

NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION FOR JOURNALISM AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

VOL. 60 No. 1 SPRING 2006

Five Dollars

What Katrina Revealed, Will Journalists Now Cover?



Journalist's Trade

Newspapers' Survival

The Job of Frontline Editor

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

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

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Cover photo: Demetrius Thomas, 2, of Biloxi sits in line at the Red Cross check distribution site parking lot. Demetrius's house was flooded with eight feet of water. He and his father arrived at the site at 6 a.m. to get in line with about 100 people in front of them. *Photo by John C. Fitzhugh/Courtesy of the Sun Herald.*

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Community Journalism's Pathway to the Future

'A newspaper can't be independent unless it is interdependent with its community of readers.'

By Bob Giles

The transformation of the mainstream media being driven by digital technology has brought citizens' voices into territories where once only journalists trod and altered "the balance of power between those who control the means to publish and those who have something they believe is important to say." With those words Nieman Reports opened its Winter 2005 issue's exploration of the emerging engagement of citizens in newsgathering and commentary and the impact these new voices are having on traditional news organizations.

In Anniston, Alabama in February a different kind of discussion took place on the subject of citizens and journalism, advancing more conventional ideas around the belief that community newspapers can and should make enduring connections with their communities. The focus was on an important kind of journalism that takes place when journalists are embedded in their communities with stories conveyed largely through the printed pages of local newspapers. Participants in these discussions characterized Weblogs and other forms of digital communication, including those at their own newspapers, as impersonal and less effective than the face-to-face conversations that are at the core of the continuing conversation between the newspaper and its community.

"The Emerging Mind of Community Journalism" conference was held at The Teaching Newspaper, a new enterprise in journalism education that seeks to emulate the traditions of the teaching hospital in training doctors by merging teaching with practice. To do this, masters degree students in community journalism from the University of Alabama will study in the newsroom of The Anniston Star. The Knight Community Journalism Fellows program, funded by a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, will enroll its first class in August.

The conference drew more than 200 students, university professors, and journalists who work at community newspapers (fewer than 50,000 daily circulation). These newspapers represent about 30 percent of the total daily circulation and 1,238 of the 1,456 dailies in the United States. Many are owned by families who live in communities where their papers are published, and they understand that personal relationships are at the heart of the paper's role in the community. (Ethnic, neighborhood and cultural sections published by metro newspapers also can be described as community journalism.)

In his keynote speech, Alberto Ibarguen, president of the Knight Foundation, observed that good journalism helps a community define itself, providing readers with information and a sense of place. Though technology and profit-driven

corporate ownership of newspapers pose challenges today, he said, "the core mission of informing our community is still there and still needs doing."

Words and expressions not typically heard when journalists discuss their craft and their business seemed a natural part of the Anniston conversation. For example, "backpack journalism" becomes an antidote to gathering information by Internet and e-mail in the newsroom. Tools—a computer, cell phone, camera and video-cam—go into reporters' backpacks as they head out to their local hospitals, police stations or homeless shelters, not to do old stories but to bring back a new perspective to share with readers.

"The Wal-Mart nation" symbolizes those places in the community where journalists can find a diversity of values and a range of religious and economic circumstances that can broaden the thinking and understanding in newsrooms. This is important, noted John X. Miller of the Detroit Free Press, because diversity that focuses only on color and ethnicity creates a workplace of journalists that share commonly understood values of journalism but don't necessarily relate to the diversity of aspirations in the community.

"Family relationships" speaks to the connection between the newspaper and its community, which in many cases "is so distant it has become aloofness," said H. Brandt Ayers, owner and publisher of The Anniston Star. "A newspaper's ties to the community should embrace all the emotions you have in a family—scolding, loving, challenging, grieving, celebrating, sometimes hurting, sometimes being hurt—emotions people feel intensely."

"The industrial age of journalism," in which newspapers tend to separate themselves from the community, is crumbling. A promising replacement is a newspaper that can create a sense of hope and belief in the possibility that communities can solve problems. This model is constructed on a central idea: A newspaper can't be independent unless it is interdependent with its community of readers. When people believe something can be done, they will re-engage in the community and remain steadfast readers of their local newspapers.

At a time when most Americans say they don't trust the press, it was refreshing to be among journalists talking about the ideal of public good and the need to go about their work in a spirit of humility. They saw their newspapers as sturdy institutions in their communities and themselves as grounded in the belief that feet-on-the-street journalism will lead them into the future. ■

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Reporting on the Gaps

In recounting her reporting experiences for the Palm Beach Post after Hurricane Wilma hit Florida, **Jane Daugherty** speaks to the “retrospective dynamic of our coverage,” in which journalists seem to rediscover in natural disasters the vulnerabilities of those who are poor and powerless. “The unfortunate reality,” Daugherty observes, is “that American journalists do not systematically or analytically cover the plight of the poor, the marginalized, the isolated, or the powerless.” Yet when disaster strikes, these people’s predictable plight becomes news, until interest wanes and the cycle prepares to repeat.

In her role as executive producer of North Carolina Public Radio-WUNC’s series about poverty, **Emily Hanford** relied on a wide array of voices and perspectives to examine in depth such questions such as “What’s political about poverty?” “What is poverty?” and “What’s changed?.” “Getting people to ponder questions like these, possibly in new ways, matters,” Hanford writes. During a 20-month period the local newspaper in Greeley, Colorado (circulation 26,000) devoted considerable space and resources to the publication of a series of articles in which reporters “explored a range of gaps—social, cultural and economic, to name a few—that separate the life experiences of Greeley’s Latino population and the Anglos . . .” writes Greeley Tribune reporter **Dan England**.

As she reported stories for two separate series about disparities in health and gaps in school achievement for WBUR, a public radio station in Boston, reporter **Martha Bebinger** asked herself whether “the arenas of health and education gaps [are] simply the latest way to measure—or possibly sanitize—the effects of discrimination,” and she struggled to figure out “what language to use and what issues to raise in reporting on [such] ‘gaps.’” As a Latina journalist at The Monterey County Herald who reports often on the city of Salinas’s Latinos, who make up 67 percent of that city’s population, **Claudia Meléndez Salinas** confronts the challenge of finding ways to “report on these complicated and historic formulas of white privilege and the disadvantage of color in a 12-inch story and on deadline.”

As business editor at The Associated Press, **Kevin Noblet** monitors closely the ever-expanding wage and benefit gaps separating “what an average employee earns and what top bosses take home.” Noblet sees this issue not as a story assigned to a single reporter but as an historic shift for which “every business reporter and columnist needs to be on watch for threads of this story.” As author and Weblogger **Danny Schechter** explored the widening credit divide in America—fueled, in part, by predatory targeting of the poor by the credit industry—he found reasons why this story might receive less media attention than it should. “. . . the media industry has discovered that there’s money to be made in the credit business and so credit card companies become big media advertisers. Why alienate them?”

Trudy Lieberman, president of the Association of Health Care Journalists, offers some explanations for why health reporting so rarely spotlights the plight of the uninsured. She tells of a newspaper reporter in Wisconsin who can’t “interest her editors in stories about

health care inequalities or other health policy issues.” In focus groups, Lieberman writes, “consumers tell publishing executives what they want, and it rarely includes a desire for more news about the ever-widening gap between the health care haves and have-nots.” As education reporter for the Walla Walla (Wash.) Union-Bulletin, **Cathy Grimes** wrote a series of articles about the achievement gap in the wake of the passage of No Child Left Behind. “Stories from the classroom—my version of frontline reporting—focused on successful strategies to bridge the gaps, as well as on efforts and attitudes that seemed destined to leave the gap firmly in place,” Grimes writes.

Paul Nyhan, a reporter at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, describes how his newspaper put a lot of reporting resources behind a series of stories examining the “overarching issues” common to the lives of the working poor. Faced now with a lean newsroom and a fight to keep the newspaper alive, Nyhan writes that he expects “to spend the next year writing about middle-class families, a group our marketers say still reads newspapers.” Freelance journalist **Susan Brenna** offers thoughts on how good writers “achieve the right tone—humane, but clear-eyed—when writing about the disadvantaged.” **Jason Johnson**, a San Francisco Chronicle reporter, relied on the details of financial experiences to tell an “in-depth story about the economic squeeze on middle-class families.” Accompanying his words are photographs from the series with descriptions of circumstances the families confronted. In reporting for Women’s eNews about how federal welfare reform was affecting poor and low-income families, freelance journalist **Jennifer Friedlin** realized how little attention most of the news media paid to this important follow-up story and how the stories being done failed to capture the more complicated dimensions that she felt needed to be told. “I got the feeling that once welfare had been ‘reformed,’ the news story was simply over,” Friedlin writes.

Ana Cristina Enriquez, who worked as editor in Reforma Group in Mexico, observes that in her country “Mexican society considers it bad taste to talk about these shameful contrasts [of rich and poor].” This attitude is adopted by the press, where the focus today is “on wealth and celebrities.” As Enriquez notes, “What one almost never reads or hears about in Mexico is the immense gap dividing more well-to-do Mexicans from the native Indians, who reside at the very bottom of the economic and social ladder.” In China, the government has acknowledged the need to address the country’s widening economic divide, but as Beijing-based journalist **Yuan Feng** writes, “From the official news media, readers cannot get a very good understanding about the presence or significance of these gaps, nor is there any mention made of the structural factors which are causing them or helping them to persist.” **Françoise Lazare**, a reporter with Le Monde in Paris, describes how foreign reporting of France’s “suburban riots” involving poor, ethnic minority youth differed from that done by French journalists, and also observes that in “normal” times “other political, social and economic issues are generally seen as greater priorities by the French press . . .” ■

Remembering Those Who Are Usually Forgotten

‘... journalists should draw attention to the obvious fault lines that exist in how well various communities are equipped to respond to an impending disaster.’

By Jane Daugherty

It was November 4, 2005, nearly two weeks after Hurricane Wilma, a wicked blow sometimes overlooked in the wake of Katrina's devastation, but a storm that nonetheless left six million people without electricity and thousands homeless. Post-hurricane rainstorms in South Florida brought down trees and weakened power poles, while blowing poorly secured tarps from hurricane-splintered roofs. The water damage was devastating.

I was interviewing Mary Bello, an articulate 88-year-old widow, in her leaking top-floor condo in a sprawling senior housing complex called Century Village west of Boca Raton. Water was trickling down the indoor walls of her apartment as workmen pulled out sodden carpet and set up giant industrial fans. “Why are you staying here when the sign is posted downstairs that says there may be electrical hazards because of water in the walls?” I asked her.

“What am I supposed to do?” she asked, incredulous at my question. “Where do I have to go? I don't have a car, I can't afford a hotel, and they're already closing the shelters.”

Bello lives in Century Village along with hundreds of other seniors, many in their 80's and 90's, with their nearest relatives in New York or New Jersey. Most rode out the 2005 hurricanes in their modest condos, which are among the more affordable housing units in increasingly affluent Palm Beach County. Red Cross volunteers delivered bottled water and emergency meals to them, but now, nearly two weeks after Wilma, they were scaling back their operation as “things returned to normal.”

Normal became a highly relative term in South Florida. Typically it meant electricity was slowly being restored and downed power poles and trees

removed. But the lives of Bello and her neighbors were still far from normal. When would their building be safe? When would they live under a roof more solid than the thin blue tarp that workers tacked to the building before they disappeared? On that day, no one could answer these questions.

Nor could I answer them now, since I never returned to Century Village because I was soon assigned to interview Katrina victims who had fled New Orleans and were being housed in a large horse-training facility and putting their kids in schools in western Palm Beach County. Like the Red Cross and power company repair crews, I and other reporters moved on.

The poor and elderly, struggling to live on limited incomes, suffer a double whammy when hit by unpredictable hurricane winds and flooding. It must be little solace that the authorities advised them in advance of the storms to prepare by stocking seven days worth of food, enough prescription drugs to last for several weeks, emergency medical supplies, bottled water, plus fresh batteries for flashlights and radios. When evacuations were ordered, they were advised to flee with those supplies, a full tank of gas in their car, and plans to stay with relatives or in hotels out of harm's way.

At first blush, that might sound like a reasonable plan to young, well-educated reporters who sprung mainly from the middle class and are eager for a major hurricane assignment. But how reasonable is it for an elderly person, who lives alone and spends almost every dollar of their Social Security check on housing, prescriptions and food? How doable is it for a single mother with a couple of preschool children who takes the bus to work, gets food stamps to

help feed her kids, and whose medical care is paid for by Medicaid (if she qualifies) because her job at Wal-Mart or McDonald's doesn't include health care benefits? Economically and politically marginalized, the poor have little choice but to stay put, ride out the weather, and hope for the best.

Remembering the Poor

Last year, with its record 27 named storms, 15 of which were hurricanes—several of particular ferocity—proved most unkind. These storms brought plenty of news to keep journalists busy and inspired in some cases excellent coverage such as the South Florida Sun-Sentinel's scathing, nationwide FEMA investigation and The Miami Herald's revelations that repeated cuts in federal funding for the National Hurricane Center have hampered its capacity to predict hurricanes' paths and severity.

But during last year's storms, when the incredible damage was being well reported and the Pulitzer Prize-winning photos of the human tragedies shot, how many editors thought of assigning reporters to spend time with poor families or elderly people as they prepared for a predicted hit by a Category 4 or 5 storm? And how many journalists—not to mention editorial writers—in Florida questioned Governor Jeb Bush's reasoning as he calmly urged Florida residents to take “personal responsibility” when preparing for approaching hurricanes?

Perhaps the governor's guidance, by itself, should have prompted editors to assign a story looking at what personal responsibility in hurricane preparedness actually means to poor, disabled or elderly people. Where are people on limited incomes supposed to get the

resources to purchase an extra week's worth of food and emergency supplies if a storm approaches at the end of the month, as did Katrina, Rita and Wilma? Most likely, their food stamps had been spent earlier in the month. And what about the elderly whose first-of-the-month Social Security checks might not afford an unplanned trip to the market and pharmacy?

In the previous issue of *Nieman Reports*, journalists eloquently recounted experiences covering the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Their words spoke to what I've noticed while covering hurricanes in Florida, and these observations, if heeded, could offer us guidance for future coverage of disasters, whether they involve nature's fury or more predictable crises whose impact will be differently experienced by those of varying economic and social backgrounds.

The poor and near-poor tend to be clustered in areas most vulnerable to flood waters. And once their homes and neighborhoods are damaged, these communities don't return "to normal" with the same speed as nearby, more well-off areas do. With the devastation of New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward—and the debate about rebuilding it—reporting has made this set of circumstances become quite obvious to most Americans. But this situation was evident, too, in the aftermath of Hurricane Andrew in South Florida in 1992, when Homestead, Perrine, Naranja and other small towns south of Miami with

high concentrations of low-income Americans and migrant workers were totally devastated, and rebuilding was delayed in some cases for more than a decade. And this awareness did not translate into more attention being paid to these poorer communities as other storms have approached.

As television brought the devastation of New Orleans into most American's homes, these circumstances have been amplified. Within a short time, reporters were explaining to many who never thought much about why a poor urban family who relies on public transportation might not have been able to get out of the area before the waters rushed in.

But this retrospective dynamic of our coverage—addressing such fundamental issues only after disaster has struck—repeatedly causes journalists to miss, or belatedly discover, similar angles in other major news stories. For example, who are the people who lose out in the new Medicare drug program? Who serves disproportionately in high-risk military assignments? Whose jobs are outsourced first?

The unfortunate reality is that American journalists do not systematically or analytically cover the plight of the poor, the marginalized, the isolated, or the powerless. When we put together elaborate hurricane coverage plans, organize medical beats, determine Iraq war coverage, or decide on approaches to stories about globalization of the economy, our focus generally is on

implications for the affluent and what "experts" have to say, while keeping a watchful eye on breaking news.

Perhaps last year's unprecedented hurricane season can convince us to factor in the life circumstances and needs of poor and low-income people as we think about coverage of disasters, natural and man-made. To try to avert massive tragedies like those experienced by so many New Orleans families stranded on rooftops or abandoned for days in the Superdome, journalists should draw attention to the obvious fault lines that exist in how well various communities are equipped to respond to an impending disaster. This can be said of hurricane preparedness, but also of potential spread of diseases, such as bird flu, or of how a community could respond to a terrorist attack. As journalists, poverty, disenfranchisement and isolation are as important for us to examine before tragedies strike as they are for us to scrutinize after the harm is done. ■

Jane Daugherty, a 1984 Nieman Fellow, is a four-time winner of the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award for coverage of the disadvantaged. She covered the impact of hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma last year for the Palm Beach Post and recently joined the faculty of Florida International University's School of Journalism as associate professor.

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Questioning Assumptions About Poverty

A North Carolina public radio station devotes extraordinary time and resources to an exploration of what it means to be poor in this time and place.

By Emily Hanford

A year ago, I was executive producer of a series about poverty that aired on North Carolina Public Radio-WUNC. The series was, if anything, large. We produced two half-hour documentaries, 20 feature

reports, 10 call-in programs, 32 pieces we called "poverty shorts," a photo exhibit, a DVD slide show, and a public-opinion poll. The size of the project, and the variety of forms we used, was a deliberate effort to get our listeners'

attention. We wanted them to think about two questions: What is poverty? And how has poverty changed since the early 1960's, when poverty was a major focus of public attention?

These questions obsessed and moti-

vated me for nearly a year while pondering, planning and producing this series that we called "North Carolina Voices: Understanding Poverty."

The idea for a radio series about poverty had been simmering in my mind for a long time. During my five years as news director at WUNC, a major shift in the state's economy had been taking place. Tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs had moved overseas, leaving entire families and whole communities shell-shocked, unprepared for the future suddenly thrust upon them. At the same time, the high-tech bubble burst, and the relatively strong economy in the state's urban areas was shaken. Highly educated workers were rethinking their lives, too, and retraining for new careers.

In our regular news reporting, we did many good stories about these changes and their consequences, but I knew there was more to be done. And around this time, it occurred to me how seldom I was hearing the word poverty on the radio. I heard a lot about layoffs, unemployment and the changing economy, but I wasn't hearing much about what it meant to be poor. Were the people losing their jobs becoming poor? Did they meet the definition of poverty? I wanted to know how the notion of poverty fit into the story of massive job loss.

The Project's Roots

All of these questions came together in the winter of 2004 when the station had a sudden opportunity to apply for some grant money, and I was asked to come up with an idea for a series, quickly. The grant required an historical angle, so I headed for the library. The afternoon I spent there—buried in the archives of the North Carolina Collection at UNC-Chapel Hill—was exhilarating. I ended up in a dusty little room with an ancient looking VCR and watched a film made in 1963 by the staff of the North Carolina Fund.

The fund was a new idea, fueled by private money and a governor, Terry Sanford, who wanted to do something about entrenched poverty in the state. This film was a "how to" for commu-



Henredon Furniture opened its Spruce Pine Plant in 1967. It was once the county's largest employer. The company began phasing out operations in the fall of 2004.

"I see a lot of people who have not found jobs. I see people who are working at much lower wages than they were before. Having lost hundreds of manufacturing jobs, the local economy is suffering. We're trying to bring jobs back that would be as good as we can locate now. I don't know that we'll ever get back perhaps what we've lost."

—Sandra Buchanan, then director of the Mitchell County office of the North Carolina Employment Security Commission. *Photo © Billy Barnes.*

nity leaders interested in applying for money to set up antipoverty programs. I was struck most by the film's tone. Dramatically, authoritatively, in a very early 1960's kind of way, the film said, as I recall: "Poverty is a huge problem. It's a problem we've been ignoring, but we can't afford to anymore. And we can solve it. We can, through effort and activism, make poverty history."

I returned to my office bursting with ideas. We wrote our proposal for a very ambitious project. Today I can go back and track the energized and fast-paced thinking that occurred as we were writing it. My drafts are saved under titles like "Thursday 8 AM" and "Thursday 8:30 AM with new ideas." The project we proposed would result in a "series of radio broadcasts concerning the changes in the experience and perception of poverty over time and especially since the pivotal 'War on Poverty' 40 years ago."

We didn't get the grant. "Whew!" was my private reaction, but the idea did not go away.

Turns out that our station manager,

Joan Siefert Rose, wanted to hear this project on the radio and was eager to see the station take on big projects like this one. Most importantly, she was willing to spend station funds to make it happen. I resigned as news director and suggested I oversee the poverty project instead. I knew I couldn't do both. The job created for me was one I hadn't known I was longing for: senior editor for special projects.

Late in the summer of 2004, I started to plan the poverty series in earnest. At the time, my other responsibility at the station was overseeing special election coverage, so a lot of newsroom conversations were focused on politics. I was thinking about everything through the prism of questions such as, "How do Republicans see this? How do Democrats? What informs the worldview of liberals and conservatives? If their worldviews are so different, why?" I started to think about poverty this way. I took a step back and did my best to push away what I thought I knew so that I could ask in a fresh way: "What's political about poverty?"

The Politics of Poverty

So began my quest to better understand the politics of poverty. I knew I was more familiar with what would be described as the liberal point of view. So I needed someone who could help me see poverty through a conservative lens. I went to Robert Rector. He's a senior research fellow who focuses on poverty at The Heritage Foundation, a Washington, D.C. think tank whose mission is to promote conservative public policies. Rector's ideology is pretty far right on the political spectrum; even some conservatives regard his thinking as extreme. But his ideas have held sway in Washington; he was an influential voice during the 1990's debate about welfare reform, and The Heritage Foundation remains one of the more powerful think tanks today.

Rector's basic argument is that there is virtually no poverty left in the United States; the 37 million Americans defined by the Census Bureau as poor are not really poor. He argues that most of the people defined as "poor" in America "live in material conditions that would be judged as comfortable or well-off just a few generations ago," as he cowrote in a paper called "Understanding Poverty in America." Americans, in his view, live in such a rich country, that to be poor in the United States is not really to be poor anymore.

This point of view was not new to me, but I heard it with new significance and interest. Here was an influential voice in current political circles making an argument that there are almost

no poor people in America and that the census definition of poverty exaggerates the problem. At the same time, the official poverty rate is going up, and people on the political left argue that the threshold is set too low and that millions of Americans struggle to get by but are not being counted among the official poor. How can meaningful conversation about poverty take place when there is so little agreement on what the word means?

I started asking everyone I talked with: "What is poverty?" That question became the central focus of our radio series, along with "What's changed?"

Questions are what drive me as a journalist, and I don't think it's my job to end up at a particular point of view or sway opinion to a certain outcome. Some people think my take on this topic is exactly what's wrong with journalism today and indeed what's wrong with the country. Some of our listeners, I learned, were frustrated that our series on poverty did not take a stronger stand on the topic, that it did not say "This is an outrage," or "This must be changed." Some were surprised—others were angry—to hear Rector's voice included as a part of our series, denying the problem of poverty altogether.

As it happens, this series aired when an intense and intensely political conversation was going on about issues of balance, accuracy and equal time, especially in public broadcasting. I believe that some listeners heard our series—full of questions, thin on answers, fascinated by various voices—and thought we were caving in to a com-

mand to "keep things equal." Other listeners heard a series that reinforced their belief that public radio is always taking on liberal topics with a liberal bias, so it's hard for me to really know what to make of the varied reaction the series evoked.

But the series achieved one of our key goals: it captured listeners' attention, and we hope it got them talking and thinking and reflecting on poverty in their place and time—asking what it means to be poor, who is poor, why are they poor, and what's changing about poverty. Getting people to ponder questions like these, possibly in new ways, matters. One listener wrote: "I listened to [your series] every morning with our sons as we drove to school. Some of it is hard for them to hear, but it has sparked great discussion within our family. And so, I am grateful to you as a professional and as a mom."

That comment—and others like it—continues to give me a tremendous amount of satisfaction about the work we did on this series. ■

Emily Hanford works with North Carolina Public Radio-WUNC, as executive producer of "North Carolina Voices" and is now working on a series about high school. "North Carolina Voices: Understanding Poverty" won a 2006 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Broadcast News Award. This series can be heard at www.wunc.org/special/poverty/index.html

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A North Carolina strip shopping center.

"It is so expensive to be poor. And I don't mean in a symbolic way. I mean physically, literally, in dollars and cents, it is more expensive to be poor than it is to be middle class. In a poor community you'll have a convenience store instead of a grocery store. In a poor community you'll have a check casher instead of an ATM machine. In a poor community you may have an ambulance that takes you to the emergency room instead of ... health insurance or a doctor's appointment. It is literally 10 to 20 percent, in some cases 50 percent, more expensive to start out poor. So how do you ever get ahead?" —Martin Eakes, founder and CEO of Self-Help Credit Union, a nonprofit lending institution in Durham, North Carolina. *Photo © Billy Barnes.*



Exploring Connections and Tensions

The small local newspaper in Greeley, Colorado devoted considerable time and space to examining the gaps emerging in its community.

By Dan England

To pass through Greeley, Colorado on the way to Denver, with a stop for lunch at the Red Robin, our town doesn't leave much of an impression beyond the slew of big box stores—Home Depot, Target, Circuit City, and Kohl's—that assault the eye. Though the land Greeley residents used to farm is being consumed by such "progress," some among us still carry the smell of cows, though not nearly as many as those who live in Denver might think. Peer inside these stores, and those of us shopping there are mostly white and appear to be middle class and conservative, whatever that looks like. But if a traveler doesn't turn off the highway and pull into Greeley, beyond all of these new homes and stores, this first impression will be quite misleading.

For years, the local newspaper, the Greeley Tribune, has invited readers to get to know their town and neighbors a little better, even if doing so makes them a bit uncomfortable. In a five-year span, the Tribune staff, once a month, presented readers with stories about poor and troubled youth who live in our community. In doing so, we often brought them face-to-face with conflicts that have arisen in the midst of an influx of Latino families.

I was a reporter on our first series of articles, which we called "Worlds Apart-Come Together." During a 20-month period, we explored a range of gaps—social, cultural and economic, to name a few—that separate the life experiences of Greeley's Latino population and the Anglos who live in Weld County, where Greeley is located. I also worked as a reporter on several installments of the second series, "Faces of our Future," which was about problems facing Greeley's youth. Then last



Ashley sits with Jessica on the foundation of what used to be the house that she grew up in. The house was condemned and torn down three years ago. Ashley said she never realized anything was wrong with her living conditions while she was growing up. When the water was shut off and she needed a shower or a hot meal or a warm bed, she just went over to Jessica's house. At one point she remembers having 13 dogs, 30 cats, lots of fish, and a ferret that someone traded her mom for a joint. "It seems crazy looking back that we had so many animals yet we never had any food," said Ashley. *Photo by Hillary Wheat/Greeley Tribune.*

year, the newspaper published its third series in this project, this one focusing on poverty. Its title was "Living on the Edge," and on that one, I was the lead reporter and part-time editor.

Each of these series offered the newspaper an opportunity to focus on different aspects of these disparate experiences. In our opening series of stories, we covered such topics as bicultural relationships and marriages involving Latinos and Anglos, the impact of Latino music on the young in our community, and the thriving Latino homebuyer's market. Each of these topics explored the tension being felt by members of

both communities. In our next series of articles, our reporters tackled such topics as obesity, teen pregnancy, and teenager's often-overstuffed lifestyles. By the time we embarked on our third series, we were ready to expand our reporting to include stories about the elderly, to look at how the schools are coping with their job of educating the young, and how middle-class families were only a few paychecks away from poverty's doorstep.

Despite their differences, in many important ways these series built on one another in their approach and also in what they strived to achieve.

Advice About Doing Project and Daily Reporting at the Same Time

What follows is more practical guidance about how to do large projects reporting at a small-staffed community newspaper, while also continuing to get news into the daily paper. —D.E.

- Offer free movie tickets, for example, in exchange for good story ideas developed through e-mail conferences with reporters, photographers, copy desk staff, and those who work in other departments.
 - Start early. Post a schedule for each installment of your series, showing specific dates when copy needs to be to editors, including photos and graphics. Encourage reporters and photographers to spread out their work on the project, both to enhance their reporting experience and also to have time for the daily obligations they must fulfill.
 - Have reporters and photographers set up appointments for when they will see their subjects. This forces them to adhere to a schedule, even when they've got a story due in two days.
 - Hold meetings every few weeks about the status of the project. Not every person involved in it has to get together, but at least one editor should be there to either prod those working on stories or pat them on the back.
 - Work on the project as it's being reported. Type in notes upon returning from a reporting session.
- This will make it much easier to organize the story when it's time to write. Photographers should also edit their pictures as they take them. The more attention given to these details as the story is being done, the easier the series will be to put together.
- Build in time for writing and selecting images. Editors will also need to set aside time to work with writers on revisions, and then designers need time to put the words and images on the page. This step appears obvious, yet it is often the most overlooked when putting a project together.
 - Have fun. Doing double-time to produce a project can be exhausting, but it's also why we became journalists. ■

In each series, our reporting illuminated the life experiences of people in our city and county whose lives too often are invisible to other residents. Readers of the Greeley Tribune were hearing about the gaps between the haves and have-nots long before Hurricane Katrina inspired some in the press to start focusing on these disparities. The installments in each series were each large projects that required weeks, if not months, to complete. These installments averaged six spreads, a dozen photographs, graphics, sidebars and a long main story. We are fortunate that Swift Newspapers, Inc., our private company that owns the Greeley Tribune and several other smaller newspapers, gives our reporters and editors the time, space and, occasionally, the travel budget to do these stories.

Each of our stories featured reporting on people's actual circumstances, rather than articles that conveyed comments about people's experiences. With every issue explored, we included a sidebar with information about this issue, but other photographs and words were primarily devoted to the storytelling about how people were struggling (and sometimes thriving) with various aspects of their lives.

The ideas for these series emerged out of staff brainstorming sessions—a once-a-year retreat where we would discuss our goals for that year. These discussions involved photographers, reporters, editors, copy-desk staffers, and our graphics editor. With all of us talking around the same table, the decision-making about what direction to move in involved everyone.

Once we'd set out the framework for each series, ideas for stories to tell came from people in Greeley as lead reporters conversed with community leaders and people whose lives were affected by the issues we hoped to cover. Out of those discussions emerged dozens of story ideas and, after months of additional meetings to talk more about these ideas and how they might be approached, we created a story plan to fit our schedule. It would be the reporter's job to find people whose lives could illuminate each of these topics, and what we discovered often is that in setting out to highlight a particular issue, our subjects led us to dig far deeper into it than we had thought was possible to do. In following a foster child, our reporter was able to share with readers the critical role that caring adults—in this situation the child's teachers and

foster parents—can play in helping a child overcome some of the difficulties that often accompany poverty.

We are a community newspaper, with a circulation of 26,000 and a small staff. This means reporters had to keep up with their beats and daily assignments while the projects were being done. To help them, we presented the project story schedule months, and in some cases more than a year, in advance. This provided time to start early in locating subjects, finding sources, and reporting their story, which is the key to getting it done. For example, I spent eight months following a teenager through the last months of her pregnancy, the birth, and the first few months of raising her child. I could not have done that, and written nearly as complete a story, without having such advance notice. [For more hints about how to do this kind of project at community newspapers, see box above.]

Though many of these stories were tough to read and see—given the content of the topics we featured—in sidebars we offered informed guidance about solutions. An editorial about the featured topic appeared on the day of the story, and on the op-ed page we published columns written by com-

munity members involved with these issues.

As a community newspaper, those of us who work here have a huge stake in Greeley's future and that of Weld County, where we all live. As part of this project, we tried to offer some answers geared to the local circumstances that are resulting in these gaps in our community's fabric. And in many of our stories glimmers of hope emerged as the person featured showed by example how difficult situations were overcome.

As we expected, some of our readers didn't like the glare of this spotlight. Some of them complained that we did far too many stories on Latinos; others told us we were "too easy" on them, though we also featured Anglo families and youngsters dealing with similarly tough issues. The pregnant teen whom

I profiled was Anglo, for example.

This reporting—and hearing these reactions—made us examine the choices we make each day in terms of whom we interview and the stories we report. We asked ourselves why, when a local Spanish radio station has a Christmas party, we tend to use quotes only from Latinos in our stories, even though Anglos are there as well. What these series have perhaps taught us most clearly is the value of looking deeply at a range of issues. For instance, in recent months we've published a story on Greeley's gang problems, exploring how drugs have made their actions more violent, how the gangs are affecting our schools, as well as how they are influencing the community's pop culture, from cars to clothes to music.

I have to admit I was glad when we finished our final series. At times, they

wore me out. They are hard work, of course, and reporting on many of these emotionally gripping experiences left me feeling drained. I am, however, thankful for the opportunity we were given to let Tribune readers learn a lot more about the interesting and diverse city that all of us call home. Many of our readers surely shared an eye-opening journey similar to mine; before I started to report these stories, these gaps were unknown and unseen by me as well. ■

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Views About Race Cloud Discussions About Disparities

'Do these labels—"health disparities" and "the achievement gap"—create a more comfortable way for us to talk about contemporary impacts of race?'

By Martha Bebinger

Often a few comments stay with me after I finish reporting a story. In the fall, while doing research for a radio series about disparities in health care, I heard such a remark from a doctor who trains other physicians to think about the role they play in the minority health care gap. When I asked him how he addresses the impact of racism, he replied: "We try not to use the 'R' word; it's just not productive."

His comment stayed with me, as I wondered how or whether to raise this as an issue in my story. It didn't make sense to me that "racism" had become an unspoken word among people trying to unravel the roots of racial and ethnic health disparities. So I talked with researchers who are pressing for

more frank discussions about everything from the effects of stereotypes to the lack of supermarkets in minority neighborhoods and about the sense of resignation now felt among some blacks and Latinos. Other physicians studying the health gap explained that the complexities involved in the dynamics of doctor-patient relationships make it difficult to focus on seeking and dissecting signs of bias. What they told me is that confrontation of this sort isn't helpful.

This led me to want to know more about the complicated interactions that go on between doctors and patients and how they might contribute to these health disparities. I decided one story in this series would focus on increasing efforts to train doctors and patients. For

patients, the goal is becoming more assertive. For doctors, it is to encourage sensitivity. But "sensitivity trainings," with the implication that doctors are insensitive, didn't go over well; over time, these classes became known as "cultural competency" sessions.

Does Training Work?

Cultural competency is part of a broader effort to improve physicians' communication skills. The idea is that learning how to take care of the body isn't enough—doctors must also know how to work effectively with patients. Doctors have great stories about the patients who catch them off guard. There was the Chinese woman who described "wind" four different ways

before her physician figured out she was talking about shortness of breath. Another doctor says she was stunned to realize that a Cambodian woman was (accurately) testing her blood-sugar level by tasting her urine.

Many doctors now wonder why their medical school training did not include tips about how to earn a patient's trust. And in several studies I read on health disparities it was found that most black patients are initially wary of white doctors. Patients with whom I spoke brought up the notorious Tuskegee experiment, where some 400 poor black men in Alabama were "studied" rather than treated for syphilis from 1932 to 1972. One social worker told me that many immigrant women she counsels in the Boston area believe white male doctors will try to sterilize them.

Workshops to help minority patients become better advocates for themselves are also relatively new, but it wasn't hard to find participants who would let a radio reporter eavesdrop on their session. In these sessions, they share stories about medical workers who assume they are drug addicts or illiterate. They encourage each other to change doctors if they feel uncomfortable or aren't satisfied with the care. With doctors, however, it took me months to get permission to record a cultural competency training and then I only got the okay from the trainer. Participating doctors didn't know in advance that I would be there.

The session I recorded for use in my story took place at one of the country's top cancer treatment centers. The physicians who attended have been treating cancer patients for 20 to 40 years. They sat around a large conference table as their discussion focused on the results of an online test they'd taken that evaluated their success in caring for minority patients. As part of this test, the doctors had been asked to figure out why several fictional patients weren't responding to care. In one example, Mrs. Bonilla, a woman from the Dominican Republic

with breast cancer, stopped taking her tamoxifen. The challenge presented to these top oncologists was to figure out why and persuade her to resume the medication.

One doctor incorrectly assumed that Mrs. Bonilla didn't have health insurance and could not afford the drug. But during this conference table review, he realized that her coverage plan was in the medical record. The trainer asked how he'd overlooked that important detail. The doctor paused for moment and then said, "It must have been innate

... a black colleague told me to avoid using the words 'racism' or 'discrimination' when I told this story. Her reasoning in telling me this was her belief that using those words causes listeners to go numb or tune out: either the concepts are too loaded, in the case of whites, or worn out, for blacks.

prejudice" that he said was based on his experience with Latino patients who are uninsured. The trainer gently reminded him that although Latinos do have the highest rates of being uninsured, making that assumption could trigger decisions that harm patients.

Two other physicians argued about what would be the best way to convince Bonilla that tamoxifen is a better treatment than the folk and herbal remedies she prefers. One doctor said his strategy would be to keep giving reluctant patients like her more and more medical evidence about the success of mainstream medical therapies until they agree with his advice. The other said doctors need to ask patients what they think will help and then collaborate on a treatment plan.

A lot of long pauses punctuated this review as the doctors looked at the answers they got right and those considered to be "wrong." Some glanced at my microphone, then didn't offer any comments. Others told me afterwards

that the workshop was worth the time and would improve their communication with patients.

But the training session left me wondering if this kind of exercise really does begin to reveal the reasons why black patients with treatable lung cancer are less than half as likely to get needed surgery when compared with white patients with the same diagnosis. Do these workshops help those in the medical profession understand why doctors recommend coronary bypass surgery more often for white men than for black men? A Harvard Medical School doctor who led the lung cancer study used the "R" word in published reports on his findings: "In our society, it is always hard to rule out racism." But he also wrote that "most doctors want to do the right thing. It's a complex situation. It's not just conscious or unconscious racism."

Early in my reporting on this health disparities series, a black colleague told me to avoid using the words "racism" or "discrimination" when I told this story. Her reasoning in telling me this was her belief that using those words causes listeners to go numb or tune out: either the concepts are too loaded, in the case of whites, or worn out, for blacks.

The Role of Race

A few weeks after we aired my series on health disparities, I started working on a collaborative series about the achievement gap in public schools. Half-seriously I asked if what we really needed to do was a larger story to look at the connections between these two growing areas of research. Are the arenas of health and education gaps simply the latest way to measure—or possibly sanitize—the effects of discrimination? Do these labels—"health disparities" and "the achievement gap"—create a more comfortable way for us to talk about contemporary impacts of race? Or do they divert attention away from core questions about why white Americans, generally speaking, have a better shot

at a productive life, including a decent education and adequate health care?

As I struggle with what language to use and what issues to raise in reporting on “gaps” such as these, another interview keeps popping into my head. I asked a leading American geneticist about his efforts to clarify the role of race in health disparities. (Predisposition for some diseases is based on a family’s genetic history and what part of the world this family comes from and not the color of one’s skin.) He threw up his hands, sighed, and said he’s ready

to stop trying to talk about race and genetics in public forums because the discussion becomes so polarized. The combination of anger and guilt about how minorities have been treated makes having a straightforward discussion difficult, he contends. But from where I sit—listening as I do to many voices talking about these issues—it doesn’t seem likely there will be much progress in closing the health and education gaps until we, as a community, find ways to get more comfortable with talking about race. ■

Martha Bebinger is a reporter for WBUR, a public radio station in Boston, Massachusetts. The story about cultural competency sessions can be heard on the Web at www.wbur.org/news/2005/52087_20050928.asp. Her reporting on the achievement gap can be heard at www.wbur.org/news/2005/53313_20051116.asp

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When the Role Race Plays in Societal Gaps Is Unspoken

A journalist faces ‘obstacles—some institutional, some personal—that stand like an invisible line between covering race and covering it up.’

By Claudia Meléndez Salinas

On December 5th, the 17-year-old son of Salinas, California Councilwoman Gloria de la Rosa, a well-regarded member of the community, was shot in the back after a street altercation. In a city gripped by gang violence, where drive-by shootings are almost routine, a kid who survives an attempt on his life seldom merits more than a breaking police story. Except in this case he was the son of a prominent politician, a woman who has spoken out against gang violence for years.

I drove to her home for a follow-up story, where I met two women who are representative of this working-class city in California’s central coast: Latinas, middle-aged, mothers of young children. Luz¹ is a farm worker who resumes her involvement in the community in the winter, once her work in the fields dwindles. Rosa works for a nonprofit aimed at curbing gang violence. The women recognized me and smiled. It was a shame, they told me,

that something like this happened to Gloria, one of the most active council members. “Nobody else is out there doing anything,” Rosa went on to say, but then she cautioned. “But don’t put that in the paper.”

“Yeah,” Luz chimed in. “Don’t put this in the paper either, but I’m going to tell you something. The police, they don’t care if Hispanics kill each other. All they do is go round up brown kids, put them in jail, but that doesn’t stop the killings. If white people started getting shot, the police would do something about it. But you’re not going to put that in the paper, are you?”

Just like the people in New Orleans after Katrina, who felt it was their race that had trapped them in the Superdome for days with no food and no water, people in Salinas often feel that their everyday struggles somehow have something to do with their background. They feel that if they get fired from a job it’s because they’re Hispanic, that

if their children get picked up by the police it’s because of the color of their skin, and if the police appear to do nothing to stem gang violence it’s because it’s only brown people who are dying.

Journalists and the Latino Story

They almost always feel, too, that the news media are not doing a good job at covering what happens in Latino communities. As a reporter for one of the city’s daily newspaper, The Monterey County Herald, I am a part of what they like to point a finger at. Even though I struggle every day with attempting to paint a more complex view into the Latino community, I face obstacles—some institutional, some personal—that stand like an invisible line between covering race and covering it up. Some people don’t like talking about race and racism, so they unwillingly contribute to the silence on racial matters. Some

¹ In my newspaper’s coverage of this story, these women’s names were changed at their request, due to their stated reluctance to be quoted in their discussions about race.

topics involved with race are so complex that it is hard to report and write about them on a regular basis. Sometimes I can't figure out how to incorporate race and ethnicity in a story, so I try to sneak it in or I decide to leave it out.

The truth is that gang violence in the Central Coast region of California is the result of complicated, long standing relationships developed among "prison gangs" and "street gangs" to control the drug trade. Latino children, often home alone as both parents work in the fields, are easy prey for older gang members, who have often served time in prison and now want to recruit new "soldiers" to join their cause. It is in this way that the Central Coast's lucrative agricultural industry becomes the perfect breeding ground for street gangs. And the majority of the members of these gangs are Latino children, since it is their Mexican migrant parents who work in the fields.

Much the same can be said for almost all of the social ills in Monterey County. Its economy is fueled by the low-paying agricultural jobs and service-industry jobs related to tourism, and these jobs don't pay enough for low-wage workers to have decent housing or health care, and the schools their children attend are resource-poor as well. Those who live at the bottom of the region's socioeconomic ladder, Latinos, are the ones who feel the brunt of these problems. Many of the workers are unskilled, and they lack a formal education, and it can be difficult for them to understand the economic formulas that have placed whites atop and people of color at the bottom. All they know is that they feel it's not right that their children don't receive a good education, or that they live in dilapidated housing, or that they can't afford health insurance.

The Dilemma of Race

Because they don't have a name to capture what they feel, they call it racism. But when they talk with me or other reporters about their lives and about

these issues, they refuse to be quoted. And this presents me with a dilemma: How do I report on these complicated and historic formulas of white privilege and the disadvantage of color in a 12-inch story and on deadline? How do I convince my sources, whether it's a woman I speak with on the street or a county supervisor, to tell me on the record that they believe there's a racist tinge on how these things play out in their daily lives?

After witnessing thousands of black people trapped not just by Katrina's devastating effects but also by their poverty and its evident intersection with race,

Some topics involved with race are so complex that it is hard to report and write about them on a regular basis. Sometimes I can't figure out how to incorporate race and ethnicity in a story, so I try to sneak it in or I decide to leave it out.

there's been a lot of hand-wringing by journalists about how to do a better job covering race—and the divisive social issues that are a part of this story. Even if we know that the direct cause is racism, the overt discrimination of people based on the color of their skin, nobody seems to know what to call what they see, either. Even worse, for us, we don't know how to incorporate these important dimensions into our daily coverage, or how to come up with in-depth pieces that could help people to look at these issues more thoughtfully.

In my daily coverage of Salinas and surrounding areas, I often try to incorporate tidbits of information that would give a fuller picture of people's ethnic, social and economic background. For instance, in stories about parents volunteering at their children's schools, I mention the Mexican state where they come from; or at social gatherings I describe the music they hear (mariachi or ranchera) or food (tamales and champurrado). At times I've found that editors are cautious when it comes to stories that mention race or ethnicity. I was assigned, for example, to write

a story about an elderly white woman who collects Nativity scenes. In my story, I mentioned how ironic it was that this woman lamented the decline of this Christian custom while just driving around Salinas would show anyone that Latino families are keeping this tradition alive and healthy. Making this point in that article was perhaps my timid attempt to remind readers that Salinas is 67 percent Latino, and many of them are people who keep their strong Catholic traditions and allow these religious scenes to be visible while many white families no longer do because of cultural messages about such public display. But with this story, the word "Latino" didn't make it into the paper.

When I worked in Latino news media, whether my stories were written in English or Spanish, writing about race and class—without having to explain myself to the higher ups at the paper—was routine. The editors there knew, as the audience did, that this country's history has been built on the backs of people of color and that hundreds of years of discrimination are not erased with a couple of decades of good intentions. Ethnic media, which historically has been more crusading than its mainstream peers, does not flinch at telling lopsided stories about injustice in which the writer is seen as favoring those who are being wronged.

Isn't that what journalism is supposed to be about, to comfort the afflicted?

Mainstream news media are different. These news outlets feel straight-jacketed by the artificial demands of "objectivity" and "balance," in which the attempt is often made to quote equally from those on both sides of an argument. With this formula, what we end up with are stories of "he said, she said" that give little depth to the real issues. These kinds of stories fail to convey to our readers the frustration or the drama when a Latino working mother sees her child in jail—or learns that he has died—then holds in her heart the sense that her family has been dealt an unfair

hand. Nor do these stories share with readers her inability to explain why.

What makes this extremely difficult for reporters is that when it comes to talking frankly about issues of inequality and ethnicity, few people are willing to open up. People who have suffered discrimination are afraid to run into trouble with the police, teachers or elected officials. They're wary of the backlash, afraid of what their white neighbors might say if they are seen as

calling them racists in a public forum. Racism is not a pretty word, and they know deep down that perhaps racism is not quite the right term. But they don't have another word to use and, without us being able to establish a dialogue about this as part of our news reporting, it might take us quite a while to find one. ■

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Monterey County Herald. An immigrant from Mexico, she has written about the Latino community for more than a decade at publications such as El Andar magazine, Nuevo Mundo, the San Jose Mercury News, and Mexico's La Jornada. She is a current fellow at the Institute for Justice in Journalism at USC Annenberg School for Communications.

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Probing the Shifting Ground of Wage and Benefit Gaps

Business reporters need to keep a careful watch on the numerous ways in which corporate executives are thriving, while promises to workers are being broken.

By Kevin Noblet

Writer F. Scott Fitzgerald made his famous observation about the very rich—that “they are different from you and me”—at a time when it was natural to be intrigued by the behavior of America's wealthy. It was the 1920's, and the ranks of the privileged class had ballooned with the expansion of the country's industrial and trading might. The relative wealth of the captains of industry and of Wall Street was truly fabulous in that era. This was happening just before the stock market crash of 1929 and before the rise of organized labor, the social and economic reforms spurred by the Great Depression, and a new sense of equality after World War II, all of which helped drive up the average worker's wages and benefits and make the United States a middle-class country.

Lately, there is reason to be intrigued again. The economic expansion that ended in 2000—the longest in U.S. history—made many people rich and made the very rich, well, more different from you and me than they've been in a long time. Compensation for CEO's and other high-ranking executives soared,

while the rank-and-file worker made meager gains, in fact almost no gain at all when inflation is factored in. And while this trend might have been interrupted for a year or two after the corporate excesses at Enron, WorldCom, Tyco and other fraud-riddled companies were exposed starting in 2001, it appears now to have resumed.

It's been called the “salary gap”—a title given to this widening difference between what an average employee earns and what top bosses take home. According to Business Week's annual survey of executive compensation, which comes out each April, CEO pay rose 15 percent in 2004 to an average \$9.6 million, while average worker pay rose just 2.9 percent to \$33,176. Using those numbers, CEO's made on average about 290 times what one of their workers made. Some other surveys put the ratio at closer to 400-to-one. A quarter century ago, it was about 40-to-one.

Call this a story, and a big one at that, one that readers and viewers of news care a lot about. But to be accurate, this trend really is about the convergence of a lot of important news stories. This

means neither I nor other business editors can simply assign this topic to a single reporter to cover as one story, or as a package of stories focused on only the gap in wages, or even as a running beat. Instead, every business reporter and columnist needs to be on watch for threads of this story and use a variety of approaches to give shape to this historic shift in the distribution of wealth derived from income, as well as in the changing relationships between employer and worker.

Tracking Executives' Expanding Perks

Story angles can no longer be limited to the astonishing sums that CEO's, CFO's and other high-ranking executives receive in wages, annual bonuses and stock options, or in the contrast, dramatic as it might be, with average workers' paychecks. These days other-worldly perks are surfacing in the news, and these often do more to illustrate the expanding executive sense of entitlement than dollar-sums can.

I'm tempted to call this the “shower-

curtain approach,” named for the \$6,000 item that hung in a maid’s bathroom of former Tyco CEO L. Dennis Kozlowski’s opulent Fifth Avenue apartment and wound up, along with the \$15,000 umbrella stand and other examples of excess, as evidence in his trial on fraud charges. But scandals and criminal cases, while they can make great stories, only exemplify how greedy some powerful executives can get. Ultimately, reporters need to investigate more common, generally accepted business practices if they want to be able to explain how a system works in which the top echelon of the U.S. workforce sees its lot in life improve so much more and so much faster than the rest.

With a little digging, evidence leading to such explanations can be found. An Associated Press (AP) business writer, Ellen Simon, uncovered a good example after she heard about a company’s practice of paying for executives’ personal trainers. She searched corporate filings at the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to turn up other cases and came upon one that stood out: Colgate-Palmolive Co. paid not just for trainers but for a wide range of other personal perks, including karate lessons, fishing gear, swimming pool care, pet sitters, and family video rentals for its top 800 executives. This was an important story to tell, and it became an even stronger story when, just as Simon was finishing her reporting, Colgate announced the elimination of 4,400 jobs in a cost-cutting effort.

Many companies, Colgate included, contend that holding onto talented, hard-working executives requires levels and kinds of compensation that the average worker will never be granted. The argument is most often raised when a company’s business turns bad; that is when its top managers are most tempted to flee to a healthier firm. While the argument might have merit, it sometimes strains the credibility of workers and the public. It is this kind of disconnect that can lead to news stories, such as in 2003 when American Airlines disclosed in an SEC filing that it was creating special benefits for executives,

including bankruptcy-proof pensions and bonuses that were, in some cases, twice an executive’s annual salary. The disclosure came right after some big unions agreed that workers would take cuts in pay and benefits as part of a deal to keep the airline out of bankruptcy. The intersection of events produced an outcry that led the airline’s chairman and CEO to step down. While reducing wages was seen as being essential to the company’s long-term future, workers couldn’t understand why they had to

Ultimately, reporters need to investigate more common, generally accepted business practices if they want to be able to explain how a system works in which the top echelon of the U.S. workforce sees its lot in life improve so much more and so much faster than the rest.

make this sacrifice while at the same time executives were receiving added security and income.

Lessons aren’t learned; the controversy at American Airlines has failed to lead to greater restraint. More recently, auto-parts maker Delphi Corporation asked a bankruptcy court judge to let it lavish \$500 million in special incentives on some 600 executives, even as it closes plants and tries to slash wages and benefits for workers. Not only were workers outraged—the plan was so extravagant that even creditors, who generally approve special executive perks in such situations, called it unacceptable.

Tracking Employees’ Shrinking Benefits

The salary gap is, of course, a benefits gap, too. Taking measures they see as critical to competing in a global economy, companies are curtailing pension

benefits and reducing their role in providing costly health insurance for most workers. In two recent instances, IBM and Verizon, both relatively healthy and growing companies, announced plans to freeze traditional pension programs and replace them with defined contribution arrangements, like 401(k)s.

Though numbers can be dramatic, often they are dry and difficult to comprehend. More compelling moments play out in the company corridors and on the plant floor at the time when stunned, and at times tearful, workers learn that promises made about benefits owed to them are about to be broken. To tell this story best means finding workers who are willing to talk, even though in doing so they risk the repercussions at work. After Verizon’s announcement of its pension freeze for managers (the company must engage in collective bargaining before it can freeze union workers’ pensions), AP’s labor and workplace writer, Adam Geller, tracked down an employee willing to be quoted on the record and paired her comments with the notice he obtained that the company had sent out to affected workers, noting in his lead the irony he’d found.

Geller’s story began:

“NEWYORK (AP) The memo to workers made the changes sound almost upbeat: ‘Your Work, Your Rewards, Your Verizon,’ it read. But to some workers at Verizon Communications Inc., the company’s announcement this past week that it will freeze the pensions of 50,500 managers is nothing but an employer breaking a decades-old promise to its own people. ‘We’re all good people here,’ said Maureen Aeckerle, a 25-year Verizon veteran in Maryland, her voice breaking. ‘And to be treated this way is just unacceptable.’”

Of course, big companies don’t offer the only perspective from which to tell these stories. Last year troubled smaller companies terminated most of the 120 pension plans, covering a total of 235,000 workers, which were assumed by the federal Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC). Geller

found a riveting tale at Ajax Magnethermic Inc., a small-size company in the rust-belt town of Howland, Ohio. One day its 138 employees found the factory gate padlocked and then, soon after, the company legally vanished along with any legal responsibility for their pension fund, which wound up in the hands of the PBGC.

While tracking a complex paper trail through a series of ownerships, including a venture-capital unit of Citigroup Inc., Geller brought this story to life through the words and circumstances of the company's workers, who described their diminished futures, the stresses they and their families now faced:

"... Necastro was expecting to retire at 65 with a pension of \$1,600 a month. Instead, he gets \$785.70. Hanton, a manager, was expecting \$2,300 monthly or a \$344,000 lump sum. Instead, at 63, the PBGC is sending him \$1,305.85 a month. In the time spent waiting for the first check, he burned through much of his savings. The floor plans he and his wife drew up for a retirement home have been shelved and talk of travel together has been put aside."

Tracking Shareholders' Reaction

Hard-pressed employees are not the only ones upset at these widening gaps in wages and benefits. Shareholders also are getting increasingly vocal, pushing for more restraint and logic in top executive compensation and complaining when it borders on the outlandish. A recent survey by a consulting firm, Watson Wyatt Worldwide, found that 90 percent of institutional shareholders, including those invested in companies that manage big pension funds and mutual funds, feel that executives are "dramatically overpaid."

Executive pay is determined by a corporate board's compensation committee that works out the contract for a chairman, CEO or other top official. What happens here is rich territory for news reporting, a territory that should be—and can be—examined before scandals break. Tracking these transactions does require that a reporter have a good

grasp of how corporations work and an ability to ferret out and then break down sometimes arcane and complex dealings into a simple sequence of events. Rachel Beck, with an MBA from Columbia University, does just this consistently in a column she writes for the AP called "All Business."

During last year's proxy season—the springtime period when companies file reports on compensation and other matters before their annual meetings—Beck examined how companies play games in so-called "benchmarking" of CEO pay. Benchmarking involves surveying compensation packages that competitors offer their CEO's. Seems fair enough. But, as Beck noted in a story she wrote about this practice, "there are those who choose to cherry-pick the companies with which they want to compare CEO pay. One is Goldman Sachs Group Inc., which said in its proxy report that the compensation committee had examined executive pay at 'certain of Fortune magazine's list of America's 50 largest corporations' to come up with the nearly \$30 million it paid CEO Henry Paulson in 2004—almost a 40 percent gain from the year before."

Beck went on to write in this story:

"Compensation committees usually don't work alone in determining 'appropriate' pay. Human-resource consultants, who mine massive databases with executive compensation information, are often hired to help define industry standards and tax implications. The trouble is that no one wants to be the one to tell the CEO that he or she just deserves only the average salary when compared to others, especially when they keep touting the CEO's above-average abilities. So they agree to pay the CEO above the average and base that compensation against high-profile, high-paying companies rather than those that they might compete for in business and talent. All that ends up being plugged into the consultants' database, which ultimately boosts salary standards across corporate America."

That's different, of course, than how pay gets set for the workers at these companies.

Shareholders are pressuring compensation committees to tighten their purse strings, and the SEC is planning to require companies to report executive compensation—wages, bonus, stock grants, perks—in a more open and straightforward manner instead of the complicated, often ambiguous, fine-print approach that many now use. Journalists have a stake in this reform: This would make it easier for them to track corporate practices and trends in pay. Right now, news outlets often have to lean on professional consultants to decipher and compare compensation among CEO's.

Not everyone thinks the accounting reform will really lead to a reduction in executive pay. There are many in business who, in fact, contend that many of the highest paid top executives aren't earning too much—that even a \$50 million annual paycheck isn't too much for someone who raises a company's worth by billions.

But more and more critics seem to be emerging, warning that the short-term gains in the stock market or in a company's balance sheet may not be worth the broader, long-term impact. Financial author and columnist Ben Stein worries about workers losing hope as they find a real pay raise—and social mobility—harder to achieve. At a recent Manhattan breakfast forum, even a vice president of Goldman Sachs & Co. warned of the "corrosive" effect of the salary gap on society in general. Ultimately only time will tell the long-term impact, but the concerns are real and coming from enough quarters that they deserve our serious attention. ■

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Investigating the Nation's Exploding Credit Squeeze

'Questions of by whom and for whom need more and better investigation, as well as a look at who are the losers and who are the winners.'

By Danny Schechter

When I started out, my film was going to be about other people's economic woes. Soon I realized I was part of this story of how the credit industry targets poor and middle-class Americans. Not only was I a target, too, but all of us are.

There is a credit divide in America that fuels our economic divide. Put another way, the globalization of our economy is about more than the outsourcing of jobs. There is a deeper shift underway from a society based around production, with the factory as the symbol of American economic prowess, to a culture driven by consumption, with the mall as its dominant icon.

My film, tentatively titled "In Debt We Trust," combines storytelling, often in a voice laced with outrage, with investigative inquiry. It's about a nation where our credit score is the only score many people and institutions care about and where vast databases record our every purchase and consumer choice. Ours has become a nation in which the carrot of instant affluence is quickly menaced by the harsh stick of bill collectors, lawsuits and foreclosures. And yet this bubble can burst: The slickest of our bankers and the savviest of our marketers have been able to undo the law of gravity, that what goes up must come down.

Viewers of our film will be transported behind the scenes to meet their biggest scammers, the engineers and operators of the billion dollar credit card industry who have researched the details and minutiae of consumer needs and our fantasies so that they can deploy the deceptive art of seductive marketing and modern usury. We will scrutinize a carefully conceived but stealth electronic Web designed to entrap, cajole and co-opt the most powerful consumer culture on earth. It

teases us with a financial advance when we want it, then sucks it away from us with more force than we realize.

Reporting These Stories

In the old days the poor couldn't qualify for loans. Today they are considered among the better risks because, unlike the rich, many feel an obligation to pay back. Steve Barnett, who worked in the credit card industry and will appear in our film, explains: "These are the perfect customers. They need credit, so they're not all that concerned about interest. They'll take a higher interest if you will grant them credit. They'll pay off a small amount each month so they're in a sense 'on the hook.' And because of their own sense of values or because of their own background, their family background, they're not likely to declare bankruptcy again. Given the change of laws that's more difficult, anyway." And manufacturers now know they can spur sales by lending money to buyers up front and then get them to pay twice—first at the register, then with credit card payments, big interest rates, and compounded interest.

Given the ubiquitousness of these practices—and the reasons why they exist and persist that stretch from corporate America into the halls of government and revolve around issues of corporate greed and political favors—the expanding gaps between those who have (and then have more) and those who don't (but pay anyway) need to be explored and exposed by journalists. I am raising this issue and suggesting ways that it can be reported because I believe this is an essential story for us to tell.

- Report more regularly on these credit issues; billions of dollars are

involved, not to mention millions of lives.

- Identify the key corporate institutions and contrast the compensation of their executives with the financial circumstances of their customers.
- Shine a spotlight on how special interests and lobbyists for financial institutions contribute to members of Congress and other politicians, across party lines, to ensure their desired policies and regulations. Investigate political influence affected by campaign contributions. Some reporting about this took place during the bankruptcy debate, but there has been little follow-up.
- Examine the influence credit card companies have on media companies through their extensive advertising.
- Take a hard look at the predatory practices in poor neighborhoods—and crimes committed against poor and working-class people, who are least able to defend themselves. Legal service lawyers tell me about how they are overwhelmed by the scale of mortgage scams involving homes whose value have been artificially inflated.
- Focus attention on what consumers can do to fight back. Robert Manning, author of "Credit Card Nation," explains: "If 10 percent of American credit cardholders withheld their monthly payments, it would bring the financial services industry to a standstill. At a larger issue, what we have to do is to get people involved at the state level, get their state attorneys general involved, aggressively filing class-action lawsuits and then putting pressure on key legislators to say, 'This is unacceptable that they're not representing and balancing the issues of commerce with consumers.'

The balance is tilted dramatically against the average American.”

The Story's Key Ingredients

Class struggle is assuming a new form in the conflict between creditors and lenders that reaches into many Americans' homes, where each month bills are juggled and rejuggled with today's credit card bills paid by tomorrow's new card. Meanwhile, with interest compounding at usurious rates, indebtedness grows, and people sink even deeper into debts they cannot manage. In this conflict, companies function as well-organized machines while borrowers are forced to react as individuals. Many are browbeaten with lectures about “personal responsibility” by corporations that only pay lip service to any form of social responsibility.

Centuries ago, we had debtor's prisons. Today, many homes become similar kinds of prisons, where debtors struggle with personal finance issues. The scale of indebtedness is staggering as consumers simply follow their government's lead. As of Christmas 2005 the national debt stood at \$8,179,165,267,626.42. Break that down, and each American's share comes to \$27,439.48, and our nation's debt increases \$2.83 billion each day. Add to that two trillion more for consumer debt, including mortgages. That's a lot of money.

Who is really responsible for it? Few of us seem to know. And fewer appear to know what can be done about it. “They're never going to be repaid,” says economic historian Michael Hudson, who for many years worked at Chase Bank. “Adam Smith said that no government had ever repaid its debts, and the same can be said of the private sector. The U.S. government does not intend to repay its trillion-dollar debt to foreign central banks and, even if it did intend to, there's no way in which it could. Most of the corporations now are avoiding paying their pension fund debts and their health care debts.”

The government and big companies might not have to pay, but regular people do, as our collective consumer debt has doubled in the past 10 years. With mortgage debt included, it's now

reached seven trillion dollars. Hudson compares the plight of millions of debtors in the United States to serfs of an age gone by: “For many people, debts now absorb 40 percent of their income. So many people are paying all of their take-home wages over and above basic expenses for debt service. And that's rising. In effect, 90 percent of the American population is indebted to the top 10 percent of the population.”

The coffers of creditors—funded by the most prestigious banks and financial institutions—are swelling with payments for arbitrarily imposed late fees and rising interest rates that seem to be largely unregulated. Borrowing is now a national habit. Fueling this shift globally has been our national debt—now in the trillions—as other countries finance our trade imbalances and keep our economy strong. Without that influx of money, the U.S. economy would be in crisis. Everyone in the know knows this, but they do little to deal with it, relying on the theory that if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Occasional warnings and lots of noise surface about cutting the government's annual deficit, including a devastating report by Comptroller General David Walker, who compares the United States today to Rome before its fall. He is dismissed as a prophet of gloom and barely covered while debt keeps growing. All of this borrowed money keeps people pacified and, for the most part, politically complacent for now.

So many of us live beyond our means. This is not news, but what isn't found in most news reporting is how this shift has been engineered through corporate decisions that are aided and abetted by government policies. Questions of by whom and for whom need more and better investigation, as well as a look at who are the losers and who are the winners.

Business reporting that focuses on the upticks and downticks of the market provides little room for explanation, analysis or connecting-the-dots journalism. In part, that is a result of the fact that many of our major media companies don't operate in a world apart from these pressures. At least 10 credit card solicitations have arrived recently in my mail, and the Disney (owner of

ABC television network) card was in that pile. Many credit cards boast of partnerships and discounts from media companies and entertainment providers, from subscriptions to DVD's. Like car companies and airlines before them, the media industry has discovered that there's money to be made in the credit business and so credit card companies become big media advertisers. Why alienate them?

This credit squeeze is hitting the news business, too. Jobs are being cut and reporting trimmed. Joe Strupp of Editor & Publisher observed in his 2005 media wrap up, “Using the bizarre premise that newspapers can bring back lost circulation and ad revenue by making their products worse, top executives at major chains from The New York Times Company to Tribune took a butcher knife to staffing with buyouts and layoffs that appeared almost epidemic.”

What happens to news business employees laid off in this environment? Like those in other industries where cost-cutting leads to unemployment, they enter what insiders in the credit business call “the turnstile,” living on more and more credit from cards, soon to be followed by a dip into home equity. Nor have wages and benefits kept up with inflation and many are being cut. Health care extensions after a job ends are over in 18 months and then what? What's the alternative? More debt is one of the few accessible options. The turnstile keeps turning as personal debt keeps growing.

These issues and scams can be reported, and they must be, not just in consumer advice columns but also with serious investigative reports. ■

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As Health Care Gaps Grow, Coverage Shrinks

Stories about the have-nots don't 'fit into today's paradigm of health news.'

By Trudy Lieberman

Last summer I returned to a subject I have reported on many times before—why families don't have health insurance and the consequences that result. This time I looked in-depth at what was happening in Tennessee, where some 200,000 people, mostly poor, were being cut off from TennCare, the state's bold expanded Medicaid program established a decade ago. For more than 10 years when these people had insurance coverage, they received better medical care and with it came better health. The state paid the bill, but when the cost became too expensive for Tennessee's political leaders to support, the Democratic Governor Phil Bredesen decided to trim the rolls of this program, and his staff carefully crafted a plan that cut these families and individuals adrift.

As I listened to those who no longer had health insurance, their stories were wrenching. One woman told me she was lucky to have breast cancer because that meant she could stay on TennCare. Even so, the state's new limits on prescription drug coverage forced her to choose which of three other life-threatening diseases she would treat. There was another woman who told me about a mole growing near her eye. She said that no doctor would remove it because she lacked insurance and did not have the money to pay for surgery. A health department physician in her county told her to come back in three months; he would take another photo to see what kind of treatment she needed if, by then, she could pay for it.

No woman with health insurance would utter the word "fortunate" to describe what it is like having breast cancer. Nor would anyone wait for a potentially cancerous growth to grow

larger before having it removed, if they had a choice.

Middle Class vs. the Poor

Consider the public outrage against health maintenance organizations (HMO's) in the 1990's when, in an effort to control costs, patients often

The dilemma of reporting on the gaps in health care brings up the age-old question in journalism: Does the press follow what newsmakers do or does it lead, based on what its reporting determines are problems?

had to wait to be seen by specialists. Remember the outcry when HMO's refused to pay for extra hospital days after a normal delivery, which their mostly middle-class moms wanted for rest. Political leaders couldn't vote fast enough to mandate that HMO's pay for three-day stays, even though for most women this length of stay is medically unnecessary. These mandates forced HMO's to spend money on wasted care at the expense of more pressing needs, such as programs to improve nutrition for their elderly members who are often poorly nourished.

The stark truth is that health policies and practices in the United States ration health care. The TennCare experience displayed this as poignantly, if not as vividly, as did the bodies of poor people floating in the post-Katrina streets of New Orleans. Of course, medical systems in all countries limit health care in some ways; in this country, though

perhaps it goes unspoken, the policy choice has been to limit the medical care available to those on the lower rungs of the economic ladder. They are less visible politically. They don't raise much of a ruckus, don't have a lot of well-paid lobbyists to plead their case, and they usually don't vote, all of which makes them expendable in the political calculus.

Last summer, however, in Tennessee advocates for those dropped from the TennCare rolls raised a ruckus, or at least they tried to. Every night from late June until Labor Day they held a candlelight vigil at the state capitol in Nashville, and every day they congregated on the capitol steps to raise awareness of the inevitable—the deterioration in health and well-being that results when no money is available to pay for care. They convened town meetings and gathered signatures from state lawmakers for a special legislative session. They asked for a public meeting with the governor. Despite their efforts, the governor and the politicians he controls were unmoved. The governor did call a special session, but that was to consider government ethics, not the TennCare cuts.

Ignoring the Real Story

Three weeks into the protests, the Nashville television station, WTVF, broadcast a story lamenting that because of the sit-in—and the extra state troopers required to police it—every hour of the protest was costing taxpayers money. Then, around Thanksgiving, the city's alternative newspaper, Nashville Scene, published a story about Tennesseans who had lost their health care coverage, some of whom had died. But the

writer, John Spragens, concluded his article with these words:

“Who is to say whether Bredesen’s TennCare reforms are the tough medicine this state must swallow—whether, as he said last week, ‘we’re getting the results we need?’ Perhaps this is, as he insists, the best of some bad options. Who knows?”

Reading this made me wonder how the public is supposed to “know” when the news media is unwilling—or unable—to present them with the necessary information. Like other stories about the plight of the uninsured, this article did not tackle the difficult subject of rationing, nor did it explore alternative proposals to keep people insured.

Perhaps one reason the writer hesitated to take the reader there was that the state’s political leaders refused to discuss these other dimensions, either. The steadfast posture, held by state officials, was that Tennessee could not afford the cost. As someone coming from outside the state—and trying to understand the dynamics of what was happening—I wondered whether members of the local press should be taking politicians to task for failing to address such issues.

Drew Altman, the thoughtful head of the Kaiser Family Foundation, which serves as a resource for journalists, contends that we—politicians, journalists and the public—have yet to confront health care’s core issue. “It is a problem of reallocating wealth in America,” Altman says, “and we don’t do that very well.” Indeed the news media avoid the subject, as well as most other topics connected with the nation’s health care have-nots.

Such stories make readers, listeners and viewers uncomfortable by reminding them of how vulnerable all of us are. Nor do such stories fit into today’s paradigm of health news. Editors prefer personal health stories, the kind with exercise and diet tips or ones that hype a yet-to-be-proven treatment to head off Alzheimer’s disease. This is market-driven journalism fueled by advertising dollars for pharmaceuticals, new tech-

nology and health care services, and by focus groups, which supposedly reveal that readers want to know how to lose weight or where to buy pills that will make them healthier.

A young reporter, who is well-trained in health journalism and works at a Wisconsin newspaper, told me that she cannot interest her editors in stories about health care inequalities or other health policy issues. “Let’s just say they aren’t intrigued,” is how she put it. Someone who works on the business side of a national publication explains that when there are too many stories in her magazine about Medicare or health insurance the concern is that reporters might wander into the forbidden territory of universal coverage, and this might offend readers.

Altman notes that the number of reporters who call him has decreased during the past 10 or 15 years. He attributes this decline to changes in the news business. Occasionally there is a major story about the uninsured or a report about a study in which blacks were found to receive worse medical care for heart attacks than whites. But those stories are scarce and, like the story about TennCare in the Nashville Scene, these articles rarely delve into potential solutions that might lead to improvement. It’s as if quiet censorship envelops the topic.

Gaps in Health Care Coverage

The dilemma of reporting on the gaps in health care brings up the age-old question in journalism: Does the press follow what newsmakers do or does it lead, based on what its reporting determines are problems? At this time, I’d argue the news media are following, as they chase after advertising dollars and a bigger audience. Focus groups help to shape coverage, too, as consumers tell publishing executives what they want, and it rarely includes a desire for more news about the ever-widening gap between the health care haves and have-nots.

This is happening at a time when the backbone of the American health insurance system—employer-based

health care coverage—weakens as more companies eliminate or reduce health benefits for employees and retirees. With government and companies less inclined to regard this as “their problem,” the imperative for editorial leadership in tackling this subject is greater than ever.

A poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation, conducted in October 2005, shows that the public is more worried about having to pay more money for health care or health insurance than many other family concerns. The 1,200 adults polled were almost twice as worried about paying for health insurance or health care (40 percent) as they were about paying their rent or a mortgage (22 percent). They were nearly three times as concerned about health matters as about losing savings in the stock market (14 percent). When compared with the worry they expressed about being a victim of a terrorist attack (18 percent), health issues were again of much greater concern.

Public concern about health care appears to be nearly as high as it was in the early 1990’s when Harris Wofford ran for the U.S. Senate in Pennsylvania and his victory—based in large measure on the power of this issue—sparked a national debate on health care reform early in Bill Clinton’s presidency. Yet for some reason that level of concern has failed to translate into political change.

What role, if any, do the news media play in maintaining this disconnect between what people indicate they want from their political leaders and actual changes in policy?

Not long ago I was wandering through the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D.C. and came across his remarks carved into the granite: “The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much, it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.” In reading those words, I thought about those in Tennessee whose circumstances I’d covered and of those in other states in similar situations whose stories too often go untold. I thought, too, about the kinds of stories that are told for and about upscale audiences, whose daily

lives and well-being are not challenged by the decisions of government policymakers. We don't have much sense of social welfare in this country—not much sense of the common good, and our media coverage reflects that.

Earlier this winter, FDR's point hit home again when a beggar appeared in a New York subway car. "I'm hungry," he said, "Can someone help me eat?" He was skinny as a rail, his suit coat hung

loosely on his shrunken frame, and his eyes were sunken. Most likely he was sick as well as hungry. I gave him a clementine; a man at the end of the car stood up and offered a banana; a young girl next to me thrust a couple of dollar bills into his hand. At that moment, too, I thought of FDR's injunction and of my profession. I found it wanting. ■

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Untangling the Achievement Gap's Factors

'Gaps intersected and converged like earthquake fault lines; what affected one rippled through the others.'

By Cathy Grimes

I have questions taped to my computer monitor. Among them are the usual prompts: What's the story? What's the point? What does this mean to the reader? But among them are other questions, equally important ones that often drive my reporting about education: What is the gap? What are its causes and consequences? How can I make the reader care?

Since passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, achievement gaps have gained more prominence. But amid the many stories about schools and districts missing test score targets, students struggling to earn test scores high enough to graduate, and schools hit with "needs improvement" labels, I wonder if the words "achievement gap" are becoming more of a metaphoric measure than a genuine identification of a real and correctable inequity. I also worry that this phrase will become linked to only one or two high-profile gaps, rather than applied to the myriad chasms that education reporters encounter in schools.

This should not happen. For if this term starts to lack true meaning, what will be undermined is the vision of the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 [ESEA], which morphed into the No Child Left Behind

legislation. When it was first authorized, ESEA received bipartisan support as it rocketed through Congress; it was regarded not as an education law, but as a central part of that era's civil rights legislation. With its passage, Congress declared that every student in public schools had the right to an education that would provide the skills and knowledge needed to become productive, contributing citizens. Though the legislation's name has changed, that right still exists.

The 1965 law originally focused on students in low-income settings (predominately rural and urban school systems), where students' performance traditionally ranked below that of their suburban peers. It expanded to include cultural and ethnic designations, special needs and language barriers, as factors influencing student achievement and resulting in gaps. Today, burned-out teachers and a focus on test scores are being added to the stew of factors simply referred to as the "achievement gap."

Federal officials like to note how much money has been spent attempting to "bridge the gaps," and journalists often point to the resounding failure in this effort. But, in fact, there are pockets of success in bridging these gaps, and it should be as much a part of our job to

explore these as it is to inform people about the failures.

Examining Why Gaps Exist

As I began delving into issues related to Washington state's education reform efforts in 1993, I recognized the importance of this newfound focus on achievement gaps. It made sense: establish learning standards in all core subjects (Washington considers the arts, physical education, and social studies to be core subjects, though its key assessments are for math, reading, writing and science), then align curricula and teaching methods so students master the skills and content. But setting forth a common goal has not meant uniform delivery, nor has it resulted in uniform high achievement. And it has certainly not erased the inequities that are inherent in schools as children carry with them into the classroom all of the circumstances and issues of their home environment, just as teachers bring their backgrounds and preparation with them.

Not surprisingly, test scores, broken down within schools by gender and family income and with ethnic and racial backgrounds in mind, highlighted a wide range of mastery among students.

And the patterns of these results were remarkably similar regardless of the district, school or grade on which I was reporting. In an effort to better understand why this was happening, I spent a lot of time in classrooms observing students, and I spoke with teachers at length about how they conveyed curriculum to students and how they assessed whether students absorbed their lessons. As I did this, I discovered gaps that stretched across grades and also within classrooms. And I discovered among teachers a range of attitudes toward students' learning and their potential.

Achievement gaps became the subtext of much of my reporting for they existed in every community and school district I covered, whether urban or rural, prosperous or poor, homogenous or diverse. Gaps intersected and converged like earthquake fault lines; what affected one rippled through the others. Some gaps had existed stubbornly for decades, as I found in studying results from norm-referenced standardized tests. Others emerged with changes that came to communities and neighborhoods. Sometimes these changes were obvious, such as an influx of employees associated with a specific industry arriving in one neighborhood while a rise in immigrant residents happened in another. As I looked more deeply at some of the gaps, they seemed to be based on more subtle influences, such as changing lifestyles or cultural pressures.

Stories from the classroom—my version of frontline reporting—focused on successful strategies to bridge the gaps, as well as on efforts and attitudes that

Even in the fun stories, like one I wrote about third-graders learning to play cribbage to reinforce rote arithmetic skills that had gotten lost in the show-your-work shuffle, I came upon a gap that threaded its way through the story. As students brought to this game a wide range of language and math proficiency levels, cribbage and the guidance of adult volunteers proved to be great levelers. One of my favorite focus-on-the-gap stories came from a high school math teacher who was frustrated by the rising number of students failing algebra. The school's traditional remediation was to have students take the course again, but this teacher decided to try something different. After much lobbying, he taught a class in which the entrance requirement was a failing grade, and his teaching methods combined technology and elementary school strategies like team learning and centers. Some of the students in his class were second-language learners and children with mild disabilities. His expectations were high and, by midsemester, all of the students were earning a "C" or better.

I wrote about an elementary school where the majority of the students qualified for federal meal programs and spoke English as a second language. Additionally, the school had a high number of special education students and a dismal parent involvement rate. Students had struggled since 1996 to master state learning goals and meet proficiency targets on state-mandated tests, missing



Green Park Elementary School teaching assistant Gayle Harwood helps kindergartner Octavia Ibarra-Flippo to be more comfortable on her second day of school. September 2003. *Photo by Jeff Horner/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin.*

seemed destined to leave the gap firmly in place. I learned to ask teachers to describe the range of abilities and achievement of students in their classrooms. And I'd talk with students about what and how they were learning.

more often than not, and the school seemed destined for a No Child Left Behind “needs improvement” label, which meant possible state intervention. (The 2001 federal law requires schools to increase the percentage of students meeting testing goals each year; schools that fail to meet the target goals for two consecutive years are considered in need of improvement.) But the adults in the school refused to accept the idea that their students could not meet high expectations. When the school’s 2003 test scores, the first ones that triggered the No Child Left Behind sanctions, were announced, the school not only met its state-mandated targets, but exceeded them.

I spent weeks with administrators, teachers, students and parents at that school to find out what had changed and why more students were passing the state test than had done so before. I was concerned that teachers might be “teaching to the test,” one way to mask true gaps. But what I found when I went there were profound changes in the way that teachers taught and students approached their work. The key change: attitude. Adults and students began to believe they could meet high expectations, and they did. I wrote several stories that helped our readers to understand the school’s strategies, all of which were accomplished with the same dollars every other elementary school in the district received. Three years later, the students at this school continue to meet state targets.

Sometimes schools’ efforts to bridge or eliminate achievement gaps become victims of rigid laws and regulations. One district I covered ran three alternative education programs to retrieve dropouts and prevent students at risk of dropping out from taking that step. But few of the students graduated “on time” because they were making up failed classes or juggling work and family. Many came from low-income families, had learning disabilities, spoke little English, or were of minority backgrounds. When the students did graduate, they were not counted in

the district’s graduation rate because of federal accounting rules; in fact, they were considered to be nongraduates, similar to dropouts, and counted against the district. In this case, the state education department took up their cause and received federal permission for alternative graduates to be included in the total rate used for school and district accountability. Such schools—and

Ask teachers about their students; listen closely as they describe their expectations of them. Ask about support they receive, or don’t receive, from their administrators, district officials, and community members, including parents. Push beyond the usual complaints about time and money. There’s never enough of either. Press them to be specific when they blame laws and policies for stagnant achievement.

issues—also deserve close scrutiny by reporters to make certain they give more than lip service to their mission.

Strategies to Tell the Story

How can the news media make sure attention remains focused on achievement gaps and the work being done to try to close them? It helps to get into the classrooms, especially in schools and districts with perennially low test scores or a pervasive attitude of ennui. Ask teachers about their students; listen closely as they describe their expectations of them. Ask about support they receive, or don’t receive, from their administrators, district officials, and community members, including parents. Push beyond the usual complaints about time and money. There’s never enough of either. Press them to be specific when they blame laws and policies for stagnant achievement. Make them define catch phrases and buzz words.

Ask about the mission of the school. Ask the administrators and elected officials what they believe about children and learning and what they’re doing to act on those beliefs. Then tag along to see if they walk the talk.

Observe, then ask to see the data, including test scores and detailed financial budgets. Scrutinize alternative education, special education, and other programs that might be masking gaps. Students might be incorrectly placed in such programs because they are low-achievers, but the lack of achievement might be happening because of poor teaching and not because of a disability or language deficiency. Explore what is going on at each grade level, from preschool up, and listen for subtle messages from teachers and peers that can affect achievement and success. Pay attention to school climate; ask students if they feel safe. Ask older students if they have teachers who take an interest in their success.

Jeffrey Fouts, former executive director of Seattle Pacific University’s Washington School Research Center, opened my eyes to the irrefutable effect that adult attitudes have on student learning. He and his colleagues studied schools that are performing against expectations. Put most simply, he looked at schools with high poverty and racial and ethnic diversity that performed well and schools with low poverty and student diversity that struggled. His findings remind us of the need to move beyond the questions I have taped to my computer. ■

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The Working Poor: Is Their Gap With the Middle Class Narrowing?

A reporter looks for ways to merge coverage of the middle class and the poor.

By Paul Nyhan

There is a distinctly American view of poverty. The poor are not like you and me. They are homeless men huddled outside shelters, single mothers lingering on welfare in the projects or, most recently, dirt-poor families ripped apart by freak hurricanes on the Gulf Coast. The poor are separated from the rest of us, this view holds, perhaps by natural disasters, addictions or long stints on welfare, and they rarely join us at work.

In reality, there are no clear boundaries. These days the poor might serve coffee, greet patients at the doctor's office, guard commuter trains, or handle legal papers. A team of Seattle Post-Intelligencer reporters spent the past year with these workers, watching them lose their homes, declare bankruptcy, enroll in college, get pregnant, and most of all work in an economy where the odds of moving off the bottom are getting longer. We met nurses who didn't realize they were poor, emergency room technicians who didn't care for the label, and cocktail waitresses who didn't want to talk about it. But they were undeniably poor. They carried loads of credit card debt to cover basics, shopped in Dumpsters, enrolled their kids in Medicaid, and increasingly lined up at local food banks for groceries.

Together, these workers represent perhaps the biggest economic story of this new century because their ranks appear to be growing, swelled by the expansion of low-wage service jobs, soaring urban housing costs, limited access to higher education, stagnant wages, and rising living standards. Together, these changes threaten to fundamentally alter the nation's workforce. The Seattle Post-Intelligencer found nearly 300,000 working-poor residents in its metro area—households living at

no more than twice the federal poverty level even though at least one member works full time.

Reluctant Sources

Our series of stories began with Kathleen Collins, a 34-year-old mother of two firmly in the labor force as a veteran emergency room technician, the kind who would check your father in if he had a heart attack. In her mind's eye, she was not poor. But she couldn't cover her bills on the \$21,000 she earned a year. Instead, the single mother racked up credit card debt for pots, pans, plates and other housewares and paid 19 percent interest on her car loan.

And she didn't really want to talk about it. After overcoming some initial reluctance, Collins decided to share her story and held little back during interviews at her home, at the hospital, and over the telephone. But as we neared publication, she appeared to become nervous, dodging the newspaper's photographers and rarely returning telephone calls. When one photographer showed up on her doorstep, she refused to let him in her house. Collins wasn't opposed to running the story, but she wasn't completely comfortable with it either. Her story appeared in the Seattle Post-Intelligencer a year ago, and she has not returned my calls since.

Collins was not unique. Throughout the year, few people initially wanted to be poster children for poverty, working or otherwise. For example, one story held for a month while we waited for a couple's cold feet to warm up. Their reluctance forced me to overhaul my approach to reporting. When I covered Congress, I could not be too aggressive; now I spent most of my early interviews simply explaining the project. I let

families tell their stories over weeks or months, and the longer they spent with us, the more comfortable they became. This slower, more easy approach worked well with almost everyone I met after Collins. Eventually, these families let us into their kitchens, cubicles, lease signings, and job-training classes.

Photographers and I succeeded because we spent time with people, and we reminded them that any bad choices they'd made were nearly always dwarfed by the changing contours of the U.S. job market. These workers were caught on the wrong end of a 21st century, service-based economy that some economists have described as a "U," with plenty of low-wage jobs at one end and lots of high-paying jobs on the other, but relatively few jobs in the middle. Further complicating the life circumstances of the working poor is that real wages for these Washington state residents have remained largely stagnant—at about nine dollars an hour—during the past 30 years, according to the Economic Policy Institute.

The fact is no matter how hard these people work there are fewer middle-class jobs for relatively unskilled workers to move into today. Many of those whom we featured in our reporting know this. "No man, I am not doing OK. If I was doing OK I would be doing something else," Nahimana Hakizimana, a Seattle security guard earning \$11 an hour, told me earlier this year. "I don't really think if I keep doing exactly what I am doing I can reach the middle class."

To avoid losing readers' engagement with these people's daily lives and their financial dilemmas, we spent days and weeks paring down research on a specific policy issue to just a few nuggets of critical information. While

it's not uncommon for a narrative story to contain only a few lines about research, in our articles a person's story might dominate the text, but the empirical findings would define the story's broader significance.

To steer clear of stereotypes common in much of today's poverty reporting, I backed away from working with nonprofits and their agendas and hunted for people whose lives fit into our reporting in unexpected areas. For example, I found a factory worker at a local high school and poverty-level employees working at a leading law firm and government agencies. The most fertile ground was among caregivers, such as a social services worker who didn't serve her own children meat often because it cost too much and a child-care teacher earning less than \$12 an hour after a quarter century in the business.

Newsroom Priorities

Despite an already lean newsroom, the newspaper launched "Hard Work, Hard Times: The Plight of Puget Sound's Working Poor" with an impressive commitment: a team of two full-time reporters, another part-time reporter, and one lead editor. Senior newsroom editors believed in the project's goal of uncovering the extent of working poverty in the region and regularly pushed to buy extra space for these stories.

When the team and newsroom leaders disagreed, it was often about time—because these stories took a lot of it. I've written fast—as many as six stories a day when I was at Bloomberg

News—but now my pace was slower, in part because what we were trying to do with this series was to answer difficult and fundamental questions about what creates poverty. For example, editors wanted to kick off the project with a definitive count of Seattle's working poor and the forces behind their struggles by the end of 2004. As it turned out, we didn't publish our leadoff article until February 2005.

This delay in timing between what editors expected and what we were able to accomplish—given the reporting, our research about underlying social and economic trends, thinking and writing—became a recurring theme for a while. By midyear, though, we'd found a balance. I fed the newspaper a steady diet of smaller stories, while we grappled with some of the overarching issues, such as the rise of poor elderly women in the workforce and the fact that access to four-year colleges has improved little for low-income students during the past three decades.

Now, management wants to move on. Having devoted a year to this exploration of the people and forces involved with the working poor, they want our newspaper to tackle other issues. Editors show little interest in extending the social and economic topics that emerged as part of this project into a full-time beat.

Like newspapers across the country, the Seattle Post-Intelligencer is trying to attract readers and keep its aging subscribers. For us, and I suspect other newspapers, this has meant reorganizing the newsroom to cover the middle

class and their concerns—the public schools, the economy, shopping and personal health. As the publisher leads this effort to keep our newspaper alive, he has precious few resources, since our newsroom was lean long before being so lean came into vogue.

It is possible, though, that the working poor hold some future promise as a news story. I noticed while looking at some Washington state data that six of the 15 jobs most in demand around Seattle pay less than \$30,000 a year. These are the kinds of people who are keenly interested in any help-wanted ads.

After having devoted a year to coverage of the working poor and the challenges they confront, my hope is to be able to merge, whenever possible, coverage of the middle class and the poor. Though I expect to spend the next year writing about middle-class families, a group our marketers say still reads newspapers, I have basically offered management a deal. I will tackle the reader-rich middle class; just let me pick away at stories about people who are a few rungs down on the economic ladder, who inhabit the increasingly crowded world of low wages. There are fewer rungs between the two groups each year anyway. ■

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Finding Perfect Pitch

'... the stronger their facts, the more vivid their detail, the less reliant they are on the poetry.'

By Susan Brenna

How difficult is it to achieve the right tone—humane, but clear-eyed—when writing about the disadvantaged? I think at times our gratitude to those who lay open their

difficult lives for our inspection—and maybe our abashed relief at returning to easier lives—can tempt us to use a tone more appropriate for a preacher than a chronicler.

I'm not talking about the well-edited coverage of the poor, the exploited, the undereducated and overlooked that is scrupulously nuanced and reported in all its complexity. There's a great deal

of that. This criticism applies only to those print and broadcast pieces that give the impression that the reporter presumes all folks of good conscience will want to join him or her in rescuing the victim of the day from any number of stock villains—rule-worshipping bureaucrats, uncaring educators, calculating politicians. While as journalists we understand that not every story can be perfectly balanced and that fairness emerges over a number of pieces in the fullness of coverage, news consumers often measure us by a simpler standard. They react to the last story they read, heard or viewed. So I worry when I come across a tone-deaf story—one where, in the noble service of trying to cut through noise and achieve impact, the reporter slips into pathos or subtle hectoring.

Striking an appropriate tone is a mighty struggle for some of my journalism students. In their hands, every profile subject is a hero or a zero. They have a hard time just letting a person be on the page. I tell them the solution lies in the reporting: the stronger their facts, the more vivid their detail, the less

reliant they are on the poetry.

A recently published book by the sociologist Annette Lareau bears that out remarkably. Written by an academic, presumably for a readership heavy with other academics, the Lareau book is crammed with fascinatingly detailed fieldwork (sociologist-speak for reporting) in the homes of children whose lives the author compares by economic class. In “Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race and Family Life,” Lareau describes, for example, a nine-year-old girl named Katie whose mother is typical of the working class and poor parents Lareau observed. Child’s play, to many of these parents, is simply not their business—it does not require adult involvement, encouragement or praise.

“While middle-class homes typically have a nearly inexhaustible supply of paper, crayons, markers, stickers and assorted other craft supplies for children’s use, the Brindle house has none, literally . . .” Lareau writes. “When Katie fashions snowflakes from clean cardboard she found in a Dumpster at the apartment complex, her mother accepts the one Katie has made for her, saying only,

‘Winter will be over soon.’ She offers no praise, no comment about Katie’s resourcefulness or creativity. Ms. Brindle sees these various creative endeavors as Katie’s projects, not hers. Thus, when Katie asks her to help build a dollhouse out of a cardboard box, she refuses, casually and without guilt.”

Lareau’s tone here is one I would describe as no-tone, tone-scrubbed. But the picture could not be clearer. When the reporting does the job, the tone can take a break. ■

Susan Brenna is a journalist based in New York City, a consultant to nonprofit organizations serving children and families, and an adjunct professor of journalism at Columbia University. She has reported and edited for publications including The New York Times, New York Newsday, New York, Atlanta, AdvoCasey, Child and Good Housekeeping. This article first appeared on the Casey Journalism Center on Children and Families Web site (www.casey.umd.edu).

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Numbers Don't Tell a Story That Connects With Readers

With reports about tough economic times in hand, a journalist relies on families' experiences to illuminate the significance of the findings.

By Jason Johnson

It was the kind of story that editors might greet with a roll of the eyes and an everybody-knows-this reaction. But when it was published, “Making Ends Meet”—stories about the challenges facing working families—drew one of the strongest reader responses I’ve seen in nearly 15 years as a reporter.

When this series began, I was in my second year as a demographics reporter at the San Francisco Chronicle, working as part of a six-person team whose job

was to produce stories about various racial and ethnic groups, as well as religion and demographic trends. My area of concentration was the African-American community. I also covered social services, which meant that routinely I’d receive reports on wages, housing costs, and the impact of political decisions on government assistance programs.

Sometimes I wrote stories generated by findings in these reports. But with the daily news-hole space tight, only so much could be addressed in a 12-

to 20-inch story; a lot of background context and important voices in the debate about policy had to be left out. Among the lost voices were often those of people I interviewed whose lives were affected by the trends represented by the long lists of numbers in these reports. It’s fine to say, for example, that five in 20 people using daycare services are single mothers, but for the significance of these numbers to be absorbed, readers need to “hear” a single mother talking about her experiences.

Second, many of these reports are done by groups leaning to the conservative or liberal side of the policy debate, and critics of their findings (and message) often brand these groups' findings as biased attempts designed to skew data to further some agenda. Also, each of these reports usually examines only a small part of what is really a much bigger and more complex situation.

During a period of several weeks early in 2005, I received several studies from local and national advocacy groups and think tanks about cost of living increases and spending trends. That summer the federal government put out a series of trend reports compiled from new census data, including "Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004," and "Income, Earnings, and Poverty from the 2004 American Community Survey." Neither report drew any sweeping conclusions, but the data were valuable enough to merit daily stories. And when combined with reports we'd received from the California Budget Project, among others, it became clear to me that there was enough valid data to draw some fairly good conclusions about trends affecting middle-class families and the working poor.

These trends were even more pronounced in the Bay Area, where housing and other cost-of-living indexes are among the nation's highest. And these reports confirmed the expanding gap between those with higher and lower incomes, while middle-income families and the working poor are experiencing increased pressure in covering their major essential expenses, having lost economic ground since the 1970's.

With this information in hand, I went to the Chronicle's demographics editor and shared what I saw as the potential for a larger story, one in which these trends could be described and illuminated. She let me know that the cost-of-living pressures on working families were an issue she'd also been following with just such a story in mind. Once she gave me a green light for my reporting, I worked to develop a Page One story as quickly as I could to hook it to news from the recent release of the census surveys. But what was even more heartening

was my editor's expressed interest in having me do a second, more in-depth story about the economic squeeze on middle-class families. Although she gave me a general target length for both stories, her main message was to write whatever I had, and we'd deal with the story size later.

Families' Experiences Illuminate the Numbers

With marching orders in hand, I started looking for people whose lives could flesh out the hard data about how working poor and middle-class families are falling further behind. I found many using sources and contacts I'd compiled from my beat reporting. I also tapped into a new database of readers that is part of the Chronicle's Two Cents outreach feature. I drafted a message to explain what my story was about, and our Two Cents editor sent out an e-mail to readers whose contact information is in our database. I ended up speaking with a wide cross section of people—diverse in their ethnic and social backgrounds—from different parts of the nine-county Bay Area region. I also sought perspective on these trends from economic and social policy experts. Accompanying this reporting were compelling visuals, including photographs of family members whose lives I wrote about, as well as detailed graphics compiled by our art department.

Working on this story reminded me that one of the more difficult areas to probe in people's lives is their personal finances, especially when that information might be published. This possibility made some families very nervous; one family pulled out of the story for this reason. Another family threatened to pull out but then changed their minds after we had a long talk one night. Often I had to go back to visit families to go over certain figures or get more information that they or I had forgotten to include in our earlier calculations.

Another challenge this story presented was a cautionary one: I wanted to write about these families in a way that didn't say to readers "pity these poor people" or imply that they were

victims of some conspiracy to crush the middle class. These stories would have the strongest impact, I believed, if they offered a straightforward account of what these people's lives were like and if I could then fit their circumstances into a broader look at the nation's economic and social trends.

Again and again, I heard—and told in my story—about the challenges posed by the high costs of housing and child care and escalating credit card debt caused by families using the cards to pay for what their paychecks could not cover. There were some emblematic moments that I think explain why this story succeeded in capturing the attention of so many readers. When a single mother who moved to a suburb of San Francisco because of rising housing costs in the city told of her long morning commute and the phone call she had with her 16-year-old son each morning to make sure he got up and off to school, her description captured what numbers and data could not. Similarly, the couple who spoke of the help their parents gave them so they could buy a house in a city where housing prices are sky-high touched a nerve with many who are living this same story. Several couples spoke of what their family life now looked like as they worked split shifts to cut down on child-care costs, and one just knew they were not alone.

I'd like to think that the approach we took to doing these stories and the space the paper devoted to them will have a lasting impact on the way such topics are covered on a daily basis. But I know the constraints of daily journalism can make this difficult. I believe that these articles—and the strong response they received—added to the consensus of opinion at the Chronicle about the importance of reporters seeking out the experiences of people whose lives are reflective of the numbers we convey. This is something many newspapers are doing, but there remains much room for improvement. ■

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These photographs accompanied the San Francisco Chronicle's article written by Jason Johnson about the economic squeeze on middle-class families.

Kerry and Gina Morning with their three kids, Marzell, 11, Rahsaan, 15, and Sydney, 9, in October 2005 in Richmond, California. The family's income plummeted when Kerry was injured at his job as an Alameda County probation officer. His \$65,000 annual salary was replaced by a little under \$3,500 a month in taxable disability payments. Gina Morning turned the odd jobs she did for extra cash into a business. She now makes about \$20,000 a year staging children's birthday parties, driving students to school, caring for kids during the summer, and sewing costumes and clothes with African-style prints. *Photo by Paul Chinn/San Francisco Chronicle.*



Patrick Campbell, 37, works on his laptop while he supervises bath time for his two daughters. Campbell and his family moved from San Francisco's Noe Valley to San Jose three years ago so they could afford to buy a home. It was a small 1,100 square foot four-bedroom one-bath model costing \$430,000, but at least it was theirs. A year later Patrick was laid off from his job at Silicon Graphics in Mountain View. The family struggled, but managed to keep it together as Patrick became a self-employed worker, with an annual income of about \$80,000. But they've managed in part by racking up \$8,000 in credit card debt and taking out a \$46,000 line of credit on their home. *Photo by Mike Kepka/San Francisco Chronicle.*



On the bed the whole family shares, Olive, 3, jumps off her dad, Lou Maunupau, 47. His wife, Claudia Vlasakova, 37, helps daughter Daisy, 2, fold laundry. Maunupau and Vlasakova live in San Francisco's Sunset District, renting a small one-bedroom, almost like a studio, for \$1,200 a month, for them and their two daughters. They have a combined income of a little over \$52,000 a year, but find themselves struggling to make ends meet. They are an example of how many Bay Area families living well above the nation's official poverty line find themselves cutting corners to afford the basics of food, housing, transportation and health care.

Photo by Christina Koci Hernandez/San Francisco Chronicle.



Linda Knighten, 45, a single mom, gets up at 4:30 a.m. every day to travel from her home in Pittsburg, California to her job as a cook at Omni San Francisco Hotel. At 6 a.m. she calls home to make sure her 16-year-old son, David, wakes up and gets ready for school. Although Knighten makes about \$40,000 a year and has her health insurance paid for by her employer, she finds herself in the red at the end of every month. *Photo by Christina Koci Hernandez/San Francisco Chronicle.*



The News Gap With the Poor: Engagement, Then Silence

'I got the feeling that once welfare had been "reformed," the news story was simply over.'

By Jennifer Friedlin

As a journalist interested in reporting on issues related to poverty, race and gender, I have envied reporters who were covering such topics in the 1980's and 1990's. Then the American people were embroiled in a spirited debate about whether the welfare system offered a necessary safety net for the indigent or whether recipients—90 percent of whom were single women with children and the majority of whom were minorities—were a bunch of "welfare queens" who were happily mooching off the public coffers.

The debate was so hot that Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential platform included the promise to "end welfare as we know it." And by 1996, he'd succeeded. That year Congress passed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, replacing the federal government's Aid to Families with Dependent Children cash assistance program with the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families [TANF] program. TANF, a decentralized system of state-run programs, was designed to encourage people to find and hold-down jobs by setting lifetime limits on welfare eligibility and providing supports such as childcare and transportation.

Once TANF was implemented, case-loads did drop and the media's coverage of welfare pretty much dried up. When stories were done, the thrust of them was that the declining rolls proved that TANF was working. Very few in the news media seemed interested in doing stories that looked behind the numbers.

In 2004, Rita Henley Jensen, editor in chief of Women's eNews, asked me if

I would be interested in exploring the effects of TANF and writing a five-part series on my findings. She was hoping that such a series would open a dialogue about how the repeal of welfare was affecting these women and their children.

Challenges to Telling This Story

I jumped at the opportunity, but the assignment presented many challenges, the first of which was figuring out a way to uncover the story behind the numbers. This was a huge task given the fact that instead of a centralized welfare system there were now 50 state programs, plus programs in the territories and the District of Columbia, each reflecting local political decision-making and economics. This challenge was compounded by limitations of time and money that could be spent on the project. An online Web site with limited resources, Women's eNews didn't have the budget to send me to communities across America to see how TANF had changed life for poor single moms. This meant I had to do nearly all of my reporting by phone, which is not a good substitute for speaking with people face-to-face and observing first-hand the circumstances in which they live.

As a freelancer, time was also an issue. While sites like Women's eNews are able to flourish on the Internet, their limited budgets for reporting prevent them from paying journalists a rate commensurate with the time it takes to do in-depth stories. The fact that freelance rates have not increased much, if at all, during the past decade takes a toll on the types of assignments many of us can

afford to take on and the time we can dedicate to them.

I got beyond these obstacles by dedicating two months to researching and reporting this story while I tried to work on some other projects in order to make ends meet. I spoke to numerous current and former TANF recipients, legislators, activists and policy wonks, and spent countless hours reading government records and reports. The final result was a five-part series that took an across-the-board look at various trends that the drop in the welfare rolls reflected. I explored, too, how states were implementing TANF and the programmatic holes that still needed to be filled.

The most important lesson I learned from working on this series was that, as suspected, the more complicated and truer story of how the changes in welfare were affecting poor women and children was different than what much of the news media had been reporting, when they even bothered to do these stories. While the welfare rolls had dropped precipitously, the reason had little to do with former recipients finding steady employment. Instead, in an effort to keep program costs down, many states had created complex rules and diversionary tactics that kept people from applying for benefits. Others had simply timed out of the system.

I also learned that many states were failing to provide the promised supports, such as childcare and transportation, which mothers needed if they were expected to hold jobs. In some cases, the high cost of providing such supports had caused states to reverse their policies, revealing the whimsical nature of the welfare-to-work philoso-

phy. One example of this was found in Tennessee, where all mothers were expected to work. The state had created a system to provide daycare for newborns so that moms with infants could work. But when Tennessee faced budgetary constraints, state officials granted mothers of newborns a one-year exemption from work requirements, saying that infancy was an important bonding time for parents and babies. The truth of the matter was that passing such an exemption saved the state \$4.3 million a year.

Being able to report on situations like these was rewarding since this part of the welfare story was largely happening out of public view because of the absence of news coverage. The most salient piece of evidence I came across

about the new system's failings was that the number of people living either in poverty or in deep poverty—defined as 50 percent of the poverty line—had increased. For them, the safety net had simply disappeared.

In the end, I felt these stories uncovered many important issues affecting the lives of poor women and children. But I was disappointed when the stories failed to generate renewed interest among other journalists in the coverage of poverty and gender. While Women's eNews hoped the series would spark a dialogue about these issues, the package did not garner much feedback. I got the feeling that once welfare had been "reformed," the news story was simply over.

Of course, hurricanes Katrina and

Rita reawakened reporters' and editors' interest in class, race and gender. As I read articles in the wake of these hurricanes and watched the television reports with their tone of righteous indignation, I wondered whether the news media would continue to stay on this story or if this revitalized interest would recede with the floodwaters. Now, nearly six months later, it looks like journalistic slumber is settling in again. ■

Jennifer Friedlin is a freelance reporter living in Brooklyn, New York. The opening article in her five-part series can be found at <http://womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/1940/context/archive>

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Wealth Is Displayed, While Poverty Goes Unnoticed By Many in the Mexican Press

'What one almost never reads or hears about in Mexico is the immense gap dividing the more well-to-do Mexicans from the native Indians . . .'

By Ana Cristina Enriquez

Mexico is known as a land of contrasts. Its terrain stretches from the most arid deserts to exuberant tropical forests, with colorful architecture in the south and sober constructions in the north, with tropical huts on the seacoasts and modern skyscrapers in the cities. In urban areas, expensive European-made automobiles sweep through on broad highways, while in mountainous villages horses pull wagons on precarious dirt roads.

The enormous gap between how the rich and poor live in this land is something readily observable, though Mexicans, for the most part, shut their eyes to this uncomfortable reality, which has existed since colonial times. Extreme poverty in proximity to enormous wealth is not new in Mexico; neither is the blind eye cast to this circumstance. In 2002, the National

Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics released a report classifying 44.1 percent of Mexican households as poor, with 15.8 percent living in what

Social inequality is often regarded as a given, and neither its presence nor its potential consequences are viewed as newsworthy.

it called "extreme poverty." In that year, 10 percent of Mexico's wealthier families held 40.8 percent of the nation's income, a number that grew in 2004 to 42.1 percent.

Mexican society considers it bad taste to talk about these shameful contrasts.

And so it seems that much of the news media in our country has adopted this sense of shame, as they ignore this story or find ways to tell it only in parts. What one almost never reads or hears about in Mexico is the immense gap dividing the more well-to-do Mexicans from the native Indians, who reside at the very bottom of the economic and social ladder. In part, this is a reflection of a lack of interest in such news by those who purchase newspapers and magazines. But this reluctance to engage with these issues is echoed in decisions made in newsrooms in which reporters are not encouraged to pursue such topics. For many—both inside and outside of journalism in Mexico—social inequality is often regarded as a given, and neither its presence nor its potential consequences is viewed as newsworthy.

After the North American Free Trade Agreement was implemented in 1994,

the Mexican market opened up to the goods available and expanded the bank accounts of a few privileged citizens. But for those living in extreme poverty, their lives have not improved, nor have their incomes, which could hardly become worse. At the same time, there seem to be no limits to the ways in which those who have wealth now choose to display it.

During the mid-1990's the look of many Mexican cities started to change. Big shopping malls flourished in urban centers, as U.S. companies such as Wal-Mart, Costco, H-E-B groceries, and Sam's Club opened stores. Restaurants such as Chili's, Applebee's, and Carl's Jr., disdained by the wealthy in the United States for being chain restaurants, became the favorites of upper middle and middle classes in Mexico, who flocked to them as a way of demonstrating their modernity. They also shopped at exclusive designer boutiques—Fendi, Prada, Salvatore Ferragamo, Louis Vuitton, Tiffany—which are now found in major cities, alongside exclusive Spanish brands, such as Zara, Mango and Tous.

Celebrity Journalism Highlights Politicians

Unless the World Bank or United Nations issues a report about the contrasting poverty and wealth in Mexico, these issues—and the ripples of their consequences—will simply garner no media interest. Instead, today, the focus is on wealth and celebrities. This kind of journalism has flourished during the past five years, ever since *Quién* magazine was launched by *Expansión*, a media group recently bought by Time, Inc. "There were people who said that it was never going to work, because we don't have royalty. But we decided that the politicians were going to be our royalty," wrote *Quién*'s editor, Blanca Gómez Morera, in an article about the *Expansión* group. "People read *Quién* to see how to dress." This successful formula was followed by Grupo Televisa, the largest media group in

Latin America, which launched *Caras*. Indeed, nearly all of Mexico's leading political figures from various parties have appeared in the pages—and on the cover—of such publications.

This coverage has opened a new

... today, the focus is on wealth and celebrities. This kind of journalism has flourished during the past five years, ever since *Quién* magazine was launched by *Expansión*, a media group recently bought by Time, Inc.

window through which Mexicans peer into the lifestyles of the rich and famous. A generation ago such frivolous stories would not have been published given the historic memory of the 1910 revolution that had raised the hopes of the nation's impoverished masses soon after Porfirio Díaz's regime, which was a period with one of the highest levels of social inequality.

Today, what appears on these pages is regarded by middle-class Mexicans as showing them the way—through dress, social behavior, and places to eat and purchase items—to move up the social ladder. These magazines have become for many a style manual for living. Unlike in other countries, education is not necessarily portrayed as the key to social and economic success. What is sometimes surprising is how willing politicians and their family members are to display their material "achievements" in a country with such high rates of poverty. And in their interviews, the sad reality of the disparities is covered with the mask of superficiality.

In a year-end interview with *Caras*, Jorge Emilio González Martínez, the young president of the Mexican Green Party who was recently involved in a corruption scandal, was portrayed in his bathrobe, eating a salad on his elegant bed, and wearing a swimming suit in what appears to be a pool in his home. His fancy closet reveals his preference for Gucci shoes (with four identical pairs), along with a pair of Ferragamo. His main concern, expressed in this

article, is not how to promote green policies but how to find what he calls "the love of his life," a woman whom he describes as "relaxed, light, joyful and not good in school," because he wouldn't like to go out with a hard worker. Also, he observes, she should be 10 years younger, so she can feel some admiration for him.

González is just one of the many public figures who have naively exposed themselves in the Mexican celebrity press. There was Mexico's first lady, Marta Sahagún de Fox, who showed the most intimate spheres of her world and her heart to audiences of several publications and flaunted her expensive taste. A few years later, a political scandal emerged about the amount of public money being spent on her wardrobe. In an auction of her designer dresses for "good causes," just four out of 36 were sold.

Until the last few years, the Mexican media were mostly controlled by an oppressive government, ruled by a party that had remained in power for 71 years. For now, self-censorship in mainstream media and the marketplace are dictating what is published. Celebrity journalism will continue entertaining Mexican readers as long as it remains an attractive business. In the midst of this, let us hope that the relative freedom the press now enjoys will, in time, lead members of the news media to more meaningful stories about the nation's social and economic inequality. The path leading to this kind of change isn't clear right now, but it's possible that out of the excess of focus on wealth and power might emerge some greater awareness of what isn't being talked about but cannot remain unseen. ■

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Reporting on Gaps in a Country Devoted to Harmony

In China, social and economic gaps are acknowledged, but the news media rarely probe their causes or their consequences.

By Yuan Feng

In the early morning of December 15, 2005, three teenage girls were killed in a traffic accident while on their way to school. This happened in Chongqing, one of the biggest cities in China. The three families received different rates of compensation: According to the girls' families, 200,000 RMB was given to the family of each girl who had an urban household registration; 50,000 RMB was given to the family of the girl with a rural household registration. [There are eight renminbi, RMB, to one American dollar.]

This unequal treatment reveals the urban/rural and income gaps that are deeply rooted in China and strengthened by law and policy. And different news media in this country handle the reporting of stories like this one in different ways.

As the Lunar New Year approached in late January, on the front page of the People's Daily, the official newspaper of the central committee of the Chinese Communist Party, a special column appeared with the title, "Sending Warm Regards, Giving a Good New Year." What follows are news items that appeared in this column on January 22, 2006:

- Central government appropriates 17 billion RMB as pension security subsidy for enterprise employees.
- Party members among central government and party organs send warm hearts with money and goods, all of the donation arrived into the hands of people who have the needs.
- Free health check-up for 63 cleaners in Jinan, Shandong Province.
- In Xian, Shaanxi Province: 800 model workers have gotten one million holiday subsidy from city government.
- In Dalian, Liaoning Province: Union



Chinese migrant workers carry sacks while the screen behind them displays the Shenzhou VI launching in a live broadcast at the Beijing railway station in October 2005. Photo by Elizabeth Dalziel/The Associated Press.

mobilizes 16.4 million RMB, helps difficult migrant workers go home for holiday family reunion.

- In Zhangjiakou, Hebei Province: Ensure 170,000 difficult people have a safe winter, 64,000 party members help 18,000.

Along with this column, there were news stories related to ways that the government is working to bridge social and economic gaps:

- Fujian Province: all new provincial financial income is spent for agriculture, rural areas, and farmers.
- Hainan Province: financial spending focuses on things that benefit people.
- And a story entitled, "We did not

expect to receive New Year call as a farmer."

More than a half of the news stories on the front page on this day were related to disadvantaged people. That kind of coverage is unusual and is likely happening now because of the Chinese New Year, the country's most important festival. But still it sheds light on the more typical way that the official media cover these gaps in China.

In the past few years, as the government started talking about building a harmonious society and began working on its Scientific Review on Development, the three new big societal gaps identified were urban/rural, east/west, and rich/poor. That there are three new large gaps is a reminder of the

historic “Three Big Gaps” theory during the Mao era. Then the gaps were urban/rural, worker/farmer, and mental labor/manual labor, and the slogan was “Eliminating the three big gaps, toward the ideal Communist Society.”

Mao's policies did indeed reduce income and social status gaps between mental and manual labor by degrading the former, but did not close the other two. In the early to mid-1980's, reformers among the party's leaders did reduce some of the urban/rural and worker/farmer gaps, however, by enhancing the latter. However, gaps among industries, regions and the haves and have-nots were still built-in, and in recent years these have even expanded in some regards.

Gradually, the topic of social gaps has received attention from scholars and those in the media, and more articles and stories about them have appeared. There are different approaches to covering these issues, since the media in China can be divided into two general categories—the official news media and the commercial one, which is also under the control of the party and state government. The typical official style is seen in what was shared above from the *People's Daily*: Most of what appears is good news about what the authorities have done to resolve the problem.

From the official news media, readers cannot get a very good understanding about the presence or significance of these gaps, nor is there any mention made of the structural factors that are causing them or helping them to persist. Nor can readers learn about efforts being made by nongovernmental organizations and other institutes in unconventional ways. When it comes to talking about causes for these gaps, official mouthpieces might mention them in very abstract ways, if they talk about them at all. Terms used to refer to gaps often appear in jargon, and usually numbers are used and few human stories are told. If people's experiences get written about, stories fall into a predictable formula: victims become beneficiaries and the state and party leaders act as patrons, and the former are grateful to the latter. Readers can hardly find in-depth and down-to-earth

stories.

Commercial media differ. On the one hand, these media have some in-depth stories, and they are more attractively told for readers. One reads some human stories and in doing so feels how people are affected by poverty and social inequality. Some stories go further to reveal deep roots of the problem, and they explore the resolution of the problem from a systematic or structural angle. At the same time, however, many of these reports have visible faults: The writing is done sensationally, so that vulnerable people like women are portrayed simply as victims/losers, sometimes as isolated cases, and their problems are personalized. In these stories, there is a failure to probe structural factors that caused their problems. Some of these reports just blame the victim and offer no hint, background, or comprehensive analysis. Stories showing how people try to change the unfair institutional arrangement and improve their situation are rarely seen, and very few media outlets, among hundreds and thousands of them, have published stories that reveal the emergence of activists and citizen movements to secure people's rights.

The Gender Gap

Coincidentally, both the official and commercial news media have paid much less attention to gender gaps. For example, women retire at an age five years younger than men do, and this was allowed by law even though it is against the equal rights principle of the constitution. Women's organizations called on this to be changed for many years, but this issue did not become a major media topic until recently. The events about Beijing +10—which was the 10-year review on the follow-up action of the commitments made by governments at the World Conference on Women held in Beijing by the United Nations in 1995—more involved a celebration than a chance to reflect on gender gaps that remain, and are even expanding in some areas.

If one searches through recent years of the *People's Daily*, one finds about 500 items that mention the gaps between rural and urban Chinese and more

than 1,200 items in which “income gap” or rich/poor gap is cited. But only 12 stories mention gender gap, even though the income gap between men and women increased by seven percent in urban China and 19 percent in rural China during the 1990's. During this same time, the employment rate of women dropped more than it did among men.

Along with reporting on these gender gaps, issues of discrimination also fall under the light of media attention. Regional discrimination under hukou, the system of household registration by area, which determines whether family members receive certain benefits and opportunities, and discrimination in health care, along with other forms of discrimination, are becoming topics of press coverage.

Ironically, gender discrimination is not very visible in the media. Among 2,103 stories that mentioned discrimination, only about 100 mentioned “gender discrimination.” In the fall of 2005, Beijing University required women applicants for a given department to score higher during their recruitment; when this became known, much of the news media gave more space and bigger voices to the opinion that this is not a clear-cut example of gender discrimination. When women's voices are not heard, gender inequity is not a visible issue in the media. If journalists don't value this topic, how can we expect more comprehensive coverage on social gaps and a harmonious society?

Now harmonious society has become a fashionable term among China's leaders and media. But how is this harmonious society to be interpreted? Some stress exists about whether it is better to maintain stability and ignore the inequity to keep the status quo. It is also very difficult for China's structural factors to be touched. There are some people who interpret the words “harmonious society” to mean that there should be a society in which everyone has food and has a voice; this interpretation is signaled by the two Chinese characters that make up the word harmony.

How can the news media in China do better? They face many challenges; the dilemma for them is how to push

the limits while following the party's guidelines. On January 24, 2006, Chinese authorities closed Freezing Point, which had been a section of China Youth Daily since the mid-1990's and was almost the only outspoken media space among official newspapers. A month earlier, the party authority removed the editor in chief of The Beijing News, a lively newspaper that had been jointly

published since November 2003 by an official newspaper belonging to the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Southern Metropolitan News, a "child newspaper" of Guangdong Provincial Party's newspaper group. The publication of The Beijing News was allowed by special permission of authorities, and as time went on its performance was beyond what the party

would accept. It is difficult to know how to make journalists keep their probing eyes while under restraint. ■

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Violence Attracts the News Media to a Story Not Reported Enough

Coverage of the riots in France reaffirmed the need for ongoing, in-depth reporting of poor immigrants' circumstances and the issues they confront.

By Françoise Lazare

Many in the international press interpreted November's riots by poor, minority youth who live in congested French suburbs as new testimony of France's weakness. In some publications, the crisis was referred to as a "civil war." Newsweek headlined its coverage "Europe's Time Bomb," and Time claimed that "Paris is Burning," while explaining that "nights of mayhem scorch France's troubled banlieues and blacken the country's image of itself."

As suburban riots continued day after day, French news media leaders became increasingly embarrassed by the spectacle. They knew that the public gravitates to violent events, no matter where they take place. Yet these French media executives also knew that giving too much attention to the riots would only dra-

matize the situation more. Even as rioters shouted hatred of the media, they worked hard to obtain maximum coverage of their neighborhoods. A kind of competition for the number of cars destroyed by fire took place. A week or so into the rioting, several TV producers decided not to inform viewers daily

about the number of burned cars in specific areas. (During the three-week period of rioting, the total was more than 8,000.)

In this atmosphere, reporters had to move in teams, sometimes wearing helmets. They tried to work away from the local police to protect press independence and also get more accurate accounts from rioters. Yet they did not want to move too far away, fearing at times for their own security. Nor did they want to miss any crucial episodes in this story, since there were, of course, many violent confrontations between the protestors and police. After several of the correspondents had been



Clichy-sous-Bois residents walk past the wreckage of a burned car in a suburb east of Paris. November 2005. Photo by Jacques Brinon/The Associated Press.

insulted or attacked, editors selected special reporters—such as those who were better able to speak Arabic—to cover the story, and these reporters approached this assignment with a sense of heightened caution. A young French-Algerian journalist said that several years after working for a newspaper as an intern, that paper called him in November to propose a new assignment.

What French journalists reported on during the time of these riots diverged so much from the coverage that the international press gave to this story that the government organized a special briefing for foreign correspondents in Paris. Yves Bordenave, a reporter for *Le Monde*, says of decisions he made about coverage of this story: “We understood very fast that following smoke and flames would lead us nowhere. Only staying on the surface of things We had to really enter the gangs to move further, though it was difficult and risky.”¹

These events were not a French “civil war,” nor did they degenerate into a new permanent form of insurrection. At the government briefing, spokesman Jean-François Coppé said that the image of “France on fire” was not accurate and called such coverage a “caricature” of the events. He even pointed out that such coverage had raised international fears that could hurt tourism and foreign investment. The intended effect did not appear to take hold. German journalists, for example, emphasized that France was the only European country in a state of emergency. Michaela Wiegel, from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, remarked that it was strange that the foreign press should be singled out, as if it were not reporting on the same events as the French press.

Broadly speaking, the problem is that these immigrants, most of whom are poor and who settled here after France’s colonies achieved independence, have not been given opportunities to integrate into traditional French society. But neither do they want to give up their different ways of life to join the core of the French population. Suburban high-rise housing was built for them to live in, but they were weak, prefabricated buildings and within only a few years they have deteriorated. Also, beginning in

the 1970’s, unemployment strongly increased; some of today’s teenagers are growing up in families in which no one has a job. Also, most of these families are Muslims and oppose anti-Islam attitudes, some of which have surfaced in the debate about women wearing a religious veil in France’s public buildings, such as schools, which have been going on for more than a year.

It is certainly not the case that what goes on in these poor neighborhoods does not receive attention from the press in “normal” times. But the fact is that other political, social and economic issues are generally seen as greater priorities by the French press, which tends to concentrate its reporting on day-to-day hard-news stories. Nor have any of the successive French governments developed any real strategies to deal with these simmering issues or integrate these families into French society.

But once the riots broke out, several newspapers, radio and TV reports focused on the poor level of education and the high number of students who drop out of school, a situation that has contributed to an astonishing 60 percent youth unemployment rate in some suburbs. As they worked to report this story, journalists struggled with language problems. Not only do many of these immigrant families not speak French, but the teenagers have developed their own way of talking, using an odd French-Arabic slang and inverting syllables of French words. Nor was it easy for journalists to avoid reverting to “war” vocabulary, especially at a time when it is so much in use in the international debate about Iraq. In addition, those in the press had



Riot police arrest youths in the Paris suburb, Le Blanc-Mesnil, early on November 3, 2005. Youths battled with police in Paris’s troubled suburbs for a seventh straight night, setting fire to a car dealership and hurling stones at police in at least 10 towns, officials said. *Photo by Christophe Enal/The Associated Press.*

to figure out how to use some of the inopportune remarks made by politicians. For example, Nicolas Sarkozy, the French minister of homeland security, spoke about the need to clean out the affected suburbs using a high-pressure water machine and referred to rioters as “rabble.”

It was quite frustrating for members of the French press to receive much general foreign criticism about their country and its news media, given that many journalists felt they were covering the issue of the urban violence in greater depth. For sure, if more journalistic attention to specific suburban and immigrant issues could be paid in daily news coverage—rather than addressing them in the midst of violent outbursts—that would likely be a good thing for the future of French society. ■

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☞ ¹To read some of Yves Bordenave’s reporting on the riots, go to www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/campanas/migration/paris.htm

Newspapers' Survival

“Reinvent or die. It’s that simple,” is advice offered to newspapers by **Tim Porter**, an editor and writer with newspapers and now a news media consultant. “And the death will be slow and painful, a continuing slide into mediocrity and irrelevance, as tighter budgets reduce staff and the public opts for newer, more compelling sources of information.” Porter argues that “local journalism,” done in new ways that he describes, will be the difference in whether daily newspapers survive. **Clark G. Gilbert**, an assistant professor at Harvard Business School, and **Scott D. Anthony**, a managing director at Innosight LLC, explain the transformative impact of “disruptive change” on the newspaper industry and describe how mistakes made by other industries that have confronted such change can be instructive. “. . . following these tips, newspaper companies have a chance to successfully navigate through increasingly turbulent times,” they write.

With Knight Ridder, the nation’s second biggest newspaper company, “headed for sale, dismemberment or reorganization because its three largest shareholders were not satisfied with the measly 19.4 percent in operating profit in 2004,” **James Naughton**, formerly an editor at The Philadelphia Inquirer and president of The Poynter Institute, presents the case for why it is essential that journalists serve on the corporate boards of newspaper companies. In the two and a half years since **Amanda Bennett** became editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer, a Knight Ridder paper, budget cuts have reduced the newsroom staff by nearly 21 percent. “In downsizing, we are forced to think hard about the basic question of what exactly journalism is,” writes Bennett, who goes on to describe some new ways of approaching their mission “that necessity is forcing us to examine.”

At the Star Tribune in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the paper’s routine redesign collided with major changes in readership habits and interests. This led to “a sweeping project taking on some of the most difficult questions confronting newspapers,” write Star Tribune editor **Anders Gyllenhaal** and **Monica Moses**, deputy managing editor and the chief architect of the redesign, who explain the changes made to their paper and the lessons learned in the process. Despite experiencing moments of great concern about the future of newspapers, his recent experiences in merging his newspaper’s print and online content have convinced **Michael Riley**, editor of The Roanoke (Va.) Times, that “Newspapers—or, more precisely, newsgathering operations—are in a position of strength.” He shares “an up-close look at what’s happened at our midsized newspaper to enable us to join the digital dance.” After 26 years working as a newspaper reporter, **Carol Bradley** has seen plenty of mistakes made when newsroom cutbacks happen and points to 10 of the more common errors that she hopes editors will avoid making. **Joe Zelnik**, editor of the Cape May (N.J.) County Herald, a weekly community newspaper, reports that “Nothing is shrinking at the Herald, which is doing more with more,” and he explains why his local paper is thriving at a time when many bigger daily newspapers are struggling.

Melvin Mencher, professor emeritus at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, notices changes in what is taught to journalism students and in news habits of the young and contends that “The question no longer is whether the newspaper will endure but

whether the kind of news that is essential to a functioning democracy will survive.” **Peg Finucane**, an assistant professor of journalism and media studies at Hofstra University’s School of Communication, describes the training of journalists for a rapidly changing workplace. “There is no blueprint for this effort, and many newspapers cannot define what they want our journalism graduates to know or do,” she writes. **Joel Kaplan**, an associate dean at the Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, sees the ripple effect from newsroom cutbacks as students move away from journalism toward public relations, advertising and film, and he worries that “journalism appears to be losing some committed students who were on the verge of entering its workforce.” At Yale, **Stanley Flink**, a lecturer in political science, challenged his students to propose ways to buttress the vital journalistic work of newsrooms. He describes the various stages of their thinking and the proposal they arrived at.

The Job of Frontline Editor

The frontline editor’s job is one that, in the words of **Jacqui Banaszynski**, who holds the Knight Chair in Editing at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, “has expanded to one that just keeps on expanding.” As she observes, changing duties often lead to a new name for the job but “none speak to the complexities or to the whole.” Her article is the first in a series of stories, compiled by a founder of the Frontline Editors Project, **John F. Greenman**, for Nieman Reports. These articles, described briefly below, track changes in this vital newsroom job and show how best to prepare for the range of its responsibilities.

- **Mae Cheng**, regional editor at Newsday, highlights moments in the work of frontline editors to illustrate lessons to be learned from doing what they do.
- **Stuart Warner**, enterprise editor and writing coach at The Plain Dealer in Cleveland, Ohio, illustrates the editor-writer relationship in narrative journalism and how he handles that work in the midst of his other editor duties.
- **John Greenman**, the Carolyn McKenzie and Don E. Carter Professor of Journalism at the University of Georgia, explores the difficulties reporters can experience when they become frontline editors and describes new efforts being made to ease their transition.
- **Michele McLellan**, who directs Tomorrow’s Workforce at Northwestern University, writes about a new online training initiative created by the Frontline Editors Project to which prospective and current editors can turn for assistance.
- **Marty Claus**, former vice president/news for Knight Ridder and now a consultant on recruitment and training, tells what the project’s online training will offer journalists in determining their suitability for the job and their development in it.
- **Lillian Swanson**, director of NewsTrain, a training program for frontline editors developed by the Associated Press Managing Editors, offers tips and advice for training editors and describes how some newsrooms approach their own training.
- **Carl Sessions Stepp**, a former editor and now journalism professor at the University of Maryland, writes about how few resources are available for those entering an editor’s job. He also compiles a list of books, articles and Web sites to which editors can go for advice and inspiration. ■

If Newspapers Are to Rise Again

'Reinvent or die. It's that simple.'

By Tim Porter

Newspapers are in big trouble, the biggest since television began eroding their audience 60 years ago. There is no need for an umpteenth recitation of the demographic, economic and technological trifecta that has endangered newspapering as a vehicle for journalism—which, of course, is why we care about the fate of newspapers: They pay the freight for the type of journalism we have considered a necessity in a democratic society.

There is, however, a need to repeat an unpleasant truth most newspaper journalists, particularly newsroom managers, don't like to hear: They are as responsible for the decline in readership and relevance of newspapers as any of the other bugaboos cited routinely as contributing causes—the Internet, pesky bloggers, disinterested youth, and that Craig guy from San Francisco.

Why is that? Because risk-averse newsrooms have spent several decades with their collective heads in the ink barrel, ignoring the changing society around them, refusing to embrace new technologies, and defensively adhering to both a rigid internal hierarchy and an inflexible definition of “news” that produces a stenographic form of journalism, one that has stood still, frozen by homage to tradition, while the world has moved on.

But there is good news. Amid the carnage of smaller newsroom budgets, buyouts, layoffs and seemingly endless prognostications of doom, opportunity lives. In fact, newspapers have never been presented with an opportunity this large—or with such an urgent reason to take it. Opportunity is not just knocking; it is kicking down the front door to the newsroom and yelling: Reinvention!

Newspapers now have the chance—albeit forced upon them—to discard decades of rote practices and processes.

They have the chance to build new forms of journalism that operate on traditional principles of fairness, stewardship and vigilance but are not bound by tired definitions of what is “news,” how it should be presented, and who should be given the tools to do so. Reinvent or die. It's that simple. And the death will be slow and painful, a continuing

All that's left is the journalism. Local journalism. That is the niche, the slice, newspapers can and must own.

slide into mediocrity and irrelevance, as tighter budgets reduce staff and the public opts for newer, more compelling sources of information.

The Route to Reinvention

Reinvention must begin at the core, the nucleus, the thing all the 1,450 or so daily American newspapers that are not The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, or USA Today must excel at: coverage of local news.

Local is the franchise for newspapers. Local reporting, local photography, local commentary, local information, local interaction with the community. Yahoo! and Google spew out routine national and international news by the screen full. The bleat of the blogosphere and the wail of cable TV heads provide the nation with punditry in spades. Myspace, Flickr and other social network sites built the virtual communities the Internet promised in its nascency. The one-time mass media has been thin-

sliced and cross-diced into me-media, an RSS feed for every person, an opinion expressed for every viewpoint offered, everyone a publisher.

All that's left is the journalism. Local journalism. That is the niche, the slice, newspapers can and must own.

I can hear the protests now. Editors are pointing to the numerous local stories in their papers, to the enterprise projects, and to the staffing that, while no doubt reduced, is devoted primarily to local news. Fair enough, but let's look more closely. True, most newspapers produce hundreds (at least) of column inches of local copy every week, but what is all that ink and all those pixels being used for? In most regional and smaller newspapers, two-thirds to three-quarters of all local, nonsports stories are about institutions (government), crime (courts and cops), and reports (more institutions). Count them in your paper. And, as the papers get smaller, these stories become increasingly eye-glazing, devolving into either recitations of agendas or, worse, poorly executed attempts to mimic the more difficult forms of journalism (narrative, analysis, columns) practiced with excellence by only the best papers.

If newspapers were a restaurant, their motto might be: “C'mon In. The Food Ain't Great, But You Get Plenty of It.”

Sadly, this tired, institutionally focused news formula makes it nearly impossible to provide readers with the one thing the Readership Institute at Northwestern University finds resonates most with the public—an experience. They want journalism that makes them feel smarter or makes them feel safer or makes them shudder, shake, shimmy or otherwise twinge with emotion. You won't find these characteristics in the halls of government, where journalists spend so much time.

Don't misunderstand. Journalists

must cover government, and journalists must cover crime—but politicians and bureaucrats and cops and criminals aren't the audience; the electorate, the taxpayers, the victims, and all the other ordinary people these institutions were formed to serve are the audience. The current beat structure and the reigning newsroom value system produce and reward news reported from the point of view of the government instead of from the perspective of the governed—and that makes for bland reading.

It doesn't have to be this way. We can change the practices and processes of journalism and still keep its principles intact. Here's how:

1. Start with a question. If you could rebuild your newsroom from scratch, with the same full-time equivalent of employees and budget numbers and with the only requirement that you must make a print and an electronic product, what would you change? Would you hire the same people? Create the same beats? Keep the same print and Web designs? Implement the same workflow? Of course you wouldn't. So why do you continue on as you do?

Asking and answering this question—honestly—compels a confrontation with assumptions about staffing, resource allocation and news judgment, and leads to conversations about editorial goals, readership strategy, and producing a newspaper that is unique to its community instead of one that reflects a generic industry template.

In short, it provides a reply to the perennial question: Where do we want to go?

2. Put the bodies in the right places. Put them where the priorities are, where the mission-critical reporting, photography and editing must be done. Is having a staff movie critic essential to your mission? If not, use the job for something else. Foreign and Washington correspondents? Aren't you already paying for the Times, the Post, The Associated Press, and Reuters? Out of town sports? Do readers really care about the byline? Hundreds of column inches for TV grids, entertainment listings, and stocks? Put them online.

After realigning resources behind true, community-oriented priorities, and after some difficult conversations, you've picked up news hole, able-bodied journalists, and production time that can be used for other things—local content, niche editorial packages, interaction with the community around you. This is called product development.

3. Determine the skills your newsroom needs to meet your new goals. Do reporters need to learn how to use digital tools—photography, video, audio? Do copyeditors need to learn how to write? Do managers need to learn to collaborate? Yes, it's training, but training with purpose. It's focused, it's goal oriented, and it's measurable. This is called resource development.

4. Kill the defensive, authoritarian newsroom culture. Break down the hierarchy. Dismantle the content silos. Don't manage, enable. Newsrooms are filled with creative people whose talents and ambitions are shackled by a plethora of inhibiting rules. Reward effort. Fail. Learn. And repeat. Free the newsroom 55,000! This is called fun.

5. Get a persona. I won't use the word "brand" because it makes journalists blanch, so let's use "identity." We all have one, and the paper must have one, too, something for which it is known, a signature type of work that reflects a zeal to excel, to be the absolute best at something that separates it from the rest of the media horde. Great writing. Great investigations. Great columns. Great reader participation. Great simplicity. Objectivity is not a personality.

6. Don't cover the community, be the community. This is an idea borrowed from Hodding Carter, former head of the Knight Foundation, who a while back spoke about his early newspaper days at the Greenville, Mississippi Delta Democrat-Times. His words are better than mine: "We practiced journalism with zeal and, occasionally, foolhardy abandon. We took up the implicit demands—the implicit responsibility inherent in the First Amendment—and let people know our editorial mind

when most of them would have happily been spared that opportunity. We covered our region, warts and all. And we participated in the life and civic causes of our town—Greenville, Mississippi—with avocational fervor. We saw ourselves as citizens as well as journalists. We saw ourselves not simply as a mirror reflecting what was happening in the community, or as its critics, but as indivisible from it, a piece of the community's fabric."

Never has the passion Carter displayed toward journalism's role in building community been more important for newspapers. Because technology has given the people, in the words of PressThink blogger Jay Rosen, "formerly known as the audience" the power to publish, they are talking back and engaging in conversations, with each other, with news sources, and with the press. Newspapers can join this conversation and help gather communities of local interest or stand mute and be left behind.

7. Finally, big ideas rule. It's too late for tinkering. There's no time to rearrange the deck chairs once again; the keel for a new boat must be laid. Media have exploded. We need to explode the newsroom.

This is a time of great transition. The tectonics of technology, demographics and economics are disrupting the ground on which newspaper journalism stood for half a century. Survival requires nimbleness, resoluteness and an unwavering sense of the possible. This is called leadership. Newspapers that acquire those skills will prosper—and so will their journalism. ■

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Can the Newspaper Industry Stare Disruption in the Face?

'Lessons learned from past failures can help to ensure future triumphs.'

By Scott D. Anthony and
Clark G. Gilbert

These are scary times for newspaper veterans. Hardly a day goes by without news about disappearing readers, shrinking revenues, declining stock prices, or looming layoffs. Tellingly, these editors and writers are just as likely to come across this news in a blog or hear it through a podcast as they are to read it in their local newspaper.

The newspaper industry is going through what we call a "disruptive" change, a phenomenon that has transformed industries such as retailing, computing, airlines and automobiles. The bad news is that when the dust of disruptive change settles, historically even the best-run companies typically end up in the loser's column. In the computing industry, for example, Digital Equipment Corporation missed the personal computer (P.C.) in the early 1980's, started to fall apart in the early 1990's, and got acquired by Compaq in 1998. Dell Computer's low-cost business model destroyed Compaq, forcing a merger with Hewlett-Packard (H.P.) in 2001. Dell's continued incursion into the P.C. and printing office now threatens H.P., which announced more than 10,000 layoffs last year in an effort to remain competitive.

There is good news: Lessons learned from past failures can help to ensure future triumphs. Even better, newspaper companies have real assets to bring to this fight, and a number of emerging industry experiments with new products and business models could point the way towards future success.

This article describes some reasons why powerful market leaders stumble in the face of disruption and describes a few simple tips to help companies avoid those pitfalls. Success won't

come easily, but by following these tips, newspaper companies have a chance to successfully navigate through increasingly turbulent times.

Disruptive innovations typically offer lower performance along dimensions that firms consider critical. In exchange, new benefits are introduced along dimensions such as simplicity, convenience, ease of use, or low price.

In the media industry, blogs, Google, eBay, Monster.com, and freely distributed commuter papers each fit the pattern of disruptive innovation. Each emerging competitor lacks something that is core to most newspaper companies' value proposition. Some can't match a newspaper's broad distribution network. Others can't compete with the newspaper's detailed reporting capability or local reach. All, however, compete along dimensions of performance that are different than the traditional metrics emphasized in the print newspaper business.

Three barriers typically make it difficult for market-leading incumbents to get disruption right:

1. Fail to spot the disruptive change early enough: Disruptive change tends to start innocently at a market's fringes. Market leaders tend to dismiss early disruptive developments because they just don't affect their core business.

2. Fail to allocate sufficient resources towards disruptive offerings: Disruptive innovations often have lower performance and lower prices than established offerings. Companies find it hard to prioritize spending time and money on disruption when they have seemingly attractive opportunities in their core business.

3. Force the disruptive initiative into the existing business model and product concept: Eastman Kodak Company spotted digital imaging in the 1970's. It invested billions of dollars to create its first commercial camera, a \$30,000 camera targeting the professional market. Only recently has it embraced simplicity and begun to experiment with new business models. Had Kodak made different choices and realized the potential to create new business models sooner, it could have owned digital imaging instead of being one of many players in space.

Our work with the newspaper industry suggests that the second and third problems are the more pressing. Most newspaper companies still focus a disproportionate share of time and attention on their print product. While not ignoring that product, allocating more resources towards new disruptive products makes sense. It seems clear to us that newspaper companies must reimagine their content and business models if they hope to succeed.

Despite the sense of doom and gloom that pervades the industry today, there are signs of hope. While newspaper readership is declining, information consumption is increasing. Almost every newspaper company has made the transition to the Web, with their properties attracting new audiences and new advertisers. In fact, the interactive nature of the Web allows forward-thinking companies to completely change the way they interact with readers and advertisers. Readers can become content creators and community builders. Web sites can serve advertisers that would eschew the static nature of print.

Additionally, companies are experi-

menting with new approaches. Dozens of companies have launched free papers targeted at young readers or recent immigrants. Last year Knight Ridder, Gannett and Tribune were among top buyers of HomeGain and a controlling stake in news aggregator Topix.net. Earlier this year Gannett took a minority position in an emerging mobile information provider called 4INFO.

To maximize their chances of successfully prospering in the next generation, newspaper companies should remember the following principles.

Assume a market-first perspective: One of the core principles of succeeding with disruptive innovation relates to how to connect with customers. The concept is elegantly simple: People don't buy products, they hire them to get jobs done in their lives. When people encounter a problem, they look around for the solution that allows them to solve the problem. Too often, companies define markets through their own internal lenses, missing great opportunities staring them in the face.

To succeed, then, try to look at the world from the perspective of your readers and advertisers. What are the jobs they are seeking to get done in their lives? How could you improve your current products so they get the job done better than by using any other competitor? What new products could be introduced that address a point of consumer frustration?

These jobs can be very different in different contexts of use. Up to 50 percent of online registrants for newspaper Web sites are not newspaper subscribers. Even print subscribers follow very different patterns of use online. As one former metro editor said to us: "When I first joined the online group, I couldn't understand why everyone referred to our readers as 'users.' It took me more than a year to realize that people read the newspaper, but they use the Internet. The whole relationship with the product is different."

Newspaper companies should look at their local market to identify jobs that people can't get done well today. They should think of the great assets they have at their disposal—top-flight

journalists, strong brands, in-depth local knowledge, healthy balance sheets—and think how they could reconstitute those assets to address important, unsatisfied jobs.

Break old business models: The newspaper industry's business model has stayed broadly consistent for years and its still-high profit margins are a testament to its power. Succeeding with disruption requires embracing new models. Metro International shows how a company can build an attractive business without any circulation revenues at all. Its key is matching its costs to its revenue sources. Metro augments content that its staff produces with substantial contributions from wire feeds and minimizes distribution costs by placing its papers in centralized locations.

The industry's online business model also needs some rethinking. Too many newspaper companies have replicated their print models online, relying on display advertisements and classifieds, instead of creating new business models. A recent study showed that as few as 10 percent of top print advertisers are top online advertisers in newspaper Web sites. These new online advertisers often require different ad metrics than those traditionally used in print media. Newspapers need to ask how much money their sites make from lead-generation, consumer direct marketing, and pay-per-use content. If the answer is zero, then they should not be satisfied with even 50 percent growth rates, because they are missing big growth opportunities.

Embrace new mindsets: Generally, succeeding with disruption requires challenging mindset barriers that might stand in the way of success. There are two specific mindsets that newspaper companies need to watch out for:

- **Don't define quality internally.** Often, companies evaluating a disruptive offering say, "We can't do that. It is just not good enough." The problem comes when a company applies its internal filters to make that evaluation. Although newspaper editors might

scuff at the quality of the writing in the blogosphere, many consumers appreciate the freshness and directness of user-generated content.

- **Assume your first strategy is wrong.** It seems strange that underfunded entrepreneurs so often triumph over resource-rich companies. One challenge that big companies face is that they often run fast and hard in the wrong direction. The initial strategy for a new growth business is typically the wrong strategy. Companies that pursue perfection and fear failure too often shut off signals that suggest they need to change their approach. Learning what's wrong with an approach and adapting appropriately is a good thing, not a failure. Focus early efforts on small-scale experiments that offer more knowledge about key assumptions.

While it might be hard to see through today's clouds, the newspaper industry has the potential to do some very exciting things in the coming years. Most companies have good brand reputations, strong cash positions, and a deep well of content. The plethora of experiments throughout the industry suggests a readiness for change. The newspaper industry has a chance—if companies make the right choices over the next 18 months—to stare disruption in the face and succeed where other industries have failed. ■

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When Journalists' Voices Are Missing

A former newspaper editor examines the impact of the lack of journalists serving on media company boards.

By James Naughton

When executives of a Florida newspaper company proposed to spend \$30 million on a 12-year marketing venture, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter challenged corporate executives to justify the expenditure. Once the voting began, there was little doubt about the outcome as one after another member voted in favor of the proposal. It might be a surprise that the editorial page editor voted yes. The editor in charge of news coverage in the competing newspaper's home city voted yes. The managing editor voted yes. The executive editor voted yes. Even the Pulitzer-winning reporter voted yes.

This was not your typical media company board. Of the 13 directors, nine were journalists, and the company was the St. Petersburg Times Co., privately owned by The Poynter Institute, a non-profit school for journalists, of which I was then president. (By the way, I also voted yes.)

Those of us on the Times Co. board knew the \$30 million would go to marketing not *instead* of to newsgathering but in *addition*. We knew the Times already had spent many more millions to expand news coverage in the primary market of the rival Tampa Tribune. This \$30 million would go to renaming the region's most important entertainment venue—in downtown Tampa—"The St. Pete Times Forum," and by doing so we'd be reinforcing, not depriving, the St. Pete newsroom's Tampa presence.

The St. Petersburg Times Co. has had and always will have journalists in charge, which might help explain

how it has become Florida's largest newspaper. Its success demonstrates that journalists can be trusted with the business of news, but they aren't given much chance to be trusted in boardrooms of public companies. Not

in 1995 after 37 years as an editor, publisher and executive in Knight Ridder. He says several McClatchy family members on the board often recite the family mantra of quality journalism and community service, as does the chairman, Gary Pruitt, a First Amendment lawyer who earned newsroom respect as publisher of The Fresno Bee.

Louis Boccardi, who joined the Gannett board after 36 years at The Associated Press, including 10 as executive editor and 19 as president and CEO, says he had to come up to

speed quickly to "understand the myriad pressures on a publicly held media company." He says Gannett's directors focus on business, but "also discuss topics such as new publications (e.g., youth tabs), circulation trends, news ratings in broadcast, Katrina coverage challenges, and similar."

Let's grant that all corporate directors are earnest, including the construction and real estate executives on the Belo board, the Hong Kong banker and the greeting card maker on the Dow Jones board, the investment company executives and the manufacturer of golf cart wheels on the Gannett board, the statistics professor on the Lee board, the family member who is chief executive of the pro baseball team, and the frozen-foods executive on the McClatchy board, the libertarian economist who's a guest host of the Rush Limbaugh show on the Media General board, the razor-blade maker and the German retailer on The New York Times board, the three food and beverage company executives and the avocado farmer on the Tribune board, the two enormously

Knight Ridder, the nation's second biggest newspaper company, is headed for sale, dismemberment or reorganization because its three largest shareholders were not satisfied with the measly 19.4 percent in operating profit in 2004.

counting family members like Arthur Sulzberger, Jr. at The New York Times or Donald Graham at The Washington Post or James Ottaway of Dow Jones & Co., who once did newsroom stints as part of their corporate tutelage, here is the current tally of media company directors who have made their careers in newsrooms:

Belo—one journalist of 13 directors
 Dow Jones—one of 16
 Gannett—two of nine
 Knight Ridder—one of 10
 Lee—zero of eight
 McClatchy—one of 14
 Media General—one of 9
 New York Times—zero of 15
 Tribune—zero of 11
 Washington Post—one of 10

Why Journalists Matter on Boards

"I've never felt isolated on the McClatchy board," says Larry Jinks, who has been a McClatchy director since he retired

An Open Letter From Knight Ridder Alumni

What follows is a letter signed by 92 journalists who have worked for Knight Ridder newspapers. It was distributed to news media outlets in November 2005.

John S. Knight, a founder of the company known today as Knight Ridder, believed—and proved—that excellent journalism is good business. The undersigned, all alumni of Knight Ridder, have lived that creed.

As did the late Jack Knight, we believe profit is not merely nice but necessary. Knight Ridder routinely has generated double-digit operating profits—such as last year's 19.4 percent. We understand the obligation of an institutional investor to maximize return on investment. An investor for whom double digits are

insufficient is free to sell Knight Ridder stock. An investor who instead demands the sale or dismantling of Knight Ridder merely in the name of a larger profit margin is engaged not in good business but in greed.

As did Jack Knight, we speak out of confidence in, not fear of, the future of the good business of excellent journalism. There is durable value in businesses that treat their citizens, their communities and their employees with respect. New technology is an ally of, not a threat to, trustworthy and nimble media. Competition gives rise to innovation and efficiency, much as recent declines in print circulation have been accompanied by increased electronic readership.

Knight Ridder is not merely another public company. It is a public

trust. It must balance corporate profitability with civic purpose. We oppose those who would cripple the purpose by coercing more profit. We abhor those for whom good business is insufficient and excellent journalism is irrelevant.

We have watched mostly in silent dismay as short-term profit demands have diminished long-term capacity of newsrooms in Knight Ridder and other public media companies. We are silent no more. We will support and counsel only corporate leadership that restores to Knight Ridder newspapers the resources to do excellent journalism. We are prepared collectively to nominate candidates for the Knight Ridder board. We wish to reassert John Knight's creed. ■

rich people named Buffett and Gates on The Washington Post board—even the four engineers and the lawyer-lobbyist for a toilet tissue manufacturer on the Knight Ridder board.

So what if these people haven't been journalists? Here's what: Knight Ridder, the nation's second biggest newspaper company, is headed for sale, dismemberment or reorganization because its three largest shareholders were not satisfied with the measly 19.4 percent in operating profit in 2004. The board of directors of Knight Ridder will play a crucial role in deciding what happens to the storied company, and it matters whether they have much of a clue about what it takes to do high-quality journalism.

Knight Ridder once was regarded as the big news company that journalists most respected and aspired to join. During the past two decades it lost that luster as the corporation's method of satisfying shareholders was to cut resources, staff and space, year after year and sometimes quarter after quarter. When Knight Ridder agreed to investor pressure to be put up for sale in

November 2005, 92 of Knight Ridder's alumni were so fed up that we signed an Open Letter demanding "corporate leadership that restores to Knight Ridder newspapers the resources to do excellent journalism" and threatening to nominate candidates for the Knight Ridder board [see box above].

We realized this effort is quixotic; if nothing else we can demonstrate the kinds of people who care about journalism and would be excellent candidates for the board of a news company. We know that there is no law, nor any securities regulation, requiring public companies to place on their boards individuals who know anything about the companies' products. Still, logic might suggest that protecting investors is more readily accomplished by directors who have some depth of understanding about the company's reason for existence. If directors of General Motors knew nothing about manufacturing vehicles, how could they guide executives in how to compete against Japanese imports? Oh, wait. Hmm. The General Motors' board boasts among its 12 members moguls

from AstraZeneca, Sara Lee, Kodak, Pfizer, Northrop Grumman, DuPont, Ernst & Young, and Compaq.

The legal obligation of board members is to protect the interest of shareholders. Michael Josephson, the ethicist who may have worn out his welcome teaching in Knight Ridder's executive leadership program when he called the fixation with quarterly profits a Ponzi scheme, says that if they wanted to do so, directors legally could "turn Knight Ridder into a travel agency." Even so, he calls it shocking that media companies have been able to let a focus on shareholder obligations dilute their public trust responsibilities in their communities. Media company boards, says Josephson, are "hiding behind the pretense that they're about journalism. They converted long ago to bankers."

Boccardi and Jinks both say that the boards on which they sit focus primarily on the journalism business and its challenges. But, Jinks says, "you cannot be on that board without being constantly reminded of McClatchy's commitment to outstanding journalism

and community service.” He says that commitment is “really a business value,” because a strong community franchise is a tremendous corporate asset.

Gannett’s board, Boccardi says, is “a corporate board responsible for guiding a seven billion dollar business. But certainly as journalistic issues arise, there is free-flowing discussion. There was, for example, extensive board discussion on the Jack Kelley case at USA Today [in which Kelley was accused of fabricating content in his foreign reporting and fired because of it], and I played a key role in the handling [of that situation], formally and informally. When matters arise to which I can contribute a newsroom perspective, I do—formally and informally. I find the input welcome.”

Some public media companies compensate for the board’s lack of journalism expertise in various ways. The McClatchy board meets five times each year at the Sacramento headquarters, but always visits one of the more distant newspapers for a sixth meeting and uses the occasion to visit each of its departments, including the newsroom. Most public boards invite a newsroom executive into the room to make the occasional report about news coverage, but not to vote on the company’s direction. At Gannett, for instance, the newspaper and broadcast divisions make presentations at every Gannett meeting. “Does the board formally sit and review, say, USA Today’s White House coverage? No, I’m not sure it should,” says Boccardi. “Local autonomy specifically for Gannett’s journalism is part of the creed.”

The Washington Post Co. and The New York Times Co. have family leaders who enunciate a clear—and correct—choice between being in journalism to support the business or being in business to support the journalism. Media General has a chief operating officer, O. Reid Ashe, Jr., who cut his teeth in newsrooms and was among Knight Ridder’s most innovative publishers. Until Peter Kann was forced out as CEO of Dow Jones, the controlling Bancroft family had respected a century-old tradition

always to have a journalist at the top of the company.

Knight Ridder’s Situation

Knight Ridder used to follow the Knight tradition of always having a journalist in one of the company’s two senior executive posts. The duality of forceful editors teamed with aggressive business leaders served the company well. Then in 1995, James K. Batten, the journalist who was chairman and CEO of Knight Ridder,

... logic might suggest that protecting investors is more readily accomplished by directors who have some depth of understanding about the company’s reason for existence.

died of a brain tumor. That June, after Batten’s funeral in Coral Gables, Florida, half a dozen of us Knight Ridder editors gathered in a Miami bar to toast Batten’s memory and to lament what we foresaw as the inevitable decline of newsroom influence in the company under his successor, P. Anthony Ridder.

It’s wrong to demonize Tony Ridder for his fixation on numbers. Tony always has been a numbers guy. But the six or seven of us who were in the pub that day correctly anticipated that his aversion to forceful editors would cause him to make the fundamental mistake of running the company without the traditional strong journalist as his number two. He picked a lawyer. He picked an accountant. Not until last year, 10 years later, when the company was headed toward total submission to investors, did he pick a journalist.

Here is how Alvah Chapman, the retired Knight Ridder chairman who had selected Batten to succeed him, described it in “Knightfall: Knight Ridder and How the Erosion of Newspaper Journalism Is Putting Democracy at Risk,” Davis (Buzz) Merritt’s excellent history of the company published last year: “Tony needed to get another Jim Batten to back him up. I told Tony that, so I’ll tell you that. Tony’s in a lot of un-

necessary hot water because he didn’t have a strong number two person who was clearly his successor and somebody with a news/editorial background.”

The duality of media company obligations was underscored when, in late January, the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) and its Northern California chapter called for national debate on the meaning of Knight Ridder’s fate, saying, “We acknowledge that newspapers cannot serve their democratic role unless they stay in business. But the increas-

ing corporate pressure to squeeze additional returns out of already profitable newspapers, at rates exceeding the margins in most other industries, has skewed the balance between journalism and commerce. SPJ and the [Northern California] Chapter believe that those

directing the production of news have an ethical obligation to readers every bit as significant as their fiduciary accountability to shareholders.”

For the two decades that Ridder was president of the newspaper division and then CEO, numbers trumped newsrooms in Knight Ridder. Perhaps the most telling and obvious symptom was that under Tony Ridder The Miami Herald was allowed to decline in quality though Miami was the corporate headquarters. After Ridder moved the headquarters to San Jose, its Mercury News declined in quality, too. And the board of directors, who might have been in position to insist on restoring the yin of newsroom values to the yang of shareholder satisfaction, did not. Chances are they didn’t even realize they should. ■

James Naughton instigated the Open Letter that Knight Ridder alumni issued last year. He was an editor for 18 years at The Philadelphia Inquirer before becoming president of The Poynter Institute in 1996. He retired in 2003.

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A Shrinking Staff Propels a Newspaper's Transformation

'If we're forced to be a smaller place, then let's aggressively teach ourselves the virtues that go along with that sensibility.'

By Amanda Bennett

Paraphrasing Samuel Johnson, folks often say that nothing focuses the mind like the sight of the gallows. I like better the version that a friend, the head of a large nonprofit organization here, recently offered. She has it taped to the back of her door: "Nothing inspires creativity like a big budget cut." It is a lesson virtually all of us in newspapers are learning—whether we like it or not.

For all its delusional, Pollyanna/glass-half-full/necessity-is-the-mother-of-invention quality, this wisdom offers us the best—and perhaps the only—way out of the fix we find ourselves in at American newspapers today. Here's the conundrum: All across America our newsrooms are shrinking—leaving us with far fewer resources than ever before to deal with a changing industry that is presenting us with problems and issues that are ever more vexing and intractable. Here's the solution: Use the crisis to do what we should have been doing all along.

Without question our newsroom here at The Philadelphia Inquirer has earned its shrinking-newsroom chops. Since I became editor here two and a half years ago, we've lost 110 people—or nearly 21 percent of our newsroom staff—along with similar cuts in newsprint and our budgets. Those with longer memories can recite even bigger staff, budget and newsprint cuts. The sad result is that more than a few people can look around our newsroom and see 425 people—plus more than 200 ghosts.

The near-constant attrition of the

past few years means that fewer people must do more work. Institutional memory and valuable community ties are severed. Every loss brings a new headache, as those who remain must spend hours, sometimes days, trying to figure out: Who will do this work?

The essence of journalism is providing information, insight, education and entertainment. It is making connections, building community, uncovering secrets and hidden information, and being watchdogs for our community.

How will we train replacements? How do we juggle schedules? What will we do when people possessing unique skills walk out the door?

After big losses—like the ones brought about by cuts we've just emerged from—dozens of us spent months doing little else but figuring out how to remake the newsroom in the wake of the departures. I can't think of one of us who at the end of this process was not emotionally and physically exhausted.

That's the bad news. Now, here's the good news: There is good news.

The skills we're honing through necessity are precisely the ones we will need to propel ourselves into the future that is thrusting itself upon us with such vigor. In the face of these challenges, we don't need to settle for simply being a

big institution—doing what big institutions do only with fewer people. If we're forced to be a smaller place, then let's aggressively teach ourselves the virtues that go along with that sensibility. In fact, as we've worked our way through this process, I've settled on some new favorite words: Resilience. Flexibility. Creativity. Collegiality. Cooperation. Focus.

In shrinking, we are forced almost daily to choose. Aggressive pruning is sad, of course, for ambitious journalists who know what they could do with just a little bit more. But it's also pushing us to think deeply, seriously and profoundly about what we value. About what our readers value. About what value we can bring to them. About what value we should and can bring to our community. Every choice we make is a reaffirmation of those values. It's like the old desert island game: When you think about the choices you would make if you had only one choice, it forces you to confront what matters most.

In downsizing, we are forced to think hard about the basic question of what exactly journalism is. Newspapers have stayed in much the same form for decades, as everything around us has been changing. Only the sight of the gallows is helping wrench us to the realization that journalism isn't just interviewing people, writing stories and headlines, taking pictures and writing captions. The essence of journalism is providing information, insight, education and entertainment. It is making connections, building community, uncovering secrets and hidden information, and being

watchdogs for our community.

And there are lots of ways to do this—ways that necessity is forcing us to examine.

The New Approach

Here's how we approached transforming what our newspaper does and how we do it with a lot fewer people than we had before.

Within a few days of learning in 2005 that we were going to have to drop 75 people, or 15 percent of our editorial staff, we held an off-site meeting of our department heads. Our nervous and strong urge was simply to try to fix the problem. After all, everyone was feeling anxious about how their own departments were going to be hit. Instead, led by editorial page editor, Chris Satullo, we spent an entire—and sometimes painful—day examining our values. At the end of the day, we reached agreement on some core principles:

We had to maintain our ambition. Our local and regional news would be robust, inclusive and investigative; our national and foreign news would be analytical, forward-looking and informative; our paper valued expertise and voice, good writing, and unique perspectives. Perhaps most important: We would no longer consider ourselves a newspaper, but rather a news organization—one that would aim to operate with equal facility in whatever medium, be it print or electronic, that would serve readers best.

We had to maintain our mission. As important as what we decided we were was what we realized we were not. We were not—nor should we be—a paper of record. The notion fell hard. Still, this was an important conclusion. It had, in fact, been years since any newspaper had truly been the kind of all-inclusive recording-secretary chronicler of the daily institutional activity of the region. What's more, every type of reader survey told us over and over again that readers no longer valued this kind of blow-by-blow incremental institutional coverage. Yet, without a specific recognition of that fact, we feared that our shrinking

resources would go increasingly to a futile, frustrating and ultimately boring attempt to chase down each detail of the day's news.

Our core conclusions underlay our subsequent decision-making. During the next few months, nearly 160 people throughout the organization came together as part of this rebuilding process. One group focused on what we called "regionalism" and was charged with fully integrating coverage of our eight-county region into every beat. One group examined our organization and its structures. Another focused on breaking down our online aspirations into achievable jobs. Yet another was tasked with simply acting as a transition team—getting us from here to there.

Fundamentally we restructured much of our operation. Some of the restructuring, admittedly, was simply for greater efficiency. But the exciting part of the restructuring was where we could merge efficiency with greater effectiveness—and get ourselves closer to our long-term goal of transforming our journalism.

Here are a few of the things we decided to do:

Re-Imagine Page One: We agreed to blast Page One out of its decades-old format, remnants of a day when newspapers were still the prime source of yesterday's news. Instead, we go deep on one daily story, layering the story of the day with background, context, interpretation and analysis. Fewer people means more planning so that we can be prepared to produce excellent packages for the major stories of the day, while creating robust briefs collections for much else inside our lead section.

Think community: We fundamentally altered our labor-intensive, geographically based zoning in favor of team coverage focusing on communities of interest. Rather than trying, unsuccessfully, to blanket all school boards, or crime stories, or town council meetings, our suburban coverage now focuses on issues with impact. Some recent examples: How communities are "unpaving" their roads to retard development

and increase privacy; how high school advanced placement classes aren't just for top scholars any more, and an investigation of underreporting of crime at local colleges and universities.

Create community: Our losses pushed us to pursue bold Internet experiments. As a result of the loss of our two theater critics, we've launched a pilot project to work with local theaters to turn Web pages we create into places where we can go beyond reviews to engage the readers themselves in richer conversations that will, hopefully, turn us into a local hub of discussion about movies.

Train, train train: Our training budgets were slashed to nearly nothing. So we decided to do more training. We used computers freed up from the downsizing to create a training center and launched "Inquirer University." Among our 425 people, we have skilled editors, computer-assisted reporting experts, designers, photographers, interviewers and wordsmiths who can act as coaches. We have launched an ambitious yearlong curriculum including classes in everything from ethics to the use of quotes, interviewing skills and narrative, to using databases, creating audio text for online to creating photo slide shows. One goal is to improve our journalistic quality despite our reduction in numbers. Another goal is to increase our flexibility by giving as many people as possible as many skill sets as possible.

Be flexible: Our cuts left departments without vacation backups. So we paired departments in a buddy system. We cross-trained editorial assistants in multiple jobs. Fewer copyeditors meant looking closely at peak-period scheduling to find dead time that could be filled effectively with nondeadline work. We're working to improve planning to eliminate costly delays and to ruthlessly excise low-value work. We've been breaking down walls between departments so that we can practice on daily stories the same kind of all-hands-on-deck cooperation that every newsroom exhibits during major breaking stories.

Integrate online: With so many fewer people, how can all of this extra online work be done? The answer was to make it as little extra work as possible. We worked with designers to make sure that graphics were designed only once—to work in the paper and online. Our director of photography, Hai Do, massaged a software package to turn the job of creating online photo shows from a half-day ordeal to a two-minute

add-on. We took the job of daily posting of breaking news, which previously was done centrally, and trained editors and reporters to do their own work. We're even going back to the "Sweetie, get me rewrite" days by rotating people through a slot that will be available to take dictation from people out of the office—turning that part of the job from a complex technological nightmare to one cell-phone call.

Nobody would contend that they like budget cuts as a spur to creativity and change. But given that is what we have, I am extremely proud of the path our newsroom has chosen. ■

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A Newspaper's Redesign Signals Its Renewal

'... newspapers have enormous strengths to rely on—and that is where we need to concentrate.

By Anders Gyllenhaal and Monica Moses

When talk of a redesign of the Star Tribune began two years ago, the plan was to launch a simple remake of the newspaper. It had been eight years since the last update, and the paper was due. But as work got under way, the ground seemed to shift under the nation's newspapers. Struggles with circulation and readership came into sharp focus. The advertising base continued to erode. Young readers proved steadily more elusive.

Before long, the remake expanded from a routine redesign to a sweeping project taking on some of the most difficult questions confronting newspapers: How does the newsroom compete in a competitive, around-the-clock media world? How do we hold onto our best traditions while keeping up with the times? How does the newspaper do a better job of hooking and keeping the impatient modern reader?

As the questions multiplied, so did the scope of the project. We scoured the corners of news, circulation and marketing for research on our readers. We talked to scores of readers in interviews, small groups, and surveys. We launched more than a dozen task forces—to study how the newsroom and online departments should interact, how to

write and package information for the hurried reader, how to attract young readers, and more. We set goals, revised them, showed them around, and revised them again. We scrutinized our beats, workflows, deadlines, communications, evaluations, rewards, training and leadership practices.

Changes that went into effect October 12, 2005 included about 100 improvements that fell into three categories.

1. Producing a newspaper that satisfies whether readers have two hours or 20 minutes.

We tried to create a paper that enables readers to get a good measure of information on the surface of almost every story—as well as to go as deep as they wish. We created a new repertoire of story forms that are easy to scan and digest—from various Q & A styles to vignettes to content-rich graphics that have come to be called "charticles."

2. Creating new content to reflect what is most meaningful today. The new paper includes a twice-a-week world section, a weekly entertainment section targeted to young singles, and a Sunday section devoted to style, fashion and living well. A growing swath of readers use the Web to broaden their knowledge, so we are becoming much more systematic about online references and about linking early versions of stories to the Web site. We know readers like to talk about news with friends and family, so we put a premium on "talker" stories with the added emphasis that they be done expertly with, with depth and perspective that were not always a part of these kinds of pieces in the past.

3. Reorganizing the newsroom to capture new content. We created a new desk at

the center of the newsroom as a kind of news triage operation for both online and print, and we established a host of new beats—from coverage of the Internet and fitness to nightlife, fashion and the seasons. After reorganizations of both local news and features, 80 reporters are in new assignments.

At the heart of this project are a couple of convictions. We know that many changes in the newspaper landscape are beyond our control. We should not expect to turn Sunday back into a leisurely day of endless reading, wrench back the clock on classified competition, or prevent news from flowing out in e-mail, cell phones, and BlackBerries. And yet newspapers have enormous strengths to rely on—and that is where we need to concentrate. Even with our circulation challenges, the paper reaches the largest market of any single competitor. Online sites give newspapers a huge advantage, when they use them well. The experience, knowledge and skills of our staffs give newspapers a vast advantage over the transience of many competitors.

Readers' reactions since the launch in October have been encouraging. Home subscriptions are up substantially in the first three months, and the stop rate is down substantially as well. One of the most gratifying early indications is in single-copy sales, which are running well above last year since the remake.

Lessons Learned

After two years of this project, a number of lessons stand out. Here, in no particular order, are 10 things we discovered.

The more involved every part of the newsroom is, the better the chances of success. By the time this project concluded, a little more than half of the newsroom had been directly involved in one of the task

forces, brainstorming sessions, prototypes or section planning. It might go without saying, but those directly involved tended to be more enthusiastic about the changes.

Listen to ideas from everyone, from clerks to the publisher. One of the most striking changes in the paper—a daily list on the front page called "Have you Heard"—came out of a cross-company group of 20-somethings studying how to attract younger readers. A popular daily print feature called "Web Search," which outlines what's new online, grew out of a challenge the publisher laid down to cover the Internet as we do television. We offer a front-page forecast for seven different times of day in response to readers telling us they like to anticipate traffic delays during lunch and the drive home. We also borrowed ideas from other newspapers, magazines and the Internet, even though traditional brainstorming led to more good ideas than we could use.

Readership is increasingly fragmented and reading habits are changing—dynamics that the newspaper and Web site must respond to aggressively. In some respects, we'd been putting out a newspaper that primarily served one segment of our readership: heavy readers, who happen to resemble journalists more than other readers do. The more we studied our readers and their needs and interests, the more ways we found of serving a broader array of readers. Ultimately a picture emerged of five discrete reader groups, and we committed ourselves to serving each with specific content and design elements. Research on readership, the market, the current paper, and reader segments should all be part of a project like this. It's hazardous to rely exclusively on research, of course, because it rarely leads to breakthrough ideas. But it's foolish to ignore the kind of deep and compelling studies available from such sources as Northwestern University's Readership Institute, the Poynter Institute, The American Press Institute, Pew Research Center, American Society of Newspaper Editors, and the Newspaper Association of America.

Star Tribune Saturday
OCTOBER 22, 2005 • STAR TRIBUNE • BASEBALL'S 'FALL CLASSIC' STARTS TONIGHT • TWIN CITIES EDITION

Is Scientology a cult?
FAITH • VALUES

'52 Fights': Get his side of the story
SOURCE

Mexico gets a big dose of Wilma
Tourets who came for sun and surf get howling winds and toppling trees as they converge into breaking waves off the shore.

LAND RUSH • A STAR TRIBUNE SPECIAL REPORT

Longtime residents being forced out
Taxes, higher prices and rising costs of ownership are driving families from their pristine solitude in Minnesota's Northwoods.

Move over, Bill Gates — investors ogle Google
If you spent \$85 for a share of Google 14 months ago, you would have \$523.00 today. Google has become the darling of investors. You'd be a Wall Street darling, too, if your earnings were up seven-fold in the last year! Even strong companies pale by comparison. For example, a \$52.20 investment in a share of Microsoft stock 14 months ago would be worth \$527.77 today. On Friday, Google's shares soared 12 percent, and by day's end its co-founders, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, both 32, each held stakes in the company worth \$1.2 billion.

Brothers' final gift is mystery of faith
The two brothers who formed the first Protestant church in the Twin Cities left a surprise for the Diocese of St. Cloud—\$1.8 million to subsidize projects.

Census tracks cities around the clock
A first-hand analysis from the Census Bureau shows the state's quietest and its busiest counties—and how they compare to other counties in the state.

Have You Heard?
• Days to register for the 2006 election are just 100 days away.
• Health care reform is being debated in Congress.
• The average cost of a home in the Twin Cities is \$122,000.
• Just before the holidays, the average cost of a home in the Twin Cities is \$122,000.

Weather
38° 41° 46° 46° 46° 46° 46° 46°
Partly Cloudy / Mostly Sunny / Partly Cloudy / Partly Cloudy / Partly Cloudy / Partly Cloudy / Partly Cloudy / Partly Cloudy

The Star Tribune after its redesign.

Newspaper remakes should not be carried out by the newsroom alone. The newsroom should lead the redesign, but if it doesn't work closely with the advertising, circulation, production and marketing departments from the beginning, the project will not be successful. Some of the freshest thinking on this project came from smart staff members not immersed in the way we've always done things. Many pieces of the launch were successful because they were managed by staff from other departments.

Work hard to keep the newsroom and overall company up to date on the progress. Early on, it's good to develop a communications game plan, and the bigger your organization, the more challenging it will be to engage the staff. We showed prototypes at monthly brown-bag sessions, sent out regular redesign bulletins, involved 75 staff members in prototyping, and conducted nine months of training prior to the launch. Still, in the final training sessions, we had people who asked, "We're starting a world section?" Many folks will wait to tune in until they are directly affected.

Keep explaining to readers what changes are being made and why. Any change is upsetting to many readers; dramatic change will get plenty of reaction. We introduced the redesigned Star Tribune with an eight-page guide, a Web site tour of the changes, and a succession of Weblogs, editors' columns, and front-page notes to readers. Still, the launch prompted questions and complaints from readers—about 5,000 e-mails, calls and letters the first month. Now that we're several months into it, the balance of reaction has been good: A deeper readership study will come in April, when we'll get a methodical look at reader reaction.

Recognize that the arms-length tone we valued in the 1970's feels aloof today to many readers. In the midcentury move to professionalism, journalists embraced the inverted pyramid and objectivity. During the Watergate years, a detached recounting of the facts seemed

important to credibility. Now newspapers compete with a host of other media that feel less cold and conventional. And those Web sites, magazines and cable news outlets are winning people over in a climate of great skepticism toward the media establishment. We're trying to engage Star Tribune readers

The Star Tribune redesign was easier *and* harder than we might have anticipated.

in a warmer, more personable way. We have a daily greeting built into our new nameplate. Our obit pages are labeled "Remembering." We use second-person pronouns in headlines and box text. We try to respond to the readers' interest as quickly and practically as possible. Old headline: "Identity theft costs consumers billions." New: "How to protect yourself from identity theft."

Training is vital, particularly when preparing for a dramatic remake. After months of brainstorming, prototype presentations and other discussions, we began redesign training in earnest nine months before launch. It took 33 three-hour sessions to train the whole staff in reader-focused story planning. We followed up with sessions on alternative story forms, budgeting and summary writing. Two months before launch, many staff said they were just plain tired of talking about the redesign and simply wanted to do it. Still, in the final round of nuts-and-bolts training, there was plenty of anxiety, especially among copyeditors and designers. Expect a certain percentage of folks to be alarmed about learning new ways. Offer extra hands-on help, checklists and, always, reassurances.

There are great advantages to questioning everything and reinventing it. One of the blessings of an ambitious redesign is the chance to stop, look at every ele-

ment of the paper, and ask if it is still valuable. Assembling a newspaper every day is complex, and in the drive to simplify we may develop habits that serve ourselves above our readers. One of our new goals is to make every journalistic decision with our readers foremost in mind. It will take time before we have fully absorbed this shift in thinking.

Improving the paper and Web site should be a constant obsession, not something we do once each decade. While dramatic changes in typography, new sections, and reorganizations have to be well planned, many other changes that were part of this project should not have waited until a formal redesign. Tastes and habits are changing faster than ever, and new beats, fresh features, good ideas for columns, puzzles and other upgrades need to be constantly under consideration.

The Star Tribune redesign was easier *and* harder than we might have anticipated. Once we felt as if we had a real grasp of our various readers' needs, the ideas for how to fulfill those flowed freely. Conceiving a paper that consistently engages and serves is not terribly difficult. The hard part comes in the maintenance. We've challenged our routines and our conventions. Now we have to continually remind ourselves why we are working in new ways and refocus our attention on the people we're working for. For that transformation to be complete, we need a few more years. ■

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Lessons From a Newsroom's Digital Frontline

In Roanoke, Virginia, a midsized newspaper has had 'the freedom to run some experiments, fail, try again, and along the way discover some meaningful success.'

By Michael Riley

What wakes you up in the middle of the night? With me, it's sometimes the dog barking or a growling stomach or perhaps a daughter with the flu, but most times it's a nagging question with no clear answer: Can the daily newspaper be saved? The theoretical angst behind this question gains a stark and frighteningly personal focus when I think about The Roanoke Times, the daily newspaper (circ: 97,000) I oversee in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains. And it's a question we've been wrestling with for a number of years.

The depressing news about newspapers seems overwhelming. A stack of studies sits on my desk, all of them lamenting circulation declines, the absence of young readers, the aging of loyal readers, the corporate squeeze for ever-higher profits, and the intense competition for readers' time as the Internet rapidly reshapes our world. The story is all too familiar—it's the end of the world as we know it, and that's enough to make any ink-stained curmudgeon cry.

Yet I'd argue that digital technology and the Internet might offer the best reason to put the cap back on the Prozac. It's counterintuitive, but the future of what we do is not as scary as it seems. Newspapers—or, more precisely, news-gathering operations—are in a position of strength: In most markets, they are the last remaining mass-medium; they are prime creators of original journalism and, in many cases, they are deeply committed to a community's civic life and welfare. Finally, they are blessed with a profitable business model that can, if allowed, underwrite a range of digital experiments and online forays to move us successfully into the future.

Simply put, we need to reinvent

newspapers. That's what we've been trying to do in Roanoke during the past few years as we've merged our print and online content operations. Recently, we launched a funky and fun online video newscast each weekday,¹ which is our way of embracing today the multimedia world of tomorrow.

Granted, this former railroad town is not at the hub of the digital universe. We're not the first place most people would look to see how the Internet is revolutionizing our business. But that's the beauty of the digital revolution—a news organization doesn't have to be in Silicon Valley to make things happen. In fact, not being in a big city is helpful; we have the freedom to run some experiments, fail, try again, and along the way discover some meaningful success.

Crossing the Digital Divide

What follows are some lessons we've learned on the digital front. Consider this an up-close look at what's happened at our midsized newspaper to enable us to join the digital dance. This is designed to be part case study, part practical advice, part big picture, and then, a look at some pitfalls to avoid.

Educate, educate, educate: About two years ago, our newsroom undertook a strategic review dubbed "Looking Ahead." Amid the tumult of change, we asked some basic questions: How is the world changing? What's happening to newspaper readers? What's the impact of shifting demographics? What does national research, such as reports from the Readership Institute, tell us, and how do these findings fit with our local experience? Where are our gaps in coverage? What do readers expect from us? And how is the Internet changing

everything?

As answers emerged, we began to glimpse ways to transform the newsroom culture, first by recognizing that we need to split the word "newspaper" apart and realize that it's the "news" that's most important and not the "paper." Once that happens, other changes follow more easily.

Take the long view: The newspaper's senior leadership team, led by our publisher, Wendy Zomparelli, played a key role in helping the newsroom think hard about the future. Once we identified where the rest of the world is headed, it was easier to decide where we wanted the news operation to go. We decided not to stick our head in the ink tank, but chose to become well-schooled in digital technology so we could find new ways to reach different audiences. We wanted to become a living laboratory and find smart ways to play in the online world.

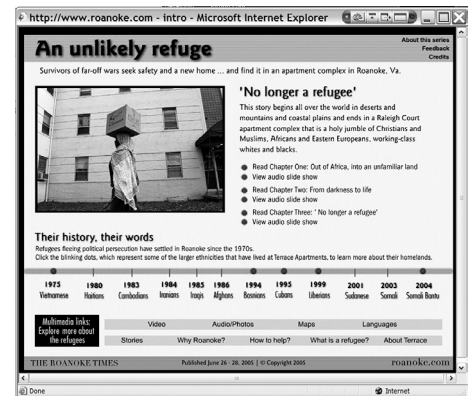
Don't force change: That's a sure path to failure, because resistance will be high. Look first for allies across the newsroom, staffers who see the need for change and the importance of online. We partnered first with photographers, technophiles who love to experiment and want to see their work go global. As creative storytellers, photographers started posting online slide shows of assignment outtakes, then began playing with an inexpensive video camera and digital mini-disk recorders. Several learned Flash and quickly emerged as teachers. I knew we'd reached a milestone when I spotted two reporters with headphones on, busily editing sound files for online stories to accompany their work in print. The enthusiasm was going viral.

Integrate, don't separate: There's a robust debate about whether a disruptive technology has a place in the traditional newsroom of the newspaper. My belief is that you shouldn't relegate online players to backrooms or basements, particularly if you want others to learn and grow. The online content operation should be integrated into the newsroom, particularly as the seismic shift of resources from print to online gains momentum. We moved our online team into the newsroom more than a year ago, and what a difference it has made. The online editor hears a metro editor talking with a reporter about a breaking story, and within minutes that nugget of news is posted on our Web site. We've even given up the old-fashioned notion that we can scoop ourselves, except in the rarest of cases.

Prepare to get messy: While our online content team is in the newsroom, our digital media operation is a separate department. That works okay, even if it can sometimes be confusing. The digital folks handle the back-shop work, the Web mastering, some advertising, and any disruptive content creation not connected to the newsroom. In this case, some separation is good, because they are free to pursue new and more radical ideas.

Get everyone to drink the Kool-Aid: Beyond our online team, we have key players in the newsroom thinking online. Editors know that breaking news online is important. Our assistant managing editor for content and planning, Dwayne Yancey, is intimately involved in online ventures. Our managing editor, Carole Tarrant, who joined us a year ago, brought with her immense online savvy, creativity and new ideas. It's vital to have key leaders pushing an online vision.

Shore up your weaknesses early: First, claim the online news ground. Plant your flag by breaking news online and beating the TV stations. Go ahead and scoop the newspaper. Anecdotal evidence leads us to believe that breaking news online leads to more interest in the print product. If we didn't



Each weekday afternoon The Roanoke Times delivers an interactive online video newscast, TimesCast (left). On roanoke.com, readers find multimedia projects tied to topics covered in the newspaper (right).

pursue this strategy, we'd then worry about who's going to get there first and eat our lunch. In the end, eyeballs are eyeballs, and we have to capture them wherever we can.

Don't be afraid to invent jobs: Who would have imagined that a newspaper would ever create a slot for a multimedia editor? That's what we did more than a year ago. Seth Gitner, a photographer who gravitated early to online, fills that role. He's helping us with video, audio and slide shows. We've invested heavily in video equipment and are building a studio next to the newsroom to allow us to create, in effect, a guerrilla TV station, so we can do online video on our terms.

So far, this approach has paid off with some stellar multimedia projects, like "An Unlikely Refuge," a chronicle of Bantu resettlement in Roanoke that won first place in the 2005 Associated Press Managing Editors Online Convergence category and "Going Down the Crooked Road," a fascinating multimedia look at old-time mountain music. Finally, we recently launched the TimesCast, an interactive, online video newscast with a playful sensibility that posts each weekday afternoon in time to beat our TV competitors.

Embrace the waves: More than a decade ago, when I was executive producer of allpolitics.com, we used Vivo, a streaming online video software that rendered

jerky, ghostly images of video on the Web. It was an experiment without an immediate payoff, and I used to wonder why we bothered. But with broadband video bearing down like a tornado, everything about this technology has changed. The same for podcasts, which we jumped into last year, and YourPix, a popular photo-sharing site that creates good user-generated content. Finding a way to play with new and emerging technologies is key, even if at first they don't attract huge audiences or drive big dollars.

Interactivity: Play to the medium's strength. Bring users into the site and listen to them. Create message boards. Build polls. Seek comments. Pay attention to the most-read stories. Bring blogs onto the site, including ones written by newspaper staff. Build them around strong communities of interest. We were slow to buy into blogs because of their bad-boy reputation. Now we're looking to drill deep in areas with strong local audiences and use blogs as an interactive reporting tool. Yes, we run them through an editor's eye and monitor the conversations. Next, we plan to pursue and publish in print more user-generated content, particularly as community news items.

Work across traditional barriers: In this new world, different departments need to communicate and coordinate well, so that means that editors will be talking



“Going Down the Crooked Road” provided a multimedia look at old-time mountain music on the newspaper’s Web site.

a lot with advertising and information technology folks. In a recent redesign, for example, we created sellable slots for advertising, which is crucial to our business success. Our content creators are constantly aware of the need to work closely with the technology. In a traditional newspaper world, such conversations might seem jarring, but in this new environment, it is essential that they take place as we construct a new paradigm. This is not always easy for newsroom folks to understand. The irony, of course, is that newspapers, the world’s chroniclers of change, are themselves frightened to death of change, and that fear can often impede vital experimentation. Don’t let that happen.

Maintain journalistic values: As online meshes with journalism, realize that the two are not separate and apart. Journalists’ work is about telling stories, albeit in different (and exceptionally powerful) ways. Core journalistic values must be maintained, for they are what lend the news organization its credibility, whether in print or online. We should not underestimate the value of that credibility, because those fundamental journalistic principles we hold dear—accuracy, verification, fairness, honesty, context, ethics and community service—will become an even more important competitive advantage as the Internet morphs and people seek sources of news they can trust. No matter where this technology is able to take us, it is essential that our strong journalistic foundation be preserved.



Beware of Pitfalls

Along the way to achieving this transition, there are plenty of bumps in the road. For starters, not everyone in the newsroom will embrace the new vision; it’s a foreign concept for many traditional journalists, particularly when the word “video” is involved, given our long-seated disdain for our TV brethren. We’ve had some robust discussions, driven by a fear that our online efforts will undermine our print credibility. Editors daily face the difficult decision of whether to ask a reporter to write a breaking news item for online or allow her to continue reporting for the print edition. We’ve debated whether we should scoop our newspaper by posting news stories online. We’ve argued about whether message board postings should be used in print, and we’ve unfortunately allowed some items on our blogs that clearly didn’t meet our journalistic standards. Currently, an internal debate is rumbling about how much playfulness we can inject in the TimesCast without besmirching the newspaper’s reputation.

For many of us, this is uncharted territory, and as we move into it and experiment, we discover new boundaries, and this can lead to a rather disquieting tension for many.

The Tipping Point

Looking at this as an economist, I would draw a chart with two trend lines to explain our future. On this chart, I’d look to see where the tipping point—when the weight of our news dissemination ef-

fort moves from print to online—might occur. The first line, declining steadily over time, captures the commitment of readers to print newspapers. The second one, increasing steadily, shows users going online to get news. At some point in the not-too-distant future, those lines will cross.

As we head towards that tipping point, these trend lines let us know that a concomitant shift already needs to be taking place at our news operations. Gradually, we need to either add or move resources—people and money—from print to online. This redeployment of resources is one of the more critical questions ahead. Our experience tells us that efforts should already be underway to make time for journalists in the newsroom to experiment with and learn more about digital storytelling. With good planning, the tradeoffs in this transformation need not be too harsh or debilitating.

So far, we’ve been fortunate. Our newspaper is consistently ranked among the Top 10 nationwide for readership, based on the percentage of adults who regularly read us. (In our case, that number for our core market is 73.5 percent, a loyal reader base.) Our corporate culture willingly embraces change, and we’ve devoted real resources to allow our newsroom to experiment. But all we’ve done is still not enough to tell us whether we might save the daily newspaper.

My hunch, however, is that we can, and here’s why: We’re motivated by a glimmer of optimism rather than a pall of fear, and we spy opportunities where others might see problems. In the end, we’ve decided to try to shape our future rather than allowing the future to shape us, and that has a calming influence, particularly in the middle of the night. ■

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📺 ¹The video newscast can be watched at www.roanoke.com

Wrong Turns Make a Difficult Situation Worse

A journalist lists Top 10 bad decisions editors make when facing cuts in staff.

By Carol Bradley

A lot of editors of small- to mid-sized dailies are struggling to overcome the waves of budget cuts that have swept through newsrooms in recent years. Chief among their worries is: Will readers notice the cutbacks? What follows are 10 common mistakes editors can (and have) made in reacting to these cutbacks.

10. Top-down approach: In the face of dwindling resources, decide it's too risky to trust reporters to unearth the stories of the day. Instead, hold morning meetings with middle managers to determine the paper's contents. Let marching orders flow forth from there and ignore entreaties from reporters who insist they can sniff out something better. Insist that reporters remain in the newsroom, accessible at all times, unless out on a specific assignment, to be there at the editor's beck and call when the next brilliant idea pops into his or her head, usually around 4:30 p.m. The result of this thinking will be fewer stories unique to the community and more generic stories, the kind that could appear in any newspaper anywhere.

9. Demand more: Let the job freeze just announced by the publisher sink in for a couple of days before dropping the other shoe: In addition to having to cover for departing colleagues, reporters must add online duties to their job descriptions. Make it clear that evaluations and raises will be based in part on the number of stories reporters flesh out online. Arrange for video interviews and have reporters dump their notebooks into sidebars the print version won't have room to run. Or add a Q & A on that series on toxic waste dumps. Remind reporters that, incidentally, this is not an excuse to let story counts falter. The result: an immediate increase in shallow, just-the-facts stories because that's all that reporters will have time to produce.

8. Less editorial edge: On the editorial page, inch steadily toward a centrist position with the objective of avoiding the alienation of any individual or group to the point that angry readers start canceling subscriptions. Become convinced that if no one calls to complain about an editorial then that's a good sign.

7. Rely on focus groups: Form a focus group of readers and assign more weight to its members' ideas for coverage than to your gut instinct. Readers often have no concept of the public-service mandate newspapers strive to live by. Focus groups will ask for more coverage of the high school girls' volleyball team or the best rides at the state fair. Indulge them their preferences and inevitably the newspaper will move away from bold, grab-'em-by-the-collar coverage toward scrapbook material.

6. Create new community-related projects: Expand the definition of a newspaper and play a bigger role in cosponsoring community events. Better yet, dream up new projects the newspaper can sponsor entirely on its own: a bridal extravaganza or a women's expo. "Borrow" the city hall reporter for a couple of weeks to help coordinate the coverage. Hope that no one notices the sudden dearth of stories about city hall.

5. Public special sections: In a similar vein, compensate for declining revenue by rolling out a series of special sections: A 10-page tab saluting the armed services or a medical directory that's no more in-depth than the Yellow Pages. News columns will be siphoned away from the daily paper and reporting and editing time stolen as well. Gradually, readers' expectations will adjust and they will come to see the paper as less of a public watchdog and more of a community "friend."

4. Focus on "real life moments": Soften the paper's personality by steeping it

with coverage of "real-life moments"—senior proms, 30-year grade-school reunions. Establish monthly quotas for these kinds of stories and make it clear that no reporter gets off the hook, even when real news is unfolding on his/her beat.

3. Swap reporters and beats: Shake up the newsroom by swapping reporters and beats—and do it without input from your staff. Don't give a senior reporter the chance to argue that he plans to retire long before he tops the learning curve on that new technology beat he was just assigned. Create enough disequilibrium and a few of more veteran (i.e. higher-priced) reporters might decide to leave. Ka-ching! At the very least, morale will be seriously damaged, and the morning pages will reflect it.

2. Establish story quotas: Generate even more turmoil by establishing story quotas. Some newspapers require an average of a story a day. To give themselves time to work on meaty stories, reporters will take an item worth a paragraph or two, stretch it to 15 inches, and call it good.

And the Number One mistake:

1. WWCW: Wield as your constant yardstick the mantra WWCW—What Would Corporate Want? Corporate would want pretty papers filled with cute, inoffensive stories. But corporate has no idea what real news had to be overlooked to serve up the warm-fuzzies. Stick to pleasing the corporate managers and readers will definitely notice something lacking in their newspaper—probably its soul. ■

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Community News Drives a Newspaper's Vigorous Growth

'We joke about how almost every day maintenance people seem to be assembling another desk.'

By Joe Zelnik

When I started as editor—one of a two-man news staff—of the Cape May (N.J.) County Herald in December 1982, the newspaper's half-dozen other employees seemed a little nervous. Finally one of them asked me if this meant they would soon be jobless. My reputation had preceded me. Twelve months earlier, the Philadelphia Bulletin, where I was a reporter, ended publication. After failing to achieve everyone's goal—usually this meant a job offer from The Philadelphia Inquirer—I went to the editorial page staff of the Buffalo (N.Y.) Courier-Express. Six months later, it closed its doors.

The Herald, a free distribution, tabloid-sized weekly newspaper, then averaged 20 pages. We worked in a two-room hovel just south of the bridge going over the canal into Cape May. If someone wanted to use the bathroom, I had to get up from my desk and let them by. Since then, there have been several physical moves as the staff and newspaper have expanded; the Herald offices are now in a modern office building in Rio Grande, New Jersey, and the company is in the process of buying a building next door that will double the square footage.

The paper is still tabloid size, still free, and still a weekly community newspaper, running as many as 100 pages with 35-40 percent news. Rows of journalism awards, for editorial and advertising, line the walls. The newspaper is available Wednesday morning at several hundred locations. Among the busiest is the Herald building where, we say without hyperbole, people stand in the rain or snow to wait for it. Well, some people.

If I had gotten the call from The Philadelphia Inquirer in 1982, I would have run to it. And undoubtedly been laid off long ago. For as former Inquirer reporter Huntly Collins wrote in Nieman Reports last summer, there have been "successive waves of buyouts" during which "scores of other reporters and editors" have left the Inky. So when Nieman Reports was recruiting stories about "shrinking newspaper/newsrooms," where people are trying to do more with less, I thought of what could have been and was delighted to instead be able to report on what is.

Nothing is shrinking at the Herald, which is doing more with more. Last year the paper hired an additional reporter, a community news editor (and two part-time assistants), a real estate editor (and one assistant). Growth is similar in other departments. We joke about how almost every day maintenance people seem to be assembling another desk.

The Value of Local News

The Herald apparently is doing something right. All local news? Or is it that nothing can compare or compete with a community newspaper? Actually, we have "competition" from a daily newspaper, local TV station, a few radio stations that rip and read, and four or five weeklies. Many communities have their own Web sites, as do all of our media competitors. None of this has slowed the Herald's growth. Advertising—display and classified—is up and with it our news hole.

Our news coverage is heavy into local government. I, along with five other reporters, report on all facets of county

government, as well as keeping an eye on the just-opened local community college, and by going to about 40 meetings each month, we bring news of local interest from 13 of the 16 towns in this county. The paper also carries a healthy mix of features from reporting about successful lung transplants to a story about a three-legged dog euthanized because no one would adopt him. We make no effort to cover local sports, though we do run some columns on various topics, including one written by a 13-year-old who follows NASCAR.

The paper publishes a strong editorial page that includes a "From the Publisher" and a column I write. Op-ed pieces can take up to three pages and include occasional columns by staffers and regular columns by contributors who include a high-school sophomore and a college freshman. We publish about 250 letters each year.

Perhaps our most widely read feature is something we call "Spout Off," a column that publishes anonymous call-in, write-in, e-mail opinions on almost every subject. This column receives hundreds of submissions a week and maybe a third of them survive our selection process. On our Web site, this column is interactive, with little attempt made by us to edit them.

Owner-publisher Art Hall embraces the Internet as an opportunity, not a threat, and has had developed an all-new Web site¹ with all sorts of interactive opportunities. Several summer publications—this is a tourism county—are being merged into an all-new weekend edition. This paper designed the software for its own classified management system that has enjoyed phenomenal success and is being pitched to other

newspapers.

As the new kid on the block, the Internet is getting a lot of attention at the Herald. But it is seen as one element of an integrated approach, in which news and information "best conveyed in print" will be in the newspaper, and what will go on the Web are "the things

that are best communicated that way," as the publisher wrote recently.

As a lifelong print guy, I note with satisfaction that this newspaper recently replaced the three trucks that were used to deliver the paper. Each replacement was larger, to accommodate the anticipated increase in circulation. ■

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Will the Meaning of Journalism Survive?

'Journalism educators are in a state of disquiet, if not distress, at their students' lack of the broad background essential for independent journalism.'

By Melvin Mencher

The question no longer is whether the newspaper will endure but whether the kind of news that is essential to a functioning democracy will survive. Studies of the reading habits of the young conclude that the drift from print to screen is steady and irreversible and that the interests of the 18-34 demographic may well generate a news budget heavily slanted to the popular culture and the quick read.

Whether this key demographic group will have an interest in "a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context that gives them some meaning," as the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press described the obligation of journalism, is uncertain. Equally uncertain is whether the new generation of journalists, most of them graduates of journalism programs, will be able to supply the public with a meaningful news account. Sower and reaper are locked in a troubling embrace.

Journalism is "the quintessential knowledge profession," says Vartan Gregorian, president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which recently funded an effort to improve journalism education, and as such "deserves the best educated and trained practitioners." Less clear to Gregorian is "whether our graduate and undergraduate programs in journalism provide adequate intellectual and technical preparation to meet those challenges."

The technical preparation is more than adequate. I am not as certain of the intellectual preparation.

Journalism training, to which I have devoted the past 40 years, increasingly centers on the techniques and the technology crucial to news delivery in this electronic age. Students are being taught to prepare news for a variety of platforms. Writing is aimed at the two-line/sentence screen reader. For reporting, pad and pencil will be supplemented, possibly replaced, with a megapixel still and digital video camera, digital audio recorder, laptop computer, digital cell phone, and half a dozen other pieces of hardware. Given the cutbacks in staffing, the future reporter cannot count on being accompanied by a photographer or any other technician on assignment. He or she will have to go solo, which adds further emphasis to the need for wide technical training. Since the journalism curriculum is limited by its accrediting association, this additional technology instruction squeezes out content, subject matter.

What's Missing?

The widening of instruction in technology by many programs recalls Thoreau's warning about our becoming the tools of our tools, or T. S. Eliot's observation, "We had the experience but missed the meaning."

The reporting process centers on the

knowledgeable reporter who is able to develop ideas that guide his or her questions and observations. Despite all the sophisticated equipment reporters might haul to an assignment, they are limited by the background knowledge that guides their reporting. The British scientist W.I.B. Beveridge said that developing ideas or hypotheses helps a person "see the significance of an object or event that otherwise would mean nothing." Or, as a former editor of Time magazine, Thomas Griffith, put it, reporting is "conjecture subject to verification." The political writer Irving Kristol said, "A person doesn't know what he has seen unless he knows what he is looking for."

Without wide-ranging knowledge, journalists are forced to rely on flacks or, at best, engage in "he said, she said" journalism.

Journalism educators are in a state of disquiet, if not distress, at their students' lack of the broad background essential for independent journalism. An instructor told me she listed Charles Darwin in a quiz in which students were asked to identify the subject and tell why he/she is in the news. "Out of 10 students, only two identified Darwin—both said he had something to do with 'survival of the fittest.' Nobody mentioned the theory of evolution. In a follow-up discussion, most knew nothing about the brouhaha over intelligent design."

Another instructor suggested I drop

a reference to Walt Whitman in a section on writing in the next edition of my journalism textbook. "Keep Stephen King," he wrote. "Drop Whitman. My students have never heard of him." From another: "I expend precious time explaining such matters as the fact that World War II followed World War I."

David T.Z. Mindich, a journalism instructor at St. Michael's College in Vermont, begins his book "Tuned Out: Why Americans Under 40 Don't Follow the News," by recalling a quiz he gave his students when the Supreme Court had ruled on the Florida Bush-Gore vote count and John Ashcroft was nominated for attorney general. He writes: "Of 23 students, 18 could not identify even one Supreme Court justice. Only one could name the attorney general nominee. Most revealing of all, four wrote that the attorney general was Colin Powell; it is likely they homed in on the word 'general,' reflecting a total ignorance of what an attorney general is or does."

Mindich observes that "young people no longer see the need to keep up with the news." The result, he continues, is that "America is facing the greatest exodus of informed citizenship in its history."

Textbook publishers are aware of the state of the student mind. They consider today's freshman the equivalent of a high school junior of a few decades back and want textbooks simplified. The author of a copyediting textbook told me that her publisher asked that in her next edition she reduce the "reading matter" and try to make it more

"skimmable." As it is, student reading matter is confined to textbooks, many of which nowadays are accompanied by a CD-ROM that duplicates the text, and to the screen. Andrea Panciera, online editor of *The Providence Journal*, says on her visits to campuses "nobody is reading the newspaper."

Not to worry about the decline of the newspaper, argue the optimists. There's cable TV, the insatiably curious bloggers, and many excellent magazines whose correspondents do a good job of digging. To which a journalism instructor in Nebraska responds, "But I defy anyone to show me how I can get reliable, thorough, unbiased information about my schools, my city, my county, even my state government if my newspaper has abdicated its responsibility to provide that. Where do I find that on the Web? On TV?"

The answer might lie in a comment by Andrew Heyward when he was president of CBS News: "There is a broader, new definition of news that we will need to develop for this next generation." This new definition may be closer to the observations of Rupert Murdoch than to those of Dean Baquet, editor of the *Los Angeles Times*:

Murdoch: "[Young readers] want control over their media instead of being controlled by it. ... Too often, the question we ask is: 'Do we have the story?' Rather than: 'Does anyone want the story?'"

Baquet: "It's not always our job to give readers what they want. What if

they don't want war coverage or foreign coverage or to see poverty in their communities?"

Does any of this really matter in the scheme of things? Associate Justice Stephen Breyer thinks it does. He writes that the First Amendment should be understood "as seeking to facilitate a conversation that will encourage the informed participation in the electoral process." But then there is the observation of John G. Roberts, Jr., now chief justice, then a White House associate counsel in the Reagan administration. In a memorandum dated August 28, 1985, Roberts said he favored relaxing the standards established by the Supreme Court in *New York Times Co. v. Sullivan* libel case.

Forty years ago, which Mindich dates as the beginning of the decline of interest in news, the British philosopher Stuart Hampshire worried that we were heading for an "ice age of not caring ... passivity and nonattachment, in a general spreading coldness." Perhaps the cold wind blowing is what many of us now feel. ■

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Teaching Journalism for an Unknown Future

Journalism professors work to align essential skills with emerging technology.

By Peg Finucane

Imagine the world 65 million years ago, where great, lumbering dinosaurs roamed. Imagine that some of them heard a warning, deep within their small, unevolved brains, that they were about to become extinct. The climate was changing. Their food was

disappearing. Smaller, more nimble creatures were gathering the best leaves and refusing to stand still long enough to be killed and eaten. Some would ignore it: How could the largest beasts on earth all die? Some would worry, but go on with their lives. Perhaps a few

in this imaginary world would look at the other beasts and try to find a way to survive; if this happened, we know they did not succeed.

In the media world today, newspapers are the great, lumbering dinosaurs. For almost 40 years, we have been hearing

warnings that newspapers were about to become extinct. But many journalists and educators have ignored them, even as papers have died and others suffered drastic cuts in a triage effort to stay alive or increase profits.

As an educator with almost 30 years experience in the newspaper business, I sometimes think of myself as a dinosaur who has learned to use tools. My colleagues and I are trying to teach the next generation how to evolve quickly while retaining the best parts of our dinosaur culture. We are training them for both the current, rapidly evolving world and a near future of changed media. We are training some students who will graduate and assume traditional jobs, but we are training others for jobs that haven't even been invented.

Passing on Necessary Skills

There is no blueprint for this effort, and many newspapers cannot define what they want our journalism graduates to know or do. Do they want writers? Interviewers? Storytellers? Multimedia producers? Chat room monitors? Community developers? Podcast recorders? The newspapers don't know, and neither do we. Yet in committee meetings and conversations, my colleagues and I find important points of agreement that form the foundations of our teaching:

- Good journalism—good writing and editing—is just as important as ever.
- Good journalism works in all media—the delivery methods might change, but the content must be informative, interesting and reliable.
- Flexibility—the ability to manage change rather than being overwhelmed by it—is required for survival.

Agreement on the first point is unanimous. We teach the same reporting skills today that my professors taught me years ago: What is news? How do journalists find information, ask questions, talk to real people, or talk to newsmakers and their professional handlers? And we teach the same writing skills: how to organize a story; how to make a story

both fair and accurate; how to interest an audience through active language, compelling narrative, and precise details; how to avoid libel or copyright issues. We discuss the same issues, practical and philosophical, including news judgment, history, ethics and the importance of communication for individuals, community and culture.

On the second point, there is majority approval, if not unanimity. It is hard for some print dinosaurs to admit that other media might serve their audiences as well as newspapers. Most journalists are not early adapters to innovations. But almost all newspapers, even the smallest, have established a presence on the Web by now. In its early form, this presence generally is no more than a straight transfer of stories and pictures from the newspaper to a Web site. Web readers get no more or less than their neighbors who read ink on paper. As newspaper Web sites become more sophisticated, newspaper staff members are pulled inexorably toward digital journalism as they are asked to edit Web content, report special or additional features, or even join online chats or podcasts. Not surprisingly, these staff members find they are doing the same work, but the end product just looks different—and it might not appear on the front porch at all.

The third point, flexibility, is complex. I've never heard anyone argue against flexibility, but it's clear that not everyone thinks change is good per se. Change is often seen not as evolution, but as criticism or rejection of older ways; therefore, this change might be easier for journalism students to embrace than for middle-aged professors and journalists. Remember, our students are the children of the baby boomers—many of whom are included in the decreased newspaper readership tracked since the 1960's. Few of our students, even the print majors, come from newspaper-reading households. They don't read newspapers every day unless we threaten them with news quizzes, yet they are constantly gathering and sharing information: online at desks, laptops and PDA's; texting or taking pictures with their cell phones, sometimes even starring on their Webcams.

This generation of students knows how to communicate in this era of round-the-clock deadlines; we need to show them how to tailor their energy to communicate with mass audiences, maybe even in service of the First Amendment.

The Converging Future

Many of us remember the transitions from hot type to cold type and from typewriters to word processors. If we squint myopically into the past we're bound to see reporters and editors who resisted these changes before being forced to adapt, plus a few who left the news business rather than change. The transition now from print journalist to multimedia journalist is meeting the same resistance throughout the industry, primarily from the over-40 crowd, who might feel they've changed enough. Some of these journalists are taking buyouts or retiring early in part because they're not sure they want to jump onto the good ship convergence. Many others are reserving judgment or trying to ignore this new technological future, fearing and rejecting the Internet and other digital tools just as their predecessors first ignored and then opposed the introduction of radio and then television as news media.

Thus, the area of least consensus among journalism educators and practitioners involves the tools we use to produce news and other information for our audience. Some of my colleagues in academia, like Hofstra's Carol Fletcher, who heads a committee studying convergence, believe we should expose students "to as many different technologies and strategies for storytelling as possible, without sacrificing the fundamentals." To guarantee this exposure, many universities have developed converged newsrooms or, like mine, are working to develop one.

Many, including me, also try to emphasize that the reporting skills and values useful in print are useful in all media and that all the "rules" stay the same whether the story is on paper or onscreen. This is the lead and the bottom line for journalism educators. A large part of our mission remains the

same: producing quality people who will produce good journalism, whatever their job titles or specs.

"There is always going to be a need for content, and honest reporters provide the best, most reliable, most trustworthy content," according to Carol R. Richards, recently retired deputy editorial page editor at Newsday on Long Island. "Newspapers have a product of great value, particularly in a marketplace where there's so much content and so little of it is thoroughly vetted," she said, even if "how we deliver it in the future is unclear."

The difficulty is not only in maintaining that reliable, trustworthy content, but also in convincing the audience that the journalists producing it still are different, dare I say better, than bloggers, interest-group commentators, or citizen monitors. Although the

notorious Matt Drudge has asserted that "Anyone with a modem can report on the world," he also has admitted that his original reporting may be accurate only 80 percent of the time. Unless we want to cede the powerful tools provided by the Internet to nonjournalistic information purveyors like Drudge, we must teach young journalists to understand the visual and digital world, plus yet-unseen technologies, and to use these to produce and distribute good journalism—news gathered and sourced with the traditional values.

In other words, while parts of the journalistic world are changing rapidly, in full color, ear-splitting audio and eye-catching video, other parts remain more essential than ever. We dinosaurs are still teaching our students all of the old tricks while preparing them to learn new ones; we can explain the evolution

of our industry as it's happening and help them to manage change. But as Professor Steven Knowlton, another colleague and former ink-stained wretch, said, "Journalism is still journalism and biased, unsourced junk is still biased, unsourced junk." It remains our task to teach the difference. ■

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Damaging Ripple Effects of Newsroom Cutbacks

'In previous downturns, rookie reporters reinvigorated the newsroom; now, there might not be any quality, young journalists to take over.'

By Joel Kaplan

It's not news to anyone who teaches journalism that the allure and prestige of being a journalist long ago vanished. For the past 10 years we've seen a steady stream of those who enter even the more prestigious communications schools planning to become journalists switching to alternative majors within the school, including film, advertising and the current favorite, public relations.

This movement away from journalism has been periodically explained by a number of factors: more money; better hours; more money; less stress; more money; better working conditions, and more money. Still, during the past decade my colleagues and I at the Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University have justified this noticeable outflow from our favored profession by rationalizing that the best and the brightest of our

students still flock to journalism. Public relations and advertising might get the numbers now, but we get the smartest, most aggressive, and most committed students. These are the students who are still captivated by our showing the movie, "All the President's Men." (Some still read the book, though only if assigned.) These students also tend to read and watch each year's Investigative Reporters and Editors' award-winning series.

This year only about 100 of the Newhouse students are newspaper majors out of 1,850 undergraduates. Almost twice that amount are magazine majors. We still have more than 300 broadcast journalism majors, though students who want to follow Marv Albert, Bob Costas, and Mike Tirico into sports broadcasting dominate that group. In contrast, we now have nearly 300 advertising majors, another 300 public

relations majors, and almost 400 majors in television, radio and film.

Given the state of journalism, it probably is not a bad thing that so few of our students are deciding to major in it. After all, in this age of newsroom cutbacks if we had as many newspaper majors as public relations majors we would be hearing from parents who have shelled out more than \$150,000 in tuition, room and board over four years and now want to know why their kids can't even get jobs as stringers for weekly newspapers.

Because of the small numbers, virtually all of our students who want to be newspaper reporters or copyeditors get to be. And some of them find jobs on great (or used to be great) newspapers. Others have their choice of several prestigious internships, which often turn into full-time jobs. And for the most part, they excel. They do great because

they received a good deal of personalized attention in college, did several internships over their college career, and because they are bright, motivated and inquisitive students.

Students and News

But events of the past year are having a profound effect on this cadre of students. It appears that newspapers are now making the same mistake with their future employees that they made with their old clients—the readers. Newspapers took their readers for granted and now have fewer and fewer, particularly younger ones. It is so rare on a college campus to see students reading a newspaper even though on our campus, like many others, they get *The New York Times* and *USA Today* for free. (The cost comes out of their student fees, for those of you seeking another circulation scandal.)

The truth is that most students no longer care about news, period. They think news no longer affects them or their lifestyle. If something important is happening in the world, then they are sure to find out about it from their friends, teachers or parents—in one of the four cell phone conversations per day they have with them. Instead of sneaking a peak at a newspaper during class, they are more likely to be glancing down at their cell phone (put on vibrate) to see the latest text message from a friend. When class is over, they don't take out a newspaper or magazine or glance at the latest news from CNN. Instead, they take their iPod from their backpack, put the earphones on, and go grab a cup of coffee.

This is true even of those hardcore, committed journalism students who were editors of their high school newspapers (at least those high schools who still have newspapers) or ran the high school television station. Even those students see the assignment of reading a daily newspaper the equivalent of reading a chapter of a textbook. Most journalism professors require at least one newspaper to be read each day by all members of their class. The result is that those papers are only read on the days of class in order to prepare for that

day's current events quiz.

How do I know this? Those free boxes of *The New York Times* and *USA Today* remain full on Fridays—the day when there are hardly any journalism classes.

These are some very discouraging signs as newspapers and other news organizations try to figure out a way to produce quality journalism in this era of significant downsizing.

Business Changes Affect Student Choices

But what I believe is even more frightening is the impact these changes are having on future journalists. Let me share one e-mail our newspaper listserv recently received from an undergraduate contemplating changing her major:

“So I'll admit it, I'm not sure about a future in journalism. This week Woodward gets grilled for protecting sources, the *L. Times* cuts 85 newsroom employees, the *Chicago Tribune* cuts 100, and *Knight Ridder* goes up for sale. On top of all of this, Google announces plans for *Google Base*, which has the potential to replace just about any written periodical anywhere. I'm concerned. I think many of us are. I was just wondering if there was anyone who could provide an explanation I haven't already heard providing a reason why I shouldn't be [unsure about a future in journalism.]”

Certainly that comment is not unusual. Similar sentiments probably echo across many newsrooms. But the difference is that a bright 20-year-old said this and not a jaded 55-year-old checking out his 401(k) statement. In previous downturns, rookie reporters reinvigorated the newsroom; now, there might not be any quality, young journalists to take over.

Last year, in my advanced reporting class, our most rigorous course for journalism majors, I started out with 13 students. Within one week, it was down to five. The students simply did not want to put in the time and effort required of the class. (I can't complain, I dubbed the remaining students the

“Fantastic Five,” and they undertook a spirited investigation of the Syracuse Police Department and produced a terrific series that ran in the school newspaper.) Still, only two of those five will probably end up in journalism.

Here is what one of those students wrote on our listserv:

“Why do I feel like I'm the only newspaper major who is looking forward to working in the newsroom after I graduate in December? Of the undergrad newspaper students in my three Newhouse classes this semester, I can count on one hand the number of students who are looking for a long-term career in journalism. Sixty percent of students in one newspaper class I took last semester are headed for either grad or law school in May. One senior with a healthy newspaper resumé recently announced that he is headed for politics where he's going to make so much money that one day he will be able to 'buy me' as a reporter. Other senior newspaper majors are even choosing uncertainty over journalism. This idea has infected fresh newspaper alums too in at least two cases where people are looking to 'get out of newspapers' as though the career is some poverty-ridden country plagued by an oppressive dictatorship.”

Journalism appears to be losing some committed students who were on the verge of entering its workforce. But the reverberations of this past year go far beyond that. Newhouse Dean David Rubin, who teaches about 75 freshmen in a general survey course, has a group of women in the class who have dubbed themselves the “Jumping Ship” students. They all came to Newhouse to major in broadcast journalism, and they have all decided to leave the major. Among the reasons they cited: general working conditions, including the inability to have a life outside of work; low salaries in small markets where they are unwilling to live; the entertainment nature of the business including the focus on soft news, and the general uncertainty about the future of news.

I fear that the difference between today and past newsroom recessions

is that in the past there was a strong cadre of young journalists ready and willing to do battle for low pay and under harsh conditions when media companies began to hire again. All indications make me think that this time, what lies ahead for newsrooms will be very different.

Is this depressing enough? It should be. But there is hope on the horizon. Innovative journalism schools are trying to teach students how to cope with the changing technological and economics dynamics of the modern-day newsroom.

And some of our students see the current crisis as an opportunity. As one of our freshman journalism majors wrote, "The Internet and new technology present significant challenges. This problem should make us excited, because it is our generation that will be given the chance to reinvent the newspaper. It's up to us to come up with a solution to the problem, something that's never been tried before."

Still, unless companies that now own news operations embrace that enthusiasm and take some chances, fewer and

fewer talented writers and top-notch reporters will aspire to journalism careers. And that would be the saddest development of all. ■

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Preserving What It Is Newsrooms Do

A teacher challenges his students 'to devise a proposal for the protection of newsroom independence and integrity' in a changing media environment.

By Stanley Flink

It was more than 20 years ago that I began teaching a seminar called "Ethics and the Media" at New York University School of Journalism. In 1985, these graduate students read newspapers and newsmagazines with some regularity and, though computers were in wide use, they were not nearly so pervasive as they have become. During our discussions of ethical issues, I asked students to think of themselves as a hypothetical editorial board, and this was something they could do with ease.

When, in the 1990's, I moved the course to Yale, a dramatic shift from print to cable television and online services was already happening. During the past five years, not more than a handful of undergraduates in this seminar have read the news on paper or watched network news. They were (and are) dependent on the Internet and are increasingly interested in blogs, those self-anointed online sites largely given to opinion on public affairs and lately devoted to highlighting errors or falsity in mainstream reporting. Students, who seem usually to seek out blogs with opinions in concert with their own, credit blogs with being a

kind of "vox populi" in the tradition of free expression protected by the First Amendment. I don't quarrel with that assumption, but I ask them to consider the challenge of arriving at some kind of consensus, to say nothing about truth, out of multitudinous voices and hidden agendas.

As part of our classroom discussion, I've asked them to consider how these forms of "new media" might replicate the efforts of mainstream news organizations that employ experienced reporters and editors engaged in the difficult business of producing reliable information on a daily basis. In a question I put to my hypothetical 2005 editorial board members, I asked if they regard the generic newsroom as an entity portable from print to television to Internet. (To ask the question a bit differently, I wanted to know if they support a process of truth-seeking by talented and skilled practitioners working together with the assistance of technology, but not in thrall to it.) The class—average age, 20—voted in the affirmative.

I next challenged them to devise a proposal for the protection of newsroom independence and integrity. To prepare for that project, they read and

discussed various texts (Confucius, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle) on the origin of ethical principles, on the evolution of freedom of expression and political discourse (Milton, Kant, Mill), and about the critical importance of a free press in the formation of the United States (the Founding Fathers and the constitutional debates).

With sadness I must acknowledge that during all of my years of teaching "Ethics and the Media," I've encountered among the students little knowledge of American history, particularly in regard to the constitutional issues that are inseparable from the role of the press in assuring an informed electorate. The concept that a nation defines itself by the deal it strikes with its press is not commonly discussed these days but, most simply put, no government can function as a democracy if it does not permit unfettered freedom of expression. In this context, students read Walter Lippmann's "Public Opinion" and Alexander Bickel's "The Morality of Consent." And as a class, we examined two critical Supreme Court cases—New York Times Co. v. Sullivan, which eliminated sedition charges as a means of silencing the press, and the Pentagon

Papers case, which confronted national security issues not unlike those being debated in regard to global terrorism. Finally, we visited the long-neglected, 1947 Hutchins Commission report, "A Free and Responsible Press," which laid out moral requirements still timely more than half a century later.

Protecting the Newsroom

All of this preceded the attempt to craft a proposal to protect the modern newsroom from the budgetary and technological forces that are buffeting it today. Though I acknowledged from the start that much of what we were contemplating wore a tinge of romanticism, I said that should not discourage thoughtful resolve. And it didn't. Some of the goals offered by the class, however, were unrealistic.

In the first draft, the students envisioned a very substantial foundation to be funded by the media corporations (and perhaps other benefactors) for the purpose of subsidizing salary increases for journalists who produced outstanding work. The notion that large corporations would donate millions to an outside organization that might reward some of their employees, or the employees of other corporations, was not explored with much sophistication.

Back to the drawing board. In the second draft, they lowered their sights. Up for discussion this time was an internal fund that could be managed by outside directors at each corporation who would have editorial experience and primary responsibility for newsroom compensation. The fund would reward excellence based on the judgment of experts. This would enhance individual careers, but in the students' view it would also be emblematic of the parent corporation's commitment.

We began a conversation about the unique status of news organizations, which are private enterprises with a constitutional protection. There is no other business with a similar obligation to serve the public interest. But the irony of ethical and enterprising journalism is that what is in the public interest does not always interest the public.

Add to this conundrum the realization that awakening and reawakening the public to moral standards has never been a natural pastime for journalists in a competitive marketplace.

Nonetheless the students were learning that newsrooms, which are generic centers of newsgathering, editing and editorializing, are confronted today with great uncertainty. As traditional media outlets and publications seek a base in cyberspace, the economic viability of newsrooms suffers. But this does not alter the fact that only vigorous, independent reporting can counter the charge that the First Amendment is being used to reinforce concentration of private power in the hands of conglomerates that now control cable

Not much has changed— except the stakes.

and television, telephone and computer networks, as well as some publishing franchises. Irrefutably, the power to distribute information is potentially the power to select content.

With these thoughts in mind, the "board members" turned to a more practical approach involving an internal fund. They were prompted to head in this direction by a reminder I made of the kind of communication with which they are most familiar—the Internet—and a suggestion that they research the growth of online services already offered by major media organizations. These include archival materials, research and analysis, maps, photographs, videos and DVDs. Fees are, or soon will be, charged for these services as well as, on some news sites, payment to read specific daily content. And advertisers are using these media Web sites because of the precision with which specific audiences can be targeted.

The students' final proposal recommends that some reasonable portion of online revenues should go to the "Newsroom Fund." Their reasoning in selecting this revenue base was two-fold: Most or all of the material and services

are supplied by newsroom personnel, and the fund will balance the fact that stock options, offered to others in the corporation, are inappropriate for reporters and editors who might have to cover the activities of separate interests owned by their parent company.

Clearly media organizations contributing to a "Newsroom Fund" will have earned the trust of the public—whatever technology is used to reach them. To keep that trust, the students agreed, requires independence and financial viability. Ultimately, the confidence of the consumer will attach to the news organizations that demonstrate consistent, uncompromising ethical standards.

In composing our proposal, we adopted three suggestions made in 2002 to newspaper companies by the Ad Hoc Committee on the Press, comprised of nine well-known senior journalists. These were: Outside directors, with editorial experience, to monitor the quality of news operations; outside directors to supervise newsroom compensation policy, and prohibition of stock options for newsroom staff and outside directors.

The Hutchins Commission report prophetically observed: "The quality of the press depends in large part upon the capacity and independence of the working members in the lower ranks. At the present time their wages and prestige are low and their tenure precarious. Adequate recognition and adequate contracts seem to us an indispensable prerequisite to the development of professional personnel."

Not much has changed—except the stakes. The question looming largest now concerns the dangers of extreme political fragmentation and the increasing individual isolation. If a social compact is to survive in the digital age, it will need the help of dedicated newsrooms. ■

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New Metaphors Needed for Changing Roles

‘It is time for some new language to describe the role and value of the assigning editor. Even the job title is dated and limiting.’

By Jacqui Banaszynski

Consider the fifth Beatle. Skip past the tedious Paul McCartney-and-Wings riff. Go back to the core. The Fab Four: John, Paul, George and Ringo. And ... ?

The concept of the fifth Beatle is so embedded in pop culture that it has been parodied by “Saturday Night Live” and “The Simpsons.” Charles Manson once laid claim to the title. Yoko Ono might as well have, to the chagrin of many fans, as did a long list of musicians who sat in with the band before—or after—it became the band.

But who was it really? The question never fails to launch an impassioned boomer debate, but usually acknowledges four true contenders: Bass guitarist Stuart Sutcliffe, who was, indeed, the fifth member of the group before the band became famous; drummer Pete Best, who kept the beat before the Beatles picked up a contract and Ringo Starr; manager Brian Epstein, the guy who made all the mundane backstage stuff happen so all the magical onstage stuff could, or producer George Martin, a musical savant most often credited with creating the Beatles’ groundbreaking sound.

So what does any of this have to do with journalism? Consider not who the fifth Beatle was, but what it was: a powerful metaphor. The anonymous guy behind the scenes. The genius who pulls it all together and makes the parts work better as a whole. The people who stand in and back up and get things started and go away and never get billing and rarely take a bow.

Now consider newsroom assigning editors. Sound familiar?

If language has power—and in journalism it should—what we call something determines how we regard it. Metaphors shape how the world sees

us and how we see ourselves. It is time for some new language to describe the role and value of the assigning editor. Even the job title is dated and limiting. There was a day when assigning editors did that and little more: They assigned, often in a bark: “Hey, you! Press conference starts in five minutes. File in-takes to the desk. Make sure you get a quote from the mayor. Keep it short. And don’t get fancy on me.”

But that job long ago expanded to one that just keeps on expanding. Some newsrooms have given a nod to that change by changing the job’s name: Team leader. Story editor. Line editor. Frontline editor. Supervising editor. All touch on rough aspects of the job—but none speak to the complexities or to the whole. Does a team leader edit? Does a line editor lead? It’s a bit like the old story about the elephant in the living room: People standing around can only touch and describe one part, but no one can get their arms around the whole beast.

Think of the metaphors we default to. The most common: traffic cop. Assigning editors keep traffic moving, minimize fender-benders, clear the crosswalk for pedestrians, and prevent any really big wrecks. (The stories get assigned and into the paper, reporters are kept busy and most names are spelled right, the big story du jour gets a little extra time and—whew!—no one is libeled.)

Put some altitude behind that metaphor: air traffic controller. Same job, but faster pace and higher stakes. They’ve got six, or 16, stories circling for a landing. They need to make lightning-speed judgments: what order to bring them down in, which to hold for midair refueling (more reporting), which to divert to a smaller airport

(brief it and put it inside). They’ve got single-engine stories and jumbo jets out there. They’re adjusting for sudden weather or mechanical failures. They’re “managing” the incredible expertise and oft-connected ego of pilot/writers. They work among chaos and cacophony, have little time to plan, are responsible for situations beyond their control, and don’t dare schedule a bathroom break. And talk about deadlines!

But those metaphors lag behind the real life of the 21st century assigning editor, with their focus on crisis management. Leadership, creativity, even journalism get lost.

Language Catches Up to Reality

A small group of assigning editors who met in 2005 at the Poynter Institute as part of the Frontline Editors Project was asked to describe what their jobs have become. [See John Greenman’s article on page 71.] Their lists were long, revealing and self-contradictory. The red-meat veteran journalist is now also a coach and teacher. Great reporter-writers must don the hats of administration, management and leadership. News judgment is no more important than people judgment. The pit bull must become sheep dog, herding up, down and sideways. They juggle reporters’ eggshell egos with readers’ needs.

Now ask traditional “word people” to learn visual language. Demand mastery of video, audio and online production. And insist they understand not just journalism—but the business model of journalism.

When asked to put their jobs in metaphorical language, the frontliners at Poynter described a multiple personality:

- Priest-rabbi-guru-shrink, bartender-cabdriver-scout leader: the people who offer comfort, guidance and wisdom, who listen, drive, nurture.
- Triage doctors in the emergency room: They decide which stories go to the front of the line, which get a few limbs lopped off, and which die for lack of time and equipment.
- Salvage artists: They take notebook dumps on deadline and transform them into something publishable.

The frontliners also applied some acerbic wit to their metaphorical roles: The guardrail on the interstate. The oil to the engine. Or this one: Duct tape. (“It’s cheap, it holds things together, and it works in any situation.”)

Senior editors across the United States agree, at least in theory, that assigning desks are the make-or-break center of their newsrooms. Good frontliners can make the day’s report, a so-so idea sparkle, a serviceable story sing. Bad ones can break the flow of production, the chain of communication, the spirit of a reporter. Those same editors will tell you their assigning desks are often the weakest parts of their newsrooms, that the jobs are the hardest to hire and promote into, and that many people in the job move up, flare out, or flounder. How often do

you hear a young reporter claim their ambition is to be an assigning editor? Even if they honor the job, they don’t see it as much fun.

The challenges are more than anecdotal. A sophisticated “profile” of assigning editors at the frontliners’ meeting showed that the jobs demand a dizzying array of almost contradictory skills: creative and analytical, administrative and emotional, strategic and fast. The profiling firm said it has never seen a job that included so many vital tasks that all had to be done in a minimal amount of time. In other words: a job in which almost everything truly is a priority.

Good people are stumbling under these burdens. And words alone aren’t going to change that reality. But words might hold the power to reflect the job as it has evolved and to respect the power it has to create the atmosphere in which great journalism thrives. Good frontline editors do much more than shovel and save. They conceive and create. They are patient problem-solvers and nimble jugglers. They do their jobs with courage and compassion. They often do it with a sense of humor.

So how about some new metaphors that speak to that rich reality? Assigning editors are honest brokers, linking the reporter and the newsroom, the writer and the reader, the story and the system.

They are forces of nature, providing calm in the midst of chaos and creating energy in the midst of a lull. They are the pilots whose steadiness lets great reporters wing walk and the ground control crew that lets great writers soar. They can be the physical manifestation of faith—the ones who still believe in stories, even when the writers lose their way; the ones who believe in the readers, even when circulation flags; the ones who practice journalism as a public service, day in and day out.

New language might help top editors and reporters alike see that they can’t function very well or very long without good assigning editors. And the right metaphors—positive, creative, powerful ones—might help assigning editors, toiling in those anonymous, impossible jobs, stand a little taller. Which brings us back to the fifth Beatle. Where would John, Paul, George or Ringo be without him? Whoever he, or she, is. ■

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Moments Illustrate the Lives of Frontline Editors

Mae Cheng, regional editor at Newsday, president of UNITY: Journalists of Color, and former president of the Asian American Journalists Association, collected capsule reports from a diverse group of frontline editors, who described lessons they’ve learned in doing their daily work.

As an assistant city editor, I have to work with all different types of people: eccentric freelancers, irritable staff reporters, and production people bellowing about missed deadlines. No matter whom I talk with, good communication is crucial but not

always realized when the number of stories I have to assign, edit or rewrite is on the rise and the time I have to do this fleeting. So when stories get lost, deadlines get missed, and wires don’t just get crossed but downright tangled, I often turn to humor to smooth the situation out.

Take the case of one freelancer, who is good at gunning for facts, and unfortunately at editors, if he hasn’t gotten paid or God forbid his story doesn’t run.

“When is my story going to run?” an irritable voice said to me over the phone. His approach was rude; still I

understood his angst. His feature story had been slated to run three weeks ago, but breaking news had forced me to hold it. What was worse was that I still had no idea when it would run.

“Well?” he demanded. “When is my story going to run?”

“I don’t know,” I said pathetically. “I just don’t know.”

He continued to badger me, so much that I could feel myself becoming agitated. Still, I didn’t lash out. Instead I began to sing. That’s right, sing, singing the phrase “I don’t know” as lustily as I could. I started with a quavering soprano then switched to an alto. I

paused.

“Sing it with me,” I said cheerily. “I’ll take the high part, you take the low.”

I could tell by his silence that he was flabbergasted, which emboldened me to sing even louder.

“I don’t know,” I sang. “I just don’t knooooooooooooooooow.”

I could hear him suppressing laughter.

“Okay,” he said. Another escaped giggle. “I’ll wait for you to call me until you do know.”

—*Tania Padgett, staff writer and former assistant city editor at Newsday*

When I started my job as an assistant city editor, I was the newbie, but supervising a former department head, former bureau chief, and other seasoned veterans. Just one person was younger than I was. At 28, and in my first editing position, earning their trust and making them feel like I was their team coach instead of team water girl was a challenge.

But I remembered this advice: Don’t give drive-by praise. You know you’ve heard it: “Good job on that story.” That doesn’t tell your reporter anything. Look for the exquisite detail your reporter has used or applaud a turn of phrase. Don’t just say “Good job.” Be specific.

It sounds simple, but it’s true. Writers crave attention. That attention to detail is important. As line editors we don’t have the luxury of time to take our reporters out on a half-day retreat to build team rapport. They have stories to write for the paper, a version to file online and, in some cases, television appearances to promote the brand. Simple things like offering specific praise or asking “How are you today?” and taking the time to listen means a lot. It shows you care.

—*Kristen Go, an assistant city editor at The Arizona Republic*

For years, I’ve thought that I could organize a staff, plan news coverage, and produce interesting stories and pages. My chance to prove this came when I

became business editor of the Columbus (Ga.) Ledger-Enquirer.

Challenge 1: Take what had been an anemic business page, triple the reporting staff (from one to three), and create a three-page section with themed local centerpieces five days a week and add a Sunday business page that had not existed.

Problem 1: I had no input on the selection of the staff, including a swap of staffers four months into the year.

Lesson Learned: A good game plan can work with any team. The coach has to let every person know his/her role and the expectations. I talk daily with my reporters about what they are working on, and we maintain a two-week schedule of stories we have budgeted for our themes. I’ve coached my reporters to understand they are partners in our section.

They regularly consult with our other teammates in photography, graphics and me on planning the entire package, not just their words.

While I certainly had expected to be able to help shape my team, attention to planning and organization have allowed us to rejuvenate the business section. If you’re the boss, even if it’s just over one section or group of reporters, clearly communicate the goals and keep the staff working toward them.

Challenge 2: Reduce our stock-market listings from two pages to one to gain space for more local business news reporting. There were production issues to work out with the stocks provider, as well as the public relations end with readers who aren’t computer savvy and still wanted to see the daily listings of the stocks in their portfolios.

Problem 2: Angry readers’ phone calls. Troubleshooting the niggling errors in the page from the conversion, such as wrong fields flowing into text boxes and wrong headers over columns.

Lesson Learned: Anticipating the topic, if not the tenor, of complaints. We were honest about our reasons for making these changes and offered to meet our readers halfway by requesting a limited number of their favorite

stocks be included in the report each day. Despite a few threats, we lost no subscriptions because of the stock page changes.

Challenge 3: A spot-news rotation was developed for reporters throughout the newsroom to spend a week at a time covering other beats or general assignment stories; this would allow other reporters time to work on enterprise projects.

Problem 3: The business staff had to give up five-week and four-weekend shifts to the spot system, but when a business reporter’s project was nearing deadline, there was hesitancy to assign a spot reporter to cover his beat.

Lesson Learned: Taxation without representation is still wrong. I had to demand that the spot system we had fed be used to backstop our daily expectations. I’m the leader of the business staff, so it’s my job to make sure we are contributing to the whole newspaper, but that in doing so we are not being taken advantage of.

—*Jerry Morehouse, business editor at the Columbus (Ga.) Ledger-Enquirer*

When I was promoted to editor, I started off with a brand-new staff. The last person hired was, in some ways, an act of desperation: The former editor’s retirement date was two weeks away, and he was reluctant to leave without a full staff in place. Alas, we had only one viable applicant.

Mistake No. 1: We settled.

Lesson Learned: If your gut is telling you this person won’t be a good fit for your newspaper, *listen!*

Mistake No. 2: As a new editor, I adopted the “let’s be friends” style of management. This was disastrous in the case of this employee, who is much older than I am and had not succeeded in management. I let her have control and tried to be nice in my criticisms.

Lesson Learned: People will take advantage of you, if you let them. Be the boss first and be a friend second.

Mistake No. 3: Allowing a nonperformer to coast. I made excuses and was afraid to be brutally honest with my boss about the situation for fear it would reflect badly on my capabilities as a manager. After four years, the problem was so bad the employee was threatened with termination. She improved ever so slightly, just enough to hang on. As an older woman, she also made veiled threats of legal action if we fired her.

Lesson Learned: Nip problems in the bud. You wouldn't be in management if your boss didn't think you could handle it. It's not fair to you or your staff to allow a poor performer to hang on. The situation has improved somewhat, but I don't think it will be resolved until this employee chooses to leave.

—Stephanie Taylor, editor at *The Salem Leader* and *The Salem (Ind.) Democrat*

Politics in a newsroom? You bet.

I'd been moving through a particularly trying period of dealing with different parts of the newsroom, each of which seemed to have its own goals that at times seemed shortsighted. Then I attended an Associated Press Managing Editors seminar in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, which included a session by Edward Miller on situational leadership. Miller is managing director of the Newsroom Leadership Group in Marietta, Georgia. Though designed for those who are new to the job, Miller's guidance works for anyone struggling with newsroom relationships: listen to other people's ideas,

build relationships, learn compromises, and spend time.

Sounds simple and, as I found out after applying it, it's also very effective.

—Doug Peterson, assistant features editor at *The Des Moines (Iowa) Register*

When our newspaper changed ownership a few years ago, the new owners applied the industry staffing standard and determined we had a few more reporters than necessary. No one was let go, but the first three or four reporters who moved on were not replaced. At the same time, we were asked to produce more local copy.

Surprisingly, that happened: The reporters produced more stories. The difficulty with a smaller staff has been covering the many beats and communities. For example, we have a bureau in a nearby town of about 20,000 people. It had been our practice to have two reporters in the bureau, one dayside and one nightside. Now one reporter decides what to cover and adjusts his schedule to do so.

Reporters with increased territories or beats were encouraged to be more selective and spend less time on minutiae, such as local government subcommittee actions that would be voted on by the larger bodies. It's probably good that we cover the more important stories, but it remains difficult trying to report on crimes promptly. Calling from out of town doesn't yield the same results as dropping by the police department

and shifting through the reports. Another challenge has been that with most reporters helping out on a story or two each day, no one is free to concentrate entirely on weekend features.

On the whole, it surprises me how much we are doing with a more compact staff.

—Brad Jolly, city editor at *The Johnson City (Tenn.) Press*

In my 13 years as a reporter and editor in the Midwest, I've found that lazy reporting habits can have their roots in fear and insecurity. It seems an astonishingly large number of reporters are introverted to some extent; many of them would rather sit in the office and contemplate a story than get out in the street and drum one up. Many reporters, too, loathe the idea of making a difficult phone call or crosschecking facts; they feel that they might hurt someone's feelings or appear stupid.

My keys to helping such reporters include encouraging out-of-the-newsroom interactions while at work, planning stories while maintaining a loose grip, and drawing attention to positive examples. Allowing reporters—with a helpful shove out the office door—to wend their way through the many steps of completing a story, along with showing off their successes in the newsroom and explaining them, have resulted in slow but sure improvements.

—C.T. Kruckeberg, managing editor at *The Washington (Iowa) Evening Journal* ■

Editor and Reporter: A Writing Journey Together

'Then Joanna found her vision. It was crisp and clear. She made me see it, too.'

By Stuart Warner

Joanna Connors was an editor's dream. The nationally respected film critic for *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, Ohio was a fast and fluid writer who rarely needed editing except for occasional lapses on length. She was

always among the newspaper's leader in byline counts. Then she met a story she couldn't get out of her head.

Near the end of the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, she got a call from home. A young man who lived in the same

upscale Cleveland suburb where she lived, who had gone to the same high school as her two teenage children, had just died of a heroin overdose. He was the son of two psychiatrists, a family that seemed to be living the American

dream. She didn't know the family, but the story touched her as a parent. "I was scared," she says.

She came to me, the paper's writing coach and narrative specialist. She wanted to follow the family's travails of dealing with the death of their son.

Just what I needed—another project. Writing coach was just one part of my

job. I had 11 feature writers and columnists working directly for me with no assistant to fill in on editing. With Ohio figuring as one of the key states in the upcoming presidential election, I was about to embark on one of the largest election packages our paper had ever attempted. I directed a group of seven reporters, five photographers, and two graphic artists on a series called "The Five Ohios," that examined why our state was such an accurate

barometer in presidential elections. I was also working with an intern who was going undercover to learn what it's like to get by on a minimum wage job.

But enough whining; I consider myself a lazy editor: I rarely rewrite a reporter's work. We chat, then I make them do the rewriting. Even on final edits, they sit at the keyboard and make all the changes while I watch. I edited 13 columns a week during most of 2004—including the Pulitzer Prize-winning commentaries of Connie Schultz. I worked on 17 major projects (two open pages or more) and my staff produced almost 200 centerpieces for our daily section. But I rarely stayed at the office past six p.m., so I couldn't say I was too busy to take on Joanna Connors. I had other misgivings.

My narrative mentor, Jon Franklin, taught me that if you are going to invest major time in one of these stories to make sure that it appears to be "clean" with some logical outcome. "I look for a clean story—with a limited number of elements," Franklin told me. "I want to make sure I know who the main characters are. I want a unified experi-

ence for the reader. ... Above all, there are two things to avoid: Confusion and boredom. Readers get enough of both in their lives."

This story may not have been "clean" at the start—I had no idea where this story might lead, and there were lots of characters and conflicted elements—but I also knew it wasn't going to be

Just what I needed — another project. Writing coach was just one part of my job. I had 11 feature writers and columnists working directly for me with no assistant to fill in on editing. With Ohio figuring as one of the key states in the upcoming presidential election, I was about to embark on one of the largest election packages our paper had ever attempted. I directed a group of seven reporters, five photographers, and two graphic artists on a series called 'The Five Ohios'

boring. I could tell that just from the passion I saw in Joanna as I listened to her recount the details. So I agreed to work with her. Besides, my boss told me to.

That was in March 2004. A year later, we still weren't certain when this reporter-editor journey would end.

Finding the Story

Once Joanna decided to pursue the story, the next step was to earn access to the family. Sometimes, journalists make the mistake of reversing that process. We're granted access to a heart transplant or get embedded with a military unit, so we decide we need to write a story about it.

Joanna spent hours getting to know Jim and Elaine Psarras, whose son Andy had died of the heroin overdose. She showed them previous narrative series the paper had written. She convinced them that their story might help others. Then she warned them: "This will be a long process. By the end of it, you will be sick of seeing me." But even she had no idea then how long it would be.

As we began to talk as reporter-edi-

tor, I talked to her about the transition to narrative journalism. "You're not going to use direct quotes," I told her, looking for the surprise in her face. I saw none. "Dialogue replaces quotes." We talked about scenes, character development, filling her notebook with details. She bought Franklin's book, "Writing for Story: Craft Secrets of Dramatic Nonfiction," and I

gave her copies of other newspapers' Pulitzer Prize-winning narrative series, including those done by Barry Siegel of the Los Angeles Times and The Oregonian's Tom Hallman, Jr.

Now we had access, and we were speaking a common narrative language. But in any project like this there are bigger obstacles to overcome, questions that had to be answered, questions

the Poynter Institute's Chip Scanlan frequently challenges writers with: Whose story was it? What was it really about? What did it say about the world in which we live?

Franklin calls the process of finding these answers the search for "vision"—connecting the dots. At The Oregonian, narrative editor Jack Hart has his writers look for "meaning" or "the universal principle." Author-educator Walt Harrington, in an essay titled "The Writer's Choice," talks about why storytelling must go beyond plot, character and scene. "Certainly it's true that drama, intrigue and tension hold readers," he wrote. "That's good in itself. But the elements of story are not only tricks but tools of inquiry, devices that direct our vision to the many nuances of real life."

So as Joanna and I met regularly, we kept talking about the questions. And the answers kept changing. With her movie background, Joanna began with the premise that she would recreate a true-life version of the film "Traffic," using Andy's experiences to trace the heroin from Mexico to Shaker Heights as well as from scary street drug to

suburban teen drug. But the authorities never found enough evidence in this case to arrest the local dealer, much less link the trail back to Mexico. Then we thought for awhile that the story might be about Andy's best friend, Ben, who was using heroin with Andy the night he died. Ben could be resurrected by this experience. Except he wasn't.

Then Joanna was certain she found the story. A bereaved family seeks justice. The parents and the local authorities decided to pursue murder charges against the suspected dealer because Andy's death, they reasoned, had occurred as the result of a felony—selling heroin. We imagined a dramatic courtroom scene at the end, Jim and Elaine hugging as their son's death is avenged.

The investigation continued for several months, with Joanna returning to the film beat most of the time, still keeping close contact with the Psarrases on nights and weekends. By now, she was almost part of the family. "When I talk to you, I feel like I'm in therapy," Elaine Psarras told her. Joanna frequently reminded her that she was recording their conversations, any of which could end up in the newspaper.

In the fall of 2004, the family—and our story—received a crushing blow. There would be no murder charges. The autopsy showed that besides heroin, Andy had been taking an antidepressant that had been suspected of causing suicidal behavior in teenagers. The drug hadn't been prescribed by Andy's doctor. It had been prescribed by his mother. There was no way, prosecutors said, to prove that the heroin by itself caused Andy's death.

By now, I was getting questioned repeatedly by Joanna's editors: When was this story going to end? I really couldn't say. We agreed she'd return to criticism full-time through the 2005 Oscars. It seemed that the dream reporter's story might turn into a nightmare. And I was mulling how to tell her that after all her work, it might be time to drop the story.

Then Joanna found her vision. It was crisp and clear. She made me see it, too.

Andy's mother knew he used recreational drugs. But she didn't know about the heroin. Certainly she never would have prescribed the antidepressant if she had. Finally, the parents began to acknowledge that they, too, had a role in their son's death, instead of seeking to assign blame elsewhere.

What had scared Joanna as a par-

I consider myself a lazy editor: I rarely rewrite a reporter's work. We chat, then I make them do the rewriting. Even on final edits, they sit at the keyboard and make all the changes while I watch.

ent when she first encountered this story—"If they're both psychiatrists and they didn't know, how are we supposed to?"—had now become her universal meaning: "How are we supposed to know about our kids' secrets?"

Writing the Story

The writing process unfolded rather quickly. Joanna's understanding of film techniques meant I didn't have to beat the inverted pyramid out of her as I often do with first-time narrative writers. And though she was accustomed to having her work sail through her editors, she even embraced the process of multiple rewrites.

I usually took her drafts home at night, made a few notes on them, discussed them with her the next morning, and she would return to the computer. She also shared the stories with other writers, including her husband, and they made suggestions, too. So by the time the stories came back to me, there was very little polish to be done.

More importantly, she had done voluminous reporting, especially collecting police and court documents. In the exclusive neighborhood she was writing about, everybody has an attorney. And our attorney knew that.

Joanna was still following the family as late as May 8th. We began the seven-part series, "Andy's Last Secret"¹ on Sunday, May 22nd. The response from readers was so powerful that our

editors asked for an eighth part on the following Sunday. Families who had been through the drug battle with a child or other loved one sent us their stories. Hundreds of others responded to Andy's Foundation, which his parents set up to spread knowledge about drug use.

The story got real traction with our younger readers. Normally, the features section of our Web site averages 1,700 hits per day. During the eight days of "Andy's Last Secret," that number was 25,000 per day—almost 200,000 through the series—and, even

after it was out of the paper, the story still saw activity on the Web.

As for Joanna, I suppose some would say she's no longer an editor's dream. After her exposure to serious narrative journalism, she decided that she couldn't spend another summer reviewing movies like "Dodgeball." She is now the newspaper's arts and entertainment critic, sort of the Frank Rich of the Midwest. But she's spent the past couple of months working on another narrative—this one about the suicide of a local man who looked like he had it made as a Hollywood producer.² Her byline count will never be the same. ■

Stuart Warner is writing coach and enterprise editor at The Plain Dealer in Cleveland, Ohio. He was the lead writer on the narrative "The Good-year War," which was a centerpiece of the Akron Beacon Journal's 1987 Pulitzer-winning coverage of the attempted takeover of Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company. He also supervised "A Question of Color," the Beacon Journal's 1994 Pulitzer Gold Medal-winner.

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📄 ¹www.cleveland.com/andy

² The series was called "Fade out: The death of producer Alan Schechter," and it can be read online at www.cleveland.com/fadeout

Listening to Editors' Difficulties Helps Find Solutions

'Frontline editors usually come from reporting ranks, and it is not unusual for problems to emerge in the transition.'

By John F. Greenman

On the day I visited a midsize daily, owned by an excellent newspaper publishing company, my job was to ask frontline editors about their problems and needs. The goal: to develop a newsroom training plan. An editor who had been in the job for about 18 months was succinct in her response: "disrespected" from above, she told me, "pitied" from below. When I ran her words by a second editor, I heard that the first editor "took the words right out of my mouth." And a third editor concurred: "Absolutely accurate." In notes I jotted while listening, I wrote, "These frontline editors are not well thought of, by themselves—or by others."

Sociologist Herbert J. Gans has referred to journalists as "troubled." None are more troubled than frontline editors, who find themselves working at the neck of an hourglass, as the American Press Institute's Carol Ann Riordan observed. They process the sand from above, then below, from above, then below. They are the managers who Oren Harari had in mind when he wrote about the impossible work of "managing from the middle."

In my work for NewsTrain¹—a frontline editors' training project of the Associated Press Managing Editors—I've asked more than 200 frontline editors to describe "the most significant supervisory or managerial problem" they've encountered. Their answers are consistent and come in four closely related categories.

1. Lack of managerial authority and related new-in-the-role issues.

2. Giving direction, motivating and communicating expectations to staff.

3. Acting on poor, deteriorating or inappropriate performance—including firing.

4. Confronting more and greater demands with fewer resources.

trash talk about me before I even began to work," one frontline editor told us. Some of these editors progress quickly into their new roles. One sought advice from her boss, adopted a "professional demeanor," and then "killed the reporter with kindness." It "won her over," she said. Others don't: "It's a trust problem that can't be solved by doing one thing," this editor said. "Will take long term."

The most common problems, frontline editors say, arise in giving direction, motivating and communicating expectations. It's toughest, many explain, when they are trying to improve things, such as increasing productivity, or raising the quality of the work, or pushing a

reporter "to reach his full potential," or reversing complacency, and getting "clean copy ... written simply and clearly ... on time," avoiding repeat mistakes. And it can be hard to even get some reporters to show up for work on time.

Some editors we spoke with found it strange that communication can be so difficult in a communication business. It can be a matter of learning, in the words of one frontline editor, "to be more focused and more detailed" in making assignments. Some expressed reluctance to be forceful or confrontational, preferring to make requests rather than demands. Others weren't so reluctant. "I've trained them, encouraged them, begged them, and

Undermining starts early. 'A gossipy reporter whom I'd worked with at a previous paper spread rumors and trash talk about me before I even began to work,' one frontline editor told us.

Dealing With the Inheritance

Frontline editors usually come from reporting ranks, and it is not unusual for problems to emerge in the transition. Some talk of reporters who are "jealous of my promotion" and who are "struggling with accepting my authority." This gets demonstrated when they "challenge assignments," are "personally insulting," and "very negative." It's toughest with veteran reporters who have "all the answers," think they know "more about what the paper needs than I do," and have "nothing to learn."

Undermining starts early. "A gossipy reporter whom I'd worked with at a previous paper spread rumors and

¹NewsTrain is funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation as part of its three year, \$10 million training initiative. As I write this, NewsTrain's frontline editor workshops have visited 18 cities, training 1,600 editors, with stunning results: 95 percent reported that they've used what they learned in their newsrooms. Virtually all said they would recommend this training to other frontline editors. —JFG

even threatened a few reporters with disciplinary action,” this editor said. “But the problem persists.”

Another common difficulty connected to these other concerns involves what to do with underperformers, who are often in place when the new editor takes over. In this category, one editor told us about “a burned-out senior reporter,” while another talked about a reporter “who had severe behavioral problems.” A third editor said he “inherited [an] office with two reporters with low morale whose production was substandard and often ended up crying in the office.” Ugly words can sometimes be used to describe such situations, and the editors we spoke with used a few of these words to tell us what they’d found: “attitude and obstinacy,” “totally disruptive to the rest of the staff,” “dealing with alcoholism and absolute denial,” “a new employee who would *not* listen nor do what she was assigned,” “an employee whose work habits completely fell apart,” a reporter who was “combative and yelled at me.”

What do these new editors do? Most learn quickly the laundry list of human resource’s approved steps: counsel, document and apply progressive discipline. A common result: The disruptive or difficult staffer left or was fired. But not before another common problem occurred, with editors convincing their boss to act: “Only when my boss reached the same frustration level,” one editor said, “did he take action.”

Exacerbating these problems, from the frontline editors’ perspective, is “having to do more with less.” One editor said that after the newspaper changed ownership, “the reporting staff was reduced ... while demand for local copy increased.” It’s often a matter of “figuring out a way to accomplish 40 things in a day with only enough time for 10,” said another. With “too much to edit,” said a third, there is “not enough time to plan and think.” To borrow their common term, most editors

“make do.” Others continue to struggle. Asked about his toughest problem and whether it was resolved, one editor said, “Managing time. Still there.”

Making a Tough Situation Better

So what’s to be done? Initial training would help, but frontline editors receive little today. Just 21 percent of those who attended NewsTrain workshops

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in 2005 reported getting any training before their first assignment.

What to teach? Listen, again, to the frontline editors. Asked what they want to learn, the responses indicate a desire for management techniques *and* editing craft. What follows is a sampling from an October workshop in Indianapolis.

- How to give more concise feedback.
- How to help my staff improve their skills.
- The magical trick of how to get everything done: the daily drill, deadline surprises, planning further out, and still keeping up with the longer-range things.
- Becoming a more accurate editor.
- Better early story coaching.
- Nailing down the key details early.
- How to work efficiently, and how to help other employees work efficiently.
- Hints for coaching young, unskilled writers.
- More leadership skills.
- How to manage writers with wide

ranges in talent.

- Tips for improving copy on deadline.
- How to motivate, get better work and more loyalty from reporters.
- Inspire employees to produce good stories.
- Time management.
- How to deliver bad news.

Given these problems, ways to resolve them are not surprising. The good news is that there is more attention to the circumstances that frontline editors confront. Current attention includes the Frontline Editors Project, which is a loose confederation of industry professionals and academicians [See article by Michele McLellan on page 73], as well as the Poynter Institute and the American Press Institute (API), which offered new seminars in the past year. API’s offering was based on a blunt assessment of

the problem. They called it a “survival guide.” A new organization called the Society of Metro Editors (SOME) grew out of an API seminar and hopes to offer a professional forum for frontline editors, according to Monica Markel, who is SOME’s first president and deputy metro editor of the San Antonio Express-News.

Journalism begins with the relationship between frontline editors and reporters. If we want better journalism, we need to understand the relationship better. One thing’s for certain. You don’t want these editors disrespected from above, nor pitied from below. ■

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Training Frontline Editors: Once Overlooked, Now Happening

‘Despite their importance and the tough transition when they switch from reporter or copyeditor, frontline editors often are sent to the end of the line for training.’

By Michele McLellan

Later this year frontline editors—prospective and current—will be able to browse an online course that introduces them to the job, helps them figure out whether they want to try it, and directs them to the training they need to be more effective at doing what’s required of them. The course, offered at Poynter Institute’s News University (NewsU), costs very little to take and is one of the first products of the Frontline Editors Project, a broad coalition of frontline editors, journalism educators, and corporate and newspaper training experts.

Launched in 2004, this project is an outgrowth of the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation’s \$10 million Newsroom Training Initiative, which seeks to increase industry support for midcareer training of journalists. The Frontline Editors Project¹ focuses on improving both the understanding of these editors’ roles and challenges and the midcareer training they receive. The job of the frontliner—the editor who has a direct hand in shaping news content and guiding newsgatherers—is among the fastest changing and most challenging in the newsroom. No longer just a conduit between the power centers of reporting and copyediting, the frontline editor must be a skilled craftsperson, manager, leader, administrator, topic specialist, coach and advocate for journalism and readers. Some of the industry’s innovators have found they could not drive change in their newsroom and their newspaper’s content without frontline editors leading the way.

Despite their importance and the tough transition when they switch from reporter or copyeditor, frontline

editors often are sent to the end of the line for training. Generally, the focus at news organizations is on craft training for writers and visual journalists, with some leadership training available for top management. There is very little training going on in between. Now that’s changing. Tomorrow’s Workforce program, which I direct at Northwestern University, is working in 16 print newsrooms to improve their training and development programs. Newspapers, including the South Florida Sun-Sentinel and The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, and news corporations, including Cox, Lee, Knight Ridder, and Scripps, have developed programs for frontline editors.

• In 2003, Mike Phillips, editorial development director for E.W. Scripps Newspapers, created an intensive training program for newsroom managers. “I spent a lot of years in midlevel jobs,” Phillips explained to those directing Tomorrow’s Workforce. “You really do feel trapped between the suits and the working stiffs in some ways. And in today’s newsroom, which is far more complex than it was when I was city editor or an assistant city editor, you’re trapped in a lot of complex processes and very demanding serial deadlines. You’ve got to post to the Web site and on and on. We all had to feed the beast forever, but the beast has gotten to be more demanding.”

- At The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, senior editors decided the importance and changing nature of the frontline role required an intensive training program. “We started our training with assigning editors because they touch so many people in the newsroom. They are the bridge between reporters and top editors, the coordinators between the various newsroom departments, and the pipeline for so many newsroom messages,” said Shawn McIntosh, deputy managing editor in Atlanta. Since 2004, McIntosh and Managing Editor Hank Klibanoff have taught two-day sessions for more than 100 frontline editors.
- In addition to efforts by news organizations, the American Press Institute and the Poynter Institute initiated programs in 2005 and will launch more online courses for frontline editors at www.newsu.org.
- The Society of Metro Editors was formed to provide a professional forum to serve frontline local news editors.

The Frontline Editors Project seeks to link such existing resources and also to identify additional training and development needs. In addition to the online overview of the job, NewsU hopes to develop additional online training to supplement other training efforts. Working with a number of frontline editors and other journalists, the project

¹Knight project directors include NewsU’s Howard Finberg, NewsTrain’s Lillian Swanson, and McLellan, who are joined by journalism educators Jacqui Banaszynski, Knight Chair in Editing at the University of Missouri; Michael Roberts, deputy managing editor of The Arizona Republic; John Greenman, journalism professor at the University of Georgia, and Carl Sessions Stepp, journalism professor at the University of Maryland.

is working to develop an inventory of skills and training needs that can help to shape a curriculum that will be presented to industry leaders in 2006.

Our goal is to help industry leaders and training providers take a fresh look at this ever-changing job—whether on the journalism or the business side of the organization. The case for training and staff development for frontline editors goes beyond their critical role

in producing quality journalism. Their roles also touch on key factors that strengthen audience: employee satisfaction (high retention is also a money saver), newsroom culture (highly defensive editors resist change and innovation), and content improvements that can bolster and build credibility, relevance and engagement.

As any top editor knows, her goals are only as good as the people she

asks to implement them. Look to the newsroom's frontline and give these editors the training they need to do the job well. ■

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Aiming to Put the Right People in Charge

New online tools will help prospective assigning editors see whether they have what it takes to succeed.

By Marty Claus

What makes a good assigning editor? Knight Ridder has offered more than 20 seminars for assigning editors during the past seven years and, at the start of each class, we ask every participant: "Who is the best assigning editor you've ever known, and why?" They always cite the same qualities, using many of the same words: She trusted me. She pushed me. She believed in me. ... He was patient. He cared about me. He helped me. ... A great coach. Set clear goals. Could see the story. ... Demanding. Generous with her time. ... Energetic. Passionate. Confident. But in almost every group of editors, someone stands and says, "I've never known a good assigning editor."

I always want to apologize for that. We should be ashamed of how many assigning editors are not good enough—not good enough to help our reporters do better work, not good enough to grow readership. It's a tough job, getting tougher all the time. Every problem seems to land on the desk of the assigning editor. Yet doing the job well is critical to the success of the newspaper. Those of us involved in the Frontline Editors Project want to increase the odds of success.

Our goal is two-fold:

1. We can help prospective assigning editors determine whether they are well suited for the job.
2. We can help assigning editors identify their most critical developmental needs.

Exploring the Job's Fit

Through the Poynter Institute's News University, which offers online training, journalists will be able to learn more about the frontline editor's job and whether it would be a good fit for them.

To give a realistic preview of the job, working assigning editors have been videotaped talking about the good, the bad, and the ugly parts of the work, telling what surprised them most, sharing their passions, and warning about pitfalls. We also plan to provide samples of raw copy and offer case studies on management and editing issues. For those who want to take the next step, we will tell how to go about shadowing an assigning editor in their newsroom and how to apply for cross-training in that job.

Originally, we planned to provide a self-assessment questionnaire, specifying desirable traits for this job, with

questions such as, "Do I like giving honest feedback?" "Am I a good teacher?" "Well organized?" "A problem solver?" "Can I juggle several tasks at once?" "Do I meet deadlines?" "Am I comfortable with tension and conflict?"

Then we wondered if job fit could be even more accurately predicted. Psychologists say there is a scientific way to predict success. If we are able to accurately describe an assigning editor's critical tasks, attributes and competencies, a sophisticated software program will be able to tell an individual just how good the fit will be.

In October, we asked Dr. Leslie Krieger, a consulting psychologist and president of Assessment Technologies Group, to meet with about a dozen assigning editors to start to develop such an interactive "job fit" tool. The group spent hours analyzing and describing how they do their job, and this information was digested by a computer. Its software then produced the first draft of our instrument.

Krieger said that in 30 years of research he had never encountered a job with such intense problem-solving demands. The assigning editors were not surprised to hear this. Based on their input, the report generated by the computer listed three essential

attributes for the job (all involved problem-solving), seven important ones (“detail-conscious,” for example) and 16 that are also relevant (“tough-minded” and “conscientious” are just two of these). Each attribute was scored from 1 to 10, and a shaded area marked on the scale where the ideal candidate would score.

Of course, that session was just the start of a process to create a credible instrument. Additional sessions in Atlanta, Kansas City, and San Jose will repeat the exercise of defining the job, to vet the instrument and gain new insights. Our target is to offer this “job fit” tool to all journalists by fall 2006. Once it’s available online, prospective editors will be

able to respond to a series of questions and receive a confidential report showing how they scored on these essential, important and relevant attribute scales and see how their scores compare with those of the ideal candidate.

Obviously, there is no such thing as an ideal candidate. But the right “job fit” tool could help journalists see how well suited they are for this demanding job. By showing how their strengths differ from those of the ideal candidate, it will help them identify developmental needs. It could also help the industry determine training priorities.

Having such a tool could avoid the harm done by having the wrong person in the assigning editor’s job or having

an assigning editor who doesn’t clearly understand the demands of the job and the consequences of performing poorly in it. And it could decrease the chances that an experienced journalist would ever say, “I’ve never known a good assigning editor.” ■

Marty Claus, a former vice president/news for Knight Ridder, was an assigning editor for more than 12 years at the San Bernardino (Calif.) Sun-Telegram and the Detroit Free Press. She is now a consultant, specializing in recruiting and training.

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Exploring What Makes Training Successful

Whether editors’ training takes place in a single newsroom or as a regional gathering, its essential elements remain consistent.

By Lillian Swanson

In April 2005, I invited 84 frontline editors attending a NewsTrain workshop in Seattle to spend an hour talking about job-related issues that were keeping them awake at night. The idea was this: divide into groups of three and have one editor describe a problem for which the two others would offer possible solutions. Let each editor present a problem. But even before I could finish these instructions, the group cut me off, and the sound in the room rose quickly to a roar. Only the lunch bell brought the exercise to a close. This eruption of conversation vividly demonstrated how overworked and overwhelmed these editors are and how hungry they are for advice on how to navigate this rapidly changing terrain.

NewsTrain, the Associated Press Managing Editors’ (APME) training program for frontline editors, has crisscrossed the nation since May 2004, hiring top-flight trainers to teach practical skills. These two-day workshops, largely funded by

the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, should reach more than 3,000 editors at 40 sites by December 2006. At NewsTrain, Carol Nunnolley, the APME projects director; Elaine Kramer, the project’s manager, and I have seen what works—and what doesn’t—and what follows are tips and advice we and other trainers have learned about teaching frontline editors.

Meet them where they are by letting them know you understand how complex, isolating and stressful their jobs can be.

It’s a role that requires a high degree of problem-solving skills, a critical evaluation of everything they read, and an understanding of human nature.

Design a training program focused on improving editing and management skills alongside their interpersonal skills. “These are skills that usually have to be taught,” said Michael Schwartz, manager of editorial training for COXnet and Cox Newspapers. “Otherwise they

may be absorbed through examples and experiences, both good and bad, in the newsroom. They will not be based on the advice of professionals who know how to do it well.” When frontline editors improve in these three areas, their skill and confidence in handling stories and managing people rises along with their credibility in the newsroom. This sets them on the path toward becoming real newsroom leaders.

Leave behind theory and academic instruction. Instead, give frontline editors practical advice, useful information they can use on the job immediately. Remember, they are busy people who are constantly evaluating what they need to know and casting off what they don’t.

Base the instruction on real-life examples. Be as specific as possible. “The more real-world that you make the learning, the more it is going to stick,” Schwartz said.

Give editors a range of solutions to their most pressing problems. Foster a discussion that helps them reach inside themselves for the answers. Butch Ward, a Distinguished Fellow at the Poynter Institute, offers this advice: “Frontline editors respond well to concrete suggestions—how to relate better to their bosses; resolve conflicts; better manage their time. These are the day in, day out challenges they face.” The solutions must take into account an editor’s style and a newsroom’s culture. It’s important to remember, Ward says, that one size does not fit all. “Training works when you give them enough room to design their own response to a challenge.”

Classes must be interactive, because editors learn as much from each other as they do from the teacher. Learning occurs through practice and small groups for discussion. Involve them in role-playing and problem-solving exercises. “Lectures and war stories accomplish very little,” said Michael Roberts, deputy managing editor/staff development at The Arizona Republic.

Vary the format. Steve Buttry, director of tailored programs at the American Press Institute, says “exercises are essential, but because they are staged, they get old if you don’t vary the approach.” Buttry often gets the stories flowing by describing how a special editor helped him grow professionally. Then he invites editors to relate their own examples. “The stories start pouring forth,” he said, “each one inspiring and each one with clear lessons we can identify.”

If trainers come from outside the newsroom, pay what it costs to hire the best. Great teachers know the issues, are engaging and entertaining, and use humor to get their points across. They must tap into the experience of a newsroom, taking into account the traditions, nuances and creativity of journalists. One of their first tasks will be to create an environment that is safe for editors to express ideas and opinions, even when misguided. The classes must operate under Las Vegas rules: What is said in the classroom, stays in the classroom.

Approaches in Different Newsrooms

A valuable benefit of this kind of training is that it can build a support network and reduce the isolation that frontline editors often feel. At the South Florida Sun-Sentinel, Gail Bulfin, editor for news research, training and readership, runs a six-month program involving 10 editors from across all disciplines of the newsroom. The group meets twice a month for half-day sessions to discuss

‘Training works when you give them enough room to design their own response to a challenge.’ —Butch Ward

job-related issues. The editors have access to top-notch trainers, high-level editors, workshops not available to others in the newsroom, and great food.

“By far, the comment that I hear most frequently—and with the most passion—is the value of just interacting with other assistant city editors in a ‘safe environment,’” Bulfin said. “They learn to share similar issues, problems and concerns. One of the first things they learn is that no one seems to be a pro in this job. They are very interested in hearing how their peers are dealing with issues, and there is comfort in knowing they are not alone.”

Giving these editors this chance to step back from demands of their jobs can be a big plus. They view their work in a different light and emerge with tools to help them make better decisions about how they spend their time. Ward suggests including an exercise that gives editors an opportunity to reflect on why they got into journalism and why they do their jobs. “This is extremely valuable for a group of people who mostly think about *how* to survive their jobs,” he said.

At The Arizona Republic, Roberts created an Editor’s Circle program, a series of readings and discussions that spans 10 weeks. One circle is for those

considering joining the editing ranks, another is for those already on the desk. Every two weeks the participants read assigned material, then meet with others in the group to discuss how to apply this to their work. Roberts also sets up experiences for them to practice using new skills. During the past year, eight new editors went through the Editor’s Circle program and then moved into frontline editing jobs. “Helping these new editors find their footing through the first year is very important,” Roberts said.

At The Washington Post, Peter Perl, director of training and professional development, has used feedback—from those who report to the editors—as an important learning tool. Nineteen assigning editors, all volunteers, took part in a training program that included the feedback component. Reporters were asked seven questions about their editor’s greatest strengths, including communication skills, their ability to manage conflict, and other core parts of the job, as well as asked to recommend areas in which the editor could improve. Each editor received anonymous feedback from at least six people they worked with. The result was a lot of positive reinforcement for editors, Perl said, as well as a raised awareness of what aspects of their work were getting in their way.

NewsTrain’s Regional Strategy

Unlike the training that goes on within a newsroom, NewsTrain takes a regional approach that relies on local partners to help produce the workshops. Though one newspaper serves as a host site, the workshop will draw as many as 100 editors from across a region. We have been surprised to find no need to offer separate classes for editors who work at large and small newspapers. They can talk to and learn from each other because the problems they face are essentially the same, though more complicated in larger newsrooms.

Likewise, veteran editors and rookies can be in the same classes, though the benefits they take back to the newsroom from them will be different. Veterans

leave with a few new insights, but with renewed confidence about what they are doing. Rookies depart with new tools and with hope that they can succeed. We've also found—no matter what the mix of participants might be—that it's

important to leave time for editors to network and talk about problems with each other. The hard part is getting them to stop. ■

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The Dearth of Resources for Entering Editors

There are available '... few books, a large but scattered field of articles, and the handouts and tip sheets collected at relatively few Web sites.'

By Carl Sessions Stepp

Some 20 years ago, my dean at the University of Maryland, Reese Cleghorn, asked me to develop a course for the editors of our student newspaper, *The Diamondback*. We were teaching basic copyediting, Cleghorn said, but it was clear that these young editors needed more. They needed to know about managing people, coordinating coverage, developing ideas, budgeting time, and keeping themselves and their staffs productive and sane under stress.

I was a former editor, just arrived at the university, and this sounded like a wonderful course, one I wanted to take myself rather than teach. I set out to collect the most relevant books and materials for this much-needed class. I found almost nothing. There were books on reporting, copyediting and design, on upper-level management, and on general matters of leadership and ethics. But the shelves were nearly bare of materials aimed directly at those key newsroom figures, the midlevel assigning editors.

Today, a generation later, things are better, but nowhere near what is needed. In both the news industry and the universities that feed it, editing is neglected. We fail to invest intellectually in identifying, recruiting, developing and nurturing editors, especially at the assigning level, and this failure is reflected in the profession's literature.

After a few years of teaching our advanced editing course, I wrote a book,

"Editing for Today's Newsroom: New Perspectives for a Changing Profession," which was published in 1989. That this book remains in use in some classrooms and newsrooms speaks to the absence of contemporary, comprehensive texts for assigning editors. While fledgling and veteran writers can choose from dozens of fine textbooks and trade volumes in their area and copyeditors and designers can select from at least a shelf-full, assigning editors must piece together their libraries from a few books, a large but scattered field of articles, and the handouts and tip sheets collected at relatively few Web sites. [See accompanying box for specific titles and relevant Web sites.]

Meantime, we must be heartened that some progress has occurred. The literature today, if not adequate, certainly surpasses what I found two decades ago. It falls into two broad categories: a few works expressly for midlevel editors and more general works that can help midlevel editors. Let's hope that today's renewed interest in editing will inspire even more advances in the literature. ■

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Resources for Midlevel Editors

This list of books, articles and Web sites has been compiled by Carl Sessions Stepp, a former assigning editor and now journalism professor at the University of Maryland.

Books About Editing

"Caught in the Middle: How to Improve the Lives and Performance of Newspaper Middle Managers," by Sharon L. Peters. Published in 1999 and now downloadable from Northwestern's www.mediamanagementcenter.org. Peters surveyed more than 500 journalists and wrote about the problems of midlevel editors from their perspective and also the views of their managers and their reporters. Great insights into the problems and some suggestions for help.

"Coaching Writers: Editors and Reporters Working Together Across Media Platforms," second edition, by Roy Peter Clark and Don Fry. Best book of its kind. Clark and Fry have been promoting collegial editing for two decades, and the book is full of wisdom, humor and hands-on techniques.

"Editing for Today's Newsroom: New Perspectives for a Changing Profession," by Carl Sessions Stepp. Out-of-date in terms of technology,

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but still somewhat useful in advising assigning editors on how they can make better decisions about everything from copy to coaching to ethics.

“The Editorial Eye,” second edition, by Jane T. Harrigan and Karen Brown Dunlap. Mostly for copyeditors, but includes friendly and helpful insights into “the big picture” of editing.

“The Effective Editor: How to Lead Your Staff to Better Writing and Better Teamwork,” by Foster Davis and Karen Dunlap. Slender volume filled with good humor and good sense, mainly about working with writers but with additional overall advice for the beginning assigning editor.

“Newsroom Management: A Guide to Theory and Practice,” by Robert H. Giles. Hefty guide, pitched more toward top than mid-level managers, but full of guidance on motivating and supervising.

Books About Editors

One can gain inspiration and insight by reading almost any editor’s biography or autobiography. The books below also contain material that is immediately and directly useful, including practical descriptions of editing style and methods, both good and horrid. —CSS

“Genius in Disguise: Harold Ross of The New Yorker,” by Thomas Kunkel. This book, written by my current dean at Maryland, looks not just at what the master editor Ross did, but at how. Every editor can learn from this book.

“Max Perkins: Editor of Genius,” by A. Scott Berg. An in-depth look at the editor behind Fitzgerald, Hemingway and others. Not really journalistic, but inspiring anyway.

“The Rose Man of Sing Sing: A True Tale of Life, Murder, and Redemption in the Age of Yellow Journalism,” by James McGrath Morris. Charles Chapin was almost certainly the meanest city editor

who ever lived (he died in prison after killing his wife). He was born to chase the news and had much success, but at a very high cost. A good book about a bad example.

Books About Managing and Leadership

These are not directed primarily to journalists, but are among the most often recommended by top editors and trainers. The titles are pretty much self-explanatory. —CSS

“First, Break All the Rules: What the World’s Greatest Managers Do Differently,” by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman.

“Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In,” by Roger Fisher and William Ury.

“Love and Profit: The Art of Caring Leadership,” by James A. Autry.

“Management of the Absurd: Paradoxes in Leadership,” by Richard Farson.

“Time Management for Dummies,” by Jeffrey J. Mayer.

“You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation,” by Deborah Tannen.

Articles

All the journalism trade magazines deal with midlevel editors from time to time. One publication that has done so regularly is The American Editor, published by the American Society of Newspaper Editors. It frequently runs articles on pertinent topics such as writing, ethics and leadership. Fortunately, content from the past several years is available online at www.asne.org. Unfortunately, the searching is rudimentary, so you have to know what you want or be willing to skim a lot of article titles. —CSS

Web Resources

www.americanpressinstitute.org: Targeted at journalism broadly

but with some useful articles and links for midlevel editors. Example: “Critical Thinking Checklist.”

www.copydesk.org: Site of the American Copy Editors Society, it provides good links, discussions and other resources. For example, click on “site features,” then “resources” and read a long list of interesting articles, such as Jane Harrigan’s “Why Editing Is Cool.”

www.journalism.org: Affiliated with the Project for Excellence in Journalism, this site has links and full texts of research reports and articles, including such practical ones as “Ten Tips on Time Management.”

www.metroeditors.org: In its infancy, as is its host, the new Society of Metro Editors. Great potential here for discussions, links and resources.

www.newsthinking.com: Run by writing coach and former Los Angeles Times editor Bob Baker. Outstanding material on how to find, write and help others write great stories. Try Susan Ager’s “A Vocabulary List for Reporters and Editors” or Laurie Hertzler’s “Yeah, I’m Defensive. You Gotta Problem With That?”

www.notrain-nogain.com: Gold mine. Newspaper trainers site, with links, exercises and tip sheets galore. Try Steve Buttry’s “Helping Reporters Improve Stories” or Michael Roberts’ “A Six-Month Program for Line Editors.”

www.poynter.org: A varied and constantly evolving site, geared more toward writers, but with numerous relevant essays and tip sheets on editing, coaching and leading.

www.readership.org: Comprehensive collection of research from Northwestern’s Readership Institute. Lots of studies and reports, plus examples of how papers are applying what is being learned. ■

“The first accurate description we heard of the storm’s wrath was told to a Sun Herald reporter in four words: ‘Your city is gone,’” writes **Stan Tiner**, executive editor of the Sun Herald in Biloxi, Mississippi. The storm was Hurricane Katrina, and in a book, “Katrina: 8 Hours That Changed the Mississippi Coast Forever,” published by the Sun Herald, words and images by journalists in South Mississippi convey a sense of what once was and what is today. Tiner describes this book (“not only a story of tragedy and devastation [but] one of survival . . .”) and how the Sun Herald regrouped in the wake of Katrina. “In this very chaotic environment,” he writes, “. . . the newspaper continued to make extraordinary efforts to see that the news reached readers.”

As seen through the eyes of **Dan Kennedy**, who teaches journalism at Northeastern University and authors *Media Nation*, a Weblog, “The Death of Media: And the Fight to Save Democracy,” by Danny Schechter is “a small, elegantly packaged call for reform of what he has dubbed ‘the mediaocracy.’” This is defined by Schechter as “a growing symbiotic relationship between increasingly interlocking media elites and their political counterparts . . . a political system tethered to a media system.” Kennedy connects what Schechter writes about with what is happening in today’s “toxic media environment.”

Maria Henson, deputy editorial page editor of *The Sacramento Bee*, explains how the book “*Press Gallery: The Newspaper in Modern and Postmodern Art*” reminds “us that what many of us do for a living continues to inspire artists to paint, to comment, to build and to assemble, often with scraps of news clippings, metal and dirt on canvas, and occasionally a crowd.” Despite the lack of shared cultural ground among the artists featured in this book, Henson writes that “newspapers have become a shared tool of storytelling across countries and eras.”

The book “*The KGB File of Andrei Sakharov*” provides journalists such as **Murray Seeger**, who once covered the Soviet Union and reported about this famous dissident, with a revealing look at “how the activities of the mild-mannered, brilliant physicist Andrei Sakharov preoccupied the ruling Communist Party Politburo for more than two decades until his death in 1989.” Seeger takes us back to this era as he explains how dissident activities were covered by the Western press and also describes how Sakharov’s use of “international communications to plead his cause” likely saved him from being “locked up in a mental institution and forgotten like many lesser-known dissidents.”

Seth Lewis, a Miami Herald editor who recently spent time in Spain as a Fulbright Scholar, reflects on how well bilingual journalism, as practiced in several regions of Spain, is working for newspapers that are publishing their content in hybrid mixtures of the regional and national language. And he assesses how readers react when presented with these choices. Lewis looks, too, at comparisons with the different way in which U.S. newspapers approach their bilingual markets. “Spain is a case study and a cautionary tale—a lesson in bilingual innovation but also a warning that such efforts, however well-intentioned, don’t always translate into readership gains,” he writes. ■

Seeing Lives as They Once Were and Are Today

More family album than newspaper report, a book published by the Sun Herald in Biloxi, Mississippi documents Hurricane Katrina's life-altering force.

Katrina: 8 Hours That Changed the Mississippi Coast Forever

Editors Keith Chrostowski, Drew Tarter, and Dorothy Wilson
Sun Herald. 122 Pages. \$29.95.

By Stan Tiner

If editions of the Sun Herald, produced in the first few days after Katrina ravaged our town of Biloxi and the entire Mississippi coastline, are the first draft of this storm's history, then the book we published, "Katrina: 8 Hours That Changed the Mississippi Coast Forever," can be considered our family album. On its pages, reporters and photographers document what "home" was like here before and after nature's extraordinary force altered our lives so dramatically on August 29, 2005.

The first accurate description we heard of the storm's wrath was told to a Sun Herald reporter in four words: "Your city is gone." Indeed all of our coastal cities: Waveland, Bay St. Louis, Pass Christian, Long Beach, Gulfport, Biloxi, Ocean Springs, Moss Point, Pascagoula—and inland communities, too—were blown and washed away on that dreadful day. The words used to tell this story are the faithful testimony of Katrina's victims but, because this is more album than memoir, its photographs tell the stories we will forever remember. For many of us, some of its pages will no doubt become tear-stained as survivors turn them to reveal images of their lost cities and transformed lives.

But this book is not only a story of tragedy and devastation. It is one of survival, helping hands, hope and even triumph, too. It might seem a cliché these months later, but from our vantage point on the frontlines of this disaster, the strength of Mississippians was a righteous truth that bolstered the journalists who told their stories, as it did the thousands of volunteers and workers who helped them dig out in

those early days and then stayed to do so many good deeds. In any book about Katrina, no final chapter can yet be written. There is only the latest chapter, and for the Sun Herald the focus has turned to the spirit of a people beginning the recovery of their region in a highly organized, deliberate and democratic fashion.

The Sun Herald's Katrina book tells one of the more important stories in American history, and its words and images are brought to its pages by journalists in South Mississippi who have not only experienced Katrina but continue to cover the stories of its aftermath.

Katrina Arrives

It can sometimes be hard to remember what Biloxi was like before Katrina arrived. But we can look back at the Sun Herald's last pre-storm edition and see that as Hurricane Katrina bore down on the Gulf Coast, our front-page headline asked the question, "Another Camille?" and a Page One editorial prophetically predicted that this hurricane would alter our communities and our lives forever.

After this edition went out, two Sun Herald reporters, one in the Harrison



County Emergency Operations Center in Gulfport and the other from a home in Hattiesburg, continued to communicate with readers through blogs. They passed along information that was unfolding by the hour that was read by those who stayed to face Katrina and those who evacuated to distant points. We'd already sent a team of editors from our newsroom in Biloxi to the Ledger-Enquirer in Columbus, Georgia, in anticipation that they might need to produce the Sun Herald for an unspecified period of time from that newsroom.

Soon we knew the answer to our headline's question: Katrina's destruction was many times worse than that of Camille. It would have been hard to imagine a worse scenario for the South Mississippi coast, as Katrina's 30-mile-wide eye-wall came ashore over Waveland and Bay St. Louis, and her deadly northeast quadrant pounded



Biloxi Beach Park on U.S. 90 was an attraction for coast residents and tourists for decades. Hurricane Katrina obliterated the popular amusement park. *Photos by John C. Fitzbugh/Courtesy of the Sun Herald.*

every inch of the state's coast. Katrina's force produced the world's highest recorded storm surge—some 35-feet in Pass Christian—far eclipsing the 23-foot mark of Camille in 1969.

When the worst of the storm had passed, Sun Herald news staff began to report the awesome scenes of death and destruction that Katrina had wrought along 70 miles of Mississippi's coast where homes, businesses, roads and bridges were destroyed, many of them flattened beyond recognition, and electric service, cell towers, phone lines were all gone.

Even though the unimaginable had happened, the Sun Herald, which had not missed publishing an edition in its 121-year history, did not break that string. On Tuesday morning, August 30th, we produced an eight-page newspaper in Columbus that was trucked into Biloxi and distributed across the region by reporters, photographers, editors and other employees who drove copies to emergency shelters and to people wherever they could be found. The first edition had a press run of 20,000; during the next few days this was increased to 80,000.

For the first month after Katrina, we delivered newspapers free of charge. Publishing and delivering the paper was accomplished under the most trying circumstances for Sun Herald staff, many of whom had lost their homes. In this very chaotic environment—in which more than 70 percent of coastal

homes were destroyed or severely damaged—the newspaper continued to make extraordinary efforts to see that the news reached readers. In addition to the initial loss of tens of thousands of home delivery customers, more than half of our news boxes were destroyed and half of our circulation force was displaced. Some paper routes were almost completely obliterated, and many subscribers were relocated to tents or FEMA trailers. By year's end we were still delivering free papers to thousands, and some carriers were experiencing some of the worst circumstances; to deliver the paper, some of them had to walk over piles of debris.

For those privileged to get them into the hands of readers, seeing people's eager anticipation for the Sun Herald was gratifying. For many people, this newspaper was their primary source of news, and the Sun Herald was soon transformed into something resembling the town square for South Mississippians whose communities no longer existed. When things were so desperate in those early days, the newspaper's editorial voice spoke loudly to the world of our plight and let it be known when government assistance programs were failing. Soon after Katrina swept so much away, our newspaper's front-page headline declared, "Help us Now," and a Page One editorial spoke clearly of our needs: "We are not calling on the nation and the state to make life more comfortable in South Mississippi," our

editorial said, "We are calling on the nation and the state to make life here possible." It became very clear to us at the newspaper, and I believe to the community, that during this incredible period of universal suffering there was no "us and them" nor an "editorial we;" there was just "we."

What we reported was also available on our Web site, for those who had access to the Internet. News could be found there, but also the site became the posting place for useful bulletin board information that was necessary for life in the post-Katrina world.

As important as it is to get the paper to our readers, it is the incredible news coverage of Katrina's impact on South Mississippi that has been at the center of the Sun Herald's effort. Since the storm, our news staff of 50 has produced more than 2,800 news stories on our towns and the people whose heroic response has humbled us and yet made us so proud to be able to tell their story. As the staff of the Sun Herald has worked tirelessly to meet their obligations, each of us has been reminded of how very important a newspaper is to a community. Our coverage of Katrina provided a sense of fulfillment and reminded us of journalism's true purpose. ■

Stan Tiner, a 1986 Nieman Fellow, is executive editor and vice president of the Sun Herald in Biloxi, Mississippi.

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The Connective Threads of the News Media and Government

A journalist sets forth a reform proposal to alter the incentives and break apart the 'mediaocracy.'

The Death of Media: And the Fight to Save Democracy

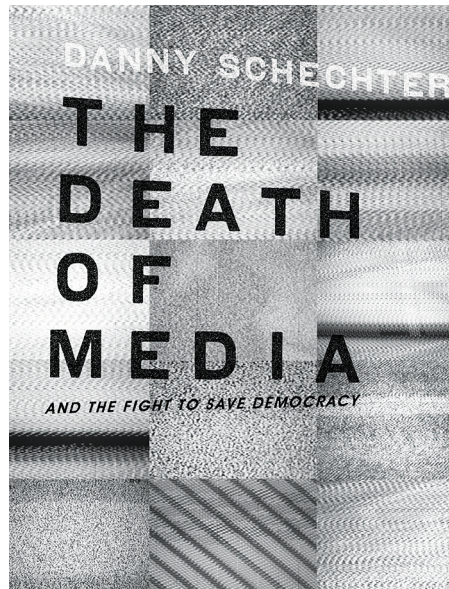
Danny Schechter

Melville Manifestos. 173 Pages. \$10.

By Dan Kennedy

Late last year The New York Times courageously performed the role envisioned for the press by the drafters of the First Amendment. In a 3,200-word front-page story, Times reporters James Risen and Eric Lichtblau revealed that the Bush administration, as part of its antiterrorism efforts, had allowed the National Security Agency (NSA) to conduct no-warrant wiretaps aimed at intercepting international telephone calls and e-mail messages from people in the United States, including American citizens. The story amounted to a tale of official wrongdoing at the highest reaches of government. It appears to be almost beyond dispute that the White House violated the law by failing to seek warrants from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court. Given the ease with which such warrants have historically been obtained, the administration's actions were not just constitutionally dubious but also inexplicable.

So it is instructive to examine how the ensuing media battle quickly transformed the story into just another partisan standoff. Conservative commentators attacked the Times's editors for publishing the article—despite allegedly having promised to kill it—after they realized they were about to be scooped by Risen's forthcoming book, as though that charge somehow negated the paper's findings. The Fox News Channel's Bill O'Reilly referred to the Times as "suspect number one," while a guest, conservative pundette Michelle Malkin, referred to the NSA story as "just the latest in a pattern of news articles and opinion and analysis [in the Times] that has undermined the Bush war on terror since September 12, 2001." The great constitutional scholar Rush Limbaugh informed his millions



Schechter defines this 'mediaocracy' as 'a growing symbiotic relationship between increasingly interlocking media elites and their political counterparts ... a political system tethered to a media system.'

of listeners that the wiretaps were legal. The Wall Street Journal editorial page, National Review, and The Weekly Standard all rallied to the White House's defense.

This conservative counterattack succeeded in changing the terms of debate. No longer was it about the original—and very real—issue of whether the administration should have obeyed the law.

Rather, it was about the phony issue of whether the government should be allowed to spy on followers of Osama bin Laden, a cynical argument based on the false notion that the law somehow prevented such spying. Not surprisingly, by mid-January a Fox News poll showed that, by a 58 percent to 36 percent margin, respondents favored warrantless domestic wiretapping of "suspected terrorists."

Dissecting War Coverage

It is this toxic media environment—in which nothing, not even illegal wiretapping, is immune from being reduced to mere politics as usual—that is the subject of Danny Schechter's book "The Death of Media: And the Fight to Save Democracy," a small, elegantly packaged call for reform of what he has dubbed the "mediaocracy." Schechter defines this "mediaocracy" as "a growing symbiotic relationship between increasingly interlocking media elites and their political counterparts ... a political system tethered to a media system." This book stands as a persuasive indictment of those intertwined systems.

Don't be put off by the back-cover blurb from far-left media critic Noam Chomsky. Although Schechter and Chomsky may share some political sympathies, Schechter understands the media as an insider. A counterculture media pioneer in the 1970's, when he was the "News Dissector" at Boston's WBCN Radio (then an independent "underground" station, now part of the CBS empire), Schechter is an award-winning television producer (his stops include ABC's "20/20") and a documentary filmmaker on topics ranging from international human rights to the

melt-down in Florida following the 2000 presidential election. (Disclosure: I'm among his talking heads in the Florida film, "Counting on Democracy.") In recent years he has worked as the executive editor of MediaChannel.org, a global, nonprofit media-watch site, and he writes a widely read Weblog at www.NewsDissector.org.

The hyperkinetic Schechter has been especially busy since the fall of 2002, when the Bush administration began preparing the nation—and the news media—for the war in Iraq. His voluminous blogging about the war was turned into a book, "Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception: How the Media Failed to Cover the War on Iraq," published by Prometheus in 2003.

His excellent 2004 film on how the media rolled over for the White House, "WMD: Weapons of Mass Deception," has now been packaged as a DVD with a companion book, "When News Lies: Media Complicity and the Iraq War," published by SelectBooks in 2006.

There is quite a bit of overlap among Schechter's various projects, but perhaps each will find its audience. What Schechter has to say is important, and it needs to be heard.

Of course, media angst over war coverage is now widespread. Critics such as Michael Massing, in *The New York Review of Books*, have painstakingly documented how the elite media—and especially *The New York Times* and its then-reporter Judith Miller—failed to exercise the normal degree of journalistic skepticism about administration claims that Saddam Hussein's regime possessed weapons of mass destruction and was in league with al-Qaeda. Few, however, have managed to connect the dots the way Schechter has.

As Schechter observes, the cheerleading coverage of the war, especially on television, played out at a moment when the major corporations that own much of our media were seeking billions of dollars in deregulatory good-

ies from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). That the FCC was then headed by Michael Powell, the son of President Bush's first secretary of state, Colin Powell, only serves to underscore this grotesque conflict of interests. And though Congress and the courts ultimately revolted against Michael Powell's proposed giveaway, the corporations were not left empty-handed. General Electric, the owner of NBC, which offered perhaps the most flag-waving war coverage among the Big Three networks, later received a \$600

... the cheerleading coverage of the war, especially on television, played out at a moment when the major corporations that own much of our media were seeking billions of dollars in deregulatory goodies from the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

million federal contract to take part in the reconstruction of Iraq.

In "The Death of Media," Schechter outlines what he calls a "Media and Democracy Act," which is just one in a series of reform plans advanced in recent years by various progressives, both foreign and domestic. Among his ideas:

- Using antitrust laws to break up the media monopolies;
- Devising a revenue stream for public broadcasting and independent producers, perhaps with a tax on advertising;
- Updating and reinstating the Fairness Doctrine for broadcasters;
- Advancing a hodgepodge of public-interest measures, from free wireless Internet access to media-literacy education.

It might be unimaginable that any of these steps would be taken in the current political climate, especially given the stake the "mediaocracy" has in making sure they fail. They are, nevertheless, commonsensical proposals to cut the media giants down to size and to provide some resources for alternative voices.

"The oligarchy doesn't need an educated public. And maybe the nation does prefer tyranny. I think that's what worries me," the late Hunter S. Thompson once said. Schechter reproduces that quote in "When News Lies," but he hardly shares Thompson's pessimism. Indeed, Schechter is enthusiastic about new developments such as blogging and citizen journalism, which empower activists and ordinary people to talk back to the established media.

Sadly, this might be the flaw in Schechter's vision—the notion that, somehow, the truth will emerge from a cacophony of voices. To his credit, Schechter has retained his faith in the ability of truth to defeat falsehood in a "free and open en-

counter," as Milton would have it, or in Holmes's marketplace of ideas. But I suspect that if Richard Nixon had been able to tap into a network of media sycophants the way George W. Bush can, he would have weaseled out of Watergate with ease, justifying the break-in on national-security grounds and letting the Rush Limbaughs and Sean Hannitys of his day do the heavy lifting for him. I fear that Thompson, ever the realist, might have gotten it right.

But still, we have to try, don't we? In "The Death of Media," Schechter asks, "How can we convert our media system into a diverse platform for more diverse expression and informed debate? How can we work to insure that media serves democracy?"

This book—as well as Schechter's other books, films and blog—is a good place to start. ■

Dan Kennedy is a visiting assistant professor at Northeastern University's School of Journalism and the author of the Weblog, Media Nation, at <http://medianation.blogspot.com>

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A Recurring Image in Art: The Newspaper

‘Though there is little shared cultural ground for these artists, newspapers have become a shared tool of storytelling across countries and eras.’

Press Gallery: The Newspaper in Modern and Postmodern Art

Shaun O’L. Higgins and Colleen Striegel

New Media Ventures, Inc. 205 Pages. \$75.

By Maria Henson

While those of us who make our living at newspapers endured pronouncements of our industry’s impending demise, last year someone in Paris was celebrating. The World Association of Newspapers marked the 400th anniversary of the birth of printed newspapers, crediting Johann Carolus with publishing “Relation” in Strasbourg in 1605. And two writers, Shaun O’L. Higgins and Colleen Striegel, went even further, declaring that “the worldwide influence of newspapers is alive and thriving in the postmodern information age.”

All of us could use a bit of encouraging news about newspapering. Whether Higgins and Striegel overstate the case

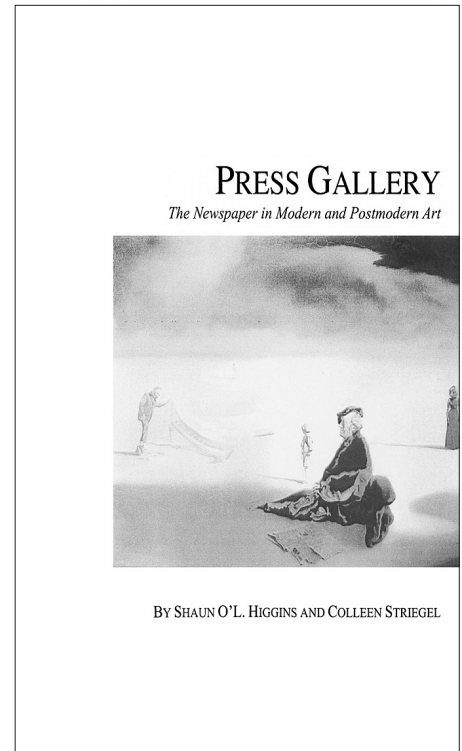
for newspapers is debatable given the disheartening scrutiny of Wall Street, but this matters little as we let them guide us through their volume of more than 140 full-color reproductions of artworks reflecting the role of newspapers in art and society. “Press Gallery: The Newspaper in Modern and Postmodern Art” remind us that what many of us do for a living continues to inspire artists to paint, to comment, to build and to assemble, often with scraps of news clippings, metal and dirt on canvas, and occasionally a crowd.

The authors concentrate on roughly the past 120 years, and for the most part they allow the art to tell the story. In an oversized book of 205 pages, they limit the narrative to 44, in which they tell us such things as how early on artists used newspapers mainly as props in their creations. Think of the fashionable paintings of crowds in cafés, where it’s easy to spot a newspaper or two. The French Impressionists in the late 19th century shifted the focus to the act of reading. The content of the newspaper appeared to be of scant concern to those masters of light, though their use of newspapers in art never went away entirely. In time, works of art featuring newspapers evolved to become purveyors of political commentary.

A 1960 painting, “Woman With Newspaper” by American artist Richard Diebenkorn, is reminiscent of the early Impressionists’ work. The woman sits with a café-au-lait-sized cup of coffee in her right hand, her left hand firmly on the chair’s armrest. The newspaper is draped over her lap, and the woman is completely engaged by it. The headlines are big but, for us, illegible. The image celebrates the reader’s solitary mo-



“Woman With Newspaper” (1960), by Richard Diebenkorn, oil on canvas, 48 x 34 inches. Used with permission of The Estate of Richard Diebenkorn. *Photo: The Estate of Richard Diebenkorn.*



ments with the paper first thing in the morning, the ritual lift-off considered endangered in our time.

A mixed-media piece, created in 1933, struck me as a fitting monument to life in today’s “information age.” Man Ray placed a bronze disembodied head in a wooden box and packed it with wadded-up newspapers. “Autoportrait” shows the head “not so much filled with, as buried in, ideas from the press,” write Higgins and Striegel. Surf the Web long enough, read all of the publications piled on your desk *and* the newspapers’ print and Web editions, and the feeling Ray’s piece evokes will be familiar.

Painted words led to pasted words and, beginning in the early 1900’s, Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso—a loyal newspaper reader—started the art of collage, cutting bits of newspapers and pasting them on canvas. Art assumed an edge: Picasso’s “Guernica” all

but screams war is hell on earth. “The greater a movement’s concern with social and political issues,” Higgins and Striegel remind us, “the more likely it was to use newspaper clippings, headlines and imagery in its art.”

There is in this book a selection of art that displays what Russian artist Alexandr Rodchenko calls “printed matter and revolution.” Artists employ the newspaper as a way to comment on Hiroshima, glasnost, the kidnapping of Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades, and the attack on the World Trade Center. A scrap of tribal newspaper from the Spokane Tribe of Indians, along with a clip from the Congressional Record, finds its way into a piece called “Buffalo Bull’s Magic Tracks Imprint the Earth,” by George Flett.

Pop Art is an essential window through which to explore newspaper’s role in art. And as they do, the authors present sweeping statements about how Pop Art established newspapers “as *the* symbol for mass media in contempo-



“Newspaper Totes,” by Maria Capotorto, laminated, recycled newspaper and double-stitched seams with ball chain handle. Small: 8 x 8 x 4 inches. Large: 11 x 12 1/2 x 4 inches. *Photo: Hamilton Film and Photography.*

rary art.” Andy Warhol was its showiest practitioner; his series of “Daily News” paintings elevated the tabloids. “Eddie Fisher Breaks Down” brings those of us from a certain generation right back into the grocery store line, circa 1962.

What appeals most about the message of this book is that no rules exist for how artists use newspapers in art. Though there is little shared cultural ground for these artists, newspapers

have become a shared tool of storytelling across countries and eras. I see Kenneth Grant’s young couple in “Looking For Rooms to Let” in an unnamed city and immediately I am transported to South Congress Avenue in Austin, Texas, the famed haunt of slackers who wouldn’t have any luck these days finding a cheap apartment. On a different page, the purses made of laminated recycled newspapers by Maria Capotorto would fit right in on that avenue.

Higgins, a past president of the International Newspaper Marketing Association, and Striegel, who majored in fine arts, have a message to pass along: Newspapers have been a powerful stimulus for artists and still are. That seems small comfort in our times, but I’ll take it. ■

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“Looking for Rooms to Let” (2003), by Kenneth Grant, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches. *Photo: Courtesy of the artist.*

The Coverage of Soviet Dissidents by Western Journalists

KGB memos about Andrei Sakharov reveal the government's increasing fear of him as his ideas received press attention in the West.

The KGB File of Andrei Sakharov

Edited by Joshua Rubenstein and Alexander Gribanov
Yale University Press. 448 Pages. \$45.

By Murray Seeger

During the decades of covering the Communist states of Europe, foreign correspondents were challenged to draw conclusions, make educated guesses, and deliver informed conjectures on the basis of modest hard evidence.

If correspondents in Washington deliver a story on 75 percent solid information and 25 percent on lesser evidence, that's normal. But writing from Moscow, Bucharest, Prague or Sofia in the bad old days a reporter was fortunate if he, or she, could show 50 percent hard information. Budapest and Warsaw were easier because of the different nature of the ruling parties there; and East Germany was unique because West Germans had sources that penetrated the wall.

This is why the newly published book, "The KGB File of Andrei Sakharov," is so important. Here is hard information from the inner machinations of the Communist Party of the old Soviet Union that answers questions for those of us who stared at the Kremlin and party headquarters and wondered, "What is really going on in there?" Published by the Yale University Press as part of the invaluable series "Annals of Communism," this book shows how the activities of the mild-mannered, brilliant physicist Andrei Sakharov preoccupied the ruling Communist Party politburo for more than two decades until his death in 1989.

The tension between the scientist and official hero and the ruling clique played out offstage until late 1972, when Sakharov was interviewed for the first time by a Western journalist, Jay Axelbank of Newsweek. From then

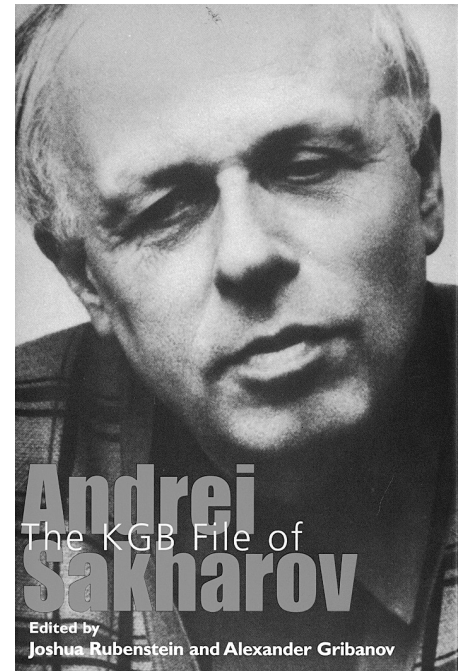
until his death, Sakharov intensified his campaign to advance the cause of human rights for all citizens of the Soviet Union, generating international support and a substantial internal following until the old system collapsed and Mikhail Gorbachev took the party leadership. Sakharov was elected to the first parliament of the post-Communist era and became the most important political figure in the country; he was drafting a new constitution for Russia when his exhausted heart collapsed at age 68.

His story percolated so many years that only the Kremlin junkies fully appreciate his accomplishment. He has been compared to many historic figures, but my favorite association is with Nelson Mandela, the founder of the modern South Africa. Like Mandela, Sakharov was able to sublimate the bitterness he must have felt toward the cruel and stupid leaders who made his life miserable, destroying his health but never quashing his spirit.

Sakharov's Situation

This book is not a spy story. There are no revelations on how the KGB listened to everyone's telephone conversations, followed, photographed and harassed foreigners and domestic troublemakers, potential and real. Such operational records of the secret police were presumably destroyed, leaving this record of dry, haunted, bureaucratic memoranda from the KGB chiefs to the Central Committee, Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and its politburo.

One assumption most accepted by correspondents was that the KGB could



do pretty much what it wanted with the targets of its interest, especially after 20 years of watching and waiting. So why didn't they squash the wistful-looking physicist and his strong-willed second wife, Yelena Bonner, a pediatrician? They were perfect candidates for the definition of insanity used by KGB boss Yuri Andropov of individuals acting outside the norms of Soviet citizenship.

The answer is clear: The political leaders of that era, led by Leonid Brezhnev, were determined to carry forward their policy of detente, relaxed tension, with the Western powers. They knew from the day Sakharov issued his first public appeal in 1968 in The New York Times that he was a special case. Moscow in the 1970's was so anxious to gain economic assistance and cooperation from the West that the top leaders had

to hold the goons on their leashes.

Detente relaxed some controls over the foreign press, especially the Americans, so that our reporting about Sakharov's work provided a shield for him. The police smothered him with surveillance and harassed him and his wife, but they had to keep him alive. And they had to keep him sealed up inside the country, because if he were allowed to travel or emigrate, he would have attracted an international following antithetical to the Kremlin.

His case was different from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the remarkable novelist who was forced into exile in 1974 when the KGB thought it had stamped out the nascent democratic underground. The police considered the two men to be collaborators, but they were different personalities; the writer was self-centered and a Slavic nationalist and religious mystic. He disappeared into Vermont and later returned home and faded from public view. Sakharov was a humanist concerned with all of Communism's victims.

Reporting on Dissidents

Correspondents could only guess how deeply these courageous men and their small circle of allies annoyed the Kremlin. We differed on how much attention to pay to the disparate dissident groups that had appeared for the first time in modern Soviet history, although there was a consensus that it was wrong to devote too much time to reporting their activities. In resignation that there were limits to our reporting on the dissidents, one colleague observed, "It is their country." The dissidents hardly constituted a political "opposition." The groups were not well organized, and there were few individuals involved. They were isolated across the vast land. Still, the fact was that brave men and women, young and old, struggling at great risk against the suffocating controls of the monolithic Soviet system, was news.

Some reporters held back, citing one notorious example of a dozen radical Jewish youth who drew wide attention by staging a brief demonstration in Red Square. It turned out that two or

three of them were KGB informers, like the many American Communists who worked for the FBI. Henry Shapiro, near retirement after 40 years in Moscow, refused to allow his United Press International (UPI) correspondents to compete with reporters from The Associated Press (AP) and Reuters in covering the dissidents. Stories on this topic were filed only on orders from UPI's New York office until Shapiro retired in 1973. On the other extreme, David Bonavia, a brilliant correspondent for The Times of London when it was one of the world's most influential newspapers, virtually adopted Pyotr Yakir, a fat, alcoholic dissident who generated genuine sympathy since he spent his youth in a prison camp after his father, a famous general, was executed by Stalin. Yakir spent long days in Bonavia's apartment, eating his food and drinking his vodka, until he was arrested with an ally, Viktor Krasin, in 1972. Bonavia was expelled in early 1972.

Eighteen months later, Yakir and Krasin appeared at a KGB press conference to denounce their previous activities, suggesting correspondents should be wary of so-called "dissidents." Yakir urged Sakharov to halt his political work that only generated "propaganda against our homeland." The hand-typed, carbon-copied "A Chronicle of Current Events" that kept correspondents informed of underground activities was shut down, and several other dissidents were arrested in 1974, and the KGB sensed victory.

Sakharov's Influence

As the KGB swept through the dissi-

dents, Sakharov emerged from the shadows and turned to the foreign press for help. His 1972 interview with Newsweek was followed the next year with a television conversation with Olle Stenholm of Sweden. Soon after, Sakharov reached into the Jewish community to borrow a trilingual interpreter, Kirill Khenkin, so he could meet with a wider selection of correspondents.

As Sakharov generated more support from foreign politicians, scientists and writers and European Communists, the KGB memos took on a more ominous tone. Sakharov was a true hero: a designer of the Soviet hydrogen bomb who turned peacenik; a member of the privileged intelligentsia who sought rights for all victims of Soviet power; a rich man who gave away his fortune and lived on 800 rubles a month from the Academy of Sciences and his wife's pension.

In 1975, Sakharov's international status was elevated when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The KGB considered



Andrei Sakharov and Yelena Bonner, Moscow 1973. Photo by Murray Seeger.

this proof of a massive international conspiracy against the Soviet Union, noting the award was made when Yelena Bonner was traveling in the West for medical treatment and could receive the prize and read Sakharov's acceptance speech. In November 1975, the Soviet police hit the panic button:

"The Committee of State Security [KGB] of the USSR Council of Ministers and the USSR Procurator's Office have reported to the Central Committee of the CPSU about Sakharov's anti-Soviet activities Recently, having embarked on the path of an open struggle against Soviet power, he is divulging state secrets to the enemy that pertain to the most vital defense issues of the country. . . ."

The goons proposed a series of criminal charges to be brought against Sakharov in addition to having him expelled from the Academy of Sciences. He and Bonner should be banished to Sverdlovsk. They reacted again after Sakharov talked with Hedrick Smith of The New York Times and then suggested to George Krimsky, AP bureau

chief, that a bomb attack in a Moscow subway might have been a KGB action. That ended the truce with American journalists; Krimsky was expelled in 1977, the first American kicked out since 1970.

Finally, in 1980, the KGB won its argument that Sakharov was a real danger to party control of the state, weakened now by poor economic performance, the rise of Solidarity in Poland, and war in Afghanistan. The politburo agreed to expel Sakharov and Bonner to Gorky, an industrial city closed to foreigners. Still, the pair was able to get messages to the outside world giving details of the dirty tricks played against them. At the same time, the CPSU was collapsing: Three supreme leaders died in rapid succession, including Yuri Andropov, the architect of the anti-Sakharov campaign.

In 1986, Gorbachev, anxious to gain credibility as a reformer, informed Sakharov and Bonner that they could return to their small apartment on Chkalov Street. The secret police still watched Sakharov as he rose to become the most popular politician in the new Russia.

It is easy to overemphasize the im-

portance of foreign reporting in making a shy physicist into an international hero and major cause for the collapse of Soviet Communism. On other hand, if Sakharov had not used international communications to plead his cause, he most likely would have been locked up in a mental institution and forgotten like many lesser-known dissidents.

Of the several lessons from this history, one should be absorbed by those journalists who portrayed Andropov as a Western-oriented liberal and political reformer. This KGB record proves he was an evil schemer determined to carry on the Communist tradition of destroying the country's most valuable citizens, in this case, one the greatest public figures of the 20th century. ■

Murray Seeger, a 1962 Nieman Fellow, covered Russia and East Europe for the Los Angeles Times for 10 years. He has recently published "Discovering Russia: 200 Years of American Journalism," a study of how Americans formed their opinions about that country.

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Delivering the News in Two Languages

What's happening in several regions of Spain with bilingual journalism offers American editors and publishers a valuable 'case study and a cautionary tale'

By Seth Lewis

Mention bilingual journalism, and Miami or the Tex-Mex border towns come to mind. But journalism's definitive "bilingual belt" is an ocean away in northern Spain, where a ribbon of regional languages has made the area a hotbed for linguistic risk-taking.

Spanish may be the country's official language, but troll the tapas bars and eavesdrop on conversations going on in the regions of Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque country, and other languages

will be heard. Once smothered by former dictator Francisco Franco, the regional languages—Catalan, Galician and Basque—have undergone a rebirth since his death in 1975, claiming greater prominence in schools and society and becoming symbols of the regions' desires for greater autonomy. That nascent nationalism, combined with new translation technologies, has ushered in the beginnings of a bilingual era in the Spanish newspaper industry.

Or so it seems. Doing dual-language

journalism in Spain has never been easier, cheaper or more culturally appropriate—so why does this approach appear to be failing? How is it that Galicia Hoxe, the only all-Galician newspaper in a region of three million Galician speakers, barely musters 4,000 in daily sales? Why, in highly nationalistic Catalonia, has the Catalan-only and publicly financed Avui faltered against the likes of all-Spanish giant La Vanguardia? Why are these larger papers reluctant to adopt more bilingualism?

Those questions are confounding editors and industry experts, and they provide a peek into the bilingual journalism dichotomy unfolding there. Spain is a case study and a cautionary tale—a lesson in bilingual innovation but also a warning that such efforts, however well-intentioned, don't always translate into readership gains. For editors in bilingual regions such as Southern California or Texas, the message might be this: Even as technology and cultural forces pave the way for language-mixing journalism, it might be that readers don't really want their news delivered in this way.

The Spanish Models

Bilingual journalism in Spain is marked by its politics and peculiarity.

The politics are hard to ignore, in part because so much of Spanish news focuses on political posturing and carries a partisan undertone and because the country's minority languages have become synonymous with regional separatist movements. By encouraging, if not enforcing, conformity to the local tongue in everything from street signage to restaurant menus, local governments—particularly those in Catalonia and the Basque country—have turned language into a political tool that emboldens but also isolates their regions.

For some newspapers, this dynamic has made the minority languages hot to the touch, almost radioactive, casting their coverage in a nationalistic glow and alienating more than a few readers who prefer their news straight, undiluted—and, yes, in Spanish.

As for peculiarity, consider the bilingual potpourri that nationalism has spawned:

- At El Periódico de Catalunya, the second-largest newspaper in Barcelona, a team of editor-linguists can, with a few mouse clicks, translate a

completed Spanish page into Catalan in minutes. Add a bit of proofreading and presto! A 96-page edition has been duplicated in just a few hours.

- Across town, in the offices of Metro Catalunya, the staff is constantly mixing the languages, with newsroom discussions in Catalan, some phone interviews in Spanish, then writing in both. The result is a popular free daily with a front page that's part-



Graphic by Seth Lewis.

Catalan, part-Spanish.

- Meanwhile, in Santiago de Compostela, a destination for Catholic pilgrims near the Atlantic coast, Galicia Hoxe churns out 48-page daily editions of Galician news, written in Galician and with a bold Galician spin. In the same newsroom, a different staff is producing different news for the stuffier all-Spanish parent paper, El Correo Gallego.
- Just up the road in La Coruña, the region's leading newspaper, La Voz de Galicia, mixes the languages on its culture pages and, in its metro section, occasionally runs a Galician quote smack in the middle of a Spanish story.

Confused yet? Spain is turning out a head-spinning array of bilingual of-

ferings, most of which fall under three categories:

1. Production bilingualism: The news is produced by one staff and then disseminated in two languages, usually with the help of computer software that nearly seamlessly translates one Romance language to another. Barcelona's El Periódico de Catalunya epitomizes this approach. It publishes identical editions in Spanish and Catalan, with the latter making up more than 40 percent of its press run. "We are a bilingual society," said Joan Busquet, the paper's languages director. "We said to ourselves, 'If someone can buy bread in Spanish or Catalan, why can't they read a newspaper in either language?'"

2. Content bilingualism: In this, the most common form of bilingual journalism in Spain, the newspaper produces a single edition in Spanish, but with a sprinkling of the local language. Take the case of Gara, which mixes Spanish and Basque as it signals the rebirth of a newspaper once shut down by the Spanish government

because of its ties to the Basque terrorist group ETA. Like other bilingual papers, Gara takes an activist approach to pushing the minority language: "Sometimes we'll publish in Spanish to reach more people, or we'll publish in Basque to uphold our obligation to support Basque," Gara editor Josu Juaristi said. Meanwhile, among the less politically motivated, Metro Catalunya, 20 Minutos, and Qué!, three free dailies with a growing share of the commuter market in Barcelona, often present locally produced stories in Catalan right alongside Spanish copy from their Madrid bureaus and wire services.

3. Tailored bilingualism: Other papers try targeted editions—perhaps a four-page weekly section—as a nod to its minority language. At the other extreme

is bilingualism with an attitude. Galicia Hoxe, unlike its all-Spanish parent, El Correo Gallego, unabashedly presents the news through a Galician lens—re-writing wire copy and giving language and culture concerns top billing in coverage. “If we see a report that the youth in Vigo are speaking less Galician, for us that’s a front-page story,” Hoxe deputy editor Xavier Cae said. “For El Correo Gallego, it will be a little note inside.”

What Goes Bilingual?

Such linguistic mixing and matching adds a new layer to editorial decision-making: In what language should a story appear? Most newspapers practicing content bilingualism have a similar standard: The more local an item, the more reason it should appear in the local language. For papers in Galicia, where the once-rural tongue of Galician today has become the language of the elite, that means high-brow sections such as arts and culture appear in Galician.

At La Voz de Galicia, most local stories appear in Spanish, but if a reporter goes to an accident scene, for example, and a witness responds to questions in Galician, the paper will run the quote in Galician—inside an otherwise Spanish story. “The reader understands perfectly, and it’s more realistic,” executive editor Bieito Rubido said.

At Metro Catalunya, where the Barcelona-produced content usually appears in Catalan, language choice is a fluid, day-to-day process. “The reporter will say, ‘Do you want this in Spanish or Catalan?’” Editor Xavier Gual said. “And then we’ll decide based on what else we have that day. We want to provide a good mix of the two.” In seeking an 80-20 Spanish-Catalan ratio, Gual tries to help the many Latin American immigrants assimilate to Catalonia by giving them just a taste of Catalan. “We don’t want to make it hard for the reader,” he said.

And therein lies the rub: Do readers really want this kind of journalism?

Recent evidence is not encouraging.

In Galicia, the all-Spanish El Correo Gallego outsells its all-Galician sister by 10-to-one—and good luck trying to find folks reading Galicia Hoxe over chocolate con churros in local cafés. In Catalonia, a region of nearly seven million Catalan speakers, the Catalan-only Avui barely tops 25,000 in weekday sales—largely because it’s a discred-

in Spain is telling—and holds lessons for the American press. “The absence of [more] bilingualism is significant,” noted Miguel Ángel Jimeno, a journalism professor at the University of Navarre in Pamplona. “Newspaper firms don’t want to lose money, so it seems clear they can’t make money with bilingual editions.”

The American model is one of separation—there are all-English papers and all-Spanish papers, but few hybrids—and the model works by reaching two distinct socio-linguistic markets. By contrast, the Spanish model of mixing languages ... likely would backfire in the United States

ited, government-subsidized organ of nationalism. And while El Periódico de Catalunya is considered a bilingual journalism success story, it gained few new readers when it began publishing in both languages; a third of its Spanish readership merely migrated to the Catalan edition.

Little wonder then that Barcelona’s largest paper, La Vanguardia, hasn’t followed its rival’s dual-edition example, or that La Voz de Galicia, after recently studying El Periódico’s model, has decided against increased bilingualism. La Voz editor Rubido said market research showed demand was insufficient. “Look,” he told me, opening the paper to the obituaries, nearly all written in Spanish. “Here the people have a chance to memorialize their loved one, and in their pain and grief what is the language that comes naturally? Spanish.”

Rubido added: “There’s nothing more democratic than kiosk sales. When thousands of people who don’t know us take this”—he held up a euro coin—“out of their pockets, that’s where we see true demand.”

The American Model

Whether a victim of politics or poor execution, bilingual journalism’s failure

How then to explain the apparent success of bilingual journalism in the United States, where Spanish-language media are mushrooming from California to North Carolina? The answer lies in at least one essential difference. The American model is one of separation—there are all-English papers and all-Spanish papers, but few hybrids—and the model works by reaching two distinct socio-linguistic mar-

kets. By contrast, the Spanish model of mixing languages—suited to a place where most people have two native languages—likely would backfire in the United States, turning off both English and Spanish readers, even in a place as bilingual as El Paso, Texas. “We don’t do Spanish in our main product,” said El Paso Times editor Dionicio “Don” Flores, “because people wouldn’t know that it’s there, and it would appear to be tokenism. And how could we ask Spanish readers to pay the full price for only a handful of articles in Spanish?”

Even if content bilingualism remains relatively unique to northern Spain, editors elsewhere can learn as much from Spaniards’ ingenuity—their translation techniques, their obsession with localizing content—as they can from their inadequacies. Bilingual journalism might yet have its day in Spain and, when it does, there’s certain to be more than one way to write about it. ■

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Nieman Notes

Compiled by Lois Fiore

Old Newspapers Lead Students to New Discoveries

A valuable collection of historic newspapers is used to put ‘journalistic skills to work on news long dead.’

By Doug Cumming

Journalists learn a lot on the job, but one thing they don’t learn is good journalism history. In newsrooms, reporters tend to absorb a local house history, a slapdash script full of legends that instruct and inspire and might even be true. But it’s a narrow, parochial history.

When I worked at the Providence Journal-Bulletin in the 1970’s and ’80’s, I heard folk tales about the noble crankiness of our city editor, Al Johnson, going back four decades. I was intrigued that two of the most skeptical critics of American journalism, A.J. Liebling and Ben Bagdikian, began at the Providence papers. (The Providence Journal, to its credit, produced an impressive official history on its 150th anniversary in 1980.) Later, at The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, I could trace that newspaper’s house history by way of a miniature brass cannon in the lobby. Editors Henry Grady and Ralph McGill each fired that cannon in turn when the Democratic Party retook the White House, first in 1884, then in 1960. Their successor on the editorial page, Cynthia Tucker, aware of the racist background of the era that forged the cannon, declined to keep the tradition in 1992. When Bill Kovach was editor there in the 1980’s, he restored and used the roll-top desk that had been Grady’s and McGill’s. Such is journalism history in the field.

I’m in academia now, where journalism history is more fussy and monkish, resting on agate footnotes and bibliographies. Not many journalism programs require media history for undergraduate majors. Here at Washington & Lee University, for instance, it was not even offered when I joined the department

three years ago. We require ethics and law to round out the other requirements in reporting, writing, editing and production. There is little room for media history, since the bulk of a journalism student’s education must be in other departments, to provide a strong liberal arts grounding. We would prefer that our students learn history in the history department. But if it could be squeezed in, journalism history could inspire and instruct future journalists in more sustaining ways than the parochial history they will pick up around the newsroom.

Learning the social history of news as a practice shines a whole new light on the so-called core values of the profession—objectivity, independence, fairness and all that. Historically viewed, these are not commandments divinely revealed, or platonic forms, but practices that emerge and change opportunistically over time. The study of media history shows a mass market not as inevitable, but an amazing evolution, infinitely rich and random. And the firewall between advertising and newsgathering is seen as the improbable miracle that it is. Or was. This understanding is the essence of a liberal-arts cast of mind, and it should be what we expect of an educated journalist.

Teaching history in a journalism department can have another side benefit, as I learned in designing a course I taught last fall called “Discovering Early American Newspapers.” History, I have found, can be approached as a reporter would stalk a story, a search for revealing documents, tips, evidence and anecdotes. This is the way historians and their graduate students approach

archival material. But it is generally not the way history is taught in college and high school, where students are force-marched through predigested facts and dates.

My university recently received a donation of more than 1,500 old newspapers, mostly 18th and 19th century American papers. The donor, Frederick Farrar, is a 1941 journalism graduate of Washington & Lee who became interested in teaching journalism history at the approach of the bicentennial in 1976. An ad executive at the time, he loved newspapers, old and new, and recognized the magic of using them to spark excitement about American history in high school classrooms. He earned a master’s degree researching that idea and then for 10 years taught advertising and journalism history at Temple University. Farrar’s collection of historic newspapers and periodicals grew ever larger as his shrewdness and luck at collecting became something amazing. He was elected to the American Antiquarian Society, the mother lode of old newspapers in Worcester, Massachusetts, founded by the father of journalism history, Isaiah Thomas, in 1812.

Farrar’s collection itself was nothing to sneeze at. He had European papers as old as 1559 (a German-language account of the death of Henry II of France, not considered a newspaper by most historians because it was not a serialized publication), volumes of British periodicals from the age of Johnson, U.S. newspapers announcing elections of new Presidents from Washington to George W. Bush, and offbeat publications from periods of reform, war and

depression. I wanted to put this donation to good use, so I secured a grant for one of my students to spend last summer getting bibliographic control over this material.¹ Next, I designed a course around the Farrar Collection.²

I was tempted to use a good textbook as a road map for “Discovering Early American Newspapers.” But I opted to keep as close as possible to the pure experience of encountering the hard data, the earth-crusted artifacts of what are called “primary sources.” So our required text was David Copeland’s “Debating the Issues in Colonial Newspapers: Primary Documents on Events

of the Period,” mostly selections from the newspapers themselves. Borrowing ideas from Farrar, I made students hold a press conference playing the role of an editor from history, many of whom were women who took over from their jailed brothers or dead husbands. And I made them pore over the actual papers, strange and beautiful messages with the long “s” (“Yr. humble Fervant”) on gently washed rag paper. This is not just studying history. It’s doing history. And in a way that I hope to continue to develop in future offerings of this course, it puts journalistic skills to work on news long dead, in hopes of bringing

it back to life. ■

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🖥️ ¹The Web site the student put together is <http://journalism.wlu.edu/Farrar/>

²The syllabus is online at <http://journalism.wlu.edu/J295a/J295%20Syllabus.htm>

—1943—

James Daniel died on December 26, 2005. He was 89 years old. According to his daughter Nina, he died peacefully in his sleep after suffering a heart attack at his home in Weston, Connecticut.

Daniel was born in Lexington, North Carolina. After graduating from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he became a reporter at The (Raleigh) News & Observer, where he worked throughout the 1930’s. In the 1940’s he moved to the Washington Daily News, where he served as both reporter and city editor. Daniel later worked as contributing editor for Time magazine and a roving editor for Reader’s Digest in the 1950’s.

When Daniel retired he and his wife, **Ramona Teijeiro Daniel**, moved into an historic home in Weston, Connecticut, which they “painstakingly and lovingly returned to museum-quality grandeur,” according to the local paper. In Weston, Daniel became a well-known town historian and, in the late 1960’s, was elected first selectman. In June of last year, Weston honored Daniel with a reception and plaque in gratitude of “his leadership and foresight in the preservation and protection of Weston’s history,” said the paper. The ceremony took place in Weston’s Meeting Room, which Daniel, dubbed curator, had decorated with authentic colonial period pieces.

“Jim will be missed by the entire town of Weston. Over the years, he

contributed in so many ways to make Weston the wonderful town it is today,” first selectman Woody Bliss said. Bliss then called the Meeting Room “a lasting monument to Jim’s intellect and dedication.”

Daniel is survived by two daughters, four grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. His wife, **Ramona**, died in 2000.

Contributions in Daniel’s name may be made to the Weston EMS, the Weston Historical Society, or Sacred Heart Church in Georgetown, Connecticut.

—1947—

Fletcher P. Martin, the first African American to receive a Nieman Fellowship, died from complications of diabetes on November 27, 2005. He was 89 years old.

A native of McMinnville, Tennessee, Martin graduated from Louisville Municipal College in 1938 and quickly became city editor of the Louisville Leader, a weekly with 20 employees and 22,000-circulation that covered the African-American community. In 1942, he joined the Louisville Defender as a feature writer and continued to cover African-Americans issues.

He spent 22 months in the South Pacific during World War II, earning the titles of first accredited war correspondent from Louisville and first black war correspondent with Douglas

MacArthur’s forces. After covering the war, he returned to the Louisville Defender as the paper’s city editor and advocated for desegregation.

According to his son, after Martin’s Nieman year, and despite his many professional experiences, he was denied a job at The Courier-Journal when an editor feared his staff would quit rather than work with a black reporter. When offered a job with The Washington Post, he declined when he learned of their segregated restrooms and instead returned to the Louisville Defender. He moved to Chicago in 1952 to cover courts and civil rights as the Chicago Sun-Times’s first black reporter. In 1962, Martin became a press attaché for the U.S. Embassy’s former U.S. Information Agency in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Later positions with the agency led him to Kenya and Ghana.

Martin retired to Majorca, part of Spain’s Balearic Islands, for 25 years, then moved to Indianapolis for the last seven years of his life.

Merv Aubespin, a former president of the National Association of Black Journalists, recalled Martin’s leadership in a Courier-Journal obituary: “He was one of the first African Americans to work for a major daily newspaper. He was one of our pioneers who opened the door in the majority media for African Americans.” Said the Sun-Times: “Fletcher Martin introduced Chicago to the Rev. Martin Luther King.” When

Martin left Louisville for Chicago, Mayor Charles Farnsley presented him with the key to the city of Louisville.

According to one of his daughters, the Harvard insignia was displayed at his wake in Indianapolis. Being a Nieman Fellow at Harvard, she said, was Martin's proudest affiliation.

Martin is survived by a son and three daughters.

—1952—

Lawrence Nakatsuka, a former Honolulu Star-Bulletin reporter, died January 1st. He was 85. Nakatsuka was the first Japanese-American Nieman Fellow.

Nakatsuka was born "Kaoru Nakatsuka" in Hanalei, Kauai, Hawaii. After graduating from the Saint Louis School, where he was called "Lawrence," Nakatsuka became the first Japanese American to join the staff of the Honolulu Star-Bulletin and covered Japanese community events and labor issues for the paper. In 1941, he was dispatched to the Japanese consulate to cover the attack on Pearl Harbor, an assignment deemed dangerous for a Japanese American. In 1946, in the job of assistant city editor, he conducted an interview with **Minnie Yamauchi**, who had recently graduated from Columbia University with a master's degree in labor relations. Two years later they were married.

Following his Nieman year, Nakatsuka was appointed press secretary to Governor Samuel Wilder King, and later Governor William Quinn, during Hawaii's statehood admission. In his last column, a 2004 viewpoint column in the Star-Bulletin, he recalled of this time, "There were tens of thousands of Hawaii residents, like myself, who were second-class citizens. Those were the years before statehood, before we became first-class citizens." Quinn appointed him deputy director of the former Department of Social Services, and in 1955 he toured Burma, India, Pakistan and the Philippines for the U.S. Information Agency.

Nakatsuka moved to Washington in 1963 to serve as legislative assistant to Senator Hiram Fong and advanced to become Fong's executive assistant

during the years of the Civil Rights Act, Voting Rights Act, and Immigration Reform Act. He returned to Hawaii as vice president for legislative affairs for the Chamber of Commerce of Hawaii, where he remained until his retirement in 1983.

Nakatsuka received the Asian American Journalists Association's (AAJA) Lifetime Achievement Award in August 2000. He is cited by the AAJA as the first Japanese American in Hawaii to work for an English-language newspaper.

Nakatsuka is survived by three children, a brother, and two sisters.

—1961—

Lewis Nkosi writes: "A book about me, with essays by international scholars and photographs, is just out from Rodopi Publishers (Amsterdam and New York) titled 'Still Beating the Drum: Critical Perspectives on Lewis Nkosi,' edited by Professors Lindy Stiebel and Liz Gunner. I finished my novel 'Mandela's Ego,' which is due to be published in May or June in Cape Town. In March there will be special panels at the ALA [African Languages Association, a U.S.-based Association of African Scholars] annual conference to be held in Accra to celebrate my 70th birthday and literary career."

"Still Beating the Drum" is an attempt to organize and evaluate the work of Nkosi, one of South Africa's most respected writers and critics. Part one consists of papers from scholars around the world currently studying Nkosi's work and writings; part two reprints Nkosi's key articles and some unpublished recent interviews, and part three is a timeline and bibliography of Nkosi's life and work.

—1968—

Edmund B. Lambeth, director of the Center for Religion, the Professions and the Public at the University of Missouri, writes that The Pew Charitable Trust's board of directors renewed its support with a \$1.5 million grant and that the program's academic home will now be the University of Missouri's School of Journalism.

Lambeth also noted that he planned to use the citizen journalism section of the Winter 2005 issue as reading material for his students: "I'd like to use it as required reading in a session of a course on Journalism, Religion and Public Life. We will explore some of the implications of citizen journalism for religion reporting, writing and editing. "As the founder of the Civic Journalism Interest Group within the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, I believe your new issue is especially timely."

Reports on the work of the center and the syllabi of the religion-related journalism courses Lambeth teaches can be found on the Web site <http://rpp.missouri.edu>. Lambeth, 73, who became director of the center in February 2004, will step down from the position in July 2006. A search is underway for a new director.

—1972—

John Carroll has been appointed the first Knight Visiting Lecturer at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. The position is designed for "distinguished journalists who will study, analyze and lead the discussion on the future of journalism in America and around the world," according to the December 2005 announcement of the appointment. The recipient of the lectureship is to spend a year at a major university of their choosing for reflection, research and teaching. The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation is funding the position with a \$200,000 grant.

In the announcement, Carroll was quoted as saying: "My topic is an urgent one: nothing less than the fate of journalism. The economic underpinnings of our craft are eroding. At the same time, the Web is offering rich opportunities for journalism in new forms. And, in the current scramble for market share, the work of the principled journalist is being lost in a din of marketing and propaganda.

"As a matter of public policy, a self-governing nation simply cannot do without real journalism. As a practical matter, we must find ways to make it

pay. These are some of the concerns I intend to explore—urgently and, I hope, realistically—in this new role at Harvard. I couldn't be more grateful for the opportunity.”

Prior to this appointment, Carroll had been editor of the Los Angeles Times. He will be based in the ShoreNSTein Center on the Press, Politics & Public Policy.

—1977—

Hennie van Deventer writes that his wife, **Tokkie**, “is 60 on 15 March. As a special tribute to a special woman, I had a Web site created. The address is www.mieliestronk.com/tokkie60.html. Even if I do not expect that you will understand one written word, I do hope that you will recognize some of the faces! ... My latest project is a so-called ‘photo album’ of our beloved Sabiepark in the South African bush. That will be my book number 11.”

—1980—

Jim Boyd, deputy editorial page editor at the Star Tribune in Minneapolis, Minnesota, received the 2005 Arthur Ross Award for Distinguished Reporting and Analysis on Foreign Affairs, given by The American Academy of Diplomacy, “for critical, perceptive and nonpartisan commentary on the policies of governments and international organizations, reflecting exhaustive research, a willingness to tell truth to power, and a consistent appreciation for the importance of cooperation among nations.”

Here is a brief excerpt from Boyd's acceptance speech:

“... The last three years have been difficult. The pushback for our aggressive views has been intense. Radio talk-show host Hugh Hewitt organized a campaign to get people to drop subscriptions; we lost about 200, and it scared my superiors. Bloggers like Power Line harassed us continuously. A senator who shall go unnamed—hint: he's no fan of Kofi Annan—had breakfast with our publisher and warned him that we were beginning to be associated with the loony left and that I had an angry agenda. Well, you folks are not the

loony left. So thank you for honoring me; it will help.

“I want to assure you that I am not an angry bomb thrower. Most of my writings on foreign affairs involve topics such as: Can the E.U. make the single currency succeed; must NATO go ‘out of area or out of business?’ Should NATO be enlarged? Should we ratify the CWC treaty, the ICC treaty? Whither Russia? And so on. ...

“... I think two factors caused our more aggressive editorializing over the last three or four years. The first is our deeply felt belief in multilateralism. John Cowles Sr., the publisher who started Cowles family ownership of the Star Tribune, was a friend of President Dwight Eisenhower and a passionate believer in the United Nations—as a prophylactic, I'm sure, against a repeat of the carnage of World War II. Cowles pretty much single-handedly pulled Minnesota out of the isolationism of the Charles Lindbergh crowd. So to see all of the multilateral institutions pretty well trashed was offensive.

“Second, I am a Vietnam veteran. I went there as an Army case officer, undercover actually as a Foreign Service Reserve officer attached to Mac/Coords. I worked for a young FSO named Mort Dworken. Last I heard he was political officer at the Court of St. James.

“But the kids I went through basic training with at Fort Lewis were mostly farm kids from around the Northwest. Most went straight from basic to advanced infantry training to Vietnam. About half did not come home. I cannot tell you how deeply I feel a commitment to them and through them to today's young men and women to help ensure that whenever they are put in a combat zone it is because we literally have no other option.

“That's what has motivated my writings. Not partisanship certainly; not a generalized angry outlook, but specific issues about which we—I—feel quite deeply....”

—1984—

Jane Daugherty reports a job change: “I'm happy to report that I have accepted a full-time appointment

as associate professor of journalism at Florida International University (FIU). The School of Journalism and Mass Communication is located on the North Miami Beach Campus on Biscayne Bay. Eight of the school's graduates have won Pulitzers so far, and FIU graduates more bilingual journalists every year than any U.S. university except the University of Texas.

“The decision to leave a great gig at the Palm Beach Post was difficult; for the past year I've been covering public health and emergency responses to things like hurricanes and terrorism. [See her article on page 6.] While there I was fortunate to work on Modern-Day Slavery, a project that won a Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, the Harry Chapin Media Award, and the James K. Batten Public Service Award. But when this offer from FIU came unexpectedly, it was just too good to turn down.

“I've taught a couple of courses at FIU as an adjunct and really admire the new journalism department head, Allan Richards, and the new dean, Lillian Lodge Kopenhaver, who is an expert in constitutional law and First Amendment issues. The school is engaged in an exciting expansion into some specialized coverage areas I care a lot about, including social welfare, public health and aging, so it is a good time to make a move I've thought about for several years.

“The other plus is the North Miami Beach campus is only 60 miles from West Palm Beach, so I'm going to continue living in my 1930 Key West-style cottage near the Intracoastal in a small town just south of West Palm, Lake Worth, which has a lot of diversity and old Florida feel.

“Other news: My daughter Meghan, 18, is a freshman at George Washington University in D.C. and just made the honor roll. My son Ryan, 25, (Nieman kid when he was four) graduated with a major in Spanish from Denison University and, after a stint as a translator for EFE News Service in Miami, has moved to Phoenix, Arizona, where he is using his bilingual skills pursuing a couple of business opportunities. He's planning to return to Spain this summer to teach English.”

—1987—

Doug Cumming writes: “The Nieman class of ’87 has probably been one of the most flocking in the fellowship’s history. We’ve had summer reunions every two years, from North Carolina beaches to British Columbia, roughly based on the model of our one week sharing a villa in Jamaica during the January break of ’87.

“The latest was a bit thin and brief, on account of some health problems. Still, the group gathered for a scrumptious long weekend at the end of July in Lexington, Virginia where my wife, **Libby**, and I were the hosts. [Doug is in his third year as a PhD teaching journalism at Washington & Lee University, and Libby is also on the W&L faculty, in physics.] **Al May**, now an associate professor of media and public affairs at George Washington University, came with his wife, **Carol Darr**; **Linda Wilson** flew in from Washington State with her husband, **Rick Carns**, and **Susan Dentzer**, currently covering the health beat for “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer,” came with her husband, **Chuck Alston**, now a senior vice president with the P.R. firm MS&L in Washington, D.C. It was good food, Blue Ridge music, a float down the James, and golf—a little like old times.”

—1989—

Liu Binyan died on December 5th of colon cancer in a hospital in New Jersey. He was 80. He spent the past 17 years in exile in the United States. Even after he was diagnosed with cancer and given only a short time to live, the Chinese government refused to give him permission to return to China, despite his own efforts and the support of his friends. He had wanted to die in the country he loved.

Liu Binyan’s presence in the class of 1989 had a powerful effect on his classmates. What follows are remembrances from two of his classmates, Constance Casey and Rick Tulskey. And the End Note, which is on page 100, is an essay written by two of Liu Binyan’s colleagues, **Juntao Wang** ’96 and **Xiaoping Chen** ’98.

Constance Casey: “We were honored to have Liu Binyan in our Nieman group. We knew about his distinguished career as a reporter, but I think it was hard for us—for me, anyway—to completely take in how eventful and difficult his life had been. On thing we did know, and could clearly see, was that he adored his wife, **Zhu Hong**, and that they were an inspiring, mutually supportive couple.

“I remember from our time together not only his dignity but also his bemused smile. He and I were sitting together in a seminar about surveillance and invasion of privacy. (That was 1988, and our speaker was sounding the alarm even then.) I asked him at the break what the Chinese word for ‘privacy’ was.

“He smiled and said, ‘There is no word in Chinese for privacy.’

“I think from his perspective, living in China through the most trying of times, he may have seen us, the American Niemans, as innocents. But he was never patronizing or dismissive or superior. When he became exiled from his home country after Tiananmen Square, I expected the Chinese government would eventually relent and allow him to be reunited with his children, especially when he became gravely ill. How innocent of me to think that.”

Rick Tulskey: “The amazing thing about our Nieman experience was spending a year with journalistic heroes—**Joe Thloloe**, who had experienced police breaking into his house to arrest him in South Africa for practicing journalism; **Julio Godoy**, whose newspaper had been blown up over crusading journalism in Guatemala; **Moeletsi Mbeki**, whose entire family had been dedicated to achieving justice in South Africa, and **Bill Kovach**, whose dedication to aggressive and courageous journalism cost him his editorship in Atlanta. But their experiences were overshadowed, as amazing as that seems, by the courage and dedication to the truth demonstrated by Liu Binyan, a man of quiet determination to journalism as a means to expose injustice and inform the public. Amazingly, Binyan remained dedicated to the truth despite decades of personal hardship as a result of his convictions.

“It would be impossible to overstate the impact of spending a year in that environment. And for that reason, I will be forever indebted to Liu Binyan.”

Constance Casey has retired after five years as a gardener with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation. “It has been fun,” she says. “I’m keeping a hand in urban gardening by volunteering one day a week. But it is time to return to the world of words. I’ve started writing a column on gardening for Slate, the online magazine.”

—1991—

Rui Araujo writes to say that he has a new job: “I became the ombudsman of the Portuguese daily newspaper *Público* as of January 1, 2006. I had lots of doubts, but Bill Kovach [former Nieman Curator] and two other journalist friends (Miguel Sousa Tavares and José Manuel Barata-Feyo) convinced me to take the job. It is another challenge in my career. The job seems to me to be a kind of Nieman year—thinking journalism instead of reporting.

“Next May, a book will be published (*Oficina do Livro*, Lisbon) with some of the best reports ever done in Portugal since the advent of democracy (April 25, 1974). I am one of the chosen reporters. My specific contribution is a story I did for monthly newsmagazine *Grande Reportagem*, almost three years ago. I tell my lonely and silent ‘adventures,’ as the second in command of the fishing boat *Intrujão*, south of Cape Verde. It is a story of men and sharks.

“I am also finishing my third thriller. It is a story based on real facts: There are two homicide brigade cops dealing with a crime connected—this time—with cocaine.”

—1992—

Seth Efron writes: “On February 1, 2006, I left my job as executive editor of State Government Radio in Raleigh, North Carolina. During 18 months with the start-up, I launched its Web site, a daily newsletter, and a daily broadcast that covered North Carolina state government and politics, local government,

economic development, and education. I achieved all I think I could and have given the operation a reporting and journalistic foundation.

"I did not stay unemployed for long. Starting on March 1, I became the deputy press secretary to North Carolina Governor Mike Easley. Easley, a Democrat, is serving his second four-year term. I'll be helping oversee all communications with the news media and work with the governor on policy development and his efforts to communicate policy initiatives."

—1994—

Jerry Kammer, of Copley News Service, won a George Polk Award for political reporting for uncovering the scandal of U.S. Representative Randy Cunningham, a Southern California Republican who admitted accepting \$2.4 million in bribes from defense contractors. Kammer won the award with Dean Calbreath, of The San Diego Union-Tribune, and Marcus Stern, also of Copley News Service. The awards, given by Long Island University to memorialize a CBS correspondent killed while covering the Greek civil war in 1948, will be presented at a ceremony in New York in April.

—1999—

Susan Reed has received an Alicia Patterson Foundation grant, one of eight journalists selected to spend time traveling, researching and writing articles on a particular project. Reed will investigate why significant numbers of women and minorities have failed to rise to the highest levels of the richer corporations.

—2000—

Mary Kay Magistad has been awarded part of a duPont-Columbia silver baton for "The Global Race for Stem Cell Therapies," a series about stem cell research in the United States, Britain, Israel and China. The series was broadcast on "The World," a nationally syndicated news program. The award went to the three reporters on the se-

ries, plus the editor and the executive producer. Magistad is the Beijing-based Northeast Asia correspondent for "The World," and reported the China-based segment of the series. The program is a coproduction of Public Radio International, BBC World Service, and WGBH Radio Boston. It is the only American radio program focusing exclusively on global issues, and it was chosen from over 620 radio and television news entries. For access to the series, go to www.theworld.org and follow the link to the series.

David Molpus is now executive editor for WVIZ/PBS and 90.3 WCPN ideastream, a multiple-media public service organization in Ohio. In making the announcement, Kit Jensen, COO of ideastream, said "David's skills, abilities and experience provide editorial direction and leadership that is essential to the continued development of our journalism as we leverage technology to provide greater service." Molpus remarked that ideastream is "a vibrant organization with the ambitious goal of becoming an indispensable resource for northeastern Ohio. I am especially impressed with the vision for building community-based journalism and the desire to expand partnerships with other service-oriented organizations."

Molpus had worked at NPR for 28 years as senior correspondent, newscaster and producer. He cohosted NPR's "All Things Considered" Weekend Edition for two years and often was a substitute host on "Morning Edition" and "Weekend Edition Sunday." On leaving NPR, he was the regional "All Things Considered" host at Minnesota Public Radio and was news director for WMRA, the NPR station serving Charlottesville and the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.

Molpus was NPR's first national correspondent to cover the American South, the first defense correspondent, and the first workplace correspondent. He has won a number of awards, including a National Headliner Award for a report on the impact of gambling on Atlantic City, New Jersey, and a Clarion Award for reports on catfish workers in the Mississippi Delta.

Thrity Umrigar has a new novel out, "The Space Between Us," published by HarperCollins:

"There are two major female characters in 'The Space Between Us'—Sera Dubash, the upper middle-class Bombayite, and Bhima, the servant who has worked in the Dubash household for many years. The character of Bhima is based on a real person. She worked in the house I grew up in Bombay, a shadow flitting around our middle-class house, her thin brown hands cleaning furniture she was not allowed to sit on, cooking food she was not allowed to share at the family dining table.

"But despite these obvious divisions, there was another reality, one that I also noticed when I was a child: I saw servants trusting their meager savings to their mistresses as a way of protecting their money from the grasping hands of drunken husbands; I saw Bhima and the females in my household working peaceably together in the kitchen in a kind of domestic shorthand.

"I have always been fascinated by this intersection of gender and class—how the lives of women from the working class and the middle-class seemed at once so connected and so removed from each other.

"It is a theme that has interested me—haunted me, even—for as long as I can remember. One of the reasons I have always loved Bombay is because it is a city riddled with contradictions and paradox. In an apartment in a small corner of the city, I grew up experiencing a microcosm of this larger paradox—this strange tug-of-war between intimacy and unfamiliarity, between awareness and blindness.

"'The Space Between Us' is an attempt to understand, through the illuminating searchlight of fiction, paradoxes that I could never make sense of in real life. I began the novel in the spring of 2003. But, in fact, I have been writing this book forever."

Umrigar has been a journalist for 17 years, and has written for The Washington Post, The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer, and other national newspapers. She also regularly writes for The Boston Globe's book pages. Umrigar teaches creative writing and journalism at Case

Western Reserve University. She is also the author of the novel “Bombay Time” and the memoir “First Darling of the Morning: Selected Memories of an Indian Childhood.”

—2003—

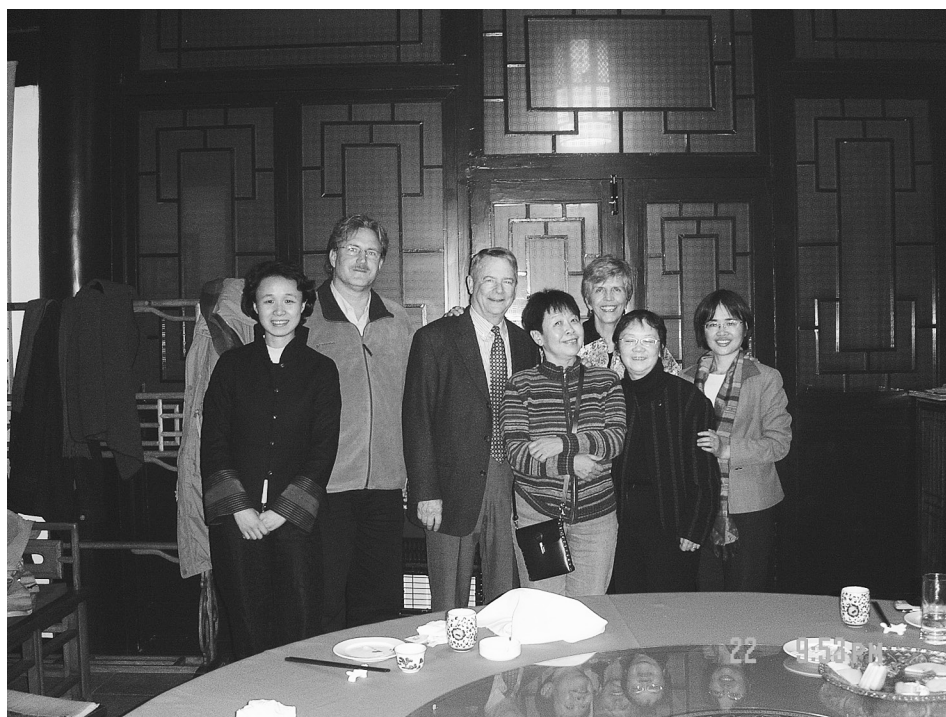
Ann Simmons will be moving to New Orleans for the Los Angeles Times to cover the many issues involved in the rebuilding of that city after Hurricane Katrina. She’ll begin the assignment in March and expects to be there for about a year. She has been the Times’s roving state reporter since 2004 and has been with the paper since 1997.

She writes, “I spent several weeks in the region following hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the experience was most exhilarating. The rebuilding of New Orleans is an important and compelling story, and I am thrilled to have the opportunity to pursue it. Having spent a lot of my career as a foreign correspondent—most recently as the bureau chief for the L.A. Times in Nairobi and Johannesburg—I am looking forward to getting back into the field and doing more on-the-ground people reporting and less desk reporting. I also see this as a great opportunity to explore yet another new culture and learn yet another new ‘foreign’ language.”

—2004—

Carol Bradley, class scribe, submitted the following notes:

Thierry Cruvellier, after having, in his own words, “embarrassed himself during his whole Nieman year for abusively claiming he had come to Lippmann House to write,” has “finally” completed his book on the genocide trials held before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). The ICTR was set up in 1994 by the United Nations and located in Arusha, Tanzania, where Thierry was the only international journalist to cover it permanently from 1997 to 2002. Under its French title “Le Tribunal des Vaincus—Un Nuremberg pour le Rwanda?” the book will be published in April by the publishing house Calmann Lévy. Through the stories of



While visiting Shanghai to be with family for the holidays, Bob and Nancy Giles went to Beijing for an evening’s gathering of Nieman Fellows. The group had a lively discussion over a traditional Chinese dinner at the Gui Gong Fu Restaurant, which is housed in an ancient building known as the house of the brother of the famous Ci Xi Queen in the Qing Dynasty. In the photo from the left are **Jingcao Hu** ’01; **Philip Cunningham** ’98; **Bob Giles** ’66; **Dai Qing** ’92; **Nancy Giles**; **Ying Chan** ’96, and **Yuan Feng** ’02.

some of the main trials and behind-the-scenes intriguing judicial plots, the book gradually opens to a somewhat disturbing analysis on how justice is rendered in an international setting. It also attempts to define how the Rwanda Tribunal has been different from any other international criminal court. It is the first independent account on the workings of this international tribunal and offers a timely point of reference while the International Criminal Court, the first permanent world criminal court, is about to open its first cases.

Don Schanche, after more than 20 cumulative years with Knight Ridder, left The Macon (Ga.) Telegraph in December to take a job as the day supervisor in AP’s Atlanta Bureau. Don reports that “the job is stimulating and the colleagues are first-rate. The hours—7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.—are a shock to the system after years of working a morning newspaper schedule (beginning each workday somewhere in the neighbor-

hood of 10 a.m.). But it’s kind of fun to see the sunrise.” AP’s office is on the 24th floor of the Centennial Tower, “so the sunrise reveals a grand view every morning,” according to Don.

David Stern is currently working as the Caucasus trainer/editor for the Institute for War & Peace Reporting (IWPR), a nonprofit organization that concentrates on reporting in conflict zones. IWPR started out in the former Yugoslavia and now runs projects in Afghanistan, Central Asia, Africa, Iraq and the Balkans war crimes tribunal in The Hague. The philosophy behind the organization is simple. Its founders believe that objective, responsible local journalism, which adheres to international standards and reflects all sides of a dispute, can play a part in bringing these conflicts to an end or preventing other conflagrations from breaking out. As part of his job, David helps teach journalists in Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia the basics of good journalism

and helps edit their articles at IWPR's online publication (www.iwpr.net). He can be reached at loydstern@hotmail.com or dlstern@caucasus.net.

—2006—

Jon Palfreman, an independent documentary film producer, had one of his productions, "Light Speed," win the 2005 American Institute of Physics Science Writing Award. "Light Speed" aired in WNET's Innovation series in 2004. The program, Palfreman says, "tells the

story of how fiber optic technology—the technology that makes the Internet possible—was developed." The award ceremony will be held in May.

A veteran of both U.K. and U.S. television, Palfreman has made over 40 BBC and PBS one-hour documentaries including the Peabody Award-winning series "The Machine That Changed the World," the Emmy Award-winning NOVA "Siamese Twins," and the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Silver Baton-winner "Harvest of Fear." Palfreman has received many awards

honoring the quality and accuracy of his journalism. He is the only television producer ever to receive the prestigious Victor Cohn Prize for Excellence in Medical Writing and is three-time winner of the American Association for the Advancement of Science science writing prize, three-time winner of the National Association of Science Writers "Science-in-Society" Journalism Award, and a winner of the Writers Guild Award for best script. Palfreman has written two books and is an adjunct professor at Tufts University. ■

Nieman Reports Heads to Journalism Classrooms

In our new outreach to journalism professors and students, Nieman Reports initiated an effort to help teachers use the content of our magazine in their classrooms. To do this, we invited friends of Nieman Reports—those who contribute to its pages and those who read it—who are faculty members at college departments and graduate schools of journalism to serve as "emissaries" for Nieman Reports.

Each emissary received a welcome packet of nine magazines—two years of quarterly issues plus our special science issue—to set up a mini-library in their office, thus creating an accessible place for Nieman Reports to be found and used by other faculty and students. A three-ring binder of Table of Contents pages was also sent, and this will be updated with each issue we publish and then sent as an addition to this faculty-corridor library. Emissaries will also become a member of an e-mail list that will be notified of any online publications of sections of Nieman Reports.

We are heartened by the response this idea has received. We

have 14 emissaries, six of whom are Nieman Fellows. Of course, we would welcome others among you to join us in this effort so that more professors can learn about what appears in Nieman Reports and look for ways to use its content as part of their teaching tools. If you would be willing to become an emissary for Nieman Reports, please contact our editorial assistant, Sarah Hagedorn, at 617-496-2968 or by e-mail at sarah_hagedorn@harvard.edu.

■ —*Melissa Ludtke*

Nieman Reports emissaries and their schools are listed below:

Rosental Calmon Alves, Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, University of Texas at Austin

Sharon Black, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania

Jim Detjen, Knight Center for Environmental Journalism, Michigan State University

John F. Greenman, Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Georgia

Ellen Hume, Center on Media and Society, University of Massachusetts, Boston

Carolyn Johnsen, College of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Joel Kaplan, Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University

Lynda McDonnell, Urban Journalism Workshop, University of St. Thomas

Philip Meyer, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of North Carolina

Gretel Schueller, Department of Journalism, State University of New York-Plattsburgh

Jeff South, School of Mass Communications, Virginia Commonwealth University

Will Sutton, Scripps Howard School of Journalism and Communications, Hampton University

Diane Winston, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California

William Woo, Graduate Journalism Program, Stanford University

The Atlantic Leaves Boston

By Robert Manning

Last December the January-February issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* went to press. It was the last one to be published in Boston of the 1,771 issues of *The Atlantic* published since the magazine was founded 149 years ago over a dinner of Brahmin intellectuals at Boston's Parker House hotel. The magazine has been transported to Washington, D.C. by its new owner, David Bradley, publisher of the National Journal Group of small-circulation but profitable Washington-insider publications.

For all those years *The Atlantic* focused on literature, art, science and politics from its vantage point among some of the world's leading intellectuals, educational, scientific and medical institutions as well as a vibrant community of writers and poets. Now it has moved to a city that may be the seat of global power but is not by any measure the seat of wisdom. I think the move is a bad one for one of America's most distinguished journals.

I know from my own experience as both a Washington correspondent and government official how living and working in the nation's capital blurs one's vision and makes one sometimes oblivious to reality. The reporting from Washington by *The New York Times* on the supposed presence of WMD's in Iraq is only one recent example of how the incestuous Beltway climate can induce severe misjudgment. It is interesting to note that some of the very best reporting and analysis of Washington affairs during the 40's, 50's and 60's came from the late Richard Rovere in *The New Yorker*. He lived and wrote in a small town on the Hudson and made only occasional visits to D.C.

Under Bradley's ownership, *The Atlantic* has taken on new vitality, publishing many blockbuster articles, such as William Langewiesche's play-by-play series on the 9-11 disaster. Circulation has zoomed from the magazine's historically small numbers to more than 450,000, meaning perhaps 1.5 million readers. So it was doing very well. So why move it into the Beltway bunker of spin and spam? *The Atlantic* has always been privileged to look at the world from its different perch. Why put it in with all those other birds and risk the onrush of Potomac flu?

The answer seems to be the crass one, financial. In the only interview to which I am privy, Bradley suggests that it makes financial sense to bring all his publications under one roof in the Watergate complex. Only a handful of the staff is going to D.C.. Bradley needs to build an entire staff almost from scratch, including a new editor to replace the estimable Cullen Murphy, who is not leaving Boston. The magazine has already relegated literature, one of its four pillars, to a once-a-year ghetto issue devoted to short stories. As one who devoted 16 years of his life to *The Atlantic*, I can only wish it well and pray for its success. It may well survive, even prosper. I hope so. But it won't be the same magazine that has served Americans with intelligence, prescience and honor for 149 years. ■

*Robert Manning, a 1946 Nieman, is a Boston-based editor and writer who was editor in chief of *The Atlantic* from 1966 to 1980.*

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Journalist Liu Binyan: China's Conscience

By Juntao Wang and Xiaoping Chen

On December 5, 2005, the news that 80-year-old Liu Binyan, a 1989 Nieman Fellow, had passed away saddened Chinese, both in China and abroad. Numerous condolence letters and memorial articles praising Liu as "China's conscience" were sent to his family and the news media.

Liu Binyan made unparalleled contributions to the profession of journalism on mainland China. As a reporter for China Youth Daily, in 1956 he penned a number of articles insisting that the role of the journalist was to serve as a watchdog of society. Among his many articles, "The Inside Story of Our Newspaper" denounced press censorship, and "On the Bridge Construction Site" exposed the dark side of life under the Communist regime.

By 1957 Liu was labeled a "rightist" and was expelled from the Communist Party. It took 20 years before he was rehabilitated. He later recalled, "As a rightist, at the bottom of society, I learned about the true reality of Communist life."

After his "rightist" label was removed, in 1985 Liu became a reporter for the People's Daily, the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party. Liu's articles once again targeted social wrongs, corruption and oppression. Two of his most famous works are "People or Monsters," which describes a case of rampant corruption in northeast China, and "A Second Kind of Loyalty," suggesting there are higher values than obedience to authority. He also became a vice chairman of the China Writers' Association. His many readers, the ordinary people in China, called him a "qingtian," an historical term referring to someone to whom the people can turn to seek justice. He became a role

model for journalists in reform China, encouraging them to take risks to defend the weak and oppressed.

Because of his significant influence, Liu Binyan once again was targeted by the authorities. In 1987, during the antibourgeois liberalization movement that attacked liberal intellectuals, paramount leader Deng Xiaoping expelled Liu from the party and banned his writings.

In 1988, Liu Binyan won a Nieman Fellowship and traveled to the United States. The next year, 1989, when the Chinese government cracked down on the democracy movement, Liu bravely and openly condemned the slaughter in Beijing. As a result, his name appeared on the Chinese government blacklist, and he was not allowed to return to China.

In exile, Liu Binyan continued his work as a journalist. In 1990, he was elected chairman of the board of the exiled newspaper Press Freedom Herald. From 1992 to 1999, he published a monthly English-language newsletter, China Focus, and from 1993 to 1996 he also published a Chinese-language monthly, The Road. In 2002 he cooperated with other independent writers to establish the Chinese Pen Association, to which he was elected the first president. To the very end of his life, he remained committed to exposing the injustices in Chinese society.

In September 2002, when he was diagnosed with cancer, he hoped to spend his final years in his motherland. However, worried about his great social influence, the Chinese authorities never replied to any of his requests to return home.

On February 27, 2005, hundreds of journalists, writers and friends came from all over the world to attend Liu

Binyan's 80th birthday gathering held in Princeton, New Jersey. As a token of their respect, they constructed a personal homepage, "Liu Binyan," at www.liubinyan.com, and published a collection of articles entitled *Eternal Exiles*. An artist also made a bronze statue in his honor. On December 17, 2005, a memorial service was held in Liu Binyan's memory at Princeton University. A moment of silence was held for this "great citizen of China, distinguished writer, iron-willed journalist, guardian of truth, and indefatigable advocate and friend of the downtrodden and the aggrieved." Among the many eulogies, a young journalist in China said that Liu Binyan had enlightened his entire generation and had encouraged him to become a journalist. Another memorial lamented that Liu Binyan had departed just when the poor and oppressed in China need him the most. Despite the ban on his works, Peking University selected his works as exemplary writings from the last century. Liu Binyan's wife, Zhu Hong, said that Liu Binyan's wishes for his own epitaph were that it would read: "Here lies a Chinese person who did some things that it was right for him to do, and said some things that were right that a person say." She has said that his family members will bring him home. ■

Juntao Wang, a 1996 Nieman Fellow, is a PhD student in political science at Columbia University. Xiaoping Chen, a 1998 Nieman Fellow, is a student in the Doctor of Juridical Science program at the University of Wisconsin Law School.

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WHAT KATRINA REVEALED, WILL JOURNALISTS NOW COVER?

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY