the candidate will be that, by being real, he will maximize his chances to obtain office.

If presidential candidates persist in presenting themselves in the manner of "Hook" or "JFK", the possibility exists that voter turnout will dwindle even further than it already has. We can't find real life and real people in Never Never Land or Camelot. If we learn the lessons of "primal politics," perhaps in 1992 we will find real candidates on TV, the prime political soapbox. ■

White House Press, Revisited

Liberal, Yet Considerably More Conservative Than It Used to Be—And More Representative of Country

The following is a slightly edited text of a speech that Stephen Hess delivered at the University of Wisconsin in Madison last December.

By Stephen Hess

In 1978 I first surveyed the White House press corps for a book called "The Washington Reporters." More recently I surveyed congressional reporters for a book called "Live From Capitol Hill!" Last summer, with a little luck I was able to do a comparison over time—noting changes between two groups of reporters on the same beat 13 years apart—and between reporters covering the two political branches of government—noting differences between those on White House and Capitol Hill beats.

Why should we bother to study these journalists? A perfectly good question. For political scientists, the utility of this information is problematical. Still, there are those who make the case. Mark J. Rozell, writing in "The Press and the Carter Presidency," says, "Journalists, in a sense, teach the public about what presidents should and should not be doing, how presidents should lead, and whether presidents are succeeding or failing the task of leadership. In his book on the press and the Reagan presidency, "On Bended Knee," Mark Hertsgaard attacked the reporters for their deferential attitude toward conservative ideology. "The value judgments American journalists made in reporting the news were inevitably influenced by their own backgrounds," he wrote. The distinguished Columbia University historian Henry Graff, who is writing a book on how the presidential "persona" is created by the media, says, "The media are the ether, the invisible avenue through which we are led and by which our governance is conducted."

Thus the case for the study.

While there are some 2,000 reporters accredited to the White House, the White House press corps is the name given to about 60 reporters, the regulars, who have assigned seats at the press secretary's daily briefing and a desk in the press room and who usually travel with the president. They include the wire services (AP, UPI, Reuters), each with four reporters; the TV networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN), with three- and four-person staffs. Some major newspapers (The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The Los Angeles Times) and the weekly news magazines have two reporters. Smaller newspapers, magazines and newspaper chains cover the White House with a single full-time reporter.

They mostly represent American news organizations producing a daily product, and, as such, follow the rules of their craft that determine what is news, length of story, standards of objectivity, rules of civility (as defined by libel law and mainstream consumers) and appropriate conventions of sourcing. They are not literati.

Valuable Assignments

Given the high cost of maintaining reporters at the White House and news industry consolidation, these reporters generally work for large organizations. This means that they are experienced, older journalists. Covering the president is not an entry-level job. They started their careers years ago someplace else, eventually moved to Washington and were eventually elevated to the White House beat.

This is a group of journalists who report on the activities of one person. With the exception of a few magazine writers (notably at The National Jour-

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nal and The New Republic), they do not concern themselves with institutional matters. They cover the resident, not the presidency.

The prestige of the beat comes from constant exposure—the reporter's by-line on page one or face on the network news—rather than from the opportunity for creativity or even enjoyment. These reporters are important because the person they report on is important. This exposure is particularly valuable for TV correspondents: Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw, Sam Donaldson and Leslie Stahl all moved up to their present perches from the White House press room. An advantage for print reporters is the opportunity for possibly lucrative freelance assignments. (Indeed, in the month of our survey, nearly half [45 per cent] of those reporters said they were engaged in some form of extra activity, such as writing books or magazine articles.)

Following a president, especially the present one, involves a great deal of travel. Don Campbell, a former White House reporter for the Gannett News Service, describes it this way in his book, "Inside the Beltway":

> Life on the beat approximates being one of the support cast in an old Western movie about cattle drives. On the road, you are constantly being herded from photo opportunity to press plane to motorcade bus to background briefing to hotel press room.

The new survey of full-time reporters was taken between July 11 and August 8, 1991, and comprises 39 interviews, which amounts to over 60 pr cent of the White House press corps. Questionnaires were administered by Lissa Topel, a student at the University of Michigan, who was assisted in the computer work by Robin Donaldson and Todd Quinn.

Mostly White Males

The basic facts are these: The White House press corps is 69 per cent male, 31 per cent female, 95 per cent white, 5 per cent minorities. These figures are close to the percentages for all journalists in the nation and represent substantial gains in Washington, where in 1978 the hiring of female reporters lagged behind the rest of the United States by seven years. Yet if Washington journalism has caught up with journalism nationally, the news business still lags behind other industries in that women make up 44 per cent of the country's professional work force and minorities account for 10 per cent of U.S. professional workers.

In several other respects the composition of the White House press corps has become more like the nation at large. After the 1978 survey, I wrote, "If there is an average Washington reporter and an average American, they do not look much like each other." The new data show that reporters and other Americans are coming together in the percentages from urban/rural backgrounds and from the different regions of the country, although Midwesterners are overrepresented and those from the West are underrepresented. The White House reporters, however, are not nearly as close to being "typical" Americans as are those who cover Congress. While 16 per cent of the Congressional reporters are in their 20's, for example, no White House reporter in our sample was under 32.

The mean age for journalists at the White House is 42. They have been journalists on average for 19 years, and Washington reporters for 13 years. This is an older and more experienced group than was there in 1978, when they averaged 39 years of age, with seven years as a journalist before going to Washington and seven years in Washington. These differences have more to do with Jimmy Carter than with any deliberate decision on the part of news organizations to put more seasoned reporters on the beat.

Traditionally many news operations, particularly the TV networks, give the White House assignment to the reporter who has covered the winning presidential candidate. The logic is supposed to be that this reporter will have developed contacts and insights while on the campaign trail. (It may also mean that the reporter has a vested interest in the candidate.) At today's White House about one-fifth of the press covered the 1988 Bush campaign. But in 1976 the campaign for the Democratic nomination of a former Governor was initially given low priority and assigned to more junior reporters. Veterans could be found following such luminaries as Birch Bayh, Frank Church and Henry Jackson. "Jimmy Who" surprised the news executives and after his inauguration, as one example, an Atlanta-based general assignment reporter, Judy Woodruff, became NBC White House correspondent. She was then 30 years old.

Changing presidential reporters when Presidents change has a musical chairs effect in Washington journalism. A new White House correspondent means that a place must be found for the old White House correspondent—send him to the State Department—and a place must be found for the old State Department correspondent, and so forth. This excuse for rotation generally has a salutary effect on news organizations. But it also insures that the White House press corps will be short on historical memory. Of those in our 1991 survey, 51 per cent have covered only President Bush, 36 per cent covered Presidents Reagan and Bush. Less than a half dozen have been in the White House during the administrations of three or more presidents.

Backgrounds Similar

Today there is virtually no difference in age or experience between the men and women on the beat, although women on average have been at the White House a year longer. The reporters tend to have been sent there in their mid-to-late-30's. A mean age of 42, I would contend, is about right for covering a president. It is a time when the energy line crosses the wisdom line, energy and wisdom being useful commodities in their business. As they grow older, they may have more wisdom and less energy.

What is most interesting when comparing male and female reporters at the White House is how few differences there are. They went to public and private colleges in the same proportion, majored in the same subjects as undergraduates, were as likely to go to

graduate school, read the same publications, watch the same TV, do the same amount of freelance work, argue with their editors on the same matters. Women are, however, more satisfied in their work, more centrist in their politics and less likely to number other journalists among their closest friends.

Educational backgrounds data hint that many of the reporters come from the upper middle class. Although 80 per cent of Americans go to public colleges and universities, 53 per cent of the reporters attended private schools. They are nearly all college graduates (95 per cent), half have had some post-graduate schooling (46 per cent) and a third earned graduate degrees (31 per cent). Our sample has three reporters with law degrees. Rated on a common selectivity scale, half went to good universities (54 per cent) and 28 per cent went to prestigious ones, such as Harvard, MIT and Cornell.

Fewer From J-Schools

What I find remarkable is that these reporters defy a strong trend toward majoring in journalism. More than 80 per cent of the entry-level applicants for journalism are journalism majors. This trend is clear in my survey of reporters covering Congress, where journalism graduates rose from 36 to 49 per cent in the 1978-88 decade. But at the White House the percentage of journalism majors actually drops slightly, from 41 per cent in 1978 to 37 per cent in 1991, while humanities/liberal arts majors go up six points, from 52 to 58 per cent. The same pattern—both over time and when comparing the White House and Congress beats—holds for graduate studies.

Since White House reporters tend to be older, and since the data from the Congress survey show that the older the reporter the less likely he or she is to have majored in journalism, an easy explanation is that this phenomenon is merely a product of age. But as Richard Nixon might have said, "This would be wrong." The reporters at the White House who majored in journalism are no younger on average than those who did not. A modest percentage point or two, not more, might be attributed to the larger number of White House reporters who attended elite schools that do not have journalism departments. Otherwise, 'tis a puzzlement.

Also, the congressional reporter data show that those in TV are more likely to be journalism majors; but, again, this is not true of the White House press corps: the journalism majors covering the President most often work for important newspapers, such as Ann Devroy of The Washington Post, who was a journalism major at the University of Wisconsin.

For those who wish to keep score, the undergraduate majors of choice (other than journalism) are english, political science and history—in that order. White House reporters, then and now, are woefully uninterested in economics and the natural sciences.

When surveying Capitol Hill in 1988 we found that television and print reporters had very distinct profiles. They didn't look much like each other. The so-called pretty-face syndrome was quite evident among TV journalists who were more apt to be young and women. These reporters worked for local TV stations. The TV people at the White House work for the networks, and, although it is harder to generalize because the numbers are small, it seems clear that there are no significant differences between the media. TV and print reporters, for example, have equal amounts of formal education. They even argue with their editors or producers about the same thing—the length of their stories. Print reporters, however, went to more prestigious schools, do more freelance work and are more likely to have other journalists as their friends.

We next asked the reporters a series of questions about their reading and viewing habits and found, as expected, that they are news junkies who consume four or five daily newspapers. They all read The Washington Post, 38 or 39 read The New York Times, and then, in descending order: The Wall Street Journal (85 per cent), The Washington Times (51 per cent), USA Today (31 per cent) and The Los Angeles Times (18 per cent). There was one reader of The Racing Forum.

They also average five magazines, with one reporter claiming to be a regular reader of 14. Ninety per cent read at least one weekly news magazine: Newsweek had 85 per cent readership; Time, 77 per cent; U.S. News & World Report, 56 per cent. Otherwise, the magazines of choice are The New Republic (59 per cent), The Economist (28 per cent), The New Yorker (21 per cent) and Vanity Fair (21 per cent). There are lots of readers of sports and hobbies magazines, but hardly any consumers of ideological journals (either of the left or the right), journalism reviews, foreign policy magazines, or the business weeklies. Theirs is not a specialist's bibliography. To the degree that it fills a need-to-know, the tilt is to those publications that feature politics-cum-current events.

TV Viewing Not Critical

What is then interesting is that television viewing is apparently not as crucial to White House reporters' need to know as it was in 1978—at least as reflected in their answers to how many network news programs they watch.

Reporters now, on average, watch the networks' evening programs three nights a week whereas in 1978 they watched five nights a week. They average three mornings a week, the same as in 1978. The averages, however, are deceptive because they are compounds of 12 reporters who are low TV users (hardly ever watching either the morning or evening news), 12 high TV users (watchers of both AM and PM news), and "the high/lows," six of whom watch in the morning but not in the evening and six watchers at night but not in the morning. And to further confuse interpretation, these groups do not neatly divide by gender—no special differences between men and women—nor by age or the type of news organization they work for, other than that TV reporters like to watch themselves. Of the two

New York Times reporters at the White House, for instance, one is a low TV user and the other is a high TV user.

For the record and excluding the TV correspondents from this count, 75 per cent of the reporters who watch the evening news are tuned to ABC, with CBS and NBC equally splitting 25 per cent. The breakdown on the morning programs: "Today Show" (NBC), 44 per cent; "Good Morning America" (ABC) 20 per cent; Fox news, 12 per cent; CBS, 8 per cent, and 16 per cent are switchers, sampling more than one channel.

It may be, of course, that this decline in watching network news simply reflects the increased fractionalization of television audiences across the country. Network TV viewers have declined about 25 per cent in the period between the two surveys. There is also the possibility that some White House reporters have made a qualitative decision. Twenty of 39, or 51 per cent, do not watch any of the weekend interview programs. They have decided that they are not of sufficient news value to turn on their sets. The average for the group is barely one program per reporter, and it is this high because one reporter claims to watch six shows. Again, for the record, of the weekend viewers: "This Week With David Brinkley" (ABC) gets 52 per cent; "Face the Nation" (CBS) and "Meet the Press" (NBC), 24 per cent each.

Burt Solomon, a magazine reporter who doesn't get to the White House every day, says he watches the evening news to remind himself of the tone of the Presidency. But there must be other White House reporters who listen to these programs out of habit or for entertainment, not as a source of useful material for their work.

Still, I think there is an additional explanation for the drop in TV viewing. For the sake of symmetry, I was probably asking 1978 questions that did not adequately account for the rise of CNN, which, as a continuous conveyer belt of information, is a constant presence in most newsrooms, and thus takes the edge off the hard news value of the network programs.

Much of the media manipulation during the Michael Deaver era at the Reagan White House was directed at network television, the medium through which a majority of Americans learn the news. Yet this survey, once again, suggests that in routine situations, that is most of the time (unlike crises, when everyone, including Presidents, turn on their sets), it is the print media—newspapers and magazine—that circulate information at the level of "informed sources."

Satisfaction Dips

Our survey shows that White House reporters continue to be a satisfied lot—only not as satisfied as they were in 1978. Thirteen years ago, when asked about job satisfaction, all the reporters interviewed claimed to be either "very" or "fairly." Today the job satisfaction figure has dropped to 85 per cent. The decline doesn't relate to circumstances in the White House press room. Most reporters, as we've shown, weren't there when Jody Powell was the President's press secretary, and thus can't make comparisons. But the oldtimers are not grumbling more than usual. President Bush's spokesman gets high marks. As Carl Leubsdorf, of The Dallas Morning News, notes, "Marlin Fitzwater doesn't have a mean bone in his body."

The problem is largely back in their own organizations where times are tough. We asked reporters to rate levels of disagreement with their home offices on nine scales, such as "money for travel" and "expenses." They indicated more conflict in seven of the nine categories. The two areas in which they claim less disagreement than in 1978 are disputes over "story length" and "time to write." I don't mean to leave the impression that news organizations have turned into snake pits. Our questions asked reporters to rate areas of friction on a scale of never-seldom-sometimes-often, and their answers fell someplace between seldom and sometimes. But there may be another cause of discontent in the White House press room—midlife crisis: in our first study we found a slight drop in job satisfaction when reporters reached their 40's. We noted, however, that they snapped back after 50.

There are some, on the other hand, who think that White House reporters are too satisfied. In 1978, when they were asked about "being out of touch with people 'out there,' meaning the rest of the nation," 88 per cent said that this was a "serious problem," none thought it was "not a problem." Today our resurvey finds that the"serious problem" response has dipped to 40 per cent and "not a problem" is up to 18 per cent. half of the reporters think that pack or herd journalism is also a serious problem at the White House, although this figure is down slightly from 1978. What I find especially revealing in defining a world of journalists that is becoming increasingly insular is that most of the White House journalists' friends are other journalists. The question we asked was: "Of your three closest friends in Washington, excluding family, how many are in journalism?" The average is 1.7—1.5 for women, 1.9 for men. In other words, at the White House half of women reporters' closest friends are journalists and two thirds of the male reporters' closest friends are journalists. This pattern is very different from data on journalists outside of Washington, who are more likely to be linked through friendship with the rest of the community.

There is a good deal of evidence, mostly in the form of straw polls, that Washington reporters in past elections voted overwhelmingly for the more liberal Presidential candidate. In my 1978 survey of all Washington reporters, 42 per cent considered themselves liberals, 39 per cent said they were middle of the road and only 19 per cent identified themselves as conservatives. While our sample was too small to draw conclusions about the politics of the White House beat, there are reasons to believe that as employees of larger, more influential news organizations, these reporters were to the left of their brethren who worked for smaller or more specialized publications.

Political Leanings Balance

Thirteen years—and two conservative Presidents—later, we asked this question: "On a scale of 4 with 4 being very conservative politically and 1 being very liberal, where would you place yourself?" Thirty-three reporters responded:

Liberal 42.4 per cent
Middle of Road 24.2
Conservative 33.3

Thus the White House press corps might be best characterized as liberal and considerably more conservative than it used to be. As Julia Malone of the Cox Newspapers told me, "You don't find many New Dealers in this crowd." And even ABC's Brit Hume, an outspoken conservative, claims to have seen White House reporters singing the national anthem. "That," he says, "is new." Most conservatives are men between the ages of 40 and 49; those in their 30's and 50's are equally liberal and equally conservative; women place themselves in the middle, but they were least likely to answer our question. TV reporters are more conservative than newspaper reporters.

We also asked the White House reporters whether they thought they were to the right or left of "the whole Washington press corps." Of those who answered, nearly half (48 per cent) said that they were to the right (i.e., more conservative), 30 per cent judged themselves to the left (more liberal) and 22 per cent said they were the same. This, by the way, is the same response that we got in 1978: Washington reporters are likely to think that other Washington reporters are more liberal than they are.

It might be possible to construct a bend-over-backwards theory about journalists' politics from the general impression that White House reporters were kinder to Republican Reagan than to Democrat Carter. My suspicion, however, has always been that Washington journalists' likes and dislikes are based more on style than substance. For example, I concluded after a year of lunch table conversations with Senate reporters in 1984 that they liked conservative Barry Goldwater and disliked conservative Jesse Helms, liked liberal Pat Moynihan and disliked liberal Howard Metzenbaum.

Does It Matter?

Now, let's turn to the original question: Does it make any difference who covers the president? Which is really the question: Would a different White House press corps do a better job?

I shall respond in terms of ability, representativeness and function. And I shall conclude that their ability is adequate to their assignment; their representativeness—that is, the match between their personal characteristics and a national composite—is irrelevant; and, that their function makes them far less important power players than they are popularly assumed to be.

We have seen that these reporters are an exceptionally experienced bunch—averaging 19 years in journalism, 13 years in Washington, five years on the White House beat. They have been tested in other places. This is important for the type of daily reporting that they are paid to practice. Each week they average eight stories, of an average length of 930 words.

They have had a considerable amount of schooling for practitioners of a semiprofession that does not require advance training for licensing or accrediting purposes, even while we could wish that their knowledge was deeper in those areas that a president must be regularly involved in, such as economics.

We could also wish that they were not such politicoids (a word I just made up, meaning resembling politicians) in that it is their habit to see every issue through a political lens. A story about competing tax proposals of resident and Congress, for instance, is most likely to be shaped in terms of political winners and losers, rather than in programmatic terms. The reason for this is that the reporters know more about politics than they know about tax policy. There is a political element to every presidential action, of course, but it is not the only element nor even always the most important element.

Unfortunately, however, only professional football teams can afford to have a highly trained specialist for every conceivable circumstance. A running back for first downs and a running back for third downs. At the White House, news organizations must go with intelligent generalists.

Representativeness

When we speak of representativeness it should be obvious that we are really talking about selective representativeness. Only about one in five Americans has finished four years of college, for example, but this is not a statistic that we would want to see represented in those who report for us on the activities of the President of the United States.

When we speak of representativeness we are referring at root to the variables of race and sex. There are excellent reasons why we should like to see a White House press corps that parallels the nation's demographics. It would say good things about the openness of the journalism business, and, indeed, it would say good things about the position of women and minorities in our society. It would not, however, change—for better or worse—the state of reportage from the White House. If you don't believe me, try this simple experiment: cut out the bylines on daily newspaper stories and then see if your friends can tell whether they were written by a man or a woman, a black or a white. I guarantee that they cannot. (I've played this game with my students at Harvard, Johns Hopkins and UCLA, so I've got a pretty safe bet!)

This is not to say that I believe every reporter will report every story from the same perspective. There are some stories that touch special sensitivities and thus demand special professional alertness. In October, 1989, the Center for Media and Public Affairs published a study of abortion coverage from The New York Times, The Washington Post, ABC, CBS and NBC, and found, "In stories reported by males, the two sides were evenly balanced. In stories reported by females, pro-choice outnumbered pro-life views by a 2-to-1 margin.

But reporters at the White House are given the same perspective to observe the same events. Differences among reporters' stories largely involve writing style, and only to that degree are they "influenced by their own backgrounds" (as Hertsgaard contended). A more accurate description of White House reporting—which explains what is known as pack journalism—was provided by Timothy Crouse, who wrote of reporters covering a Presidential campaign, "They arrived at their answers just as independently as a class of honest seventh graders using the same geometry text—they did not have to cheat off each other to come up with the same answer."

To start thinking about the function performed by White House reporting, let us imagine the pointillist painting "A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte" by Georges Seurat. You will recall the late 19-Century scene: men and women strolling or sitting on the grass, flowered bonnets and parasols, top hats and walking sticks, children and dogs, even a pet monkey. And what is remarkable, of course, is that the entire scene has been constructed out of thousands of tiny dots. Now imagine that the painting is a president's term in office—"Sunday in the Park With George Bush." Each dot represents a reporter's story. Stand close to the canvas and all you discern are dots, slightly different in shape and color; only as you move away from the canvas do the figures and the design become obvious.

Does it make any difference if one reporter's dots are slightly bigger or slightly brighter than another reporter's? The answer is no, partly because there are so many dots. But the answer also has to do with the dots.

It is June 18, 1982, a lovely late spring day in Washington, and Sam Donaldson and I are sunning ourselves outside the press room on the north lawn of the White House, a place you know from the nightly news. He is describing for me how the three network correspondents covered President Reagan's speech to the United Nations the day before in New York. ABC and CBS had a shot of Japanese delegates examining Reagan's Teleprompter. It's not important to the story, he says, but a nice touch. He notes that it wasn't used by NBC. CBS had the best intro—a montage of delegates from warring countries (Israel and Lebanon, Britain and Argentina), all listening to the U.S. President. Sam thinks this is classy. I am impressed, as always, by Donaldson's knowledge and technique. The differences he outlines may be important to Sam & Chris & Judy, to their executive producers and to Michael Deaver. But the dots are not distinct enough to change the president's painting. Under some circumstances fierce competition produces uppercut journalism—two Little Rock papers locked in mortal combat, for example—but at the White House competition among journalists means making sure that you never have to say you're sorry to someone back in the home office.

For Mark Hertsgaard, the radical reformer, the function of the White House press corps apparently is to expose the corruption of the presidency, as long as it is done to his specifications. For Mark Rozell, the political scientist, the function of the White House press corps seems to be to practice political science without a license, a sort of national teacher about what presidents should and should not be doing. But for mainstream media, who pay for the reporters to be at the White House, the press corps is neither reformer nor teacher.

White House reporters are there as the dot makers of the presidency painting. Dot makers should not be confused with the artist. Dot makers have no scheme for the painting nor vision of how they want it to turn out in the end. Honorable dot makers tell us what they see and hear each day and try not to tell us what they do not know. Talented dot makers tell their tales of Presidents with flair, luring us into the web of stories. Experienced dot makers keep out of traps that are set for them by the president's friends and enemies.

They are not so remarkable that they cannot be replaced by other honorable, talented, experienced journalists. Henry Graff seems to see their role in almost mythic terms. But he is a historian and can stand back farther from the canvas. For me it is sufficient that when given their chance they do necessary and useful work. ■

Five Ideas

continued from page 2

and makes decisions; whom the candidate listens to; to whom or what is the candidate beholden. For television why not the Ken Burns approach of still photos, music and the real words of the candidate and people who know the candidate? These pieces can be run more than once during a campaign. Not a denigrating seven-dwarfs approach but a Mr. Smith-wants-to-go-to-Washington approach.

4. Making sense of issues.

There is plenty of inherent drama in issues such as relative spending for defense and social programs, world economy, health care, education. One reason there is great reluctance to cover these issues thoroughly is concern that we'll wind up alienating an audience of the right or the left. Depoliticize the presentation. There are more than two sides to these issues. Much experimentation with new approaches to almost every domestic program is going on at the state level. What messages are the voters of Washington state or Massachusetts or New Mexico sending in the way they are reacting to health care issues or unemployment or crime and punishment?

5. A little history won't hurt.

We missed a real opportunity to knit something together with the pair of winter elections. Harris Wofford's victory and David Duke's sudden emergence offered two views of the politics of economic scarcity and fear. When the economy turns sour and people begin to lose jobs the politicians become fearful of how people respond. Harris Wofford won by offering hope; Duke lost by offering scapegoats. It was Franklin Roosevelt-Huey Long all over again. The stuff of legend. It could be the stuff of riveting and informative news coverage. ■

Journalists as Fiction Writers

Reporters Who Have Made the Switch Are Divided Over Value of News to Creative Writing

In 1949, WHEN "The Way West" was published, the author, A.B. Guthrie, was asked whether his years as a reporter and newspaper editor had helped him as a fiction writer. Guthrie, who spent a great deal of his year as a Nieman Fellow working on "The Big Sky," answered with a resounding "No!"

The Pulitzer Prize winning novelist and screen playwright went even further, saying journalistic experience was harmful to creative writing. News reporting stifles the imagination, he insisted, by its emphasis on facts, and paralyzes style with its straight-declarative sentences. The only value to novelists he saw in news reporting was the rough life that police reporters often observe. A few months of that, Guthrie said, was enough; further experience was harmful.

In reply, many journalists can name reporters who have become successful fiction writers–Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Jack London and Ernest Hemingway. Of these four authors, it was Hemingway, perhaps the leading American novelist of the Twentieth Century, who most specifically credited his newspaper experience for help in developing his writing style. In an interview in 1940, Hemingway, who was a cub reporter on The Kansas City Star in 1917, recalled his boss, an assistant city editor named C.G. (Pete) Wellington: "Wellington was a stern disciplinarian, very just and very harsh, and I can never say properly how grateful I am to have worked under him." Wellington was under orders to enforce The Star's 110 rules for writing vigorous journalistic English. These included short sentences, a plainness of expression with a minimum of adjectives and avoidance of slang that had lost its freshness. "These were the best rules I ever learned for the business of writing," Hemingway said. "I've never forgotten them. No man with any talent, who feels and writes truly about the thing he is trying to say, can fail to write well if he abides by them." The famed editor Maxwell Perkins, who edited Hemingway's books at Scribners, said that it was at The Star that Hemingway "began to learn."

With this background in mind, Nieman Reports asked Anne Bernays, who teaches fiction writing and journalism at Harvard, and journalists who have turned to fiction for comments on the value of news reporting to creative writing. Here is what they say.

Anne Bernays

Anne Bernays is the author of eight novels, among them, "Growing Up Rich" and "Professor Romeo." With Pamela Painter she collaborated on "What If? Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers." She has taught writing at the Harvard Extension School, Holy Cross College, Boston College, the University of Massachusetts and elsewhere.

JERRY BAUER

Journalism doesn't seem to give its practitioners more of an edge vis a vis the writing of fiction that any other racket does. On the one hand, journalists have a distinct head start on the non-writing population because they already know—or should, anyway—how to make every word count.They understand the value of clarity, precision and the telling detail.

On the other hand, they're often behind the rest of us because they've trained themselves not to order the single most crucial item on every fiction writer's menu,. namely, imagination.

The upside and the downside cancel each other out.

The trick for a professional journalist who wants to write short stories or novels is to incapacitate his or her internal censor and start making things up and taking emotional risks. From having had several journalists in my fiction workshop at the Harvard Extension School, I'm convinced that this is the hardest and, in some ways, the most daunting operation they have to perform. While other students are still slogging through the rudiments of clear, direct, evocative prose, our journalists are bravely trying to pick up the axe with which to cut off their censor's head. They'll take a story just so far and then get stuck: "I don't know what to do next." They don't know what to do next because they're not thinking like storytellers—they're sticking to the known, the seen, the easily heard, the verifiable. They don't realize that they have to make their characters do and say any and everything no matter how far out, heart-wrenching, brutal, or funny it seems—so long as it's plausible within its context.

While journalists have many of the basic skills and techniques of fiction down cold, some of them are reluctant or scared to re-tool their heads and flex their psychic muscles. And it can't be "taught" the same way other, more mechanical techniques can; it's not like

learning when to use dialogue and when to avoid it, how to stay away from adjectives and adverbs and how to handle exposition.

The would-be fiction writer is either willing to let go emotionally or not—and this is what's going to make the difference between a competent writer and a writer whose work echoes long after you've finished reading their story or novel.

Among the very best students I've had over the 15 years or so that I've been teaching were: a day care center worker, an ordinary seaman, a college French teacher, an unpaid editorial intern, a young mother with two babies, a teen-aged high school drop-out, an Army court martial lawyer. A working journalist in one of my classes was a Boston Globe copy editor, Fran Schumer, who eventually had a short story published, as well as a book about Mary Cunningham. All of which underscores what I said in the beginning: journalists are in the middle of the pack, along with the bartenders, waitresses, social workers, computer programmers and other assorted laborers who are determined to see their fiction in print.

Paul Hemphill

Paul Hemphill, Nieman Fellow 1969, has been a sports writer, editor and general columnist on newspapers as well as a magazine writer and editor. He has published eight books, including three novels, "Long Gone," "The Sixkiller Chronicles" and "King of the Road." "Long Gone," his first novel, was produced as an HBO film. He is Writer-in-Residence at Brenau College in Georgia.

Funny you should ask what influence a newspaper background has on the writing of fiction. In the same day's mail there came the first rejections of my fourth novel. Some key phrases from a half-dozen editors: "...too neatly resolved...narrative lacks force and drive... written almost as non-fiction...a bit too simple, its ending foretold, lacking the necessary tension...[the story] begins to fade and never regains its momentum..." They generally praise my "ear for dialogue" and "attention to detail" and "distinctive voice," things I learned during my years as a journalist, but these strengths aren't quite enough for the writing of a novel. Back to the drawing board. Again.

All things considered, I think a background in journalism is more of a hindrance than a help for one who would write fiction. Even though I was a columnist, spinning out a 1,000-word human drama every day of the week for five years (a pine box arrives at the Atlanta airport from Vietnam at 4 a.m., and so on, the New Journalism Jimmy Breslin was doing at The Herald Tribune in the Sixties), writing these sharp little vignettes to illuminate the larger issue, telling a story with a beginning and a middle and an end, employing a style that some called (not always kindly) "faction," I nevertheless had to operate within the parameters of journalism. I was still a reporter, charged with getting to the point as clearly and succinctly and as accurately as possible.

It was not until I was struggling with my first novel (drawn from my experience in minor-league baseball) that I fully understood what Hemingway had said in an interview: "On The [Kansas City] Star you were forced to learn to write a simple declarative sentence. This is useful to anyone. Newspaper work will not harm a young writer and could help him if he gets out of it in time." Newspapering had taught me the simple declarative sentence and much more—coming up with ideas, researching, handling dialogue, getting to the essence, rewriting, plain hard work—but in no way had it prepared me for the real stuff of writing fiction: nuance, mystery, drama, tension, withholding material until its time has come. Readers of newspapers are too impatient for that. They want it now and they don't intend to re-read your stuff to see if they missed something.

So I'm back at work on my latest tale, about a young mountain couple adrift in the city. The characters are rich, the locations are right, the premise is good. As with the other three novels, it's just going to take time. "Hemphill," says one of those editors who rejected it so far, "has to find some way to convey all that information through the drama rather than simply plopping it down on the page." He's right, of course, and major surgery is about to be performed.

There is a poem I came across once while teaching freshman English, of all places, and although I can carry a barroom baseball discussion to ethereal levels by reciting it, I find it helpful at times like this when I need to be reminded of the basic differences between fiction and non-fiction. The poem is "Pitcher," by Robert Francis, and it is not about baseball:

> His art is eccentricity, his aim
> How not to hit the mark he seems
> to aim at,
> His passion how to avoid the
> obvious,
> His technique how to vary the
> avoidance,
> The others throw to comprehend.
> He
> Throws to be a moment misunder-
> stood.
> Yet not too much. Not errant,
> arrant, wild,
> But every seeming aberration
> willed.
> Not to, yet still, still to communi-
> cate
> Making the batter understand too
> late.

Dan Wakefield

Dan Wakefield, Nieman Fellow 1964, is the author of five novels including the best-sellers "Going All the Way" and "Starting Over," and seven non-fiction books. His newest, "New York in the Fifties," will be published in May by Houghton Mifflin/Seymour Lawrence.

When I read in college that Ernest Hemingway had gone to work for The Kansas City Star as a kind of apprenticeship to writing fiction, I felt elated. Suddenly my summer replacement jobs on the sports desk of The Indianapolis Star and as a general assignment reporter for The Grand Rapids Press took on new meaning. I had not only been earning some money for college and learning the craft of journalism, I was also preparing myself for the novel I dreamed of someday writing!

My reaction may have been overly romantic, but I still think there's truth to the notion that reporting the news is

a valuable preparation for writing fiction. As a reporter you must look and listen, absorb information, then shape it and make sense of it.

The same basic process goes on in writing a short story or novel. You have to be accurate in fiction as in journalism — to details, nuances, dialogue, all of which must "ring true." To be any good at writing fiction, you must be "emotionally accurate." If you're not, you simply lose the reader — but before that you lose the editor, and your work may never see the light of print.

For every novel I've written, I've spent many weeks in the open stack periodical room of The Boston Public Library, doing research, the same way I would do it for a journalistic assignment. My first novel, "Going All the Way," was written in 1968-69, but set in the summer of 1954, and I needed to go back and see what the songs and books were then, the fashions, the news stories, the subjects that were uppermost in people's minds and conversations. I learned a lot just by looking at the ads, to see the way people dressed, what styles and fashions were popular. In the first chapter of the novel I had my hero, Sonny Burns, reading an issue of Newsweek on the train he took home from his Army service to show not only his attitudes about what was going on, but to evoke that time through the events that pervaded peoples' consciousness.

When I created the TV series "James at 15" for NBC in 1977, I started by researching it as a reporter—interviewing high school kids to find out their current concerns, the dress codes, the key words and slang, the dating and mating customs and rituals, and how they differed from the ones I knew growing up in the Fifties. It was my confidence in the techniques of journalism—my faith in research and interviews—that gave me the belief I could write such a show when I had never before written anything for television.

I just finished writing a non-fiction book on New York in the Fifties, and out of my research and interviews on the subject came a desire to write a novel set in the same period. Now that I know about it as a journalist, I feel I'm prepared to write about it as a novelist.

William Montalbano

Bill Montalbano, Nieman Fellow 1972, is Rome Bureau Chief for The Los Angeles Times. He is (fitfully) at work on his fifth novel.

Every sprinter ought to run a marathon now and then. It works different muscles. It's hard. It exercises the mind.

That's one reason I write fiction. Another is that I enjoy telling stories, and not all of them fit in neat newspaper columns. Foreign correspondence is my trade, fiction my hobby.

To a certain extent, one fuels the other. I get paid to go to strange, often spooky places that other writers dream about. I meet characters who practically vault between book covers, so compelling is their presence. In an Athens cafe, a Portuguese fishing boat, dialogue writes itself. A reporter synthesizes. Only a tiny portion of what I see and hear, smell and feel, can I cram into the daily canvas on which I must paint. The rest I cache.

But there are limits. I sometimes report events so grotesque in their absurdity that no editor would buy them as fiction. Last year alone: half a million Kurds crouched defenseless on a Turkish mountainside in the rain, pathetic losers of the war America won; 20,000 Albanians battled on an Italian dock for scraps of bread, the victors in a struggle against collapsing communism.

Daily journalism, particularly foreign correspondence, offers bountiful grist, but a fiction writer, alas, must build his own mill. It is daunting work; shucking the inverted pyramid, unraveling hard-learned feature formulae, unfettering an 800-word mind. Worth it? Yes. But it doesn't come easy. To plot is to squirm. To write is to sweat. Too often, reading the result is to fume.

Once, in a mercifully brief incarnation as an editor, I was a fairly productive fiction writer. I went home at night bristling with untapped energies. It doesn't take much.

The correspondent's world is more hopscotch than Monopoly. I always vow to write fiction on long airplane rides and once actually did half a chapter on a flight to Easter Island. But most often on planes I find myself next to smuggler monks or manic bankers much more engaging than characters who lurk, half-known, in my subconscious.

Occasionally a correspondent finds himself on garrison duty, nailed to one place away from home for a prolonged stay: I spent four years in Amman one month. At such times, I always resolve to hit fiction a good lick. Invariably, though, at day's end in my hotel room-cell, decision weighs: write a story, or summon the courage not to file that day. Scant room for fiction, either way.

No complaints. I enjoy being a fly-by-night correspondent; besides, that's what pays the bills. The books will come when they are ready. Because they are challenging, expanding, fun to do. Because they also make some money. And because, as a matter of principle, every hack ought to write something he can confess is fiction.

Smith Hempstone

Smith Hempstone is Ambassador to Kenya. He wrote his first novel, "A Tract of Time," in the year 1964-65, when he was a Nieman Fellow. He was assisted by "the late, great Ted Morrison" the much-revered Harvard teacher of creative writing.

During my 36 years as a newspaperman, I wrote three other books: two nonfiction works on Africa, and a second novel, "In the Midst of Lions," set in the Middle East during the 1967 Six-Day War. That was published in 1968.

I think a newspaper background is a mixed blessing for an aspiring writer, whether fiction or nonfiction. It is a good background in the sense that it does (or did) expose one to many aspects of life closed to other observers. It also instilled in one the sense of self-discipline required if one is to sit down and write a book rather than just talking about it.

On the other hand, a newspaper background has its negative aspects. In the first place, one gets accustomed to

what one may call formula writing. The newspaper business certainly has its share of cliches and few of us are immune to them.

I guess my advice to a young newspaperman who wanted to write fiction would be similar to what Ernest Hemingway once offered: Newspapering is fine, but get out before it ruins you. Ward Just is a good example of someone who did just that. I guess I would add David Halberstam, but the list is, I am afraid, rather short.

Volta Torrey

Volta Torrey was named by his electrical engineer father after the inventor of the battery. Volta was a newspaper reporter and editor for many years, also a magazine writer and an editor of Popular Science and for 20 years a writer for MIT and the space administration. A Nieman Fellow 1940, he lives in Palo Alto, CA.

When I was young, I wrote enuf fiction to convince me I should not write any more.

Thomas Sancton

Thomas Sancton, Nieman Fellow 1942, is working on his third novel. He lives in New Orleans.

Whenever a newspaperman who has done one or two or many novels is tempted to think of his doorbell-ringing, picture-stealing, taxi-riding days as the essential part of life which made the novels possible—as in my own case—he has got to remember also that greater category who did not need it, the isolated marvels who had no experience at all. Jane Austen and the Brontes are the most famous examples; but there are many others. "In tragic life, God wot—" wrote Meredith, "no villain need be. / Our passions spin the plot./ We are betrayed by what is false within." And we are empowered by what is empowered within. Waking up to a bowl of oatmeal could be the experience of Jocasta and the plotting of Oedipus Rex, for Charlotte Bronte.

Randall Jarrell, who apparently preferred the manageable limits and the line by line perfection of a beautiful poem, defined the novel as "a prose work of a certain length and there is something wrong with it." Except for the very greatest, there is something wrong with almost every novel we can think of. You hit the wall, as a novelist, when you begin to see what is wrong with your own book. Sometime it takes 10 pages, sometimes 10 chapters; sometimes only the beginning—as with Snoopy—"it was a dark and stormy night—" Then what? Newspaper training can help a writer drive on, carrying the wall with him, it may be, right to the end. But newspaper training can also so generalize and flatten his impressions and the verbs and nouns that go with them that his own banality (and hers, we now add) defeats him at the start, and he goes through life selecting fine titles for something that will never be written. The banality of "Les Miserables," of "Gone With the Wind," of "Little Dorrit"—which might have choked up the strong esthete but weak writer, was swept right along by the forces of nature who did those books All three (Victor Hugo, Margaret Mitchell, Charles Dickens) got that drive to the end of the story from their journalism. Dickens in youth wrote his copy in stage coaches to swinging lantern lights—returning from great political speeches to the typesetters. Robert W. Chambers, whose historical novels of the American Revolution dominated bestseller lists, advised "five years of reporting then get out." Bestseller writing was not part-time work.

"The great song we hear no more / Yet there's delight in what we have—/ The rattle of pebbles on the shore / Under the receding wave." (Yeats). A Homer we will hear no more. Gogol's "Dead Souls," Tolstoy-Dostoevsky-Proust-Dickens's "Bleak House," "Nicholas Nickleby"—something like—we will never meet again, for the mind's climate has changed on earth. But the seas remain the same. The surges within remain the same. Our passions forever spin the plot. Then, if we need to talk about it, we have the 300 pages still to do. Since, in this survey, the question has been asked, I can say that I was empowered to rattle my two pebbles, to write and publish my two novels, only, as I regard my own makeup, by the deep grooving of the writing habit that was forced on me by years of pounding those magical old Underwood No. 5 typewriters which went along with the Front Page clamor, glamor, foolishness, and wonder, of our days.

Joanne Omang

Joanne Omang reported on Latin America for The Washington Post. Her first novel, "Incident at Akabal," is reviewed in this edition of Nieman Reports. She is working on a second book. She lives in Washington with her husband, the writer David Burnham, a former reporter for The New York Times.

If journalism is the most fun you can have with your clothes on, then reporters trying to write fiction are starting out fully dressed at the nudists' convention.

By definition journalists are buttoned up, hiding everything personal, relishing the front-row seat but not the stage, and it's uncomfortable to see all these novelists exposing scars and warts and sagging flesh to just about anybody who comes along.

For a journalist, learning to write fiction is learning to take it all off, drop trou, expose yourself to art and learn to say what the hell, I'm just like everybody else after all—it's journalism dishabille.

Reporters should be natural novelists. Like most readers of fiction, they're curious about the world's most interesting people; they relish the excitement of high-stakes conflicts; they lust for a good story. And they know the drama comes from the suffering of individuals. But journalists are cowards of commitment. It's part of the code that getting the story out is more important than whom it might hurt, so the best journalists try to avoid involvement with their subjects., if only to avoid hurting friends. We tell the world that a conflict exists, and then run back and forth

between the partisans, calling out the yardage. We can care what happens, yes, but we shouldn't let on; with practice many journalists avoid caring altogether.

The best do care, of course, and this is probably the reason so many journalists have a fragment of a novel tucked in a drawer somewhere—the effort not to care is just too hard. With fiction, one is liberated: caring is required.

Journalists have two great advantages over many other would-be writers of fiction. One, they seldom get writer's block. Accustomed to going with what they've got when deadline approaches, most journalists can crank out something anytime they sit down at a keyboard. And two, unlike many writers, they have some interesting life experiences to chew over, think through and write from. As Annie Dillard put it in her fine book, "The Writing Life:"

> Many writers do little else but sit in small rooms recalling the real world. This explains why so many books recall the author's childhood. A writer's childhood may well have been the occasion of his only firsthand experience.

Not for journalists. Of course, what they write fast and fluently can still be dreck, and that's the problem. So far I've found at least six drastic differences between writing journalism and writing fiction:

1. Fiction is like going into journalistic reverse. Reporters take a huge cloud of events and crush it down into a few words; novelists take a little idea, an image or a thought and blow air into it for 300 pages.
2. Fictional facts don't really matter. I wrote 130 pages before I fully understood that I could change a quote.
3. Everything you know and feel is relevant. Everything, not just what you've checked. And you don't know what you know or what you feel until you're writing, exposing yourself.
4. People in fiction are not depicted in order to illustrate events, as they are in journalism; events occur to help define the people. This is very hard for journalists to grasp and leads to many bad novels.
5. You cannot tell whether fiction you write is any good, and it's so naked a thing that your best friends are embarrassed to tell you. The only opinion that matters is that of a disinterested professional. Get an agent.
6. No one is going to yell at you to finish your novel. You have to learn, every day, all the time, to yell at yourself.

Suzanne R. Wetlaufer

Suzanne Wetlaufer, 32, received her B.A. and M.B.A. from Harvard. She was a staff reporter at The Miami Herald and The Associated Press before writing her first novel, "Judgment Call," which will be published by William Morrow in July. She lives in the Boston suburb of Newton.

There is a place in my book called "Nerve Central," a revved-up kinetic, unrelentingly important place where reporters at the "Miami Citizen" get their front page stories assigned and edited, a place where they huddle over cups of Cuban coffee and exchange scintillating gossip, a place where they curse each other out, scream about journalism ethics, and fall madly in and out of love.

There is no City Desk in the world like Nerve Central, But my editor loves it. "So cinematic!" she says. "I can just see it. I can hear it!"

I do not love Nerve Central. In fact, every time I encounter it, I feel queasy at its lack of veracity, at its reckless disregard for the truth. I recall the real city desks of my career—couple of tables shoved together in the middle of the newsroom, staffed by a crew of overworked editors, some great, some not, none of them ranting "Get me copy, fast, or you're outta here!" I suppose curses flew around the City Desk at The Miami Herald and the AP now and again, and I guess I heard journalism ethics debated too, and certainly there were newsroom romances that played out before everyone's watchful eyes—but never with the unrelenting drama and intensity of "Nerve Central." And that is why every time I think about "Nerve Central" I cringe. "What," I ask myself, "would Edna Buchanan think if she read this? She would...she would scoff at me." I have broken the Golden Rule of Reporting. I've lied.

And therein, for me, rests the problem with being a journalist-turned-novelist. Journalists tell the truth. They traffic in accuracy. They uncover falsehoods. They expose those who mislead, misrepresent and misspeak. I did this too; I was a good soldier in the Truth Army. Once, covering a murder trial in Boston for the AP, the victim's wife screamed out a few words of grief at the three reporters across the room. None of us could make them out—that was agreed. Next day, the reporter sitting beside me quoted her: pure fabrication. To my mind, he wasn't a journalist any more.

But novelists, well, we don't have to tell the truth. We can make up what the murder victim's wife screamed—and anything else that the plot of our story demands. A cop's tragic life story, a murderer's unexpectedly altruistic motives, a D.A.'s hidden agenda. Which is not to say real events and people aren't fascinating fodder in and of themselves—far from it—but novelists have a license to run with the story. We embellish it. Twist it and turn it in ways that make it more immediate and meaningful. Easy to say now, yes, but it took me three years of writing and one year of rewriting to unlearn journalism's basic tenets and accept these declarations. I was urged on by my editor, who repeatedly reminded me: it's fiction. You're free. Let go of rules.

And so I have. Of course, like most novelists, much of what I write is based in truth. Much of it is based in experience. I would have never been able to write my book if I hadn't been a journalist, because being a journalist taught me how to listen, look and write, not to mention how to cut my own copy. But now that I've retired from the Truth Army, I get to play with characters and ideas and words with a wonderful new latitude. Still, the guilt remains, quietly, almost as if I've betrayed former com-

rades, gone over to the other side, the side where "Nerve Central" is as real as I want it to be.

Marguerite Del Giudice

Marguerite Del Giudice was a reporter for The Boston Globe and The Philadelphia Inquirer. Since leaving The Inquirer she has written as a free lance for The New York Times Magazine and other publications.

Over 20 years in journalism, I have saved all the notes from every story I have ever written—transcripts of interviews, descriptions of places, newspaper clippings, documents, souvenirs. I have also accumulated endless journal dreck about my own life and compiled a copious oral family history based on interviews with my parents and relatives. The result is that I am overwhelmed with "material" and I find that when I sit down to write something fictional, the habits formed from so many years of gathering "facts" compel me like a lemming to rely on that material rather than my imagination—whether I refer to the files or not.

In my untrained youth I could sit down at a rickety Underwood the night before fiction-writing class and dreamily hammer out a 3,000-word short story about a hanging in the West during the 1860's, or two teenagers falling in love on a hayride, or a one-act play involving a family in a room during the reading of a will. These dramas were always just there, waiting for me to pluck them out; who knows where they came from?

Now I have plenty of life experience to draw from, and journalism has given me more dramas than I know what to do with. But the "fictive dream" state is what I want to regain, that and the trust of my own imagination. I'm trying to pull off a power reversal: imagination in control of the facts, rather than the other way around.

William Beecher

Bill Beecher is Washington bureau chief of The Minneapolis Star Tribune. His first novel, "Mayday Man," came out in 1990.

As some would insist, not the most kindly associates and sources, I've been writing fiction in Washington for more than 30 years—for The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Boston Globe and The Minneapolis Star Tribune. But only in my first novel, "Mayday Man," is my work so labeled.

So much for truth in labeling.

There are, of course, many differences in the pursuit of news and muse. But to the extent that fiction aspires to believability, the experiences of the reporter are invaluable.

Some successful novelists have revealed research on locale as taking them no farther from home than the local library, where they can harvest street names and local lore from the National Geographic and travel magazines. Others go on grand, first-class tours, paid for out of the indulgence of the friendly IRS.

As for me, having long ago misplaced my library card, and having neither the time nor chutzpah to enlist Uncle Sam as my travel agent and partner, I prefer the osmotic process of getting a feel for places, cultures, values and moods from my working assignments, at home and abroad. In "Mayday Man," for instance, when I described scenes at Wadi Natrun, an out-of-the-way air base in Egypt, or Moshav Neve Ilan in the Judean Hills, I drew on vivid memories.

More important still, the widespread feeling of angst and betrayal that many Egyptian officers felt about Anwar Sadat's peace terms with Israel, part of the background of the book, came through in numerous hushed conversations in Cairo during the period. So, too, the ever present Israeli nervousness about living on the edge of danger in a deeply hostile neighborhood.

Core ideas for novels spring from such experiences, as well, more ideas than there is time to pursue.

The reporter's discipline of being careful about facts, of not blithely accepting the conventional wisdom, of having an acute sense of skepticism and curiosity, also serve.

The most telling difference—and it is a joy to the newsman—is the uplifting feeling of liberation. Free of space limitations. Free of constant deadlines. Free of conventional writing constraints. And free, when the mood moves, to create your own small piece of eternity, with your own characters, plots, outcomes. The novelist is a mini-god in a place of his own making.

But the seventh day is not for rest. It's for writing.

Dave Stout

Dave Stout, a copy editor on the National Desk of The New York Times, is the author of "Carolina Skeletons," a mystery based on the true story of George Stinney, who, in 1944, at the age of 14, was the youngest person to be legally executed in this century. The novel, Dave's first, was published in 1988 and dramatized on NBC last September.

Is a newspaper background a help or hindrance in writing fiction? Sure it is.

There: I've been more flip and ambiguous than one is usually allowed to be (intentionally, anyhow) in the newspaper world. And now that I've indulged myself, here's a serious answer.

My newspaper background has helped my fiction writing enormously. I'll touch on some of the ways, but NOT in order of importance, for the traditional inverted-pyramid structure of hard-news writing is of no use here and is destructive to anyone's fiction style.

Words are what I do and what I am, so my years in newspaperdom—writing, editing and being edited, occasionally even being SKILLFULLY edited—have kept me in training the way running and lifting weights keeps athletes in training. What's more, newspaper work teaches you that you can't always wait until you feel like writing—and forcing yourself to write when you don't really want to, at least sometimes, is what it's all about. Anyone can write when he wants to.

And now I come to the heart of it: story-telling. If you try hard in newspaper work, you can tell a good story now and then (or, as an editor, help someone else tell a story better). You learn the difference between the cluttering detail and the authenticating one, learn pacing and variety, when to ladle on the extra word or two and when to be lean. Story-telling.

My speciality has been the mystery novel. I write what I know, and, because of my newspaper background, I know the sights and sounds and smells of police station and back alley, of courtroom and board room. I have heard the talk of lawyers and judges and factory workers and captains of industry and politicians and just plain folks. Oh, yes. And newspaper folks. I sometimes write about them.

Was it Hawthorne who said that a writer must be an icy onlooker at the feast of life? No. I have been allowed to nibble, occasionally even to dine at the feasts of others.

Food for thought. Food for writing.

Dean Brelis

Dean Brelis is author of "Run, Dig or Stay." He is a 1958 Nieman Fellow.

Fiction writing—especially novels—seems to be more favorable to journalists that writing poetry or drama for the stage. At least it is to me. I failed miserably at writing a three-act play that did get me a production contract but alas, never reached Broadway. I'm now doing a screenplay and generally, it's going okay.

To the basic question—how much hindrance journalism is to the writing of fiction in any form.

Journalism is learning and practicing objectivity. Once that's accomplished, and it is by the best of us, there's a thwarted sense of not having dealt with the subjective. You ask yourself what made this man or woman, once perceived as heroic, turn out to be a human being with feet of clay. You can't really answer the question as a journalist. You can as a novelist—look at John Hersey, Bob Shaplen, Teddy White, Bud Guthrie, Tom Wicker, Ward Just, Bill McIlwain, and many others.

The host of journalists who have written splendid non-fiction books is a classical example of the modern Thucydides emptying his exhaustive notebooks to produce a book that may be read as a history, though it may not be timeless, even proven wrong.

Fiction, on the other hand, is different, perhaps more valuable, because in the end, great fiction is not proven wrong by the passage of time. It lasts forever.

For me, journalism inculcates every smell, every emotion—fear, courage, sorrow, happiness—elements that can't be included in every story because of space, deadline, objectivity. They remain as part of the journalist's iceberg, deep down, molded into deepest meanings and understanding of the human condition. I believe these come forth into life for a journalist who decides to try his hand at writing fiction. They become his handmaids.

The journalist turned fiction-writer remembers the necessary details. They insist themselves upon him, extend his imagination, perform like dancers, far more interesting and colorful in memory than perhaps they ever were, in fact.

Fiction, it has been said, is larger than life. Journalists do not lead boring lives and when one decides to write fiction, he will not stare at chapter one, page one, for very long. All he has to do is ask himself the question--when did my career in journalism begin, where? In answering the question subjectively, he begins writing fiction.

Frank K. Kelly

Frank Kelly started out as a fiction writer, switched to newspaper reporting, returned to fiction, resumed the reporter's life, then—but you get the picture. He is a 1943 Nieman Fellow. He has been devoting most of his time for the last year to a National Council of Citizens to develop constructive nonpartisan programs for solving problems.

Life to me is a running series of stories—some of them based on the flow of events called "news," others emerging from my mind or other minds impinging on mine within a changing context created by a Larger Mind endlessly engaged in expanding and reshaping the many universes within us and around us. My experiences have convinced me that Gregory Bateson described the situation very well in his seminal book, "Steps to an Ecology of Mind":

> ...there is a large mind of which the individual mind is only a subsystem. This larger mind is comparable to God and is perhaps what some people mean by God.

I believe that this Mind—like mine—expresses what's going on in a stream of stories.

I was a writer long before I got into the newspaper business. In my teens I wrote wild tales of interplanetary explorations, which were published in science fiction magazines and later in anthologies. I don't know where I got the ideas which poured through my hands as rapidly as I could hit the typewriter keys. I think W. MacNeil Dixon, the English philosopher, was right when he said:

> Ideas are the most mysterious things in a mysterious world .... They are beyond prediction. ...They appear to have a life of their own, independent of space and time....

In college, a professor persuaded me to try various forms of fiction. One of the stories I wrote for his class—"With Some Gaiety and Laughter"—led me into journalism. It appeared in Story Magazine and then was reprinted in Edward J. O'Brien's anthology, "Best American Short Stories 1936, where it attracted the attention of an editor on The Kansas City Star. That story was about a starving unemployed veteran of World War I who attempted to sell his last valuable possession to a German pawnbroker. The story reflected the angry feelings of bitter veterans I had encountered through my father, who was severely wounded in combat in that war. Although the story was reprinted in European magazines and was the basis for a program on the National Broadcasting Company's radio network, it brought me little money. When I learned The Star might take me on as a reporter, I was immediately interested—although I had never expected to be a newspaperman.

Pete Wellington, the night managing editor of The Star, told me that he had been impressed by the quality of my writing but he had grave doubts about hiring me. He wasn't disturbed by the fact that I had never taken a course in journalism. He said: "We prefer to train people in our own way. But it will probably take you three or four years to become a good Star man. Then you'll probably do what Hemingway did. I hired him, too, and he ran off to write novels." I assured him that I would stay on The Star as long as the editors wanted me to be there. He offered me a salary of $100 a month—and I jumped at it.

My newspaper experiences both helped and hindered me as a writer. What I wrote as a reporter was checked sternly by copy editors and had to fit into the paper's "style." I chafed under the restrictions imposed upon me, but I did develop a leaner, tighter way of writing. Kansas City was a wide-open town in the 1930's, loosely governed by the corrupt Pendergast organization, and there were hundreds of stories floating through the newsrooms of The Star, The Journal-Post and other papers in the city—stories of gamblers and jazz musicians, drunken evangelists, holy rollers, politicians who won elections with stolen votes. I was stunned and shaken by the torrent of events in that vibrating city, where Tom Pendergast and Johnny Lazia fought for power—and where Harry Truman accepted the backing of the Pendergast gang to reach the Senate without being tarred by its corruption.

When I was sent to the General Hospital, which Hemingway had covered 20 years before me, I was plunged into a whirl of painful activities which made me realize how much suffering existed in that city in the depths of the Depression—and how hard it was to convey the grim realities I saw at fires, shootings, stabbings and brutal actions by policemen against striking workers. Fearing for my own life, I rode in ambulances to the scenes of murders, accidents, suicides and bloody fights. I telephoned stories to jaundiced rewritemen who boiled down tragedies into a few paragraphs that did not give readers the pain and the significance of what had happened. I realized that being a reporter for a daily newspaper was a tough and demanding job—worthy of more respect than it received—but I yearned to be free to tell stories in my own way. I was exhausted by the reporting life.

So I didn't keep my promise to Pete Wellington. In 1941 I left The Star to go to New York, determined to write novels. I lived in a bleak apartment off Seventh Avenue and began to sell fiction again. Then a friend—Hal Boyle, who later became a prize-winning war correspondent—persuaded me to join the New York staff of The Associated Press. I wrote feature stories for the AP, which were used by newspapers across the country, and I converted some of my experiences as an AP reporter into fiction published by Esquire, Liberty and other magazines. I can't remember now the exact details of how I transformed the people in news stories into character in fiction.

While I was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard in 1942, I was drafted into the United States Army. Although I couldn't hit a target on the rifle range, I was trained as an infantry soldier and sent to England early in 1944. Just before the Allied landing in France, I was pulled from the infantry and given credentials from General Eisenhower's headquarters as an army correspondent, probably on the recommendation of Hal Boyle. I landed in Normandy as a correspondent. A conversation I overheard in a bar in LeHavre between two American combat soldiers became the basis for a short story entitled "Crossing the Volturno," published in The New Yorker. That story brought out the heroism of Allied troops struggling to get across a river under fire in Italy.

I rode into Paris on that city's day of liberation in August, 1944, with General Patton's men. I used that day of triumph and turmoil, of laughter and drinking and bursts of tears, as the background for a short story about the disillusionments of an American soldier who fell in love with a French prostitute. It also appeared in an American magazine.

My first long novel, "An Edge of Light," came partly out of an experience I had in 1946. After my army service I returned to the AP and I covered some of the first sessions of the United Nations Security Council in New York. I learned from a friend that President Truman had sent a strong message to Stalin, declaring that he would urge drastic action by the U.N. to get Soviet forces removed from Iran. The principal characters in my novel were newspapermen who were trying to find "an edge of light" coming from the secret negotiations—and to discover whether the United States and the Soviets were on the verge of armed conflict. In his memoirs, Truman said later: "In early 1946 Russian activities in Iran threatened the peace of the world." He also indicated that he had made it plain to Stalin that the Soviets had to get out of Iran—and to move quickly.

Some of the readers of my novel felt that I had exaggerated the dangers in the 1946 crisis and that I had depicted Stalin in the worst possible terms. But the high tension in that book reflected the deep alarm I had at that time. I had seen the suffering of soldiers and civilians in World War II. I had come close to being killed myself. I saw a real possibility of another war on the horizon—and I tried to convey my sense of peril in that story. My work as a reporter permeated the development of that novel.

In the last 40 years I have devoted much of my time to the struggle against the arms race. I believe that all writers in this nuclear age, when the threat of annihilation still hangs over the human race, have an obligation to do as much as they can to support the United Nations and to promote the peaceful solution of all conflicts.

Bruce Grant

To Bruce Grant, Nieman Fellow 1959, writing is often a personal, as much as a professional issue. Therefore he offers the following comments with caution. Everyday moods are important, he says. Bruce, who lives in Victoria, Australia, has written one novel, some 30 short stories, eight books of non-fiction and a lot of journalism. "The evolution continues," he says.

The main hindrance in my case has been switching off the important events and influential people that journalism

depends on. These events are frequent, partly because journalism demands frequency, and the people journalism is interested in tend to change frequently, too, because their influence often depends on their positions. Journalism is therefore fascinated with what is new, neglecting what is lasting, and its attention span is short. The journalist mindset becomes apprehensive, because you are at the mercy of events, while you need confidence in your own perception of life to write fiction.

The training and discipline of journalism is, however, a help, especially once you have realized that writing other than "news" means adding bit by bit, probably daily, to the whole picture and keeping that picture in your head for a long period. I have found two assets in particular.

One: journalism appreciates the importance of detail. I'm not thinking of the simple aggregation of facts, which can obscure truth, but the opposite—pegging down a recognizable reality with a detail or two, the kind of significance detail that Chekhov said was so important and Scott Fitzgerald at his best did so well. Journalism is probably not the best training of the imagination (just as law, with its strict rules regarding admissible evidence, is probably not either) but it does help the writer to avoid those ascending levels of generality that in some fiction dispatch reality almost out of sight.

Two: the impartiality of journalism has been an asset for me. It is a persistent reminder that life is full of interesting people and they are all entitled to their say. American fiction-journalism overflows with examples, accidentally, that while a democratic outlooks does not necessarily make great fiction it helps the writer to remain open to life and to people—and therefore write readable fiction. I'm not thinking of "unforgettable characters." I'm thinking rather of Mozart, whose popular genius is that he gives every bit of life its say.

W. J. Lederer

Bill Lederer says he was the maverick of the Nieman Fellows class of 1951. "I had not come from a newspaper, but had been nominated by magazine editors and book publishers. My newspaper work was 20 years behind me; and, during my Nieman year I was on a year's leave of absence from active duty in the Navy. However, in my spare time I had written and published fiction and non-fiction magazine articles, stories, books and television material."

A poll of what the Niemans wanted to write in their spare time showed that only three of them wanted to write novels or short stories. Eight wanted to write non-fiction; and one was interested in poetry. However, all the Nieman Fellows wanted information about any kind of non-newspaper writing that could be accomplished during the spare time of the journalist's hurried and often unpredictable profession. They wanted to produce manuscripts that would be published and paid for. True, the Fellows felt that fiction was the glamour stuff, but statistics showed that in the United States only three per cent of the fiction writers sold their works. Non-fiction writing seemed more opportune because seven times as much non-fiction as fiction was published. Therefore, even if their interest was in fiction, it appeared reasonable to start with non-fiction because there are few differences between fiction and non-fiction skills and techniques.

Teachers of creative writing may dispute this and frequently emphasize the artsy and almost-holy aspects of fiction; they are often contemptuous of non-fiction, factual books and "slick" magazines. Sometimes creative-writing teachers forget that the most successful authors do not work with the intent of being artsy. What they work for is money, influence and, perhaps, fame. They create or report whatever material helps them reach their goals, regardless of its form. Also, teachers often overlook the fact that non-fiction is just as creative an activity as is fiction. Hemingway and Michener are a few modern examples. Oh, how often have I blessed Archibald MacLeish, Theodore Morrison and Robert Frost for hammering this point into our thick creative-writing conditioned skulls.

With the above in mind, the Nieman group, in November of 1950, decided they wanted a seminar in Professional Authoring. In later years, when the Professional Authoring class was available to other groups for credit, the description of the course included: "Anyone who does not have what s/he writes in this course published, and paid for, will fail the course." Some creative-writing teachers did not approve.

To get back to the Niemans: The first research done for their seminar in professional writing was to query magazine editors and book publishers regarding their opinions of manuscripts submitted by journalists. The surprise was that journalists as a class received a higher percentage of rejections than other writers. Why? Because the newspaper reporters did not know how to write well. Here are some of the editors' comments:

"Most of the journalists' manuscripts seem out of breath—as if mailed the moment they were jerked from the typewriter."

"The manuscripts usually concern hot subjects but almost always lack dialogue and anecdotes."

"Most reporters write their leads in round-up style. This gives away the entire story in the first paragraph."

"Newspapermen writing magazine pieces or books usually forget that people—not events—are the most interesting of all subjects. People (not events) are the action. People cry, dream, succeed, fail. Almost all readers want to know about a character's reaction to a situation, not the naked problem itself. Every story has the same basic plot: a person has a problem. Either the character solves the problem or the problem defeats him. If the reader does not vicariously experience what the character experiences, the story is dead. Newspaper reporters do not learn this while working for a paper."

"Often the newspaperman submits pictures with his manuscript. This is good. But too often he assumes that the

picture replaces a chunk of his writing. The writing must be able to stand on its own. The photographs are gravy."

"The most important rule of non-newspaper writing almost always is violated by journalists. This important rule is, 'Show, don't tell.' For example, the reader must not be told that a character is angry. The writer must show what the character looks like, how he moves, what s/he says so that the reader can conclude from the action that the character is angry."

"Newspapermen use too damned many adjectives and too few active verbs. Hemingway counted the adjectives and active verbs in important sections of his manuscripts. If the number of adjectives exceeded the number of active verbs, he rewrote."

"Journalists use cliches to excess. The frequent use of cliches marks the writer as slovenly, uninventive, indeed, incompetent. Yet s/he often believes the writing is worth its *weight in gold* and that the editor will wait *with bated breath* for more manuscripts. Cliches are *beyond the pale* one of the most annoying things *under the sun*. Editors *bare their teeth* when they see them. It often makes their *blood boil*. And so forth."

The above are some of the major objections given by editors after reading journalists' manuscripts.

In teaching many courses in professional authoring, it has become clear that one of the major problems, especially for a journalist, is finding spare time for outside writing. This was the Niemans' major complaint.

In researching the subject of "spare time," I interviewed 392 people who wanted to become writers. I found that these people spent on the average 27 hours each week doing such things as going to movies and sports events, at parties, visiting, gossiping, listening to the radio, watching television, reading papers, or just sitting around doing nothing over the weekend. That amounts to three full working days available for writing, enough time for a novel a year. The figure for the 22 newspaper people I interviewed was 31 hours a week.

Nieman Reports has asked how much help or hindrance a newspaper background is to fiction writing. I have discussed some of the hindrances that impede any kind of non-newspaper writing, be it fiction or non-fiction. However, a newspaper background also supplies some important helps. The reporter develops a feel for the type of human actions that excite readers to buy papers; and the reporter also acquires the habit for working on a story with energy and urgency.

A spare-time writing career for newspaper journalists is neither new nor impossible. Some of the best authors began writing in their spare time. Here are a few:

Charles Lamb (clerk), Anthony Trollope (postal worker), John Donne (minister), Bernard DeVoto (teacher), Ring Lardner (newspaperman), Somerset Maugham (medical students), James T. Farrell (baseball player), Francois Villon (thief), Pearl Buck (housewife), Jack London (laundryman), Rachel Carson (scientist), Catherine Drinker Bowen (housewife), Ernest Hemingway (reporter).

Some of these authors remained part-timers even after their works made them famous.

The question of how much help or hindrance a newspaper background is to fiction writing (and only fiction) is flimflam. The important things for journalists who want to write fiction or non-fiction for any other medium are to stick with their present job, learn how to write, arrange their lives so that their spare time is useable, and then write, write, write.

Daniel A. Neary Jr.

Off and on for 20 years Dan Neary has been writing fiction. He worked as a reporter for Vermont newspapers and in Maine and Vermont for The Associated Press. He was correspondent in charge of the AP's Montpelier bureau from 1967 to 1970. His first fiction was published in Vermont Vanguard Press Magazine in the 1980's.

I would argue that if you stay in the newspaper business too long—say more than five years—it would be a hindrance to good fiction writing because of the style imposed on writing in the newspaper business combined with the professional code that reporters should be "objective" and be recorders of events rather than participants expressing their own views.

The best fiction to me stirs the mind and the emotions. In my own case, my best stories are achieved when I am able to extend on paper words which exactly reflect the feelings and observations that are going on in my brain. Newspaper style, I'm speaking of the AP stylebook, which is adopted by many papers in New England and elsewhere, does not always permit the writer to express his or her own individuality—a requisite of good fiction writing. Consequently, if a writer has only written newspaper style—short paragraphs and brief short sentences, it is sometimes difficult to express more complicated observations and settings.

It has been my experience that long-time reporters who stay in the same job find it hard to express personal beliefs or convictions about issues of the day. They are able to process the different viewpoints and communicate these on paper, but they haven't made the leap to say this particular viewpoint is preferred or their own. Exposure to different viewpoints is good for fiction writing in that it helps to create different characters, but the best fiction has to make a comment or a statement about life. There is so much difficulty in creating fiction that the writer usually must have strong convictions about issues or questions to get this idea across to the reader.

The newspaper business can help a future writer overcome the fear of the blank page because the pressures to produce copy are enormous. But it is only the first step in writing good fiction. There are many things in writing fiction, like tension, foreshadowing, frames and other techniques which take a long time to learn. If the writer stays in the newspaper business too long, he or she will get used to expressing feelings in a newspaper style—a process which will take a long time to unlearn in order to produce individual and powerful fiction. ■

Books

Three Russian Leaders and Their Impact on History

Boris Yeltsin:
From Bolshevik to Democrat

John Morrison
Dutton, $20

Mikhail Gorbachev:
The Origins of Perestroika

Michel Tatu
East European Monographs, distributed by Columbia University Press, $24.50

Stalin:
Breaker of Nations

Robert Conquest
Viking, $25

BY JEFF TRIMBLE

IT'S BEEN ARGUED that the definitive book on the American Civil war wasn't written until 40 years after the fact, by a man who hadn't even been alive during the conflict. Stephen Crane's "Red Badge of Courage" skillfully distilled the essence of the national tragedy, capturing the war's horror and heroism for future generations far more vividly than dozens of earlier eyewitness accounts, novels and academic tracts.

Why? Because those who lived through the war couldn't put it into proper historical and social perspective. The war was the defining event of their lives, and indelibly shaped their psychological make-ups. They were in no shape to judge its real meaning. A similar argument can be made today about efforts to produce a Vietnam "epic": the truth, both factual and emotional, will be apparent only to future writers, not to the eyewitness Vietnam generation.

John Reed, the radical American journalist whose "Ten Days that Shook the World" chronicled the 1917 Russian Revolution, was convinced that his was a true history of the event. But no one turns to Reed today for objective truth about November, 1917. Warren Beatty's cinematic efforts aside, Reed has long-since been discredited as a lapdog of Lenin and the Bolsheviks. But "Ten Days" still is a rich read for its sheer drama, its detailed description of the chaos, fear, hope, cruelty and courage that marked the revolution. Reed's vivid description of events in St. Petersburg is at least a match for any of the on-scene reporting of last August's failed coup.

It will be years, if not decades, until we can judge the events unfolding in the former USSR and Eastern Europe during the last half of the 1980's and early 1990's. As with earlier historical earthquakes—such as the American Civil War and Russian Revolution—the confusion and uncertainty of the moment undermine attempts to capture events on paper. It's a story so hot that even daily newspapers have fallen behind the news curve; imagine trying to get a book on the stands before its contents are overtaken by the next lava flow.

Witness the fate of two talented journalist/scholars, John Morrison and Michel Tatu: each offers a credibly written, thought-provoking account of the perestroika years in the USSR; each is sinking already, Reed-like, as events swamp their themes and research. But then turn to Robert Conquest, the Stephen Crane of this review, whose brilliant new biography of Stalin and his times finds haunting echoes in today's Russia, the land of Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin.

Conquest Summarizes Stalin's Life and Times

"Stalin s nami"; "Stalin is with us". It was a rallying cry screamed by millions of young men on their way to certain death in World War Two, a chant intoned by farmers and industrial workers coping with appalling adversity but looking to a brighter future, a whispered mock-warning among intellectuals who knew the price to be paid for free thinking in the despot's world.

Robert Conquest shows the chilling aptness of this slogan even in today's Russia, which, he points out, is still in the death throes of the monstrous system that Stalin crafted. In the introduction to "Stalin: Breaker of Nations," the eminent historian argues that Stalin "more than any other [man] determined the course of the 20th century."

Conquest is a harsh judge of Stalin and the Soviet system. His earlier classics of Soviet history, "The Great Terror" and "The Harvest of Sorrow," were vitriolically condemned by Soviet experts, who heatedly denied Conquest's claims that millions died in Stalin's terror of the 1930's and forced agricultural collectivization. Now both books are being published in Russia with barely a raised eyebrow, amid glasnost revelations which demonstrate that Stalin's cruelty dwarfed even that of Adolf Hitler's regime.

It is the glasnost-era revelations that prompted Conquest to write the new book. "Stalin" is not an exhaustive study; rather it is a brisk summary of Stalin's life and times, with enough detail to hold interest and unencumbered by

academic mulch. He even leaves out disruptive footnotes, instead summarizing sources at the end of the book in explanatory notes pegged to each chapter.

The book clips through Stalin's busy biography: his humble birth in a Georgian peasant family as Iosif Vissarionovich Dzugashvili on Dec. 21, 1879; his tortured relationship with a cruel father; education and failure as a seminarian (later he crushed organized religion with zealous, almost gleeful, determination); his revolutionary roots and stint as a bank robber (to get money for the cause) in 1907; various exiles and slow climb into the Bolshevik elite; his careful quest for power in the 1920's; collectivization and terror of the 1930's; World War Two, and his decline and death in March, 1953.

Hitler's View of Stalin: Beast on Grand Scale

He was a loner, a rootless, restless man. At just 5'4", with a crippled arm and a face pock–marked by childhood disease, Stalin was hardly an imposing physical presence—except for his eyes. Almost everyone who met him commented on his eyes, calling them "yellow," "narrow," "wise", even "frightening." Trotsky said Stalin was a mediocrity, but not a nonentity. Another rival, Nikolai Bukharin, thought he was lazy. Lenin said Stalin was driven by spite, and warned he should be prevented from taking power. John Reed (good journalist, bad historian) wrote prophetically in 1920 that Stalin was not intellectual or well–informed but "knows what he wants. He's got will–power, and he's going to be on top of the pile some day." Stalin impressed even Hitler, who said "he is a beast, but he's a beast on a grand scale."

A single example from Conquest's book illustrates the grandness of the scale: during one afternoon on Dec. 12, 1937, Stalin and his comrade and Foreign Minister, Vychaslav Molotov, approved an execution list of 3,167 people, called it a day and went to a movie.

"Death solves all problems," Stalin is quoted as saying. "No man, no problem."

But most disturbing is the frank relevance of "Stalin" to what is happening in Russia today, as it struggles to overcome the despot's legacy. "Perhaps no other system has even been so completely based on falsehood and delusion," argues Conquest.

Stalinism, says Conquest, was about "the rapid transformation of the whole Soviet Union into a new type of social order, at a cost of enormous suffering." For the sake of some enormous experiment, Stalin was ready to sacrifice almost everything, first and foremost human lives. The question of life and death may not be so stark with Stalin's successors, but one trait endures even into this day of budding Russian democracy: flagrant lack of concern for the people, either their opinion or well–being. It's the sort of mentality that led the Russian government in January to lift price controls, sending food costs spiraling out of reach of many consumers, while not bothering to implement a coordinated plan of economic recovery at the same time.

Stalin blithely ignored the advice of experts, whether they were generals warning him about Hitler or geneticists arguing that Trofim Lysenko's theories of natural selection were nutty. The country—the people—paid the price. Mikhail Gorbachev did the same thing in the move that ensured his eventual demise, in November 1990 when he rejected a painstakingly crafted radical economic reform plan and sat down himself to draft a new scheme, which turned out to be a disastrous hybrid of reform and go–slow kowtowing to the bureaucracy. Adopted over the pleas of economists, it never got off the ground.

Stalin was plagued by lack of talent among his advisers; Boris Yeltsin is saddled today with a bizarre array of know–nothings, in their posts because of their loyalty to him.

Journalists Taken In; (So Were Liberals)

Stalin needed an enemy on whom he could blame failures and shortcomings. He chose the "kulaks," better–off peasants whom he blamed for hoarding food and exploiting laborers. Today the knife is being sharpened for entrepreneurs, who are accused of hoarding goods in order to drive up prices and profits.

Chilling too is Conquest's description of the West's wide–eyed admiration for Stalin, a self–inflicted myopia about the man and his actions. Sound familiar? Journalists, in particular, get short shrift from Conquest, who quotes from a number of adulatory interviews they conducted with Stalin. Liberal social figures also were sucked in: in 1934 H.G. Wells emerged from a meeting with the dictator saying "I have never met a man more candid, fair and honest."

When, in 1935, the death penalty for economic crimes was extended down to age 12, adoring French communists were reduced to arguing that people matured so quickly under socialism that by age 12 they already were fully responsible citizens.

Then there was the diplomatic fiasco that produced the post–war order and led to the Cold War, in which Franklin Roosevelt ignored warnings about Stalin from his seasoned diplomats in favor of amateur advice from aides such as Harry Hopkins who had been taken in by Stalin's earthy charm. Is there any lesson in this for an anxious West, looking desperately to leaders such as Gorbachev and Yeltsin as the "last" hope to stave off chaos?

In 1931, just as Stalin's twin cauldrons of collectivization and industrialization were beginning to boil, two men destined to change the course of Soviet history were born in different parts of Russia.

Boris Yeltsin was born in the Ural mountains, of peasant parents. His father soon took a factory job and added his family to the industrialization wave rolling into the big cities. Mikhail Gorbachev had peasant roots too; he was born a month after Yeltsin in a backwater village in the Russian south.

That the two men emerged atop the Soviet power structure, sometimes allied, sometimes at odds, is known by just about anyone on Earth over age five who has been conscious during the past few years. How they got to where they are is less clear. Their respective

paths to power, their real beliefs and aims and their true relationship remain hazy and the subject of continued speculation, even after close scrutiny in recent years by legions of journalists and scholars.

Morrison and Tatu Useful Books, But—

Two new books about the men don't do much to clear up these mysteries. John Morrison's "Boris Yeltsin: From Bolshevik to Democrat" and Michel Tatu's "Mikhail Gorbachev: The Origins of Perestroika" are billed as biographies; neither is. Each, in its own way, is a useful chronicle of the perestroika era. Morrison, a veteran Reuter correspondent who served in Moscow, has a Reed–like flair for gritty detail. Tatu, a journalist/Kremlinologist, offers intriguing new twists and inside details on Gorbachev's meteoric climb to power. But the sheer scope of events, and the rapidity of change, doom the books as histories and consign them to a category with "Ten Days": useful as companion readers to a fascinating time in history.

Tatu's book covers only the period through 1987 with an update in this version, a translation from the French. Morrison's book covers events through the August, 1991 attempted coup in Moscow, but leaves its main character without a hint of what was to come: Gorbachev's downfall and Yeltsin's assuming full control of Russia's fate. Not that Morrison possibly could have known this was going to happen, but events of these last months have radically shifted the nature of the story, to the detriment of earlier analyses.

Tatu abandons the biographical guise in his book's first sentence: "Even in an atmosphere of glasnost it is no easy task to learn about the early life of a Soviet leader, especially during his youth."

There's something else about that sentence: it doesn't make much sense. Many passages in "Gorbachev" don't, pointing to a shoddy translation that muddies many of this insightful analyst's points. The editing too is irritating: "Tow the line" (sic), for instance, makes at least two appearances. Editing errors include referring to the Soviet censorship agency as Slavlit (it was called Glavlit).

Tatu's early biographical notes on Gorbachev add little to the fine reporting of such journalists as David Remnick of The Washington Post, or to anecdotal material spoon-fed into Time magazine over the years by Gorbachev's PR team. At this point Gorbachev himself has revealed more about his early years in interviews and articles, and his wife Raisa added colorful details (including remarkable 1950's snapshots of herself and a debonair Gorbachev) in her recent book, "I Hope."

What Tatu does well is piece together remarkable details—mostly in the chapter "Apparatchik, 1955–1978," about Gorbachev's early advancement through the labyrinth of the Communist Party bureaucracy to a place on the Central Committee and high Moscow post (Party secretary overseeing agriculture) at a record young age.

Gorbachev Lucky But Also Skillful

What emerges is a portrait of a man who was lucky as well as skillful. As a rising young Party apparatchik in his native Stavropol region, Gorbachev was adopted as a protege by Fedor Kulakov, the region's Communist boss starting in 1960. Kulakov aligned himself in the anti–Khrushchev camp (interesting, given Gorbachev's later praise for the deposed Khrushchev's stymied reforms) and moved on to Moscow after Khrushchev's fall, keeping an eye out for young Gorbachev's interests all the while.

Also Gorbachev's region included resort areas such as Mineralniye Vodi, a mineral spring region popular with the Kremlin leadership. He befriended Yuri Andropov, who was to become his second strong Moscow supporter. It was Andropov who arranged a crucial meeting for Gorbachev in September 1978 between Gorbachev and vacationing Leonid Brezhnev. Gorbachev was offered the Moscow job shortly thereafter, and never looked back.

Tatu also unearthed another potential, but unexpected, sponsor for Gorbachev: Mikhail Suslov, the austere, Stalinist ideologist under Brezhnev. Suslov had been Party boss in Gorbachev's Stavropol region in the 1940's, and may have known Gorbachev's family or simply had an affinity for the rising young man from a region he know well.

Tatu's book concludes with an updated epilogue, but the fact that it gives Yeltsin scant attention indicates the obsolescence of the work even as it is being released. What is missing in Tatu is detail, the color that brings a book to life. Combined with the sloppy translation and editing, it makes for a tough read even at its brief (155 pages) length.

John Morrison's "Boris Yeltsin" opens with a lovely description of his return to Moscow in May, 1991, after four years away from the USSR. He has a fine eye for detail, capturing the tumultuous atmosphere of change in Russia. But when he turns to his main topic, Yeltsin, the color fades—because he didn't witness the events he is describing.

Written during a stint at Harvard's Russian Research Center, the book is a solid contemporary account of the Gorbachev era, from an unusual point of view: that of Boris Yeltsin, one–time Kremlin bad boy, now President of Russia. It includes thorough discussion of Yeltsin's major speeches during perestroika, of his coming to Moscow at Gorbachev's behest (and with future enemy Yegor Ligachev's backing) in 1985 to take over the city's Communist Party organization, of his fall from power in 1987 and triumphant uphill fight back to the top of the pile.

But the book doesn't break new reporting ground, a surprise, coming from such a respected foreign correspondent. Morrison relies heavily on Yeltsin's self–serving autobiography, "Against the Grain," in telling about his early years. There is no indication that Morrison went far afield for new information, such as a trip to Sverdlovsk where Yeltsin grew up and first held power (as a local Communist official) to dig up new facts.

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Foreign Affairs as Seen by Cartoonists (Without Hindsight)

A Cartoon History of United States Foreign Policy:
From 1945 to the Present

Nancy King Bernstein and the Editors of the Foreign Policy Association
Pharos Books, New York, 1991. $12.95

BY GEORGE DE LAMA

THERE IS SOMETHING magical about the way political cartoons tell a story that newspapers, for all their mountains of ink, cannot match in words and that television, with its torrent of fast-moving images, cannot replicate.

At their best, cartoons hit readers between the eyes with the message of the day—succinctly, crisply, often cruelly, and invariably, with humor. They bite and they kick, sometimes below the belt, but they touch something deep within the public and the politicians they so love to lampoon.

Some of the best of the best tell the story of America's involvement in the world of those frenzied postwar years in "A Cartoon History of United States Foreign Policy: From 1945 to the Present." Pulled together by the Foreign Policy Association, a nonprofit educational organization based in New York, the book is a delicious collection of some 200 classic cartoons that formed the basis for an exhibit in Philadelphia honoring the 200th anniversary of the Bill of Rights.

From the euphoric days at the end of World War II to the formalized terror of the Cold War to the uncertainty that characterizes the world in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, these cartoons provide a pictorial view of history as seen at the time, without the benefit of hindsight.

The work of such gifted practitioners of this traditional art as Mike Peters, Bill Mauldin, Herblock, Garry Trudeau,

Drawing by David Levine. Reprinted with permission from The New York Review of Books Copyright © 1966

Tony Auth and Jeff MacNelly transports readers back to the anxiety over the fate of postwar Europe, the nation's anguish over Vietnam, the frustrations of the hostage era and the amazing collapse of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe.

Political cartoons have been a staple of the American press since colonial times, providing satire and laughter and provoking thought and debate through both difficult and confident periods of American history.

As author Richard Reeves notes in his introduction, "A few deft lines, a word or two, and a little drawing by the right man or woman can be worth more than a thousand words or a thousand pages of analysis....The cartoonist is simply the shortest distance between one point and one citizen."

Not everyone is so enamored of political cartoonists and the drawings they use to explain the news, of course. If cartoons can break down a complicated situation and provide new insight, critics contend they also sometimes unfairly distort reality through oversimplification and stereotype. For years Arab-American groups have chafed at cartoons portraying Middle Eastern leaders as fat, wealthy oil sheiks, for instance, and former President Jimmy Carter long bristled at the outsized teeth and silly grin that cartoonists fixed upon in their depictions of him.

Still, cartoonists wield a powerful weapon, and politicians in particular take them and their drawings seriously, occasionally laughing at themselves even as they suffer, not always in silence.

Ronald Reagan, a genuine fan of the funny pages, used to make a practice of inviting some of the nation's top political cartoonists to the White House for an annual lunch, he enjoyed their work so much. Word was he could laugh at himself, and at their depiction of his world-class pompadour hair style, with the best of them.

Last year Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d, weary and frustrated over the slow progress of his constant shuttles to the Middle East, asked The Chicago Tribune's MacNelly for an autographed original copy of a cartoon about the rough going in the peace process. It portrayed a lonely Baker sitting on the front porch of a rundown wooden shack in the middle of the desert, open for business but not having much luck trying to sell pork ribs to Arabs and Jews.

"More parking in the Sinai," a sign outside the shack said, and none of the hundreds of stories written about the Baker missions explained more cogently the difficulties of launching a genuine peace process among the historic enemies in that turbulent part of the world.

More recently, Vice President Dan Quayle had his hackles raised by Trudeau's allegations in his comic strip Doonesbury that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration might have covered up charges that Quayle once used cocaine. Quayle and President Bush angrily denied the accusations, and in turn accused Trudeau of a smear.

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Why Latin America's Bloody Wars Rage On and On

Incident at Akabal
Joanne Omang
Houghton Mifflin Company $19.95

BY MARK SEIBEL

IN THE EARLY 1980's, as U.S. reporters were chronicling El Salvador's growing reliance on American aid, Guatemala's generals undertook a different course, forgoing U.S. military help to avoid any inconvenient attachments about respect for human rights.

Then, with no one looking over their shoulders, the generals unleashed a scorched earth campaign against the country's insurgents, the intensity of which is still being learned today. Thousands of Indians in Guatemala's highlands were summarily executed on suspicion of sympathizing with the guerrillas, and their bodies dumped into unmarked graves. Entire communities—men, women, children, farm animals—were swept up and slaughtered. Tens of thousands fled north into Mexico.

That bloodfest is the backdrop for Joanne Omang's fictional account of one Central American village's search for a way to avoid being part of the carnage. The beauty of her book lies not just in the pace and force of the tale, which encompasses a mere 24-hour period, but in the way Omang uses the personal stories of her characters to get at the deeper truths of the conflict.

For this is a struggle driven not by ideology but by the tragedies of poverty, personal betrayal and romantic rivalry. The war is less an instrument of human cunning than a sort of natural disaster, like one of the earthquakes that periodically rumble through the countryside. Human beings are caught up in its waves, but there is little they can do to influence its coming and going.

Omang's fictional Akabal could be any of the scores of one-horse towns that dot the Guatemalan highlands. All but one of its hundred or so residents are descendants of the Maya and most speak only their native Indian language; Spanish is a foreign tongue in need of translation.

Until now, the most brutal aspects of the army's anti-guerrilla campaign have skirted Akabal. A new general has recently taken command in the capital, promising less bloodshed. But the townspeople know enough to realize they are in imminent danger when they awake one morning to find an army patrol crouched on a ridge nearby.

The soldiers have been on the run all night, hot on the trail of whoever had triggered a bomb blast that devastated the nearby military barracks. The trail has led to Akabal.

Now the unit's commander, Lt. Jesus Prospero Gomez, is demanding that the town surrender one of its own, Miguel Angel Kanak. He gives the town 24 hours to comply or face the consequences, which everyone, including Gomez, knows means wholesale slaughter.

What ensues is the town's soulful search for the right thing to do. Many simply reject the idea. Miguel could not possibly be guilty and handing him to the army would mean horrible torture before the certainty of painful death. Besides, some argue, the army will murder them all anyway, Miguel or no Miguel. One resident argues that the townspeople should trust the government's new promises, arguing that Miguel will receive a fair trial. But everyone, even those who want Miguel turned over, recognize that as hopelessly naive.

Throughout the town's deliberations, one sees just how outside the control of human forces is the war that now dominates the lives of each of the book's characters. Even the commander's singling out of Miguel is more act-of-God than design. Gomez has no evidence against Miguel; Miguel's name just happens to be at the top of a list drawn up months earlier, a list the commander had forgotten about until he arrives at Akabal. For Gomez, everyone in the town is a sympathizer, and one name is as good as the next.

As luck would have it, however, Miguel is in fact the guilty party, as the reader knows from the first pages of the book. It is the revelation of his guilt that provides town leaders with a way out that both satisfies the army and allows the town to save itself while protecting one of its own. The ending, in a twist reminiscent of a Shirley Jackson short story, is both unexpected and triumphant.

Omang has drawn on her experience as a Washington Post correspondent in Central America in the early 1980's to paint a credible picture of the motives and pressures behind much of the violence that has wracked those poor, benighted nations for the last few decades. As anyone who has covered the region knows, the ideological explanations for the struggle so often heard in Washington frequently bear little resemblance to what one sees on the ground.

Miguel is drawn to the guerrillas not by ideological arguments but because to fight with them is to be someone. His father died, asphyxiated by exhaust fumes in the back of an overloaded truck carrying farmworkers, because the driver didn't care enough to hear the cries of his human cargo.

Gomez is driven not only by the contempt he feels for the Indian residents of Akabal, but by the burning memory of a dead brother killed in another barracks bombing and of a ruined sister, abandoned, pregnant, by a guerrilla fighter.

Omang's skill is in using the memories and musings of her characters to weave the last 30 years of history into a tightly knit vision of the intractability of the conflict. She manages to maintain the tension of the town's precarious situation, even though nothing much

happens, except in the minds and memories of her characters.

But that may be, after all, the most important place for us to probe. What keeps these wars going on after so many years of bloodshed, with so few gains on either side? In El Salvador, guerrillas and government have signed a peace treaty after 12 years of conflict. Hope is the order of the day, but can the deaths of 75,000 people, most non-combatants, so easily be shunted aside? What, in fact, has actually changed?

In Guatemala, the guerrillas and government have reached no agreement and the war percolates on. The unmarked graves left from the 1980's campaign are just now being explored by forensic specialists. Americas Watch, the human rights group, reports in its most recent publication on Guatemala that ten years later thousands of Guatemalan Indians are still hiding from the army.

"Incident at Akabal" helps us understand why. ■

Mark Seibel, a current Nieman Fellow, spent the previous seven years as Foreign Editor of The Miami Herald.

About Journalism

Committed Journalism: An Ethic for the Profession 2d ed. Edmund B. Lambeth. Indiana University Press. $35 hc, $12.95 pb

Great Editorials: Masterpieces of Opinion Writing. Wm. David Sloan, Cheryl Watts and Joanne Sloan. Vision Press. $16.95 pb

Images of Education: The Mass Media's Version of America's Schools. George R. Kaplan. National Schools Public Relations Association and Institute for Educational Leadership. $14 pb

Live From Capitol Hill: Studies of Congress and the Media. Stephen Hess. Brookings Institution. $22.95 hc, $8.95 pb

The United States of Ambition: Politicians, Power and the Pursuit of Office. Alan Ehrenhalt. Random House. $23

3 Russian Leaders

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Morrison Sides With Yeltsin

Morrison's own interviews stick mostly with Yeltsin's supporters, men like Russian Information Minister Mikhail Poltaranin, a new–style Bolshevik in his near–fanatic devotion to Yeltsin and hatred for the the old system. Morrison didn't interview (or at least didn't mention) people like Yegor Ligachev, Yeltsin's nemesis who now is readily accessible to the press, or other anti–Yeltsin figures in the leadership. He takes many accounts of Yeltsin's tribulations (and attributes them, to his credit) from the solid reporting of his Reuter colleagues and others who worked in Moscow during the perestroika years.

It's hardly surprising, then, that the book comes down firmly on Yeltsin's side in the power struggles of the past six years.

"On the whole," writes Morrison, "since 1985 it is Gorbachev who emerges from the story with the worse record of zigzags, broken promises, and vindictive comments." Yeltsin's strategy, insists Morrison, was "not to replace his rival as president of the Soviet Union but, like a leaders of the boyars at the Muscovite court, to turn him into a weak autocrat, subordinate to the will of republican leaders." We now know that isn't the way it worked out.

Yeltsin, writes Morrison, is a Reagan–esque figure, with a healthy disdain for detail and shrewd, natural political instincts.

"If Yeltsin, with such great popular support, fails," concludes Morrison, "then the chances of anyone else succeeding are slim." It wasn't long ago the same was being said—especially in the West—about Gorbachev. Or Stalin, for that matter.

"Russia has only one future—its past," is a favorite saying of gloomy Russian intellectuals. The idea has merit. To follow the events of today, read the papers, watch CNN, pick up books such at Tatu's and Morrison's. But to understand Russia, read its history, and the Stephen Crane–like accounts seasoned by the passage of time.

Russia is unkind to reformers: the Decembrists, Stolypin, Khrushchev, even Gorbachev. It punishes its failed leaders: during the last "Time of Troubles" (many count today as such a time) in the early 17th century, the Czar known as the False Dmitri was rapturously welcomed in Moscow and only a short time later quartered, dragged through the streets and burned. His ashes were fired from a cannon toward his native Poland.

This means reading, among others, Richard Pipes, Adam Ulam, Robert C. Tucker—and Robert Conquest. By knowing their Russia, a reader is well–equipped to understand today's Russia. It is a story with few happy endings. ■

Jeff Trimble was the Moscow bureau chief for U.S. News & World Report from 1986–1991. As a graduate student studying Russian, he lived in Moscow for 18 months, between 1979 and 1981. A Senior Editor of U.S. News & World Report, he is currently a Fellow at the Joan Shorenstein Barone Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University.

Foreign Affairs

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Most news organizations had checked out the story and concluded it was not true, and some newspapers decided to hold out the Quayle segments of the strip. But controversy, the mother's milk of political cartoons, was joined.

Pretty soon either Trudeau or another of his pencil-armed colleagues will be harpooning some other thin-skinned politician and getting their attention. Setting their sights on the high and mighty is what cartoonists do for a living, capturing the essence of America and freezing a moment of history in the process. ■

George de Lama, chief diplomatic correspondent of The Chicago Tribune, is a current Nieman Fellow.

RESPONSE

The Real Reason Why Business Reporting Is So Bad

After reading articles on economic coverage in the Fall 1991 Nieman Reports, Bernard Nossiter, an alumnus of The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and The New York Times and a Nieman Fellow, 1963, now living and writing in New York City, sat down and wrote the following response.

"PROPERTY IS THEFT," wrote Proudhon, a phrase business reporters might well copy into their word processors. Skepticism and doubt are critical for all editors and reporters; the business page is singularly marked by credulity. Corporate and even Treasury pronouncements tend to be treated as holy writ. Corporate officials are likely to be regarded with awe, at least until they are indicted. Even then the financial writers draw a tight, protective ring around the culprits, isolating them from fellow practitioners.

"When we run a long piece, we are making a statement," Seymour Topping, a solemn and ranking New York Times editor, once told me. So the paper's Sunday financial section ran a long and detailed piece on Salomon's market corner, squeeze and possible bid rigging. This epic concluded that all the evil flowed from one discredited executive. Everyone else at Solly was clean. No doubt the other 105 executives whose income in a single year exceeded one million dollars found their checks under their pillows, a gift of the tooth fairy.

To be sure, business reporters should not be singled out unfairly for broadcasting corporate truth. Beat reporters at City Hall, the State Department, the Pentagon and the White House also tend to become spokesmen for their sources. Life is easier that way, invites less pressure on their editors. Business journalists are subject to the same temptations, only more so.

There are several reasons for this. For one thing, reporters are literate rather than numerate, more at home with history or biography than the arithmetic, algebra and geometry needed to decipher financial matter. The frequent confusion between per cent and percentage points shows business reporters and editors would rather be doing something else.

There was the evening at The Washington Post when an amiable night managing editor swallowed the wire story which had swallowed U.S. Steel's handout announcing a price increase. The editor said he had buried the story in the financial pages because the increase was only a few cents a pound. It was gently explained that steel prices are quoted in dollars per ton, that U.S. Steel had raised prices $6 and this was sure to provoke a godawful row with the Kennedy administration. The story then moved outside in later editions, not far from the lead position it deserved.

Bottom Line: Money

Apart from arithmetic, reporters have trouble with stories about money because they don't have much of it. They rarely, if ever, buy or sell shares, trade in Treasury bills, invest in tax-exempt municipal bonds. This is the real bottom line for corporate executives. Mostly, in fact, they worry about the share prices of their own corporations because they have given themselves options to buy such shares at fixed prices. Business reporters who sense all this vicariously can't really appreciate corporate strategy over pricing, merging, disinvestment. But these activities and the pecuniary motives that lie behind them are the very essence for leaders in computers, chemicals, drugs, autos, oil, steel and the other large industrial sectors.

In contrast, sports writers have played the games they cover. Writers for what is called "Style" or some such, go to parties, gossip, cook, have some acquaintance with films, novels, theater, the stuff of their reports. Mencken once said that the proper stance for a reporter with respect to a politician is looking down. Most political reporters regard themselves at least equal in intelligence to the senators and congressmen they cover. But business reporters are likelier to be in awe than stand in contempt of business and banking executives.

The single most important reason that business news is thinly covered, disguises rather than reveals, is that business reporters work for large corporations that prefer financial pages to serve as comfort stations for the well-off. Gannett's sales last year were $3.4 billion and Knight-Ridder's $2.8 billion. The New York Times took in $1.8 billion and The Washington Post $1.4 billion. Each is in Fortune's list of the 500 largest corporations. Even in an inflationary age, one billion dollars is real money, as Senator Everett Dirksen might have said.

Top executives in these chains and papers mingle socially and financially with others of the corporate elite. They swim together, sleep, marry and divorce each other. At poolside, they swap stock tips well out of hearing range of a U.S. attorney. They do not welcome accounts of corporate skullduggery in their business pages. They believe the press must be free, essentially free, to tell the story as corporate public relations would have it told. They rarely give orders to reporters. They don't need to. Their views filter down daily.

Some time ago, John O'Connor, the chief executive at Merck, told Philip Graham, an old pal and a brilliant publisher at The Washington Post, that Senator Kefauver's inquiry into drugs

was going nowhere, would produce no news. So the national desk ordered me off Kefauver's Antitrust and Monopoly Subcommittee, where I had been enjoying wild tales of oligopolistic pricing in autos and steel, daily exclusives because my only competitors were from the trade press.

"What a pity," said John Blair, the subcommittee's chief economist. A Dr. Kelsey was coming to testify about how she was being suppressed by the FDA because she wanted to stop sales of a tranquilizer that mutilated live fetuses.

You could do an end run at The Post then and a memo was sent to the city desk on the sound theory that it had heard nothing of the O'Connor-Graham ukase. City desk had the wit to assign Morton Mintz to cover, thereby bringing to public consciousness thalidomide and Mintz and inspiring a bill that knocked a penny or two off Merck's profits and ordered doctors to prescribe pills by their generic rather than their monopoly brand name.

In four years at The Times, I never found such porosity. Would today's Post, rationalizing under new management, be more open?

And The Wall Street Journal?

It is now reasonable to ask how The Wall Street Journal does it. Nearly every issue tells of a General Dynamics colluding with other generals to gangrape taxpayers, or the defects in General Motors' cars or the pills from a General Drug killing patients again. The Journal, after all, is big business, too. Dow Jones sales last year were $1.7 billion.

The point is that The Journal is a trade paper, not a general paper. It is, of course, the trade paper of trade papers, the king of kings. Its readership, mostly monied, needs to know. If a corporation faces large penalties or law suits because it has misbehaved, Journal readers must be told this and in detail. That determines whether they should buy, sell, hold or short the stock. The Journal is virtuous by necessity, praise that strains my objectivity. Forty or so years ago I was fired off the copy desk for trying to organize the place, a venture thought quixotic by the management and the New York Newspaper Guild. No similar need to know infects most readers of the general business pages. They are happier with stock quotations and a bulletin board for corporate handouts. The gap between Times financial editors and really rich people is illustrated by the financial tables. Almost unthinkingly, the paper dropped its table of representative tax-exempt municipal bonds, a favorite investment for top brackets.

The Fall 1991 issue of Nieman Reports addressed the question of how business news fell off the track. Only Mintz came close to the target. Through sheer persistence, he was remarkably successful in getting stories of corporate misbehavior into The Washington Post, so successful he is unlikely to be replaced. But even Mintz skewed a point. He is under the impression that corporate directors determine corporate behavior. In fact, they are paid $10,000 or so a quarter to rubberstamp the multimillion dollar salaries and bonuses that top executives award themselves.

In the same way, directors have little influence on newspapers. It is the top managers, chief executive and chief financial officers that set the tone. Directors are supposed to represent stockholders but they were subjected to euthanasia generations ago as A.A. Berle and Gardiner Means explained in "The Modern Corporations and Private Property." The Times and Post are special cases where owners and managers are the same, all named Sulzberger or Graham. This neat trick was accomplished by stripping other shareholders of voting rights, a practice once frowned on by a more fastidious Stock Exchange.

The academic contributors to Nieman Reporters know something is wrong with business news but they are gloriously wide of the mark. Joseph Bower of the Harvard Business School actually thinks we have run out of money to finance schools, parks, libraries and other useful public works. The better financial reporters could tell him that dollars are spun out of thin air by the Federal Reserve, buying Treasury bills from and enlarging the deposits of commercial banks who expand the money supply because only a fraction of their loans must be backed by deposits at the Fed. The Fed's spinning, moreover, is an especially good thing when, as now, men and plants are jobless.

Another contributor, economist James Hamilton of Duke, thinks there is a conflict between economics and entertainment. Someone should introduce him to J.K. Galbraith, D. H. Robertson and A. Smith, the 18th Century one. The Journal's leaders, columns one and six, often entertain. So does The Economist magazine and the arts and editorial pages of that most adult business daily, The Financial Times.

Look at Greider's Book

Matters are not as hopeless as they seem. Less reverent reporting on business and the economy can be found in books. William Greider scooped his daily brethren in "Secrets of the Temple," disclosing that the Federal Reserve is not a gathering of vestal virgins but services clients — notably large commercial banks—like any regulatory agency. Business reporters from the dailies were so furious with this idea that they gave Greider bad reviews and his story remains largely exclusive. Thomas Edsall in "The New Politics of Inequality" first revealed that Reagan had succeeded in shifting income from the poor to the rich, an idea later broadcast widely by Kevin Phillips.

As far as I know, the Reagan-Bush strategy of deliberate slack, high unemployment, tacit repeal of the 1946 Employment Act, still remains unreported in the dailies. So, too, is the rediscovery that most investment in new plants and machinery is financed by retained earnings, the involuntary savings created by consumers. The business pages dutifully follow the preaching of the best off, that capital flows from the savings of the rich and is damaged by the debt demands of the government.

This is the way things are and are likely to be. Business pages in general newspapers are useful chiefly to provide clues for the way the corporate world wants to be perceived, for transmitting conventional wisdom. To expect more is to demand latitude and longitude from a flat earth map. ■

Nieman Notes

Wanted

We have lost contact with the Nieman Fellows listed below. If you have any information regarding them please contact the Nieman Foundation office at (617) 495-2237 or write to: 1 Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138. Your help would be greatly appreciated.

Paul Bichara, NF '74
Tony Castro, NF '77
Carl Cobb, NF '70
David Corbett, NF '66
Ian Cross, NF '55
Andreas DeRhoda, NF '57
Fred Flowers, NF '55
Frank Hewlett, NF '46
Everett Holles, NF '42
Henry Hornsby, NF '47
Maurice Jones, NF '59
Thomas Joyce, NF '61
Donald Kendall, NF '65
Paul Kidd, NF '63
William McIlwain, NF '58
Kyoichi Morinaga, NF '65
Woon-Yin Pang, NF '64
Rodolfo Reyes, NF '66
John Ryan, NF '70
Juan Saez, NF '63
Nguyen Thai, NF '63
Nicholas Valery, 'NF 84
Walter Waggonner, 'NF 48
George Weller, NF '48
Piyal Wickramasinghe, NF '58
Ivor Wilkins, NF '84
Francis Wong, NF '61
L.M. Wright, NF '57
Herbert Yahraes, NF '44

Selection Committee

Three journalists and three members of the Harvard University community have been named to select 12 American journalists as 1992-93 Nieman Fellows. They are:

Valerie Hyman, Director of The Poynter Institute's Program for Broadcast Journalists and a 1987 Nieman Fellow.

Florence C. Ladd, Director of the Mary Ingraham Bunting Institute of Radcliffe College.

Eileen McNamara, staff writer for The Boston Globe Magazine and a 1988 Nieman Fellow.

Richard Salant, Former president of CBS News and former President of the National News Council.

Robert H. Scott, Vice President for Finance, Harvard University.

Preston N. Williams, Houghton Professor of Theology and Contemporary Change, The Divinity School, Harvard University.

In a separate process, approximately 12 international journalists will be chosen as 1992-93 Nieman Fellows.

1943

Word has been received of the death in December 1990 of Vera W. Elliott, wife of **Robert C. Elliott**. Mrs. Elliott, who enjoyed flowering plants, was a generous supporter of the Nieman Fellows' Garden. Through her contributions over the years, many colorful annuals and spring bulbs were planted in the garden. Her thoughtfulness also extended to the interior of Lippmann House where a painting she did of the garden hangs over the fireplace in a first-floor office. Mrs. Elliott lived in Concord, CA.

1953

In The North Gate News, the newsletter of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley, we read of **Kenneth Wilson's** involvement in the establishment of a scholarship fund in memory of John G. (Dick) Trezevant.

Wilson preferred to talk about his longtime friend and colleague rather than his involvement with the scholarship fund. Their friendship began in 1948 while Trezevant was teaching at Berkeley and Wilson was a student. The two and their future wives developed a friendship that lasted through the years.

Trezevant began his journalism career as a copy editor at The San Francisco Chronicle. Eventually he became executive vice president of The Chicago Sun-Times and The Chicago Daily News. He returned to the San Francisco area in 1984 on his retirement. He died May 9, 1991.

Ken and Verna Lee Wilson wanted to find an on-going way to memorialize their "wonderful friend." With the support of Mrs. Trezevant and the Trezevant family, the scholarship fund was established. Ken reports that the fund is fairly successful but he hopes it will grow.

Ken retired as Assistant to the Publisher of The San Francisco Chronicle three years ago. The Wilsons live in a retirement community in Santa Rosa, CA., where the "living is easy." He refers to himself as a "contented vegetable." He does some traveling and enjoys playing with his Macintosh computer.

1959

John Seigenthaler, who has retired as editorial director of USA Today and as editor and publisher of The Nashville Tennessean, is chairman of The Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University. Creation of the center was announced last December. "Our charge is to develop programs, projects and publications to discuss and study the values of free expression protected by the First Amendment," Seigenthaler said. "We will do so using the academic resources of Vanderbilt

University and the professional resources of experts across the USA." Paul McMasters, former associate editor of the editorial page of USA Today, is executive director of the center.

1962

***Murray Seeger,** once a correspondent in Moscow for The Los Angeles Times and now assistant director of the Department of External Relations of the International Monetary Fund in Washington, reminisces:*

Reading The Washington Post the other day, I noticed that a relatively new reporter in Moscow had discovered that a generation of children was growing up without knowing what a banana is. If I were the paper's editor, I would have inserted one word—"another"—in that dramatic report about the hard winter that had begun for the people of Russia and other parts of the Soviet Union.

I wrote a similar sentence about Russian children and bananas and other food that many of us take for granted 20 years ago when I first arrived in Moscow as a foreign correspondent. January 1972 was part of another hard winter in Russia.

This and many other deeply imbedded memories came tumbling to the surface in October when I returned to Moscow for the first time in a decade as part of a small mission led by Michel Camdessus, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, and including John Odling-Smee, Deputy Director of the European Department, and Jean Foglizzo, the new Resident Representative.

Our goal was to secure the signature of then-President Mikhail Gorbachev on the agreement establishing a Special Association between the Soviet Union and the IMF, and to meet with responsible officials to get an early start for a series of Technical Assistance missions. We completed the key portion of the mission on Saturday, October 5, when President Gorbachev and Mr. Camdessus exchanged letters on the Special Association during a 90-minute Kremlin meeting. This was one of the last international agreements Gorbachev made before his resignation.

We went from the Kremlin a short distance to the Foreign Ministry Press Center, built for the 1980 Olympic Games, where the Managing Director described the agreement and answered journalists' questions for 45 minutes. Around those two events we had a fast round of conferences with officials of the central union and Russian governments. We also visited Zagorsk, the center of the Russian Orthodox Church 25 miles northeast of Moscow.

As we moved from meeting to meeting, I watched for old landmarks and new signs of change. Moscow has long resisted change, but perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness) started a process that could last for decades.

President Gorbachev, the engineer of change, seemed a much more vigorous, persuasive leader than Leonid Brezhnev, a predecessor whom I often saw in action. We walked long corridors in the Kremlin Palace, past empty and sealed offices of former Politburo members to reach the President's office, different from the one used by Brezhnev.

Outside, in the streets of Moscow, and at Zagorsk, two kinds of street corner open markets had cropped up. At one, younger people were selling souvenirs and changing foreign money with little concern for currency regulations. At others, older people were selling used personal goods to raise rubles.

No such trading outside the state system was allowed in the "days of stagnation," as the pre-perestroika period is known. In those days, even the sidewalk shoeshine and shoelace stands were part of a giant, central state enterprise. Now, co-existing with the old enterprises, there is a mixture of nascent capitalism and selling from desperate economic need.

Zagorsk, always beautiful with its crowded collection of old churches, chapels, museums, seminary and residence for the Metropolitan of the church, has a new, freer air. In the bad old days, men in dark blue raincoats lurked to discourage conversations between Soviet citizens and foreign visitors. Local worshippers were mostly old women.

Now the secret policemen and young seminary students are out of hiding. They were taking their families through the yards and posing for photographs. A long line of young and old believers waited to fill their containers with water from a holy spring.

Lines have always been a part of Russian life but the longest line of all these days is outside Moscow's only McDonald's. The Muscovites stand patiently in a winding queue near the bust of Pushkin, where each December 5 a small group of political dissidents would gather to mourn the rights promised but undelivered to commemorate the Soviet Constitution.

One snowy December evening I watched the tall, noble figure of Andrei Sakharov arrive at the square with his wife, Yelena Bonner. He stopped and slowly removed his hat, a protest signal that stirred waiting uniformed and secret police and their red-banded "volunteers" to arrest demonstrators and to intimidate onlookers, including foreign journalists.

In 1981, when Sakharov was in exile in Gorky, a central Russian city closed to foreigners, I made my last previous visit to Moscow. The KGB held me at the airport for more than an hour because they found material about the physicist in my baggage.

The opposite end of Pushkin Square is the home of Izvestia, the government newspaper that is now independent under glasnost. In the 1970's, this was the site of protests by young Jews seeking the right to emigrate to Israel. They barely had their banner unfurled when police hustled them into a van.

The vast Red Square was marked, as ever, by a line of people waiting to enter Lenin's Tomb; they may now fear that the leader's remains will be removed. Behind the tomb, past the grave of Stalin and above the Kremlin Wall, the red hammer and sickle flag of the Soviet Union flew from one building while the horizontal tricolor of the Czarist empire flew from another.

The great square stirred another memory, about my son who was then 10, and his younger friend, the son of The New York Times correspondent, Hedrick Smith (Nieman Fellow 1970). We had become separated from the boys during a huge May Day celebration. After the parade and demonstration were over, we searched the square in controlled panic for an hour before heading toward our car.

As we entered a large pedestrian subway under the adjacent Marx Square the two boys came up the stairway, hand in hand. They had made their way to the car, a half mile away, and finding their fathers missing, retraced their steps to the square. It was several years before we told this adventure to the mothers.

The IMF team passed the same underpass and the small street where our car had been parked when we walked from the Metropole Hotel to a meeting at the State Bank. In its now-empty lobby I did my financial business two decades earlier. The Metropole, a run-down, pre-revolutionary landmark in those days, has been completely refurbished and acts as temporary IMF headquarters.

The Managing Director stopped there to meet Tom Wolf, European Division Chief, and 13 other staff members waiting to put the Special Association into action.

Twice our mission drove around the Garden Ring past the large apartment,

built at the end of World War II by German prisoners, where my wife, son and I had lived. It is still home to many foreign correspondents.

When we drove down Gorky Street, I saw the apartment where two other correspondents and I met with Alexander Solzhenitsyn just before he was arrested and sent into exile. He read a portion of the Gulag books to us; as we left we saw many of the familiar men in blue raincoats.

Not far away, the Foreign Ministry gave a farewell lunch for the Managing Director and Mrs. Camdessus in a handsome old mansion long used as a reception center. In its former stable, my wife had performed gymnastic exercises with a vigorous Russian instructor.

More memories were stirred at the official residence house where our hosts housed us. Correspondents used to drive past these 15 houses to see if special guests had arrived in Moscow without notice. In the nearby park, close to Moscow State University, I used to walk my dog.

So much of that seemed like ancient history as we had our meetings with the new generation of leaders about reform, structural adjustment, debt, technical assistance and possible future membership. Still, as in the old day, when were were unable to make international telephone calls from the guest house telephone, we had to go to the Metropole and use a special booth in the modernized lobby.

1969

Richard Longworth has been transferred by The Chicago Tribune from London, where he was Chief European Correspondent, to Chicago, where he will be Senior Writer specializing in economics and foreign affairs. In London, Longworth covered developments in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, as well as economic changes in Western Europe.

1975

James R. Scudder of North Little Rock, Arkansas, died last November 26.

He had retired as religion editor of The Arkansas Gazette. He was previously affiliated with The Arkansas Democrat as the associate editor of the Voices page and was assistant city editor at the time of his appointment as a Nieman Fellow.

Scudder maintained a dual career as a journalist and as a pastor. He was also the former pastor of the Redfield United Methodist Church.

He is survived by three brothers and four sisters.

***Tony Eluemunor,** correspondent for TimesWeek newsmagazine and a Nieman Fellow 1991, faxed us the following:*

Chief **Segun Osoba** was sworn in in January as Governor of Ogun state. This Nigerian Nieman, who ran on the Social Democratic Party ticket, soundly defeated his opponent in the December 1991 election.

Osoba has had an illustrious journalism career. After serving as Editor of Nigeria's largest weekly and daily newspapers, The Sunday Times and the Daily Times, he became Managing Director and Chief Executive of what is clearly Black Africa's biggest publication company, The Daily Times of Nigeria, Ltd. Other publications in the group are the 75-year-old London-based West Africa magazine, TimesWeek newsmagazine, The Sporting Record, Nigeria Year Book, Lagos Weekend, Poise and Business Times. The organization also runs a journalism training school.

In 1989, after seven years as Daily Times chief executive, Osoba resigned to seek elective office in Nigeria's third democratic attempt. As a state governor he is part of Nigeria's political experiment, in which the Army remains in power until October.

While running for office, Osoba remained active in journalism by running the community newspaper he founded a few months after leaving The Daily Times. Osoba, who entered journalism as a cub reporter, said he ran his political campaign like a reporter with a deadline to meet.

1977

Hennie van Deventer, Editor of Die Volksblad, Bloemfontein, South Africa, for the last 12 years, has been appointed senior general manager of the Nasionale Pers (National Press) group, with responsibility for the group's newspapers—Die Burger, Beeld, Die Volkssblad, Oosterlig and City Press. He will take up his new duties in April and will attend the convention of the American Newspaper Publishers Association in May.

1979

Margaret Engel and her twin sister, Allison, have revised "Food Finds," the directory of America's best local foods, which originally was published in 1984. The new edition, published by HarperCollins, includes more than 400 entries, ranging from Bad News All-Purpose Sauce to Hellfire and Damnation Relish. It sells for $16.

Peggy, on leave from her job as a reporter for The Washington Post, directs the Alicia Patterson Foundation, which grants journalism fellowships. Allison is an editor for Pacific News Service, working out of Des Moines. The HarperCollins news release says that the authors spent six years sifting through and testing approximately 3,000 food products for the updated version. The publisher quotes the authors:

"We loved traveling to the obscure corners of the country to find some of these products. These visits felt like moving backward in time. Often we happened on small factories where the setting, recipes and prices seemed of an earlier age."

One gravel road in Indiana led to a tidy Amish farmhouse where Elmer and Viola Knepp make candy without the help of electricity.

1983

Eli Reed has won the Eastman Kodak World Image Medal for Fine Art Photography. The award, given by the Parsons School of Design and The New School, was presented in January at a dinner in New York City.

Eli's submission included pictures of four generations living in public housing projects, which ran in The New York Times Magazine, and some single shots from Northern Ireland.

1985

Ching-Chang Hsiao and his wife, Mei-Rong Yang, report from the University of Minnesota Journalism Department that they are now researching American media coverage of China from the end of the Cultural Revolution to the Tiananmen Square massacre. Previously they studied American coverage of China during the Cultural Revolution. They plan to stay in Minnesota until the end of 1993.

1986

Yvonne van der Heijden is now freelancing in Peking. The Dutch journalist quit her copyediting job on the foreign desk of the Eindhovens Dagblad a year ago and decided to go to East Asia. She plans to stay in Asia for at least five years.

Recently she went to Mongolia and did a series of articles on that developing country. While there she learned that a handful of journalists in Ulan Bator are trying to set up an independent national daily even though they lack knowledge of how to run a newspaper and are unfamiliar with the responsibilities of journalists in a democratic society. One of the group, C. Erdene, the director general of Montsame, the Mongolian News Agency, has already started an English-language weekly, The Mongol Messenger. It is critical of government officials.

1987

Marites Vitug was one of two women who received "Courage in Journalism" awards from the International Women's Media Fund.

She was honored for her courage in breaking a story of greed and environmental catastrophe and persisting in her reporting after criminal libel charges were filed against her.

As a reporter for The Manila Chronicle, Marites broke a story of the plunder of the last Philippines tropical rain forest by a businessman and a corrupt politician. Her work brought death threats and a series of libel suits that could mean imprisonment under Filipino law. Despite this danger, Marites continues to report about the threats to the rain forest. She has also founded, with another woman, the Philippines first institute for investigative reporting. She was featured last year on a PBS special, "Dangerous Assignments."

The other winner was Lyubov Kovalevskaya, reporter and then editor, of the newspaper of the Chernobyl Atomic Energy plant who obtained secret documents and wrote of the dangers a month before the nuclear accident.

More than 40 women were nominated for the award.

1989

Cynthia Tucker, formerly a columnist and associate editorial page editor of The Atlanta Constitution, is now the editorial page editor.

Elizabeth Rose Tulsky was born December 12, 1991, to Kim and **Rick Tulsky.** She was six pounds 14 ounces at birth, but gained more than four pounds in her first two months. Elizabeth, who has dark hair as thin as her father's, adores brother Eric, 16, and smiles every time he puts his fingers in her mouth. Eric has repeatedly warned his sister that their parents are crazy and that their father has a terrible sense of humor.

1990

Monica Flores has been living in New York City since last June. She is the only United States correspondent for Pagina 12. Monica says that she has never worked so hard in her life. Every time she calls Argentina she invites the journalist who happens to answer the phone to come up and give her a hand. So far, Monica says, her invitations haven't been accepted. While Monica admits that she is really happy, life would be definitely excellent, she says, if she could take another Nieman year.

***Dianna Solis** writes from the Mexico City Bureau of The Wall Street Journal:*

For a time, it looked like the office situation here was scripted in hell. Our German landlady and her Doberman dogs stepped straight out of "Die Hard." Tenants have even had her hauled off by the policia. The phones and elevator work on and off. The plumbing was out for a full three months. My computer was busted when I arrived; Mexican technos said it wasn't worth fixing. New York sends me a 286 computer but I can't get it through the behemoth bureaucracy here without an import permit because it's an old computer, not a new computer... .In desperation, I flew to Houston and bought a laptop. Still waiting for the import permit. But all that is behind me now, yessiree, and I can savor the glamour of being a foreign correspondent.

Solis noted that Mexico is "undergoing some fast-paced and fascinating changes." She explains:

Every day it seems major tenets of "la Revolucion Mexicana" get reversed. It's sometimes a bit sad because with President Salinas pursuing capitalism at full throttle, some folks are going to get run over. It seems that the changes are ultimately for the good of the United States, and it's debatable as to whether wages will rise and Mexican poverty will subside.

With or without this free-trade agreement, the integration of the two countries is going to continue. We're now witness not only to a commercial Salinasstroika but to a cultural Gringostroika... . You take your "junkets" to Guadalajara... .Pretty soon, as the border blurs more, memory will, too. People are going to stop talking about that 2,000-mile line as a scar.

On the subject of Mexican journalism, Solis writes:

The government has these ridiculous press conferences here where, sometimes, no questions are taken. Sending weekly packets of money to reporters covering various ministries is common, as well. David Brooks, a New Yorker who runs a foundation-funded project called "Dialogos," [which] brings together U.S. and Mexican types to exchange ideas on such topics as free trade and labor... tries to bring the Mexican point of view to the U.S. public by working with razor-witted Mexican cartoonists, who can get to a lead much quicker than the the bought-off press here.

In late January **Vladimir Voina** settled in the Los Angeles area where he is a journalist-in-residence with the Foundation for American Communications. The foundation is a nonprofit educational organization sponsored by news organizations, business foundations and corporations. During the next three years or so Vladimir will be working on the first stage of a project. In the initial stage a directory of media in the new Commonwealth of Independent States will be compiled. The second stage, the long-term goal, will seek to formulate a program to educate CIS journalists on the economics of a free market.

Vladimir continues to write a weekly column for Creators Syndicate, Inc., on life in the CIS compared with life in the United States. The column appears in The Boston Herald, several other American publications and in Japan and Korea. He also lectures.

1991

*Life has changed a great deal for the **Joel Greenbergs** since their return to Jerusalem. But let Joel tell it:*

We wanted to drop y'all a line and tell you about the arrival of the newest Nieman kid, our baby girl, born on December 31, hours before a rare New Year's Eve snowstorm that paralyzed our Holy City.

Tamar Leah, seven and a half pounds at birth, is living proof that we had a produc-

tive Nieman year. Rena is fine and spending her days enjoying the new addition.

We had a nice slow reentry here in Jerusalem. After staying on in Cambridge for some weeks, we went back home via Turkey, where we stopped off with Rena's parents for a visit. Istanbul was fascinating, and if you ever get a chance, go to the southern Turkish coast, it is stunning.

After we got home, I went back to The Jerusalem Post and covered the Middle East peace conference in Madrid, which was quite a thrill. It's not every day that I get a chance to ask questions at press conferences with the Foreign Minister of Syria or Jordan and talk with officials of Arab countries technically at war with Israel.

The encounters with reporters from the Arab world were fascinating. Everyone was actually quite friendly, except for the Syrians, who stayed aloof and barred Israeli reporters from their press office. I saw Ana Puga there.

After the Madrid high, however, ...in early December I decided to leave The Post and took a job as the local reporter/bureau stringer with The New York Times office here in Jerusalem. I had my first stories in The Times [in mid-January], some of them bylined, some not. I had to make the adjustment of being the second reporter, under Bureau Chief Clyde Haberman, but I can't complain. This is an opportunity to work with pros, something I have yearned for during my years at The Post... .

Rena went back to running her business, a store that sells items for children's rooms: quilts, crib-bumpers, wall hangings, etc.... . Nadav has had to adjust to the hard realities of a rather run-of-the-mill school after his golden year at the Fayerweather Street School in Cambridge. But he's made the shift, and is actually quite happy hanging out with his friends. He puts it this way: "I like school socially, but not academically." He also managed to relearn his forgotten Hebrew and start talking and reading the language again in record time. I was impressed... .

We have tentative plans to visit the States in late June/early July.

Rui Araujo, with Portuguese National Television (RTP), has won an award for a story he did on missionaries working with refugees from Mozambique, in southern Malawi. There are more than a million refugees in Malawi, some living in camps financed by the United Nations, others starving in illegal camps. Rui's story focused on Father Martinho, a missionary priest who has spent more than 20 years in Africa working with displaced people. The Club de Journalistas gives this national award, which is one of the most prestigious in Portugal. Rui shared the award with another journalist, who won for a separate story.

Katherine M. Skiba, reporter for The Milwaukee Journal, visited the crumbling Soviet Union late in 1991. She filed spot stories through The Associated Press and, on returning to the United States, wrote seven profiles of former Soviet citizens—a black marketeer, a ballet dancer, a business woman, a monk, an ex-KGB official, some peasants and some Olympic skaters. The series, "We Will Survive: Voices From the Second Russian Revolution," generated more than 100 requests for Skiba to speak about her experiences.

Her trip led to a reunion with Vladimir Vessenski, also a 1991 Nieman Fellow, and his wife, Valentina. For the first time Skiba met their son Nikita, who is 29. Nikita often worked with Skiba—driving, translating and cutting red tape, all the while singing along with her Natalie Cole cassette tape "Unforgettable."

Other 1991 Niemans—**John Carlson, Barbara Ross** and **Ana Puga**—have also made reporting trips to the former Soviet Union in 1991.

Note to Readers

With this edition Nieman Reports catches up with modern technology. It is now a product of desktop publishing.

Writers now submit their articles on disks, which are edited and formatted on the Nieman Foundation's new Apple Macintosh computer. Printouts of the articles are then sent to the authors for corrections. Then the magazine is designed and the articles and illustrations are placed in the columns.

The switch to desktop publishing was guided by Lewis Clapp of International Computer Research, our computer consultant, and by Deborah Smiley, our design editor.

Correction

The caption of the photo by Eli Reed of an anti-discrimination demonstration in Forsythe County, GA., in the Winter edition incorrectly gave the date as 1976. It was 1986.

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Chinese Nieman Fellow Wins Golden Pen Award

RED PRINCESS. AN expert on inter continental missiles. A spy. A dissident. A prisoner. And now the first woman to win the coveted Golden Pen of Freedom Award in its 32-year history. Dai Qing's life story reads more like fiction than reality. The latest chapter was added to her story after her arrival in Cambridge in late December to join the Nieman class of 1991-1992.

Photo by Stan Grossfeld, Nieman Fellow, 1992

Dai Qing had been trying to leave China since receiving her fellowship last summer, but Beijing officials continually blocked her exit. Authorities seized her in November when she tried to meet with United States Secretary of State James Baker and held her for four days. But these actions backfired on the Chinese government. Baker, Nieman curator Bill Kovach, Senators Edward Kennedy and Albert Gore and many others pressured the Chinese to allow her to come to Harvard. Finally government officials relented, and on the day after Christmas, Dai Qing flew to the United States.

The 50 year-old journalist comes from one of China's most distinguished families. Her father worked as a Comintern agent in China and was executed by the Japanese. Her mother left to work for the Chinese Communist forces. Dai Qing was then adopted and raised by the late Marshal Ye Jianying, who, until his death in 1986, was one of the most powerful men in the Chinese government. Her godmother is the widow of Zhou Enlai.

She studied ballistic-missile guidance systems in college. After the Cultural Revolution, she worked for Chinese military intelligence, as a plant inside the Chinese Writers Association. The work involved writing reports and memos on visiting foreign authors."I don't think spies are bad people," she told The New York Times. "But I absolutely didn't like that kind of work. The special thing about being a spy is that you have to cheat people into believing you and this was too much against my nature."

Since she proved resistant to a career as a spy, she transferred to the Guangming Daily, where she adopted her pen name, Dai Qing. (Her real name is Fu Xiaoqing.) Her fall from a secure position in Chinese Communist society started in 1988, when she challenged the most powerful woman in China, Chen Muhua, at a meeting of the Chinese Women's Association. Muhua was the sole candidate for the organization's presidency. But Dai Qing confronted her on her record as head of the Bank of China, charging that she had presided over the worst inflation in 30 years. Dai Qing's also infuriated officials when she organized opposition to the proposed Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River.

When the authorities crushed the uprising in Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989, and Dai Qing renounced her Communist Party membership, the government officials decided they had seen enough. Dai was arrested and held for ten months in Qincheng Prison, China's top security prison for political prisoners. During that time guards repeatedly told her she was on a list for execution. It was a difficult period for Dai. Her hair turned white and came out in clumps. She was released in May 1990 because, she believes, the authorities could find no evidence to continue to hold her.

Late in January of this year, the International Federation of Newspaper Publishers (FIEJ) honored her with its Golden Pen of Freedom Award.

"Qing has been chosen as a well-known and respected representative of all those [in China] fighting for their freedoms," FIEJ representatives said.

Dai Qing says she plans to take cultural anthropology and study Mao's impact on the cultural revolution. She is the fourth Chinese journalist to win a Nieman Fellowship. The first three did not return to China.

" I want to come back," she told the Toronto Globe and Mail just before she left for the U.S. "The problem will be whether they let me back. But they have no right to prevent me. I am a Chinese citizen." ■

—Tom Regan, Nieman Fellow, 1992

Close Escape

continued from back cover

ported as he had stated them, without verification. Bantu said he would not do this until the story had been investigated.

The next day Bantu and the others began to check with the "plotters" named by Johnson. The story was not heard on the BBC nor was it reported in local papers. As the so-called plotters were dismissing Johnson's charges as "fantasy", one of Johnson's press officers was telling him that Bantu was responsible for the media's not running with the story.

On January 4, Johnson called Bantu and fellow journalist Dan Brown and told them he had more proof of his charges. He wanted them to come to his base for another press conference. "Some people thought I was crazy to go, but I'm not afraid of anybody, so I went to see him," Bantu said.

Bantu and Brown were driven to the camp by one of Johnson's advisors as Johnson followed in a jeep. Almost from the moment they arrived at the camp, Bantu knew that he and Brown were in danger.

"We were waiting for Johnson outside his apartment, when he drove up in his jeep, jumped out and started to yell at one of his men," said Bantu. "Then he shot the man in the leg three times, on the ground that he was wearing a red band around his head. Red is the color of Charles Taylor, another rebel leader. This commando dropped to the ground, but then Johnson screamed at him to run, or he would kill him. That's when he turned around and shouted, 'Where's Bantu and Brown?'

"When that happened, if I could have wet myself, I would have. We were knocked to the ground and tabey by some of the troops. (Tabey is the method of tying the arms at the elbow behind the back.) And then he said he was going to kill us."

Bantu, a Baptist, asked for a few minutes to pray. Johnson agreed. As he moved to shoot the two men, he was stopped by his deputy, Colonel Sam Varney. Varney warned Johnson that if he killed, or even held, two such prominent journalists, he would find himself in deep trouble with the international community. Johnson refused to listen and Varney left. But the Colonel had obviously placed a seed of doubt in the "Field Marshall's" mind.

After ranting for nearly 30 minutes, Johnson decided on a new course. He drove the two journalists and three fishermen he had also arrested as spies to a private residence some 20 miles from his main camp. "He calls the place 'Zimbabwe'," Bantu said. "And the saying goes that anyone who goes to Zimbabwe never comes back."

Johnson pulled the men from the jeep, saying he would kill them, "no matter what happened." Then he turned the men over to his jailer, a soldier known as "Playboy." As it turned out, this was a lucky break for Bantu and Brown. Playboy was more intelligent than Johnson's others soldiers, and had listened to Bantu's reports on the BBC. In effect, he was a fan. He quietly told Bantu he would look after him.

But Playboy's promise of help could not change the conditions that Bantu and Brown now found themselves in. Johnson threw them in a tiny cell covered with urine and feces. One of Bantu's new cellmates turned out to be the 13-year-old boy whom Johnson had presented to the media only two days before. His body was covered with marks of whipping, and his arms were also "tabey."

But at least they were still alive. "We both felt better, " said Bantu. "Because we knew that if he was going to kill us, he would have done it right on the spot."

Bantu later convinced Playboy to loosen and finally remove the ropes used on all the prisoners. It looked as if they would only have to wait for Johnson to release them. Then night — and the Death Squad — came to visit.

"The Death Squad are eight females," said Bantu. "They are very beautiful ladies, but they are very dangerous. They are armed to the teeth. They came to our cell five times that first night, and each time threatened to drag us out and kill us, or cut off our privates. It got quite serious between them and Playboy, because he was standing up for us. This period was even worse than what we had gone through with Johnson. I was very frightened, because I knew these ladies were responsible for the deaths of several people."

The Death Squad visited several times each night, keeping Bantu and his cellmates in a state of constant fear. But Bantu was closer to freedom then he might have thought by that second night. Two of Bantu's Nieman classmates, Carmel Rickard and Paddy Kearney of South Africa, were visiting BBC headquarters in London. Hearing that Bantu had been taken prisoner, they immediately called Bill Kovach, the Nieman Curator in Cambridge, who asked for help from news organizations and the government. The Committee to Protect Journalists, Africa Watch and many other organizations cabled Johnson demanding the freedom of Bantu and Brown. On January 7 Johnson finally relented. And as it turned out, not a minute too soon.

"The day after we were released, Johnson killed four men, including his deputy chief of staff," said Bantu. "He later called it a mistake caused by vexation. I have not doubt that if we had still been in Zimbabwe, he would have killed us."

The ordeal took its toll on Bantu. His arms were scarred and numb from being tied behind his back . Doctors say it may be three or four months before he regains all the feeling in his left arm. He also caught malaria from sleeping in urine and feces for three days.

Now Bantu must decide whether to return to Liberia and possible death, or stay in the United States, away from the country he so loves.

"I'm not afraid of going back," he says slowly. "This was the third time that I have been in prison. But it was the worst by far. If I go back, I'll still have to speak out.

"But we have an idiot running around. And I have to face the fact that I just missed death. If I was single, okay. But I have a family. So I think I'll wait a while before I decide what I want to do." ■

Tom Regan, a 1992 NF, is a columnist for The Daily News in Halifax, N.S.

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Stan Grossfeld, NF 1992, took this picture of Isaac Bantu on his return to Harvard after being jailed in Liberia.

A Close Escape for Nieman Fellow Seized in Liberia

BY TOM REGAN

ISAAC BANTU WAS sure he had only a few moments left to live. Sprawled on the ground, his arms tied at his elbows behind his back, Bantu looked up to see "Field Marshall" Prince Johnson, leader of one of Liberia's largest rebel factions, coming toward him with a machine gun, yelling, "No more America for you, Mr. Harvard University man, you're going to die right now."

Bantu, president of the Press Union of Liberia, BBC stringer, correspondent for West Africa Magazine and 1991-92 Nieman Fellow, survived, although it was only the first of many times in a four-day period when his life would be threatened.

Bantu had been honored only the month before by the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights. He was the only journalist among the 11 recipients. He had returned to Liberia in December for what he hoped would be a short visit to check on a journalism program he helped organize. While in Monrovia on January 2 Bantu heard that Johnson was holding a press conference.

"I suppose I didn't have to go," Bantu said later. " But I'm a journalist. So I went along."

The press conference was held at Johnson's camp outside Monrovia. The rebel leader alleged that he had discovered a plot to kill him and "derail the on-going peace process." He blamed some of Liberia's highest officials including the interim president and the Roman Catholic Bishop of Monrovia. To back his claim, he produced a 13-year-old boy, who told the press that he was one of a number of youths taken from a Catholic mission to undergo military training with the goal of assassinating Johnson.

After the boy finished, Bantu and the other reporters told Johnson to write letters outlining the situation to the Chairman of the Organization of African Unity and the Economic Community of West African States. Meanwhile, the media would investigate his charges. This suggestion did not satisfy Johnson, who demanded that his charges be re-

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