

# NIEMAN REPORTS

THE NIEMAN FOUNDATION AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

Vol. XLVIII No. 1 Spring 1994

FIVE DOLLARS

## ETHICS ON TRIAL

Tabloid Trash and Flash Threaten  
To Corrupt the American Media



A Special Report to the Editors of the Nation's Newspapers

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

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

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AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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CURATOR .....

# *From the Curator*

## New Ethical Questions for a New Age

BY BILL KOVACH

**F**or most of this century the personality of an American newspaper was defined by the owner. The newspaper described its relationship with the community with words like watchdog, mirror, or crusader.

But in response to dramatic shifts in the economic marketplace and the introduction of powerful new technologies these relationships have undergone extraordinary change. Today's newspapers are more likely to describe themselves with terms like "demographically strong," "user-friendly," or "ready for the interactive future."

This new self-definition reflects the fundamental nature of the changes that have inspired them. Economic trends of the last two decades have radically increased the investment required and the potential loss of press owners. At the same time technology has permanently altered the nature of the competition, creating literally hundreds of new outlets for news. This combination of greater economic stakes and accelerated competition puts a wrenching strain on a system shaped by more structured times. Old standards of taste are eaten away as editors feel the pressure from the increased competition to publish or censor.

### Curator's Note

The production of this edition of Nieman Reports and its distribution to all members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors was made possible by a generous grant from The New York Times Foundation.

Many of the traditional conventions of journalism—from the editorial independence of the news room to the value of objective reporting—are open to examination, challenge and debate.

The structural and economic consequences of change are relatively easy to see, if not to measure. But the pressure to change the conventions and values of journalism is not so easily seen. The advantages or cost they carry are even more difficult to measure.

But one thing is clear: Every new definition of how we work and how we commit resources can have important ethical implications. For this reason the Ethics Committee of the American Society of Newspaper Editors thought it important to draw on the experiences of editors and reporters facing the new challenges to measure their dimensions and probe their nature. (Members of the committee are listed on the inside back cover.)

A similar effort undertaken 10 years ago by the ASNE Ethics Committee resulted in the publication of "Drawing the Line." That study attempted to measure the impact of three decades of corporatization of American newspapers, which placed the press firmly in play in Wall Street's marketplace. The ethical implications of those economic trends reflected themselves in the questions posed for editors by the 1984 study. The questions fell in several broad categories: How does a newspaper reconcile its business needs with its financial responsibilities? What are a newspaper's legitimate corporate responsibilities? What are a newspaper's legitimate corporate concerns? Or as A.J. Liebling would ask: Does freedom

of the press belong only to those who own one?

Ten years later it has become clear that the elements of the change at work then have only accelerated and intensified. The questions have become more insistent. As you will see as you read the accounts from reporters and editors around the country in this report, a new set of ethical questions has emerged, a few of which can be roughly summarized as follows:

### 1. Values.

New competitive pressures have created a more democratic marketplace in which sources of information from supermarket tabloids to radio talk shows are equal, producing an increasingly integrated mixture of news and entertainment. Is there a place in this new atmosphere for objective reporting? Do editors have any role as gatekeepers of issues of public taste?

### 2. Community Journalism.

As distant corporate ownership searches for community ties, where do community relations begin to override excellence and integrity?

### 3. Technology.

How do editors protect their reports from copyright infringement, plagiarism during computer data base searches or the alteration of digital photographs?

### 4. Economic Pressures.

Rather than being posed as a question, the challenge to the public interest journalist is best summarized by a statement by John Malone, the telecommunications entrepreneur: "Nobody would invest hundreds of millions of dollars for the public interest. One would be fired if he took that stance."

*continued on page 42*

# Surrender of the Gatekeepers

*Single Greatest Ethical Problem Confronting Editors  
Is Letting Trashy Tabs Set News Agenda*

BY DAVID SHAW

Steve Lovelady, the Managing Editor of The Philadelphia Inquirer, likes to recall the time Harry Ashmore, the legendary, retired Editor of The Arkansas Gazette, stepped up to the podium at an Associated Press Managing Editors convention after having watched the Phil Donahue Show in his hotel room.

As Lovelady tells the story, Ashmore informed the assembled editors, some 600 strong, that Donahue had been interviewing six housewives about the role of oral sex in marriage. "Ladies and gentlemen," Ashmore intoned, "When NBC is beaming this hour-long talk show...about blow jobs...at 9 o'clock in the morning...to 40 million viewers...does it suggest to you that maybe, just perhaps, your newspapers are a little behind the times?"

Good story.

Good question.

On the one hand, newspapers are indeed "behind the times"—especially on matters sexual. That's one reason why, whenever we publish a story that has something to do with sex, we screw it up. It doesn't matter what the story is, Gary Hart and Donna Rice. AIDS. Child-molestation. Bill Clinton and Gennifer Flowers. The Florida rape case in which William Kennedy Smith was ultimately acquitted. Whatever the story, if it involves sex, we stumble and fumble worse than a teenager in the back seat of a car on prom night. Most editors are still white males, raised in a society with a Puritan/Victorian heritage, and they still haven't learned to talk comfortably (or think clearly) where sex is concerned. So, like clumsy, insecure adolescents everywhere, they either say too little (*vide* early AIDS coverage) or too much (*vide* the recent, excruciatingly detailed accounts of Bill Clinton's alleged phi-

landing) or they just say the wrong thing (*vide* The New York Times' pre-trial disclosure of the name of the woman who had accused William Kennedy Smith of raping her).

Which brings us to "on the other hand." Just because sex is in the perfervid air these days—not just Bill Clinton's sex life but the sex lives of Bob Packwood, Heidi Fleiss, Michael Jackson, Lorena Bobbitt, Amy Fisher and more celebrities and pseudo-celebrities than you could shake a dildo at—does that mean sex has to be all over our front pages on an almost daily basis? Don't misunderstand me. I am neither a Puritan nor a Victorian. Far from it. As my own editors can testify, I have long argued—and written—in favor of more candor in the news pages, especially on matters sexual. If a member of the President's cabinet is fired for telling a



*David Shaw has been the media critic for The Los Angeles Times since 1974, writing analytical, meticulously researched series on everything from coverage of race, abortion, religion and the White House to restaurant criticism and sports writing. He has won a variety of regional and national awards—most notably the 1991 Pulitzer Prize for his examination of how the media (including his own paper) mishandled coverage of the McMartin Pre-school molestation case. Shaw, the author of four books, has also written extensively for various national magazines, ranging from Esquire and GQ to Cigar Aficionado and Condé Nast Traveler. In a relaxed mood David is shown here with his wife, Lucy Stille, and son, Lucas.*

vile, disgusting, obscene, racist joke, I think it is arrogant—dishonest—of us to decline to refuse to publish that joke (as every daily newspaper in the country, except The Toledo Blade and Madison Capital Times, did when Earl Butz was fired as Secretary of Agriculture in 1976 after suggesting in conversation that Republicans could not attract more black votes because, he said, blacks only want “three things...a tight pussy...loose shoes and...a warm place to shit.”)

If controversies over obscenity and censorship make page 1 news all across the country, I think it is preposterous for us to resort to euphemisms and circumlocutions, rather than clear, unambiguous English, to describe the words and works involved (as virtually all newspapers did with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe and the rock group 2 Live Crew in 1990). But just as I think it is wrong for us to allow our Puritan heritage to distort our news judgment, so I think it is even worse for us to allow the men and women who publish supermarket tabloids and who broadcast tabloid television shows to distort our news judgment. And that's happening more and more with each passing day—with each passing news cycle.

When New York Times editors decided to publish the name of the woman who had accused William Kennedy Smith of rape, they did not do so because, in their own, independent journalistic judgment, this was A Legitimate, Newsworthy Fact; they did so because, as they said at the time, NBC News had done so the night before. Of course, NBC News had done so not because, in their own independent journalistic judgment, it was A Legitimate, Newsworthy Fact but because a supermarket tabloid had already published the woman's name. Great. So publications best-known for stories on quack cancer cures concocted by two-headed monsters from Mars who were definitely seen having sex with Elvis Presley on the White House lawn just last week are now dictating news judgments in the hallowed halls of Huntley-Brinkley and in the exalted atmosphere responsible for the Pentagon Papers, *Times v.*

Sullivan and 66 Pulitzer Prizes.

To me, this may be the single greatest ethical problem confronting editors as we take our first tentative steps down the much ballyhooed but potentially treacherous Information Superhighway.

Twenty years ago, there were essentially seven gatekeepers in the American news business—the executive editors of The New York Times and The Washington Post; the executive producers (or anchors) of the CBS, NBC and ABC evening news shows; the editors of Time and Newsweek. Occasionally, someone else—60 Minutes, The Wall Street Journal, The Los Angeles Times, The New Yorker—would break a big story that would force everyone to take notice, but day in and day out, it was the big seven that set the agenda. If a story didn't make it past one of those gatekeepers, if they didn't decide it was newsworthy (and nose-worthy—as in “Something here that just doesn't smell quite right”), it was a dead story. In reality, there was frequently only one gatekeeper—the Executive Editor of The New York Times. Editors at other prestigious news organizations, print and broadcast—including the other members of the Big Seven—could (and did) complain about the good stories they broke that died aborning because The New York Times ignored them. Since The New York Times has traditionally had the most sensitive nose of all (perhaps because it was often stuck so high into the rarefied air), that meant the premature death of many stories that didn't meet their standards for proper journalistic discourse.

Now all that has changed. Well almost all. The New York Times is still, in my view, clearly the best newspaper in the country. But its editors no longer make their decisions in a lofty vacuum. Nor do any other newspaper editors (or television news directors). Today there are dozens of gatekeepers. Or no gatekeepers at all. Today, there is a weekly network magazine show—60 Minutes, 20/20, Day One, Turning Point, Dateline—on the air virtually every night of the week. The syndicated magazine shows—Inside Edition, Hard Copy, A Current Affair, American Journal—are each on every night. That's a vast maw

craving information—infotainment—around the clock. Although the executive producer of every one of these programs can reach into a pure, distant corner of his journalistic heart and tell you about a story he refused to air because it was too tawdry, it seems reasonable to suggest that the “nose test” of these programs—individually and collectively—falls somewhat short of the sniffing once done by The New York Times. The syndicated tabloid shows in particular seem willing to broadcast virtually any story, the sexier and the stranger the better, if only to fill that nightly void (and, not incidentally, drive those nightly ratings).

Add to this mix CNN, with its even greater demand for fodder—news every minute of every hour of every day—and it's not difficult to understand why some questionable stories inevitably find their way onto the air. But once on the air—or in print, as with the original Bill Clinton/Gennifer Flowers story, first given breath in a supermarket tabloid—they take on a life of their own. Editors and producers at mainstream news organizations seem terrified of ignoring them. So they abandon their decision-making responsibility to the titans of the tabs.

Peter Jennings told me he was initially opposed to running the Clinton/Flowers story without further independent checking, but “It was made clear to me that...every affiliate in the country would say, ‘What the hell's going on? Don't they know a story when they see it?’”

Jennings says he “succumbed”—and he's “done so several times since—to the notion that...[one story or another] is somehow ‘out there.’”

Not many newspaper editors are that candid about their susceptibility to yielding decision-making authority to others. It's clear, though, that their decision-making process has been as corrupted by the tabs—and, in a different way, by CNN—as has Jennings's.

CNN has speeded up the decision-making cycle. Newspapers used to have all day and most of the night to make up their minds about whether to publish a story. The network news shows had most of the day. But CNN goes live

instantly. That often pressures the networks to follow suit—as happened during the last campaign, with rumors about President Bush's alleged mistress and, again—at year's end—with the Arkansas state troopers' allegations about Bill Clinton's alleged philandering. A story moves from CNN to the networks' evening news shows to the front pages of the next day's newspapers faster than you can say "whorehouse."

"The dynamics of the decision-making have changed," says Matthew Storrin, Editor of *The Boston Globe*. Once a story is already "out there," an editor has to decide, not "do I print this or not but do I withhold this or not."

Since most editors resist withholding information with every fiber of their being—after all, isn't that why we worship daily at the holy shrine of the Freedom of Information Act?—this subtle shift has had dramatic and unintended consequences.

"The gatekeeping authority of all editors is still there; you can exercise it if you want to," says Bob McGruder, Managing Editor of *The Detroit Free Press*, "but editors think they do it at their own peril." If you withhold too much too often what your competitor prints, "people are going to that other publication."

McGruder says he doesn't think there are as many editors today as there used to be who "feel as comfortable about saying, 'I know what's best and I won't run that stuff.' There are good and bad editors, then and now," he says, but many decisions about what to publish are now "driven by people other than that alleged gatekeeper."

Elsewhere in this issue, a few editors reluctantly concede "There is no question that there is increasing pressure to publish stories about which we have reservations," in the words of Clayton Haswell, Executive Editor of *The Contra Costa (Calif.) Times*.

Or as Jennie Buckner, Editor of *The Charlotte Observer*, puts it:

"As an editor in Charlotte, I can't let Howard Stern edit my newspaper for me. Nevertheless, if everyone's talking about something, you have to let that be part of your decision-making process."

But how big a part? And at what stage

**We've become knee-jerk cynics, automatic adversaries of everyone in government, no matter what they try to do or how they try to do it.**

of the process?

Susan Taylor Martin, Managing Editor of *The St. Petersburg Times*, says her paper has been "largely able" to keep its coverage of potentially sensational stories "responsible rather than sensational," but she concedes, "It would be fair to say that we detailed every teensy development in some of these tales long after the readers—and certainly the editors—were thoroughly sick of them."

Why?

"We may get bored but we certainly don't want to get beaten," Martin says.

OK, a merit badge for honesty for Martin. But I wonder how her readers—and all readers—would vote if asked, "Would you rather be bored by your daily newspaper or would you rather have the editors take their time to carefully evaluate the information they have and sometimes be second on a story and maybe even leave out some 'teensy detail' that other papers have?"

I know how I'd vote and I think I know how most readers would vote. But I sympathize with editors who worry that they'll be beaten or look like they're withholding information to protect someone if they don't publish a given story. And their dilemma will get worse as we travel together down the Information Superhighway. The newspaper of the future—a hybrid of sophisticated technologies not yet developed—will provide more information than ever before and make it available faster than ever before. How will even the most responsible editors be able to justify withholding information that most of their readers will already have absorbed in bed that morning, through headsets attached to their combination digital alarm clock/personal computer/CD-ROM/high-speed fax/phone/high-reso-

lution, fiber-optic TV/coffee-and-out-bran croissant maker?

There are any number of ethical problems, new and old, confronting editors and reporters today. Much of our campaign reportage reads like *The Racing Form* and *Public Opinion Quarterly* (not to mention *The National Enquirer*). We're often insensitive to victims of tragedy and invade their lives—and the lives of other news subjects—with little or no regard for their sense of privacy. We've become knee-jerk cynics, automatic adversaries of everyone in government, no matter what they try to do or how they try to do it. On issues like abortion and the early performance of the Clinton administration, too many journalists let their personal views unfairly influence their coverage. In addition, too many stories still rely—needlessly—on too many unnamed sources. And too many journalists still get too close to their sources. (I can't think of a more shameful case of social climbing in recent years than the off-the-record collaboration of journalists and 1,000 of Bill Clinton's best friends at last New Year's Renaissance weekend.) But with all these problems—and I haven't included them all by any means—I think the most pernicious is the ceding of editorial authority to the purveyors of flash and trash in our society.

I'm not an elitist or a self-appointed guardian of societal morals. I don't underestimate either the intelligence of our readers or the pressures of an increasingly competitive marketplace. My own definition of "All the news that's fit to print" would no doubt be substantially more elastic than that of Adolph Ochs. But I would hope that editors everywhere have—and follow—their own definitions of news, whatever they are, and do not let themselves (and their newspapers) be defined (and defiled) by people who think that being first is more important than being right—and that ratings are more important than responsibility.

The alternative, of course, is relatively simple: We can make Joey Buttafuoco the next president of ASNE.

■

# Editors Look at Themselves as Gatekeepers

## Copley Guidelines Change With Times

BY ROBERT M. WITTY  
Editor, Copley News Service

I go along with Barbara Jordan, the former Congresswoman from Texas, who defined ethics during the debate over Zoe Baird's nomination to be U.S. Attorney General.

"There is nothing complicated or difficult about ethics," said Ms. Jordan. "A person is ethical if they have a set of core, basic values and principles which govern their lives."

However, some of the "ethical" problems facing newspapers stem not so much from core values as from a lack of guidelines.

I was confronted a few years ago by an editor with an underperforming reporter he had long wanted to let go. This time the editor had him cold. Several whole paragraphs of the reporter's story had been lifted from a Los Angeles publication, whose editor had complained. The evidence was clear, and all that remained was for me to fire him.

Before bringing down the ax, I asked the reporter where he had obtained the information, and he mumbled that he thought it was from a press release.

Could he show it to me? He would try to find it.

To my surprise and his editor's, he showed up the next day with the press release. His pilfered paragraphs were taken directly from the press release as were, it turned out, those in The Los Angeles publication.

This was sloppy journalism, but in the reporter's mind at least, not plagiarism. He had begun his journalism career in an era when press releases, especially those aimed at special sections, often found their way to the composing room, altered only by some quick editing.

The point is that journalism ethics evolve. Sometimes newspapers fail to update their guidelines to address changes in ethics,

possibly unwilling to admit that such "unethical" practices ever existed on their newspapers.

It is possible that today's ethics may be derided tomorrow. ■

## In Contra Costa, It's a Struggle

BY CLAYTON HASWELL  
Executive Editor, Contra Costa Times

There is no question that there is increasing pressure to publish stories about which we have reservations. Ethical issues, and particularly sourcing problems, are becoming far more difficult as news is delivered by media whose standards differ from our own.

Supermarket tabloids that dabble in news are a distinct problem, and news organizations, ours included, struggle with stories of intense public interest produced by media who may not subscribe to ASNE's code of ethics—or any ethical code, for that matter.

Worse still, decisions on whether to publish sometimes have to be made in a void. Was the source in a position to know? In cases where the source was anonymous, were efforts made to obtain the information on the record? If so, what were those efforts?

Questions such as these are critical to our decision-making. But I expect that the next decision on whether to publish a story about sexual allegations surrounding a political figure will be made without such critical knowledge.

The problem is larger than the tabloids. More frequently, TV stations go with stories that totally overlook credibility and sourcing problems that are important to us. Balance and context are often absent in a 30-second byte.

The recent allegations about President Clinton originated with an advocacy publication. That in itself crosses a threshold that troubles us: credibility diminishes when a source or publication has an ax to grind.

And so we are cast into the abyss, and our

values are irrelevant to the factual setting. Or are they?

There is a test out there somewhere, and I think in the final analysis it can be reduced to this: is the version of the story we are attempting to publish fair, insofar as we know it, and as balanced as we can make it? Is there adequate response, and is it played prominently? Are gaps or questions about the sourcing explained to the reader?

Those are things upon which I think we can insist, even under the heat of deadline.

Perhaps this is naive, but I believe our readers care as much about whether they see can see efforts at fairness and balance on our part as they do about the stories themselves. ■

## Dallas News Uses Tabs for Tips

BY BILL EVANS  
Executive Managing Editor, The Dallas Morning News

The Dallas Morning News has maintained its ethics guidelines despite the presence of talk radio, supermarket tabloids, a local alternative paper and competition in a strong area television news market.

We do feel readers will be looking to their morning newspaper for an explanation for stories that have drawn major media attention. Such stories as the Kennedy rape charge or the Clinton scandal must be handled despite the fact that the original source of information was a tabloid—print or television.

However, we apply our ethical standards regardless of the original medium's handling of the report. For example, we do not name a sexual assault victim without that person's permission and our understanding after a full discussion that he or she is capable of making such a decision. This is regardless of other media's policy. Also, we would not publish an unanswered accusation without checking the story source and trying to get our own rebuttal. Moreover, the play of the story would be indicative to



our readers of our judgment of its validity: front page, inside, brief or fully developed, etc.

At times, one is forced to deal with a story because of such media attention before having all the desired information. There certainly is pressure in this sense because of the speed of news being released today by electronic media.

However, don't underestimate readers' judgment and sensitivity. If you feel your readers must have an incomplete story, be sure that what you do publish meets your ethical standards of fairness and accuracy. Your credibility outweighs all other considerations in the long run.

None of this means that the newspaper avoids sensitive issues because of any ethical "rule" since each situation must be considered in its own circumstance. There are plenty of gray areas and we only require that editors be aware of and fully discuss any ethical questions. This can all be done within the guidelines for fairness and accuracy.

In summary, competition cannot be the determining factor. Your readers' needs should be considered if the story has become a media event and should not be ignored. Then any story should be pursued as usual by you or your services to pin down any accusations. Simply stay the course. ■

## Detroit News, Often on 'Edge'

BY ROBERT H. GILES  
Editor and Publisher  
The Detroit News

In Detroit, competition has defined The Detroit News for years. The long war with The Detroit Free Press shaped our news judgment, encouraging a more daring attitude about what is news. We're often on the edge, sometimes drawing criticism for it.

The struggle to snare readers and to survive helped change our idea of what belonged on the top of the front page long before talk radio, cable and niche publications reached the marketplace. We learned to value stories that were interesting or intriguing in deciding the story mix on page one.

The impact of the new competitors has blurred distinctions between what's interesting, such as Madonna or thigh-reducing creams, and what's private or bizarre. An increasing number of private facts are getting into newspapers. Often they appear

first in tabloids or broadcast outlets that thrive on trash. That's the worry for editors. The test is being able to make the independent critical judgment that will give our news pages a flavor that is interesting and intriguing but not bizarre.

Over time, such value judgments by editors will help readers make their own choices about newspapers. ■

## Orange County: Let the Barbarians In

BY RICHARD E. CHEVERTON  
Managing Editor, Strategy & Administration,  
The Orange County Register

Is a fragmented market eroding our gatekeeping function? The problem with American newspaper journalism is that there is too much "gatekeeping" and not enough reader-keeping.

The question is a tired replay of the "pandering" argument—that lurking somewhere out there, west of the Hudson or Potomac, is a vast body of readers waiting to have its basest impulses "pandered" to—and that only we in the priesthood of editors can guard these innocents against these, God forbid, tasteless impulses.

This is just one symptom of the introspective arrogance that has gotten American journalism into its well-known and much-debated jam. This is the attitude that is empowering our more nimble and market-oriented competitors to kill us with a thousand cuts. With blood now around our ankles, we are far past the debate about what middle-aged, college-educated, upwardly mobile newspaper editors consider to be tasteful. God forbid we should go down with the Titanic wearing anything less than white tie and tails.

There is a sense of fear and nostalgia embedded in the question; a fear of listening to readers and to entertaining new ideas is, at its base, our most self-destructive trait. And a nostalgia that ignores the robust and quite often tasteless history of American newspapering. A Hearst or Pulitzer rose to greatness not by keeping the gates closed—but by making products that customers wanted to spend money to acquire. Simple as that.

Open the gates. Let the barbarians in. They have better genes. ■

## Philadelphia Lauds TV Shows' Editing

BY STEVEN M. LOVELADY  
Managing Editor  
The Philadelphia Inquirer

I'm of the conviction that talk radio, cable TV talk shows and, to a lesser degree, even supermarket tabloids, have something to teach gatekeeper editors who once drew the lines against...stories of questionable taste.

As do the assortment of hugely popular TV news magazines, and even some prime-time dramas, such as L.A. Law at its best, which derive story lines from the news.

We must always be gatekeepers, and we draw lines based on taste every day. But...we have to balance that with the mandate to paint a reasonably accurate picture of the world our readers live in and move through. And that's something the gatekeepers of old all too often didn't do.

So...should a serious newspaper put together a page-one story on, say, Heidi Fleiss, the Hollywood madam with the little black book that supposedly has all of moviedom scared to death? Hell, yes, if it wants to capture the way an important and hugely influential segment of society lives and works.

We did, and I'm glad of it.

Should a serious newspaper put together an instant but intelligent and well-crafted page-one story on, say, Oprah Winfrey's TV interview with Michael Jackson, which got the highest ratings in the history of network TV?

We didn't, and I raised hell. For if a serious newspaper doesn't do that, it's just kidding itself; it's trapped in a quaint and outdated definition of "news" that excludes popular culture.

Should a serious newspaper try to compete with, say, the multiplying TV news magazines? Yes. Because those "magazines" all too often deliver exactly what a well-done newspaper project story ought to deliver.

But, you know something? They do it well. Sometimes they do it better—they tell stories better than we often do, and they edit more rigorously than we often do. And we wonder why they succeed.

It's not unusual for an editor at 60 Minutes to spend 20 or 30 hours in an editing booth honing and sharpening a 12-minute segment. Don Hewitt, the impresario of the show, says the secret of its popularity is...good writing! In 50 years in the busi-

ness, he says, "I've never seen a picture that captivated me more than a well-turned phrase."

There's something we can learn from that.

I worry when the conversation turns to editors' drawing lines their forefathers drew. Too many of those lines left us with a world of newspapers which defined "news" as reports about the doings of a bunch of elderly white gentlemen in gray suits who worked in tall buildings with white columns. ■

## Quincy Prints Sex Case Names

BY RANDALL KEITH

City Editor

The Quincy (MA) Patriot Ledger

A local police officer stood accused of secretly videotaping himself having consensual sex with two women friends, and The Patriot Ledger faced a difficult decision: should it shield the women's names?

The women, their lawyer and town officials wanted the names withheld at a disciplinary hearing for the officer to avoid public embarrassment for the presumed innocent victims. We printed them.

Authorities got involved when the police officer's live-in girlfriend, who was not on the tape, found the home video showing the sex acts with the other women. She turned it over to the police department for investigation. Town officials scheduled a hearing on whether to fire the officer for off-duty misconduct.

Sixty people showed up. Although the hearing was public, the women's lawyer asked that their names be withheld. No names were mentioned during their testimony against the officer, or in television and metro newspaper reports of the hearing.

But for a community newspaper names are news. Real names make a story real. The Patriot Ledger's policy is to print names, unless there is a compelling reason not to.

The lawyer for the two women argued that protecting their privacy and avoiding potential embarrassment were compelling reasons not to publish their names. He compared their situation to that of rape victims.

The Patriot Ledger does not print the names of rape victims, unless they consent or recant the charge, or some other unusual

circumstance exists. But this was not a rape case. The sex acts were consensual; it was the videotaping that was done without the women's knowledge.

Town officials said the public didn't need to know who the women were, and that publishing their names added nothing to the story.

Yet in a town where the case attracted widespread attention—and where half the households subscribe to The Patriot Ledger—printing the names served to dispel rumors about just who was involved in the videotaping.

Beyond that, the women testified at a crowded public hearing. What they said was a crucial part of the case against the officer.

The officer and his former girlfriend were identified at the hearing. So withholding the names of his two key accusers would have resulted in an incomplete story, and given the appearance of special treatment.

In this case we picked the unpopular path. Several readers complained that we were insensitive. We haven't heard from anyone who applauded our decision to publish. ■

## In St. Louis, Values Triumph

BY RICHARD H. WEISS

Features Editor

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Am I really in the same business as Howard Stern? We're both in the communications industry. We inform and entertain. We push a product. I am the features editor of The St. Louis Post-Dispatch. Howard...you know Howard.

Stern rudely intruded on my consciousness recently when our television writer sent in a piece about a day spent watching nothing but talk shows. Howard was a guest on one of those shows ("Geraldo," how'd you guess?) during which he spoke of the size of his sex organ. Our writer included this information in her report whereupon I found myself at the journalistic gate, wondering whether to allow this in or to keep it out.

First thought...You can find much more graphic stuff any day of the week, just about anywhere else.

Second thought...This is a mirror of our culture, such as it is...

Third thought...Gross!

Fourth thought...Lots of our readers hate it when we do this...

Fifth and final thought...What's our fran-

chise? Stern's is outrageousness. His popularity and usefulness, if he has any at all, will flame out within the decade, probably much sooner.

Our newspaper has endured for more than a century because we maintain a standard of decency and good taste. In a world gone haywire, we're a bastion of good judgment and solid values. That's why so many of our readers hate it when we deviate from that standard even slightly—often in the name of progressive thought or "holding up the mirror."

So I tossed out the reference to Howard's organ. But we went with the stuff on the transvestite lesbian. ■

## In Tampa Bay, Don't Get Beat

BY SUSAN TAYLOR MARTIN

Deputy Managing Editor

St. Petersburg Times

Outside New York, Los Angeles and other mega-markets, the competitive pressures slack considerably, I suspect, to chronicle every twist and turn of the Mega-Story. Mercifully, we here in the Tampa Bay area have not felt the need to dog The Donald or search for every scintilla of evidence that yes, indeed, Michael Jackson is one weird 35-year-old.

Still, this part of Florida has produced more than its share of strange, lurid and tragic stories—The Baby M custody battle, the Kimberly Mays baby swap case, the Christopher Wilson burning trial, T-back hot dog vendors, Pee Wee Herman, etc. etc.

"Tampa Bay—God bless you—has been good to A Current Affair," Executive Producer Anthea Disney once commented. "I think we're going to have to open up a bureau in Florida."

In all these cases, it was The St. Petersburg Times or other local newspapers that broke the original stories, and by staying out in front, we were largely able to keep the coverage responsible rather than sensational. However, it would be fair to say that we detailed every teensy development in some of these tales long after the readers—and certainly the editors—were thoroughly sick of them. We may get bored but we certainly don't want to get beat.

All in all, though, we've been fortunate in being able to choose our shots much of the time. That's meant less of Donald and Michael and more of the depth and investigative reporting that readers still seem to appreciate. ■

# Tab Rags Face Gags

BY CHRISTINA LAMB

“OFF YEO GO YOU DIRTY SO AND SO!” screamed the front page of Britain’s best-selling newspaper, *The Sun*, in a blaze of self-congratulatory glory for disposing of yet another minister from the beleaguered Conservative government.

Tim Yeo was sacked as Environment Minister in January following a series of tabloid revelations that he had fathered two “love-children” outside his marriage while preaching against single-parent families as part of the government’s ill-fated morality crusade.

The unfortunate Mr. Yeo was just one in a growing string of British ministerial embarrassments, forced out of office after having intimate details of their private lives splashed across the tabloids. The last 18 months have seen ministers fall like dominoes—victims of their own indiscretions and a fierce circulation war among the country’s voracious tabloid newspapers which hold 80 percent of newspaper sales in perhaps the world’s most competitive market. As a result of this unprecedented attack by mainly right-wing newspapers on a right-wing government, politicians are calling for curbs which could threaten Britain’s free press.

The no-holds-barred tabloid orgy on John Major’s government started in September 1992 when *The Sunday People* revealed that David Mellor, the Heritage Minister, had been having an affair with Spanish actress Antonio de Sancha. The tabloids had a field day with the allegations about the self-described Minister of Fun and his predilection for sucking Ms. de Sancha’s toes. When he was sacked *The Sun*’s headline writers surpassed themselves with the memorable “FROM TOE-JOB TO NO JOB.”

The next to fall was Norman Lamont,

the Chancellor of the Exchequer, sacked after disclosures that he had been renting his London home to a sex therapist known as Miss Whiplash and that the Treasury had paid £4,700 of his legal costs to evict her. Moreover the man in charge of the nation’s finances had exceeded his credit card limit 22 times.

Other departures included Michael Mates, the Northern Ireland Minister, over links with the Cypriot tycoon Asil Nadir who jumped bail while facing charges of theft and false accounting involving the collapse of his Polly Peck group. Just days before Mr. Nadir’s flight, Mr. Mates had given him a watch inscribed “Don’t let the buggers get you down.”

As the tabloids hurried to outdo each other with the next story, the scandal surrounding Mr. Yeo was quickly followed by allegations that the junior Transport Minister, the Earl of Caithness, had been having an affair. A few days later his wife committed suicide.

The tabloids were undeterred by such tragedy. Instead they revealed that David

Ashby, a Tory MP, had slept with another man in a French hotel. Shortly afterwards another Conservative MP, Stephen Milligan, was found dead in his London flat clad in women’s underwear with a plastic bag over his head.

As British readers devour the latest scandal and ask where it will all end, such scurrilous reporting is watched with bemusement across the channel. In France tough privacy laws mean that the private lives of politicians are out of bounds for reporters, and photos cannot be published without the subject’s permission.

In an editorial after Mr. Yeo’s dismissal, *The Sun* called it “a victory for people power,” adding that the government’s “Back to Basics” crusade for restoring moral values had made its members’ private lives fair game. “A man who preaches morality cannot expect to nip behind the pulpit for a secret leg-over,” it stormed.

But while there can be no free society without a free press there is increasing unease that some British editors are abusing that freedom. Publishing se-



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cretely taped phone conversations, even between members of the royal family, has become accepted practice, and to get its Mellor scoop The People rented the garden of a basement apartment in order to bug his activities in the apartment above. The fear that the tabloids have overstepped the line of decency in the battle for circulation surfaced last fall when The Mirror published photos of Princess Diana working out in a gym taken with a hidden camera by the manager.

The subsequent outcry could endanger the survival of a free and relatively unfettered press and lead to the introduction of a privacy law. Stephen Glover recently wrote in *The Evening Standard* that "many MPs on both sides of the House are itching to apply statutory controls to papers and believe the publication of these photos give them the chance to press for press-restraint legislation."

The British press is currently self-regulating. In 1989 concerns over increasingly intrusive reporting on the Royal Family led to the creation of a Commission of Privacy under Sir David Calcutt. This instituted the creation of a Press Complaints Commission to give the press one last chance to show it could act responsibly. But the commission is generally seen as having failed to curb excesses and was seriously embarrassed when after criticizing reporting on the tempestuous marriage of Prince Charles and Princess Di, it found that the offices of the Princess had been supplying much of the information to the press.

Britain does have very strict libel laws but to take a major paper to court requires plenty of money and stamina. Pop stars Elton John and Michael Jackson have both been successful, but in January a case by a leading British soap star, contesting allegations of indecent behavior with her boyfriend in a high-way layby, backfired, leaving her to pick up costs estimated at £500,000.

Britain's tabloids, with their mixture of sports, sex scandal and Europhobia, remain vastly popular. The Sun, owned by Australian-born media baron Rupert Murdoch, is one of the world's best-selling papers. A veritable money ma-



chine, it sells at least 4 million copies compared to the paltry 366,000 circulation of *The Times*, Britain's best known quality paper. Dominating conversation in pubs and commuter trains, the tabloids increasingly set the agenda. Even those who turn their noses up at the so-called "gutterpress" can often be found sneaking a glance. During my school years I used to work weekends in a newspaper shop where I was amazed by the number of customers who would buy *The Times* and then slip a tabloid between its covers.

Challenged on the gossip-driven content of tabloid newspapers, Kelvin Mackenzie, until recently Editor of *The Sun*, said "as far as I'm concerned public interest is whatever interests the public." This view seems to be spreading. The British qualities are increasingly devoting column inches to scandal and British tabloid hacks are being

offered lucrative contracts at U.S. papers and television stations.

While the general view in Britain is that the situation cannot continue, there is little public support for a privacy law which is seen as a device for protecting those running the country rather than the ordinary person. Michael Leapman, in his new book "Treacherous Estate: The Press After Fleet Street," writes "A free press must be free to offend people. Any mechanism put in place to protect those unjustly pilloried will equally be used by others with something to hide and something it would be in the public interest to expose." ■

# Who Cares About the Truth?

## *Merger of News and Entertainment and Replacement of Facts With Fiction Are Troubling—and Profitable*

Following is a slightly trimmed transcript of a lecture by Michael J. O'Neill, former Editor of *The Daily News* of New York and former president of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, at Long Island University on October 5, 1993.

Most people seem to think that journalism and ethics are a contradiction in terms, an oxymoron as Bill Buckley would put it in his more elegant way. A recent poll in *ADWEEK* was particularly unflattering. When people were asked to pick a phrase that best described the media in pursuit of a story, 57 percent said they were "like vultures circling for the kill."

Nothing is so unkind as "man's ingratitude," as the sonnet says, so it is perhaps understandable that the press's selfless service to the nation is widely unappreciated. And most conspicuously by our presidents who use the media to get elected but then complain constantly that distorted reporting is preventing their true greatness from shining through to the people. From Harry Truman to Bill Clinton—Democrat or Republican—this is the one thing they all agree on: they don't get a fair shake from the press.

An example of their sensitivity is a tongue-lashing Lyndon Johnson once gave me while we were in Bangkok, of all places, floating down one of the city's klongs or canals on a Royal Thai barge. He was making a fact-finding tour of Vietnam and South Asia at the time and I had been the pool reporter on the leg from Hong Kong to Bangkok. As usual with Johnson, there were all sorts of hilarious incidents which I later reported to my colleagues—with appropriate wisecracks that I knew they wouldn't use in their stories.

The next day, Johnson spotted me in the

hotel lobby and, on an impulse, invited me along with him on the barge trip. It looked like a great chance to get an exclusive interview, but unfortunately, a Secret Service agent handed him a copy of what must have been the only English language newspaper within a thousand miles. And even more unfortunately, there was a front page story with an almost verbatim account of my supposedly private pool report, complete with wisecracks and such tidbits as the fact that Lady Bird couldn't remember the name of a Thai princess who was going to school with one of the Johnson daughters.

Johnson blew up. "If it was so important to know the name of the princess," he thundered, poking my chest with his finger, "we could have cabled Washington to get it. It was not necessary to tell the whole world Lady Bird couldn't remember it." For 40 minutes he raged on, first about my hapless pool report and then about stories by other reporters that were supposedly ruining his image as a great world statesman. I only escaped when my colleagues came rushing up on another barge in order to horn in on my exclusive interview and, to my delight, Johnson turned his fury on them.

Collisions like this are more or less routine in the hurly-burly of press-White House relations, running the gauntlet from charges of elections lost to arguments over stories about a presidential haircut holding up airport traffic in Los Angeles.

Conflicts are similarly endemic in the relations between the media and just about everyone else who wanders in front of a TV camera—from mayors and governors to an Arthur Ashe secretly dying of AIDS or a tortured government official like Vincent Foster who cries out in a suicide note: "I was not meant for the job or the spotlight of public life in Washington. Here ruining people is considered sport."

These confrontations, so prevalent and so seemingly routine, are easily passed off as just the normal give-and-take of public life in the electronic age. But they are anything

but normal. They actually mask new, deep, and troubling trends in the relationship between American society and the whole broad spectrum of institutions by which it is informed. Trends that can be seen most clearly in the merger of news and entertainment, in the casual replacement of fact with fantasy and fiction, in the blurring of the lines between what is real and unreal, between natural occurrence and synthetic event. Trends that drive to the extremes of moral permissiveness and emotional excess until truth is betrayed and our links to certitude are broken.

This is the central ethical problem facing the media today—the corruption of journalism by the culture of entertainment, by new technology that informs by image and emotion and by an intellectual elitism that rejects objective rules of behavior in favor of limitless self-expression and moral relativism. "Why has moral discourse become unfashionable or merely partisan?" asks the scholar James Q. Wilson, "...because we have learned... from intellectuals... that morality has no basis in science or logic. To



defend morality is to defend the indefensible." The old rules based on moral intuitions have therefore been replaced, Wilson says, by a freedom-of-choice morality in which one picks and chooses values as casually as "ice cream flavors."

In this process, right and wrong become subjective judgments rather than objective measures of human conduct. Reality and truth are only what we say they are—they have no existence outside our own fictions. Our celebration of laissez-faire lifestyles is extended to the outer frontiers of moral behavior. So we have the spectacle of producers not being the least bit troubled when they butcher facts, truth, and just about everything else to create fanciful docudramas like Oliver Stone's "JFK." Or we see a Joe McGinniss cynically defending his departure from "traditional journalism" to steal from William Manchester, to invent quotes and private thoughts, and to create phony scenes in order to hype his own garbled version of Ted Kennedy's life.

This new artistic and journalistic fraud was captured beautifully in a New York Times headline over Michiko Kakutani's review of McGinniss' book: "Is it Fiction? Is it Nonfiction? And Why Doesn't Anyone Care?" Why indeed? That is the key question. Why do so many producers and writers conspire without conscience in reckless travesties of news and history and art and information? Kakutani noted rather despairingly that "we are daily assaulted by books, movies and television docudramas that hopscotch back and forth between the realms of history and fiction, reality and virtual reality" and, she added, this happens "with impunity." Instead of outrage and denunciation, there is general acceptance. Why?

The quick answer is that these miscarriages of truth are wildly popular—and profitable. The three TV movies of the Amy Fisher case did not agree on the facts, but they were all smash hits in the ratings which, of course, are more valued than accuracy in the counting rooms of media barons. However, there is more to the story. Many other factors—social, cultural, technological and economic—are involved in the general decline we now see in the integrity of public information. What is happening cannot be defined only in terms of journalistic ethics, good or bad.

The first point is probably the most important, although it is also the most elusive. This is the generally hedonistic character of contemporary American society with its emphasis on mass consumption, self-gratification, entertainment, personal entitlements, and unfettered individual expression. TV images and noise flood through

our days and nights, stimulating desires and setting off waves of emotion, but smothering knowledge and reason. It is a culture that Zbig Brzezinski calls "permissive cornucopia." And he warns that it is promoting a kind of "moral ambiguity" that is undermining liberal democracy as a global political model and threatening America's capacity for leadership in the post Cold War world.

"Many of the weaknesses of a permissive cornucopia represent the potentially defining trend in the current American culture," Brzezinski argues in his most recent book. "Unless there is some deliberate effort to establish the centrality of some moral criteria for the exercise of self-control, the phase of American preponderance may not last long..." The reason, he says, is that a society in which self-gratification is the norm is a society in which "moral judgments become dispensable. There is no need to differentiate between 'right' and 'wrong'."

James MacGregor Burns attacks the problem in a similar way in his classic study of political leadership. He notes Max Weber's famous distinction between an ethic of "ultimate ends" or a higher good, and an "ethic of responsibility" in which people make their own choices not in terms of a supreme value but in terms of "many values, attitudes and interests." This ethic, according to Burns, has "opened the floodgates" to so many different values that even the most expedient, opportunistic, and self-serving kinds of actions can be justified. So one arrives again at the idea of moral ambiguity.

It is in this larger framework then—in the overall context of contemporary society—that one has to consider the problem of media ethics. For what can we say about what is right or wrong, true or false, if everything is relative? Many Americans may believe in immutable rules they learned at home or in church or synagogue. But in the never-never land of mass entertainment there are no immutable rules, no social restraints, no limits on personal behavior, no commitments to truth. It is an industry of imagery and manipulation that rearranges life to fit its own dramatic forms, its own peculiar visions, its own commercial ambitions.

And because mass entertainment is now indiscriminately fused with news, the very term media ethics is misleading. It is too narrowly focused. When we talk about the media we tend to think of newspaper editors and network anchors presiding over the great switchboards of daily knowledge, gathering news from around the world, sifting, evaluating, challenging everything they see to separate wheat from chaff, to

protect us from bias and deceit so that we can form sound judgments in our own interest and in society's. But journalists no longer hold the commanding position they once did in the ever-expanding universe of news and information. They simply do not have the power and control they exercised, for example, in the heady days of Watergate. And this points to another crucial factor that must be considered in any discussion of media ethics: The impact of the communications revolution.

The mind-boggling advances we have seen in communications technology have not only shaped much of the cultural environment we have been talking about. They have also utterly transformed the news and information business. Newspaper editors who have the longest journalistic traditions can write all the ethical codes they want to—and they have written many. But they will not touch the practices of literally thousands of other people who have no journalistic training, but who are now happily manufacturing, manipulating, hyping and delivering their own news or pseudo-news to the public.

Television, of course, is king, or perhaps I should say queen. For most Americans—and increasingly for foreigners as well—it is overwhelmingly the principal source of news, information, and entertainment. It is the dominant force in mass communication and, in its ever more varied and sophisticated forms, the chief link between society and government. That is why the hard-liners made the central television complex in Moscow the main target of their anti-Yeltsin attack last October.

During its formative years, in the 1960's and 1970's, television followed the newspaper model in its coverage of news; it applied the same ethical standards. Many of the early news producers and anchors came directly from newspaper careers. Walter Cronkite, for example, was a wire service veteran—a United Press colleague of mine who went on to TV fame and fortune while I was still grubbing away in the newspaper business. Cronkite, John Chancellor, Eric Sevareid, David Brinkley and others like them had very high reporting standards. For them, the wall between TV news and entertainment was inviolable.

But as television matured and developed its own independent character, that wall began to crumble. Young new producers with no hard news training moved into the control rooms. They added entertainment, emotional hype and Hollywood tricks. Pictures and celebrities were in—language, thought, and complexity were out. Television turned everything into television, as

The Washington Post critic Tom Shales put it. It denatured events and even tragedies. "The peculiar potency of television lies not in the wickedness of the journalists who operate the machine," a British minister once observed, "but in the very nature of the machine." It was the machine that created a whole new kind of mass communication.

The result was not news as print journalism defined news. But it was still called news, and it profoundly changed the whole culture of news making and news coverage. TV cameras took charge of public events and network anchormen became bigger than rock stars, summoning the great ones to their booths at any hour of the day or night. Newspaper reporters were sent to the back of the bus, and newspapers generally suffered humiliating declines in number, in readership and, what hurt most, in political clout.

Politicians fared no better. In the early days of TV news, technology was cumbersome and access to television was extremely limited. They were at the mercy of a few producers who decided who and what would be favored on the evening news. Candidates became front runners or forgotten names according to the vagaries of TV attention. They still relied on old-fashioned press secretaries who did not know how to promote their wares on camera. Lobbyists were similarly limited, and the media influence factories were still in their infancy.

Later, however, as new electronic discoveries came on stream and professional media handlers multiplied like weeds, the balance of power shifted. Suddenly, presidents, congressmen, and lobbyists were able to put many of television's wonders to their own use. Politics and government, like news reporting, were remade for television.

On the one hand, the arrival of minicams, video recorders, microwave relays, dish antennas, cable systems, satellites and computers freed television from old encumbrances. News crews, no longer immobilized by bulky equipment, were able to move faster and roam farther afield to get action pictures and live reports. And these could be delivered almost instantly from almost anywhere in the world; it no longer took hours or even days for film to make its way through long relays of couriers, motorcycles, trains, and airplanes. The whole content, tone, and immediacy of news shows changed dramatically.

On the other hand, however, TV production also became less centralized. With satellites and cable systems, film and TV reports could be flashed easily from place to place. Individual stations could import programming directly from any number of dif-

ferent sources; they became less dependent on network feeds and on network news organizations.

Equally significant, the new technologies also brought TV's power, which only large media organizations had been able to afford, within the reach of much smaller groups and even ordinary citizens. Technology diffused and, in a sense, democratized television. It made low-cost TV cameras and video recorders so widely available that almost anyone could be his own producer. Think how often non-commercial videos—cops beating a prisoner in Los Angeles, for example—now make their way onto news shows.

Technology also triggered a major expansion of outlets and air time for news and information. It did this directly through multi-channel cable systems and indirectly by increasing the ability of local TV stations to produce and expand their own news programs. As these trends spread, the near monopoly of the national networks was effectively broken. Control over what finally appeared on millions of screens shifted significantly to local TV news producers and cable outlets. Access to television was extended to a much wider spectrum of people. Political action groups and special interests... city councilmen, mayors, governors, cabinet members, presidential candidates—just about anybody with a plug to make or cause to plead was able to get a spot in television's sun.

Politicians, for example, used to depend on reporters to communicate with their constituents. Their careers could be made or broken by the way they were covered. But now they are not nearly so vulnerable. They can create their own photo-ops and news events, just as Bill Clinton does on every and all occasions. If they don't feel like talking to troublesome reporters, they don't have to. During the 1992 presidential election campaign, the candidates rushed off to talk shows, call-ins and other electronic platforms—not to attack each other but to bypass the network correspondents and the national press.

Congressmen now hold press conferences with themselves and then send the tapes, at taxpayer expense, to local TV stations and cable outlets. Their videos are often delivered directly to our screens without any editing or ethical supervision. The result, as the Washington Journalism Review put it, is that "a congressman gets to control his own 15-second appearance on the evening news—all the more effective because viewers consider it straight news. And the news director gets a free clip out of Washington relating to current events—all

the more effective because viewers assume it's news coverage by the station, not the transmission of a political message."

The same advances in TV technology that have helped congressmen have also helped the media handlers in the White House. They exercise far more control over the images of government that the public receives than many people might suppose or that journalists themselves are happy about. The fact is that pictures and action are the lifeblood of television. News producers need to get the president on camera, and for this they depend crucially on access which the White House generally controls. Television also needs live drama, real or artificial events to translate the daily life of government into visual illusions of bold decisions, policy initiatives, and leadership. This requires staging, the manufacturing of news which does not occur naturally and for this, of course, television again depends on the White House. An example of Bush's media factory in action was the time he decided to tell the nation about his administration's valiant actions in the war against drugs. The White House team decided that words were not enough; only a gripping TV vignette could tell the story. So they created a phony drug bust.

The scenario, approved by the President, called for him to raise a plastic bag of crack that had been seized in Lafayette Park immediately across from the White House. The idea, Bush explained, was to prove that drug deals "can happen anywhere." The trouble was that drug dealers did not operate in Lafayette Park; it was too close to the White House. As a result, it was only with considerable difficulty that federal undercover agents finally lured one hapless seller into the park so that they could make a three-ounce buy. But it worked. Just when Bush's speech began to sag, he was able to look sternly into the camera and flash his bag of crack with a conspicuous "evidence" label. It was as if to say, "See, I'm not kidding; here's the proof."

In this kind of theatrical atmosphere, with news producers, politicians, lobbyists and everybody else madly rearranging reality to suit their own needs and fancies, it's no wonder facts are hard to come by. No wonder either that the news and entertainment divisions in television that once ran on parallel but separate tracks have now, for all intents and purposes, been switched onto a single high-speed line.

TV executives can talk all they want about how they keep news and drama separate, but any ordinary viewer knows better. And so does Dan Rather. He put it bluntly in a talk to radio and TV news directors last fall.

"They've got us putting more and more fuzz and wuzz on the air, copshop stuff," he said, "so as to compete not with other news programs but with entertainment programs, including those posing as news programs, for dead bodies, mayhem and lurid tales. Action, Jackson, is the cry. Hire lookers, not writers. Do powder puff, not probing interviews."

He's right. Pick almost any night, and it's all a blur—violence and death... crimes reported, recycled through TV magazines, made into movies and then plugged on news shows with synthetic news angles and interviews. The viewer is caught coming and going.

An astonishing 35 to 40 percent of all the made-for-TV movies on crime and other misery are taken from real life. Not only did NBC rush to the screen with its super-rated Amy Fisher movie, it surrounded it with innumerable quasi news reports and two separate Amy interviews on its weekly magazine, "Dateline NBC." [Within weeks after] Carolyn Warmus, a school teacher, was convicted of murdering her lover's wife, CBS hit the tubes with its movie, "The Danger of Love." Thanks to new technology, television producers can now grind out movies almost as fast as the news breaks. So everything—hard news, movies, commercials, hyped interviews, everything—is thrown into the same pot. No one seems to care about old-fashioned journalistic ideals like accuracy, fairness and at least some approximation of objectivity.

No one cares because the culture of entertainment is tuned to emotional stimulation rather than information. There is no journalistic tradition to guide the decision-makers and, in a climate of moral relativism, there are few scruples about perverting the public's view of society, government and the world beyond.

It is against this panorama of extraordinary cultural and technological change that one has to consider the state of media ethics. For this change measures both the depth of the problem and the limits of possibility.

The ideals of journalism are challenged in many ways, from highly adversarial reporting techniques that compromise balance and fairness to wanton raids on individual privacy that market sensation under the mask of public service. But the greatest challenge of all, the most serious threat to a free press, is the progressive corruption of news and information by entertainment, fiction and moral indifference.

The whole purpose of a free press is to inform a free society. News may not be truth, but it supposed to be linked to reality and to the facts which a nation needs for its

**The ideals of journalism are challenged in many ways, from highly adversarial reporting techniques that compromise balance and fairness to wanton raids on individual privacy that market sensation under the mask of public service. But the greatest challenge of all, the most serious threat to a free press, is the progressive corruption of news and information by entertainment, fiction and moral indifference.**

own governance. That is why the press was singled out for special protection under the First Amendment. Entertainment and emotional hype are nowhere listed as services essential to an informed people. The mass production of fiction masquerading as truth can hardly be defended as a constitutional requirement.

So Hollywood journalism injures both the news and itself when it sweeps all of its output under the rug of public service. It is not the surrogate of the people and therefore cannot exempt itself from responsibility for the damage it does. Making false claims under the First Amendment is to invite the very government intervention the clause was intended to prevent. Jody Powell cut to the heart of the issue when he said, "tasteless, exploitative, sensationalized coverage undermines public support for the legal protections that allow journalists to do their job. An obsession with tonight's ratings to the detriment of such fundamental long-term interests is not only irresponsible, it's just plain stupid."

What is the answer? I'm not sure there is one—nothing at least that is very clear or simple or final. The beginning of wisdom is to recognize that there often are no solutions for some problems. Only the possibility sometimes of modest improvement and limited progress.

Serious journalists—in television as well

as newspapers—are committed to improvement. Dan Rather made that clear in his speech to the news directors. People like Tom Brokaw and Peter Jennings and the MacNeil/Lehrer team also set high standards for themselves. The same is true of most newspaper editors. But they have to contend both with journalism's own combative nature and also with a vast new information system that is operating outside of journalism and without its standards. The professionals simply do not have the say they used to have about how news is reported and packaged.

Any number of reforms have been proposed and discarded. We once had a National News Council that was supposed to ride herd on media ethics like the imperious British Press Council, but it faded away. There also are a few ombudsmen on newspapers and in television who make some waves about journalistic performance. But the larger trends we have been talking about still move inexorably onward because they are cultural and technological as well as journalistic in nature.

We can see what is needed from what is wrong. We must separate news from entertainment and fact from fiction. We must fight against the staging and manipulation of news by politicians, lobbyists, and other special pleaders—something that calls, in turn, for more well-trained journalists. We also must subordinate needless personal exposure and harassment to fairness and humanity. We need to resist adversarial impulses that distort reality merely to create controversy. We should also redefine news to emphasize thought as well as action, harmony as well as conflict, and explanation as well as scandal.

And most of all, we need a moral consensus in the media and the arts, as well as in society generally, that at least some things are right and others are wrong. That the mores of the entertainment world are poor guides for a democracy. That it does matter if we televise fake versions of history or make up quotes in a would-be biography of Ted Kennedy or if we open up the private wounds of an Arthur Ashe. ■



# A New Agenda for Journalism

*A Call for Action to Stake Out the Role of News  
In the Emerging Technological World*

BY KATHERINE FULTON

**H**ow can a news company survive and prosper, given the current communications free-for-all? What's the right choice? Anybody who claims to know for sure is either a fool or a salesman. To judge from the announcements of new divisions, mergers and experiments, every company involved in journalism is suddenly searching for the answer.

Unfortunately, it may not be the right question.

Certainly the convergence of technological and market forces in the late 20th Century has created a historic turning point for journalism in this country. But newspaper publishers, editors, reporters and broadcasters tend to frame the problem solely in the most narrow economic terms—How can my company grab a piece of the action?

Early in this century, newspaper journalists dominated the flow of information in their communities. News, raw data, advertising messages, communication to and among the citizens—newspapers were in the business of publishing them all, and the distinctions were not particularly important. They were all part of the same manufactured product. A journalist, meanwhile, was a person who had access to an audience through this one-way mass distribution system.

This world has virtually disappeared, of course, as control has passed to audiences and advertisers. Local journalists no longer monopolize the megaphone. New competitors proliferate, exploding the old newspaper business into many parts. News has become a commodity, available from CNN 24 hours a day. Computer-based on-line systems

deliver raw data on demand. Television, radio, print niche competitors and the Post Office have segmented the advertising market. Citizens can talk back on radio call-in shows and on-line systems—when the plentiful entertainment and leisure options don't drown out all public discourse. In the age of America's Funniest Home Videos (not to mention the video that eventually caused Los Angeles to erupt), just who is a journalist and who is a publisher is up for grabs.

We've hardly begun to adapt to these changes. Now comes the interactive, multi-media world—in some as-yet-to-be-determined form. When newspaper publishers haven't been tossing and turning in the night, they've been busy exploring personal communications, entertainment and transactional ser-

vices—the products expected to drive change in the new communications environment. Or, they're taking old forms and formats and retrofitting them for use on-line, trying to adapt the strengths of an old medium to a new medium no one yet understands. As anyone who has studied the media will tell you, that won't be enough.

But what will be enough? Nothing less than re-imagining what it means to be a journalist in a democratic society, with these new tools at our disposal. Journalism companies won't have a future (at least as journalism companies) unless journalism itself has a future. Who, what, when, where, why and how are the urgent ethical and practical questions we need to ask about journalism itself.

Given the new technological and



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economic realities, when will journalists get in the way of democracy, and when will we be essential to it? What are the new opportunities for journalists to connect with citizens, and citizens with their governments? Who is a journalist and what is journalism, in a world where data, information and raw video will be plentiful, and where everyone with access to a computer and a telephone will own their own press? What will make professional journalism valuable?

These are the sorts of fundamental questions anyone concerned about journalism's survival needs to ask. The industries driving the changes in the new communications systems—telephone and cable TV companies, computer and entertainment companies—aren't going to ask these questions, let alone answer them. The business sides of newspaper and broadcasting companies may not ask them, because they don't obviously relate to the short-term bottom line. Indeed, the business people—for all the hype surrounding their decisions—are often as clueless as the rest of us. I sometimes wonder whether the frenzy of media mergers has been fueled by the search for a partner who understands what the hell is going on.

Journalists, therefore, have got to get a whole lot more sophisticated about understanding what's going on and what it means—to journalism, to the political system, to the public and to the old and new businesses that sell journalism under the protection of the First Amendment. Then we've got to ask ourselves what we need to accept and what we need to do, before it's too late.

Here are some ideas about where to start, individually and collectively.

### **1. Launch a massive technological literacy campaign for journalists.**

We're making progress here. Many individual journalists are teaching themselves, and organizations such as Investigative Reporters and Editors are providing better and better training opportunities. Recent Pulitzer Prizes have showcased the difference computer-assisted reporting can make.

Still, given that personal computers have already been around for more

than a decade, it's shameful how slowly we're still moving to take advantage of the new tools for reporting, thinking, communicating and telling stories. The nation's newsrooms are full of reporters and editors who have no idea how to mine the vast resources of the on-line world—much less how to prepare themselves to produce journalism for interactive, multi-media formats. It's as though a whole generation of journalists and journalism educators secretly believes that they'll be able to retire before having to relearn their jobs.

For their part, many publishers talk a good game about the central importance of the information franchise, arguing that substance and content—not delivery systems—will drive the future. That's good news for journalists. Yet the big investments go into new delivery systems and mergers, rather than into the hiring, training and equipping of the people who gather information.

We can do better, much better. And we must, before our ignorance kills us. The communications marketplace is already full of information providers who spotted the new opportunities traditional journalism companies have missed. Nexus and CNN spring immediately to mind.

People at the top of the profession, in a position to negotiate for resources, need to provide more aggressive leadership, inspiring their colleagues and their companies to adapt old values to new realities. Reporters and editors need to be given time and the equipment to learn new skills and imagine how to do their jobs better. Newsrooms need to be energized by the possibilities, not immobilized by fear.

Proposed innovations need to be funded and rewarded as experiments that will increase the learning curve.

We also need to insist that the journalism schools train their students for the future, not the past. Nobody should graduate from a journalism school now without sophisticated computer skills, a broad introduction to working in various media and the understanding that their jobs may require them to work well in teams.

Journalists in the future will be asked to perform new functions, in new jobs, in new market niches. Will we be ready?

### **2. Educate ourselves about the ethical, economic and political issues surrounding the "information highway"—and cover them aggressively.**

The hype about any new technology always races ahead of serious questions about the moral and social implications. Certainly that has been the case so far about the multi-media, interactive future, which has been covered in the mainstream press as a business story, a feature story and a subject for grumpy Luddite columnists. This failure is due, in part, to the ignorance just discussed, not only of technology but of history as well. Important technology stories are waiting to be discovered in the schools, museums, libraries, hospitals and governments. But too many reporters and their editors don't know where to look or what questions to ask.

The restructuring of the communications system is an enormous story. So far, the agenda has been shaped by the big industries most affected, especially telephones and cable television. The nation's press could do a big service by helping frame the debate in broader terms—not as a business story, but as a public policy story that will affect every citizen for decades to come. If access to the information highway will mean access to the democratic system, as many experts believe, what protections need to be built in to make sure that no one is left out, that not just the elite benefit?

Educating ourselves about these changes will have an important side effect: a deeper understanding of the stakes for journalism. If huge, new companies are allowed to control both the conduits and the content that moves over them, what are the dangers? If the system develops as pay per view, what are the implications for news programming?

These are urgent questions in a year when major communications reform bills are moving through Congress.

### **3. Make the case that journalism is worth saving—then sell it to the public.**

Technology and economics aren't the only challenges we face. Indeed, one might argue they aren't even the

greatest ones. Our own performance has led to an deepening credibility problem, which in turn feeds the desire some people have to bypass mainstream journalism and search for other information sources.

We're arrogant, we're ignorant, we're destructive. If citizens are disengaged from politics, our cynicism is partly to blame. This litany from critics inside and outside the profession is familiar—and mostly ignored in the nation's newsrooms.

It's not just that journalists failed to report well on such major stories as the S&L crisis and the massive redistribution of wealth that took place during the 1980's. The problem extends deeply into the journalistic norms that favor drama, conflict, celebrity and toughness when it comes to defining news.

"The blunt truth is that tinkering and half-measures will no longer do the trick," Washington Post media writer Howard Kurtz said in his book "Media Circus." "There is a cancer eating away at the newspaper business—the cancer of boredom, superficiality, and irrelevance—and radical surgery is needed."

Novelist Michael Crichton went further in his speech last year to the National Press Club, labeling us dinosaurs whose ingrained habits for gathering and reporting the news are little more than "a way to conceal institutional incompetence." Our product, he said, is "flashy but it's basically junk. So people have begun to stop buying it."

People also don't understand why good journalism matters. Public support for government censorship during the Gulf War dramatically illustrated how few citizens understand the difference between propaganda and independent reporting, and therefore the need for a skilled, free press. The popularity of tabloid TV shows deepens the problem, especially when mainstream reporters start behaving like infotainers, promoting every Tonya Harding story into a major international event.

In short, we do not really know how many publics there are. If that is true now, imagine the problems journalism will face in the new world. Who will be our publics? How many are there? What information will they want? In what

form? How will they want to get information? When and how often will they want the information? How can we serve such a fragmented market? We cannot decide what we will do until we understand the needs and desires of the segments that make up the market.

If professional journalism is to survive, professional journalists have to be willing to be as tough on ourselves as we routinely are on others. And we need to understand that there's nothing sacred about *how* we've defined our jobs in the past—which is where the new technologies and economics may provide us with an opportunity.

It is easy to imagine a future in which the newspaper won't be dropped on the front porch. The "newspaper" can become the community's front porch. New technologies will make it possible for people to gather, to gossip, to debate, to play a game together, because the "newspaper" has made it possible for them to find each other. Journalists will sit on the porch too, telling their stories and listening to peoples' reactions. Just behind the front porch, through the front door, will lie the world of information and ideas and people. The "newspaper" will help anyone who walks through in search of a fact or a service, whether they're looking for the most minute detail about the local sandlot league or about desert sands half a planet away.

In this future, journalists can more often be perceived as raconteurs and bridge builders and researchers, not just cynical public prosecutors. Indeed, electronic mail and "real time" forums are already making new relationships with audiences possible.

So we can and should make the case that journalism is worth saving by improving our performance and reaching out to readers and viewers. But we should consider finding other ways of reaching out as well.

We might call for a new Hutchins Commission report for the 21st Century—a blue ribbon panel of respected Americans who can study the purposes and performance of the press. This group may be precisely the place to sort out the whos, whats, whens, wheres, hows and whys of responsible 21st Cen-

tury journalism. The commission could, for instance, study the democratic functions of town hall meetings, talk shows, electronic interest groups and investigative reporting. Facing the future may well mean coming to terms with when journalists aren't needed, as well as when we are.

Or, as Bill Kovach, the Nieman Foundation curator, has suggested, journalists might get involved in popular culture, creating scripts and series that tell the story of real journalists doing their jobs.

Whatever the strategy, we've got to find some high-profile ways to argue that raw data and video, uploaded and downloaded in every home, can't substitute entirely for professional journalism in a free society.

**4. Advocate for, support and pay attention to serious intellectual work that could have an impact on public interest journalism, including the boldest experiments, no matter who is funding them.**

If our job is to help educate the public, we do it, too often, blind. How do ideas spread? Why do some stories have impact and others die? How do people learn from media? What do they retain and what do they forget? What's the role of fun, and aesthetics and the ability to talk back? What kinds of stories are best told in print, which in video?

We can't afford to guess about questions like these. Serious corporate thinking is going on about interactive video advertising messages, sophisticated new computer games, new computer agents to do our information retrieval for us, and lord knows what else. A few journalistic pioneers are out there experimenting with and promoting new ways of getting citizens involved in community dialogues. But we need more high-profile and intellectually rigorous efforts to look at the kind of communication a democracy needs—and how indeed it might need to be marketed.

Listen to this description of the kind of research going on at Xerox's research facility in California: "...doctrine today is grounded in an intellectual founda-

tion combining aspects of biology, anthropology, organizational and literary theory, along with the ideas of traditional physics, engineering, software and systems, and cognitive science," writes Howard Rheingold in *Wired* magazine. The head of the facility "envision[s] a new, dynamic ecology of communications—rather than a static architecture of information."

That's just the sort of sophistication we need about news and communication in a political system. We may get some of it from MIT's Media Lab, where investigators are exploring the possibility that news could become a service integrated into your life, rather than a product you retrieve.

So far, the high-profile redefinitions of journalism—The Orange County Register and Boca Raton, for instance—have advocated viewing readers as customers who need to be given what they want. That's an important antidote to top-down high-mindedness. But it may not go far enough. Maybe, as Tufts political scientist Russell Neuman has suggested, we need to start over and ask what is journalism that serves the people—and how can we fund it.

Since that sort of big project is unlikely to be supported coherently by an industry that has always lacked serious R&D, independent researchers and journalists will probably have to assemble the pieces on their own, by studying bulletin board systems, 24-hour local cable news channels, the computer industry's R&D, the first interactive television experiments, and much more. We need to be open to learning from innovators, whenever and wherever we find them, inside or outside journalism, inside or outside Big Media funded projects.

Will the bulletin board systems really make newsrooms more accountable? What kinds of public dialogues work best on-line? When is it a good idea for reporters to carry video cams, as we carry tape recorders now, and when is it really a bad idea? What can we learn from the newspapers-on-TV experiments in Chicago and Philadelphia? Will Xerox show how new communication systems can change human relationships? Will the alternative press and

specialized magazines show the way, as they so often have during the last 30 years? Should freenets be absorbed by local news on-line systems, or should certain kinds of public information be protected from proprietary commercial interests?

These are the sorts of questions we need to study, while remaining open to the surprising answers we may find. Certainly the early newspaper-funded video text experiments hinted that personal communication, rather than data retrieval, is central to the new on-line cultures. That's a message that might have set newspapers on a different course much earlier—if they had heeded it.

In short, we need to unlock our imaginations, deepen our knowledge, learn to see the intellectual box we're sitting in. We need to get beyond what University of North Carolina Professor Donald Shaw has called "analog thinking in a digital world."

#### **5. Consider whether we need a new advocacy organization for journalists.**

Do any of the existing organizations have the muscle and the vision to redefine journalism? Maybe. Or do we need to make a fresh beginning, as the newspaper publishers recently did? New York University Professor Jay Rosen has suggested a Union of Democratic Journalists, dedicated to reimagining the purposes of the profession.

Journalists, I believe, need to carefully differentiate the stakes we must defend from the stakes of our employers—or even the fate of the particular medium we have preferred to work in so far. The corporate identities and product lines of our employers will change. The media are all going to blend together.

We need to understand that what we have in common is far more important than what separates us, whether we practice our journalism as mainstream reporters, book writers, independent documentary filmmakers, magazine editors, public radio correspondents, television magazine producers, or alternative press columnists. Powerful forces are arrayed in opposition to the

quality journalism and dissenting voices a democracy needs.

So we don't need an agenda for newspapers, or television, or radio—how to save them, how to improve them. We need a new agenda for journalism, and perhaps an organization to help us move beyond our lone hero culture.

Such an organization could advocate for the ideas already mentioned on this agenda. It could certainly facilitate communication about innovation. And it could help explore new ways to finance public interest journalism.

The current regulatory fight over the shape of the new communications system is a good place to start. Journalists need to consider joining with librarians, public educators and public interest groups in lobbying over access and pricing issues. Along with these groups, we have an interest in keeping public information free or cheap, and access open to small competitors, such as journalists who may want to open their own shops. Our employers may well have an understandable interest in protecting their investments by limiting access and charging high prices for easy access to large databases.

Then there are the coming battles over intellectual property. Again, journalists may need to part ways with our employers. We will have an interest in preserving the most open intellectual marketplace possible, where those who generate knowledge can make sure potential readers get access to it and authors get compensated fairly for repeated on-line uses.

In other words, journalists have to find new ways to work together because the huge once-in-a-lifetime story we need to react to, to mobilize our resources for, is journalism itself.

So there you have it—an attempt to address some of the opportunities and threats before us. We need to help each other learn and act. After all, when it comes to facing this complex future, there's really only one ethical stance for committed journalists: tough-minded hope. ■

# A Cautionary Tale

*Digital Manipulation Can Not Only Improve Photos  
But Also Raise Question of Credibility*

BY FRANK VAN RIPER

Among my colleagues who are commercial photographers, one of the hottest topics of conversation these days is how many thousands of dollars we all are going to have to spend on computers in order to remain competitive in our field.

"Digital imaging," "computer enhancement," "next generation Scitex"—these are the things you hear being discussed much more than the tonal range of a print, or its composition, or—heaven forbid—its content.

And among young photographers, especially those fortunate enough to have trained at good schools, the excitement in producing an image seems as much generated by the electronic tools they have been able to use to expand their vision as by the quaint boxes in their hands called cameras.

It is understandable, even good, when something new generates great interest, especially when, in the case of electronic photography, technology can free the individual from much tedious darkroom work or set design. But as photography prepares to enter the next century—still and always among the very youngest of the visual arts—it is important to recall what makes photography unique and how that uniqueness has carved a niche for it among the fine arts, as well as a singular position for it in journalism.

Doubtless because of my own background as a journalist, photography always has seemed to me first a medium of reportage and of storytelling. It literally is the only one of the visual arts in which the subject depicted determines absolutely what that depiction will be. Put simply: A painter can create an image from memory; a photographer

cannot. For this reason photography has gained a reputation for truth-telling. ("The camera never lies," though in fact the camera always lies simply by translating a three-dimensional image into one of only two dimensions.)

This is not to say that a manipulated image is less desirable than one that is not; only that something precious is sacrificed whenever such manipulation goes to extremes.

The same inherent dislike of manipulation that prompted Stieglitz and other adherents of "straight" photography to rebel against those who, through manipulating their negatives or painting their prints, tried to turn photography into something it was not (namely, another form of painting) animates my criticism of moving photography too far into the new world of computer enhancement and other manipulation.

But before going further, let me lay aside one straw man: that it is wrong to manipulate an image. As artists we can do whatever we please to express our vision. And remember: manipulation did not begin with the Mac. One only has to look at the work of Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy, the surreal photographic constructions of Jerry Uelsmann—or for that matter the multiple variations of tone, cropping and printing that Stieglitz himself was known to perform on individual negatives to see that beautiful pictures are not necessarily produced only from 8 x 10 contact prints.

In journalism, the difficulty over manipulation is more a moral than an artistic dilemma, yet one that also touches on the very aspect that makes photography special—the ability to record objectively what lies before it. Ever since the halftone printing process

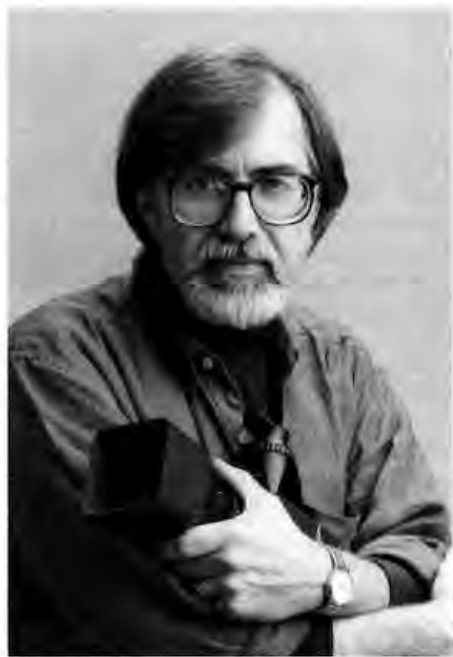


photo © Judith Goodman

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permitted the quick and mass dissemination of photographs, a picture in a newspaper or magazine was a kind of editorial underpinning for the text it accompanied. A reporter might, through ignorance or intent, slant a story, but the picture was there—"in black and white"—to at least give the reader a reasonably objective look at the players involved, or the action or object described, the better for the reader to reach an opinion.

Now, however, even photos can be suspect. The ease with which an image or negative can be scanned, its information digitized, its final incarnation altered, has created an understandable uproar among journalism ethicists. Two examples from early this year: New York Newsday's page one photo of Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding seemingly skating together in a practice session at the Olympics and ABC's Cokie Roberts, in an overcoat, seemingly standing outside the national Capitol in Washington as she reported on Congress. Actually she was standing in front of a large photo of the Capitol on a wall of the ABC Washington bureau.

New York Newsday's caption clearly labeled the photo a composite and said that the imaginary event had not yet occurred. New York Newsday's Editor, Donald Forst, said he saw no ethical issue involved. "I think there is nothing wrong with illustration—and using the magic of electronics to do so—as long as it is understood as such." Stephen D. Isaacs, the Acting Dean of the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, denounced the picture as "the ultimate journalistic sin" because it tampered with reality. "A composite photograph is a lie, and, therefore, a great danger to the standards and integrity of what we do," he told *The New York Times*.

In the Cokie Roberts case, Richard C. Wald, Senior Vice President of ABC News, reprimanded her and the Executive Producer of "World News Tonight," Rick Kaplan. "Even though it had no editorial effect, the action was serious because it misled the audience," Wald said in a memo.

It's not that an evil cabal of editors is putting bags under Hillary Rodham

Clinton's eyes every time she appears in the paper, or that the Pope is shown dancing at a nightclub in Paris when in fact he was saying mass in Rome. The fear and uproar is over the fact that these admittedly farfetched examples could happen, with no one the wiser, so sophisticated has digital manipulation become.

In this regard, I'm reminded of one of the few downsides of computers in written journalism.

When I first began as a reporter in the mid-to-late 60's, I typed my stories manually onto six-part carbon "books," each page earmarked for a different desk in the city room. Depending on the story's content, the City Desk or National Desk would edit my piece first, with a heavy black copy pencil. The corrections and changes would be obvious for all to see. The other desks would then use their own carbon copies of my now-edited piece to write headlines, space the story on a page—and occasionally to edit some more.

If my story appeared in the paper the next day in a way that curdled my lunch I could, if I wanted, go through the offending desk's spike of carbons and determine where my prose had been mangled, and by whom.

Now, however, that's all but impossible. Each change on a computer screen creates a new original. Editors today leave no footprints or fingerprints.

This is one reason there was such hell to pay a few years back when *National Geographic*, for purely aesthetic reasons, digitally moved one of the great pyramids of Egypt so it would fit better on its cover. This was, if you will, the nose of the camel under the tent. If a magazine of the caliber of *National Geo* could manipulate an image anonymously and with impunity, argued the ethicists, it would not be long before every image in the public prints could be suspect. Outlandish though it might seem, the same drive for a compelling picture that produces in a supermarket scandal sheet a shot of Bill Clinton deep in conversation with an extraterrestrial is also what may entice a serious picture editor to remove an extraneous person from the middle of a group photo, or to truncate or expand an image to better

fit onto a page.

This is all very innocent. But insidious, too. After all, it used to be commonplace for totalitarian regimes to remove "nonpersons" from official photographs, often with laughable crudeness. Now, however, the same can be achieved seamlessly with the push of a button.

The computer doesn't care. And it doesn't leave fingerprints.

Should the day ever come when photographs in mainstream newspapers or magazines are greeted with doubt as to their very content or origin, something terrible will have happened to our democratic free press in the name of higher technology.

When process dominates or interferes with image it is well to ask if the manipulation is being used prudently or merely for its own sake. For example, does every movie trailer, TV station signature, or magazine layout have to look as if it were produced by *Industrial Light and Magic*? The marriage of first-rate photography with computer manipulation and intelligent art direction can produce the kind of arresting images that would have been impossible to achieve in the past without laborious set design, model making, hours of darkroom time—and in many cases, luck.

There's no denying that computer imaging is becoming, not merely a way to change or improve upon the silver image, but an entire art form. Nevertheless, photographers should realize that anything that removes the "photographness" of their photographs not only can change their work, but also diminish and devalue it at the same time. ■



photo ©Goodman/Van Ripper



## How Composite Was Made

Andrew Child, a Washington area corporate and advertising photographer who specializes in electronic imaging, explains how he made the Kennedy-Cronkite composite picture, which he created for demonstration purposes only.

First he separately scanned photographs of Senator Edward Kennedy and the other man, and photo of Walter Cronkite, on a black and white 300 dots per inch flatbed scanner. Then he adjusted contrast and brightness for each image. Next he selected the other man's body and saved the selection as a mask. (To mask is to electronically segregate it.)

The next step was to select Cronkite's head and save it as a mask. The Cronkite head was electronically pasted into Kennedy photo in such a way that the other man's body was protected by the mask from the pasting. This technique assured a clean neckline with the collar.

Cronkite's head was reduced to a reasonable size, reversed and rotated slightly clockwise so he is looking toward Kennedy's face. Edges around Cronkite's head were touched up to make pasting seamless.

The next step was to electronically "dodge," or lighten, Cronkite's forehead and chin. After that miscellaneous touch-ups furthered the illusion that the image was taken with the same lighting. Then the other man's body mask was scaled out horizontally to increase it in size slightly. Pixels along waistline were cloned to create more Cronkited physique. Body edges were touched up and areas of carpet around foot and legs were cloned to fill in gaps left by scaling. The other man's hands were burned (darkened) to match Cronkite's facial skin tones. A hotspot (a very bright spot) behind Kennedy's head was burned and some hair was cloned in where hotspot flared into his head. The final action was a little spot printing (removing white specks) to compensate for dust on the scanner glass. Then, photographer Child said, he waited for the "Truth in Photojournalism Police" to come knocking at his door. ■

# Reinventing Foreign Correspondence

*Dangerous New World Demands New Thinking,  
New Reporting and New Look at Ethics*

BY WILLIAM D. MONTALBANO

**W**e were foreign correspondents, prideful American outposts in cultured corners, mobile troubleshooters in chilling cul-de-sacs of a divided world. For exhilarating decades, wherever we were, whatever else we did, we were threat monitors, counting Commies, firing warning flares; we fought front line in the trench coats and bars of a world ominously stalked by the Red Menace.

There was The Wall. It was a cruel absolute, but also solidly reassuring. We knew what side we stood on, and what evil lurked on the other. Cold Warriors had many enemies.

We understood some better than others, but we surveilled them all: Kremlin clods, Vietnamese warriors who could not make a revolution work, Maoist madmen cursing one-fifth of humanity to backwardness, African chieftains in ideological drag, angry Arabs turning to Moscow in quicksilver quest for Jerusalem, Italy's Moscow-shy Eurocommunists.

The world turns. With the passing of the Cold War, it is time to count the last half century's practice of American foreign correspondence among the casualties of a victory that it helped to win.

When communism collapsed, so did the foundation that sustained American foreign correspondence since World War II. Happily, there's no time to rest in the noisy absence of peace that has replaced superpower confrontation.

Change is opportunity in a suddenly unipolar world largely uncharted and dangerously fissured. It demands new thinking, new ideas and new reporting techniques to effectively cover it—and America's uneasy new role in its flux.

Today's dangerous new world also demands a new look at the ethical underpinning of foreign coverage. We must be more aware than ever that our responsibility is to cover the news, not to make it. For young countries and assertive regions uncertainly steering new courses, international media exposure can have both immediate and unsettling impact. We must rigorously shun simplistic black/white labels in identifying players on complex fields whose dominant color is often gray.

## Change With Grace

Mirroring changes within newspapers that have historically sponsored the best of it, the style and the substance of American foreign correspondence has endured many wounds since World War II: reader ennui, editor myopia, and revolutions of technology and communication that robbed the written word of its immediacy and muted its impact. Today, fewer correspondents battle for constricting space in designer news holes.

Around the world, the latter-day relative handful of American correspondents have borne change with perseverance of purpose, even some grace. Now, After the Fall, we have a chance to accelerate the change to better cover the new-mosaic world by re-examining where we live, how we work and what we write.

We have a once-in-a-life chance to redefine the nature of one of American journalism's endangered jewels. We can rewrite our mandate and recast our craft. To make it better. And to assure its survival in the McMind epoch.

We must learn to husband dwindling resources, and to more finely calculate risk. We must transform the self-image of the correspondent, and the correspondent's usefulness to his reader.

There was a time when a cornerstone of foreign correspondence was to get there in a hurry. No more. Because there's no need any more to be the fastest: inevitably—fact of life—there's always a camera there first. The correspondent-as-paratrooper is a dimin-



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ished asset if the battleground into which he is dropping has already been widely seen and is well-known.

The good news is that cameras are like computers: they can't think. We can. A new-look correspondent needs to be not fastest, but smartest.

Today, the correspondent-as-interpreter is more valuable than ever, because it is ever-more important to have savvy outriders exploring volatile, complex events in often little-known places no longer tied to communism and Moscow.

For one thing, there are many more countries where an American correspondent can freely go than there were when the world was neatly halved. For another, they are, almost generically, harder to understand and explain as they wrestle with new economics amid political and cultural uncertainty. And most of their governments now treat directly with the United States rather than through a Soviet interlocutor.

Correspondent Redux needs to be a curious soul as ever able to explain what she sees to Americans who, in their great majority, either have no innate interest in what is reported, or—worse—an active disinterest in offshore anything.

Bend-the-ethics quick fixes won't bridge the gap. Shallow thinking tabloid responses to broadsheet issues won't work. Puerile, Diana-at-the-gym attention grabbers ultimately tattle more about the publications that rely on them than the people and countries they portray.

While we must never sacrifice substance for style, we must nevertheless make foreign correspondence more alluring to a largely apathetic audience. It must be more immediate, more pertinent, more relevant, more readable. We must report better. We must write better. And shorter.

We must, in short, make century's end foreign correspondence better for all the common sense, dollar and cents, and national interest reasons that have always underlain its purpose.

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### The Nepal Telex

It is only a few years since an American correspondent taking some unannounced time off on a Nepalese mountainside was confronted by a four-day-old, get-there-now telex brought by a Sherpa who improbably trekked him down. With masterpiece (and perhaps apocryphal) inspiration the correspondent scrawled a reply for the Sherpa to schlep back to civilization: "Message garbled, please repeat."

There has always been a lot of the Yankee tinker in American correspondents out on the rim. Whatever journalism we produced, we have been masters of the improbable: squeezing out visas for Iraq and lemons in a Beijing winter. Every plane has that one extra seat and no hotel is ever really fully booked when something's burning. Long rides across bleak mountains on cold nights; restaurants closed 10 minutes before; jostles for an elusive phone; places you'd rather not have been, things you wish you hadn't seen.

It's sometimes hard to explain foreign correspondence to touch tone folks at designer desks in homogenized glass cages. But it shouldn't matter, as long as we recognize that seat-of-the-pants living is not only a big part of what we do, but also often a big part of why we do it.

Hooky, for example, is a

correspondent's birthright, even if it's chancier fun these days: You can still run; it's just harder to hide. Communications technology, world-binding in ideology's wake as never before, sometimes rankles. But at base it is a correspondent's friend: less technical hassle means more time for journalism—and unrelated unreportables. So, too, the welcome, new-found freedom to travel more places, and to get there easier. Like phones that work, that ought to be a catalyst for better foreign correspondence, not least by adding novelty to substance: everybody loves exotic datelines and the tales of little known places implicit in them.

So far so good, but there is a scary flip side to post-communism's impact on foreign correspondence, and that is the changing nature of old-fashioned violence that stalks the changed globe. One of the truisms about foreign correspondence is that sometimes it is dangerous to practice it right. Staying alive in the nastier neighborhoods of today's fractured new world can be tougher than ever: there are suddenly more of them, and they are peopled by gunmen with greater firepower who shoot in more directions with less discipline. Old rules still apply when more than rhetoric flies: heroism is not in the job description.

Best, when temptation bites, when the itch to ride down that one more dusty road absolutely must be scratched, to recite The Correspondent's Credo: There's nothing here worth getting killed for. Reinforce against foolhardiness with close focus observance of Montalbano's Second Law: *Never go anywhere with a photographer.*

Editors back home can never know what we know about danger on the ground, so it must be correspondents themselves who decide what can be covered and what must not be. It is an every-story-is-different question of weighing risk and need. I think, for example, that any good correspondent would have found herself on the streets around Tiananmen Square in 1989, and near Moscow's White House last Autumn (1993.)

As a general rule, though, chronicling mindless violence in lesser places

may not be worth the risk. There came a time when it was smart to leave Lebanon, just as, now, it is probably smart to think about going back. Somalia, another case in point, strikes me as precursor of new age anarchy that needs to be reported with a coldly reasoned blend of dedication and circumspection.

Stories like Somalia with a strong American spin demand coverage despite considerable danger, but there is nothing, (except perhaps human nature), to say they cannot be covered dispassionately.

As a matter of principle, when there are no security guarantees for correspondents on the ground, there shouldn't be any correspondents on the ground. That is when the shooting time should become a waiting game.

Even anarchic places stumble into fleeting instants of reason, or at least truce. If only in exhaustion. Use them to go in—quick and dirty—for sharp, short reporting. Write the stories someplace safe.

Last year, 56 journalists were killed around the world while covering the news. Too many, too many. Many were victims of murderers whose chieftains see journalists not as observers but as threats and targets. Often—Bosnia today, El Salvador yesterday—both sides shoot at reporters. What defense do we have in anarchic places like ex-Yugoslavia, disintegrating African states and countries where mindless mobs or crazed zealots kill indiscriminately, as if for sport? Beyond common sense, not much. Giving danger a miss is not always the easiest or most ego-satisfying role for a reporter. But, like having the courage not to file when there's nothing worth saying, it is always better to live to write another day.

It is in places where violence is not all-consuming that it is possible to test new-breed correspondence. Its basis, no surprise, is old-fashioned good reporting adapted to new realities.

Today there are awakening countries on virtually every continent that were dictatorships a short while ago. Reporting from a dictatorship is hard work. Dictators invariably muzzle information. (When I got to just-opening China in 1980, even the next day's

weather forecast was secret.)

In countries where, by contrast, information flows freely, I think we ought to make use of it. Every correspondent brings his own agenda to work with him. My own working premise is to cede "the government said today," to The New York Times, "despite Administration assertions," to The Washington Post, agate to The Wall Street Journal and small thoughts to USA Today. That leaves me a lot of nice eddies to fish, thanks.

The first thing I want to know when I arrive in a country is what I have to work to get, and what's for free.

Researching a political overview, it would be important to interview opposition leaders in, say, Cuba or Myanmar (Burma), but not necessarily in Greece or Spain where open-mouthed politicians are regular visitors to newspaper columns and the evening news. If it's quotes you crave, there they are.

It's ideas and the people behind them on which I focus my reporting, not chasing sound bites. The task is not to impress the reader with how important the correspondent is—hobnobbing with all those VIPs—but to persuade the reader, quickly and engagingly, why he should care enough to finish the story.

As an aid to reader engagement, I offer Montalbano's Third Law: Never *interview anybody you can't quote*. I know that's quaint and impossible in self-erasing places like Washington, but, happily, not yet in the real world.

It means that everybody you quote has a name, and a face, which you might even describe, if it were possible to do that without being racist, sexist or ageist. Once a character in your story has a name and a face she is no longer a shadowy half-thing called a source, but real: a person. People like to read about persons.

The goal of tying quotes to sources with names may be as anachronistic, say, as talking face-to with the helpful folk who will people your stories. But I do that, too.

Sometimes I go a whole week without breaking the Third Law. If there's an idea worth putting in the paper, often all it takes is a little extra reporting to

find somebody—a politician, a government official, a newspaper editor—to say it for attribution. Failing all else, it is always possible to sneak ideas into print as if they came from God (the idea is the correspondent's.) Woe betide the reporter (or the editor) who believes pertinent thoughts must be tarted up with "observers here believe."

Something else I try never to forget is that Western diplomats are cab drivers. Sure, correspondents should talk with diplomats: It's often important to know what balloon the neighborhood American Embassy is flying. But diplomats, like cab drivers, should never make the paper except when the United States is a major player. In all their many guises, informed sources, Western observers and their shadowy cousins should be banned from every story that does not directly bear on American interests.

Indeed, one of the most fundamental reasons why we must make foreign correspondence sharper and more reader friendly is patriotic.

Fewer correspondents and fewer foreign bureaus means more reliance on Washington bureaus means more reliance on government and greater opportunity for government to influence both the news agenda and its content.

Professional, high quality, foreign correspondence is as essential as ever if Americans are to have independent means of knowing what is happening in a volatile new world where surprise is apt to be the only certainty.

It's this simple: while American foreign correspondents are a shrinking thin line, the bewildering number of independent new Backlandists, each demanding its own American Embassy, is proving the greatest boon to diplomatic careerism since the cleft stick.

Damned if I want my world reduced to a two-dimensional set for whatever theater's playing inside the Beltway this week. If we don't take the trouble to go out and vigorously look for ourselves at the post-Wall world, Washington will tell us—on deep background—all it needs us to know about it. Count on that, observers here believe. ■

# Who Goes Where in Montalbano's World

- **We need to re-examine where foreign bureaus are placed and whether it makes sense to keep them there.** Reporting flexibility demands basing flexibility. Good journalism requires uncompromising ethical standards in the selection of bureaus, correspondents and stories. We cannot walk away from stories abroad because they seem too hard, too far, or too costly, any more than we can at home. Historically, the majority of American correspondents have been based in a dozen countries: Argentina, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, Russia, United Kingdom. We have shuffled around when circumstances demanded: Lebanon out, China in; and when news demanded Central America out, in, now out again. There is no sense wearing a hair shirt because the flow of information remains overwhelmingly North-North. That is the flow of news most important to Americans. Neither, though, have we proved as innovative as we might have, or as quick to match changing circumstance. It is a long time since Rio de Janeiro was either the economic or the political capital of Brazil, but it remains the base for American coverage of Brazil. It is by now nearly two decades since the Latin American country that reaches most directly, most often—and most menacingly—into the lives of most Americans has been Colombia. How many American newspapers have based correspondents in Colombia over the past two decades? Turkey, like Indonesia, is one of the great secrets American newspapers keep from their readers. Not even The Associated Press—shame!—has a resident American correspondent in Tur-

key, a dynamic Muslim democracy at the volcanic junction of East and West, North and South. Turkey is newsy in its own right, and a springboard for covering its linguistic and religious cousins in the newly independent former Soviet republics of Central Asia.

- **We need to think more about bureaus with precise missions and limited lifetimes.** Technology liberates newspapers, if not wire services, from the need for established offices everywhere. They can come and go as circumstances and news interest demand. Asia, as focus of mounting economic importance and awakening reader interest, is particularly fertile ground for think-quick foreign correspondence. It no longer makes sense to staff Manila, but Hong Kong beckons, as a base for business writing and as a news source in the runup to 1997. I think any foreign report could benefit from a curious correspondent who lived for a year or two in Korea, moved on to Indonesia, and wound up in Australia around 1999 thinking Olympics.
- **If we are restructuring the craft with an eye toward stretching precious resources, we also ought to look at datelines, one of our oldest and most justly honored sacred cows.** The rule is that you can't put a dateline on a daily story unless you are actually there that day. Fair enough. If a plane crashes, go. When less-than-page-one daily stories interest editors from countries where there is no correspondent the answer is to use wires or a stringer. It seems to me, though, that if the correspondent responsible for the

country has been there recently he should write from wherever he is. Clips, wires, and phone interviews will invariably produce better copy than wire or stringer copy. Run the story undated or use the dateline that the correspondent is writing from with a shirttail to say he was recently in... The trick, of course is to be honest. If "recently in" stretches ethics, better use the wires.

- **American journalism in general and foreign correspondence in particular would profit from greater audacity by smaller papers.** Yes, they must leave big bureau networks and daily coverage to bigger fish. But that is no reason to abandon the game entirely. Why not blue ribbon foreign coverage? As mettle tester, morale builder. As fun for the staff, and for the readers. Pick a spot and go for it—even if only once or twice a year. It needn't cost much. It seems to me any paper of decent size anywhere in the southern U.S. ought to do some Mexico reporting of its own. How often do northern papers look at Canada? A sizable immigrant population living in town? How are things now in the countries the immigrants came from? Are investors from Japan, Germany or the Persian Gulf important newcomers to the local economy? Dispatch a young reporter to live "over there" for a few months, or a year or two, sending back publishable postcards composed on (second class) train rides. With a who-cares-if-it's-stolen laptop and an economy air ticket, she takes a dictionary and the editor's dog-eared copy of "The Innocents Abroad." ■

## Ideas on Assignments

- **We need to focus on issue-driven rather than event-driven foreign coverage.** Even in major countries we can no longer offer every-turn-of-the-screw reporting. There are some obvious exceptions: Russia, Israel, South Africa, China-when-Deng-goes. Elsewhere, there are insufficient resources, space and demand to warrant sustaining close examination except for brief periods of crisis. Coverage will usually remain politically driven. But on the understanding that in ever-more specialized global villages we cannot be all things to all people, stories should concentrate less on events that happened yesterday than on ideas and issues that will influence events tomorrow in individual countries and groups of countries. Ethically, our mission must rest on commitments to synthesize and to explain, bringing readers scope and meaning that exceed the reach of shallow, narrowly focused TV coverage.
- **We can't do it all, so we must do what we can do very well. We must write more about more and less about less.** That means fuller, more detailed and insightful reporting from countries that matter to American interests and American readers and, alas, less from those that don't—no matter whose sensibilities we offend. The Southern Hemisphere has a legitimate gripe about information flow, but it cannot be effectively addressed by correspondents with more to report than space to report it. We should fish, leaving dem finer minds (like our friendly monitor-critics in government and academia) to debate how to cut de bait.
- **We must be everywhere more catholic in our choice of issues and our story menu.** Most of us were weaned on politics, economics and violence. That's not enough anymore: a good correspondent must also write about business, technology, the arts, lifestyle, sports. More stories in more sections means more readers: salesmanship is now part of the correspondent's beat. Generate a demand for stories and then fill it.
- **We must look more at societal issues than at institutions like governments:** Who deals better with everyday problems of life in high-stress industrial societies than Americans? Why are West Europeans and Asians able to get along without huge loss of life from gunshot?
- **We must focus on elements within countries that have particular relevance to Americans and use them as a vehicle for wooing the reader.** Illustrate themes that reach into American lives. Scandinavia's not terribly alluring to most readers. But how Scandinavians confront social issues of concern to Americans, from child care to care for the elderly, is not only interesting, but also a good way of introducing other-structured societies to center-of-the-universe-minded Americans.
- **We must write more about people.** People, more than institutions, corporations, fads or fashions, must underlie the reporting and illuminate the reader. Real people with names and faces, accents and carbuncles, never faceless, empty informed sources who seldom really are. ■

## A Century Ago

William Montalbano's responsible appeal to reinvent foreign correspondence contrasts sharply with the new dimension that William Randolph Hearst brought to foreign affairs in the late 1890's. Hearst, too, wanted to reinvent foreign correspondence, but he created the news and beat the drums for war.

Without regard to international law, Hearst sent a man to Havana to break a rebel woman out of jail. He whipped up hysteria in the United States with false stories of Spanish cruelties, sailed into the battle area in his own ship, turned 40 Spanish sailors over to the rebels (who beheaded them) and even planned to sink a rented boat in the Suez Canal to stop a Spanish fleet from speeding to the Philippines.

But Hearst is perhaps best known for his telegram to Frederick Remington, the illustrator he had sent to Havana to cover the effort by Cuban rebels to win independence from Spain. Remington had telegraphed Hearst:

"Everything is quiet. There is no trouble here. There will be no war. I wish to return."—Remington.

Hearst telegraphed this response:

"Please remain. You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war."—W. R. Hearst.

W. A. Swanberg, in his biography of Hearst, concluded that the Spanish-American War was unnecessary. "It was the newspapers' war. Above all, it was Hearst's war."

Of special interest a century later is Swanberg's comment that Hearst's "tawdry flair for publicity and agitation" dragged Joseph Pulitzer's powerful World along with him "into journalistic ill-fame." In other words, competition led Pulitzer to lower his standards. ■

# Bobby Ray Inman

## *No Rules for Columnists, But a Basic Ethic Bars Journalists From Lobbying Government*

BY LARS-ERIK NELSON

Admiral Bobby Ray Inman, former head of the National Security Agency and former deputy director of Central Intelligence, was supposed to be one of Washington's smoothest operators, a man who keenly understood the interaction between government and the media. Yet after he was nominated by President Bill Clinton to be Secretary of Defense, he seemed genuinely baffled at the way the press attacked him. He specifically singled out columnists—William Safire and Anthony Lewis of *The New York Times* and Ellen Goodman of *The Boston Globe*—for articles that smacked, he said, of a “new McCarthyism.”

Inman's overwrought withdrawal prompted the editors of *Nieman Reports* to commission this essay, which sounds like a candidate for the world's shortest article: columnist ethics. Is there such a thing?

The short answer is no, at least not any standard of ethics that all would observe, except insofar as we are presumably decent human beings. Are we obliged to give both sides of a story? No. Are we supposed to be objective? Far from it. Are we supposed to be carefully measured in our prose, cautious in our conclusions, consistently logical in our reasoning, restrained in our passions, dispensing our judgments on friend and foe alike without fear or favor? Do those things as a columnist and die.

In his farewell, Inman leveled one specific charge that raises an unavoidable ethical question. He accused Safire, while a *Times* columnist, of lobbying former CIA Director Bill Casey to restore Israel's apparently unlimited access to CIA information on military targets, access that Inman had partially

limited. Casey agreed with Safire, but Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger backed Inman. Defeated in his private diplomacy, Safire thereafter referred to Inman as being “anti-Israel.”

One basic rule for journalists in Washington—at least for all those who carry press credentials—is that we do not lobby the government. We enjoy what little special access the press card gives us on the condition that we are using our access to inform the public, not to pursue a private agenda. If Inman is correct, Safire not only lobbied the government in private for a private purpose, but then used his *New York Times* column to punish Inman, his opponent in a secret bureaucratic struggle. Is this ethical? As a practical matter, *The New York Times* sets the standards for much of American journalism, and if *The Times*, in its majesty, decides Safire did

nothing wrong, that will inevitably be the new level of ethics to which we should all be held. To me, it stinks to high heaven.

Columnists remain the glaring exception to the professionalism of modern journalism. As late as the 1950's, working journalists wrote speeches for politicians they covered. Senator Joseph McCarthy was one of many who used friendly reporters to help him craft his prose. Today such collaboration by a working reporter would be considered outrageous, unprofessional, unethical and a firing offense. But in the 1980 presidential campaign, columnist George Will was only mildly criticized for helping candidate Ronald Reagan rehearse for his debates against Jimmy Carter—and then, as a TV commentator, praising Reagan's performance. Read the columns of Robert Novak on



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Jack Kemp and supply-side economics and you can't tell whether Novak is a commentator or one of Kemp's strategists.

Working as nationally syndicated columnists today we see not merely the superannuated reporters who once ascended to punditry, but also a former candidate for President, Pat Buchanan; a former chief of staff to House Speaker Tip O'Neill, Chris Mathews; a former ambassador to the United Nations, Jeane Kirkpatrick; two former Secretaries of State, Henry Kissinger and James Baker; a former political theorist in the Reagan White House, James Pinkerton; a former aide to Robert Kennedy, Jeff Greenfield; a former executive in Pat Robertson's Moral Majority, Cal Thomas. As a group, though only Buchanan, I believe, was professionally trained in journalism school, they are probably a good deal more ethical than some of the practitioners of the past. Arthur Krock of *The Times* was on a retainer from Joseph Kennedy Sr. Walter Lippmann helped write speeches for a succession of administrations. The *New York Times* obituary of its own C.L. Sulzberger disclosed that he was at times a mouthpiece for the Central Intelligence Agency. And this is not to mention legends of bombast and prejudice like John O'Donnell of *The New York Daily News*, who routinely used FBI leaks to smear his liberal opponents, or his fellow frothers Westbrook Pegler, Walter Winchell and George Skolsky.

Journalism, by and large, has become more ethical, not less so. But in the dozen years since Inman left Washington, there has been a change he clearly did not recognize. By coincidence, I became a columnist late in 1981, shortly before Inman resigned from government. One of the first calls I got was from Betty Cole Dukert, producer of *Meet the Press*, informing me that I could no longer be a panelist because I was a columnist, not a straight reporter, and *Meet the Press*—then hosted by Bill Monroe, who was as straight and clean as the Washington Monument—had its standards: impartiality, objectivity, fairness, etc. Today, *Meet the Press* is hosted by Tim Russert, a pleasant rascal who is a former aide to

Gov. Mario Cuomo and Sen. Pat Moynihan. Russert's panelists are almost invariably opinion columnists: Novak, David Broder, Mary McGrory. Instead of "straight reporters" discussing his nomination, Inman could see Safire describing him as the worst nomination President Clinton ever made—with no rebuttal.

Further, there has been a mixing of roles that would never have been tolerated in the past. ABC TV's White House correspondent, Brit Hume, is a columnist for William F. Buckley Jr.'s *National Review*. Eleanor Clift of *Newsweek* is a straight news reporter, and an excellent one, in the magazine, and a liberal advocate, also an excellent one, on the McLaughlin Group. But what are we to make of *Time*'s Michael Kramer, who used his access to President Clinton at a Renaissance Weekend in South Carolina to lobby for his wife, Kimba Wood, to become Attorney General? What are

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**For a syndicated columnist, the way to success is a) appearing on television and b) taking a predictable, even knee-jerk posture so that editorial page editors can balance their pages with commentary left and right, black and white, male and female, Anglo and Latino. Editors reason that if they present an entertaining, combative lunacy of the left and an equal lunacy of the right, the truth must obviously lie, as Lippmann so often said, somewhere between these two extremes.**

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we to make of David Gergen, communications director in the Reagan White House, then a columnist who praised Clinton, and now an adviser to Clinton? This role-swapping muddles the issue beyond rigorous analysis.

Television plays a central role: television thrives on conflict, not reasoned discourse. The slam-bang, take-no-prisoners combat of McLaughlin Group and *Crossfire* now sets the standard for print as well. For a syndicated columnist, the way to success is a) appearing on television and b) taking a predictable, even knee-jerk posture so that editorial page editors can balance their pages with commentary left and right, black and white, male and female, Anglo and Latino. Editors reason that if they present an entertaining, combative lunacy of the left and an equal lunacy of the right, the truth must obviously lie, as Lippmann so often said, somewhere between these two extremes.

For a columnist, the way to avoid success is to be unpredictable, to weigh each issue fairly on its merits and take whichever position seems most logical, to be willing to offend old friends, to resist the flattery of powerful politicians who seek your private counsel, to refuse to demonize opponents, to have no personal political ambitions or private agenda, to admit error when wrong, to refuse to use journalistic access for private gain, to turn down invitations to address, for large sums, powerful interest groups like the American Medical Association and the National Organization for Women, to shun the social opportunities offered by the Bohemian Grove or the Council on Foreign Relations, to serve your readers rather than your ambitions and never, never use your column for private revenge. If you know of any columnist like that, I would say he or she is ethical—and does not appear in very many newspapers. George Orwell was such a columnist. If not for his novels, he would have died poor. ■

# Tonya Harding Orgy

*Out-of-Town 'Swarm' Finds Few Facts in Portland,  
Buys Interviews and Depends on Oregonian*

By JOHN PAINTER, JR.

**W**as it an orgy? As the Tonya Harding-Nancy Kerrigan assault scandal unfolded in normally low-key Portland, Ore., the media became a mob, often over-reacting with limited self-searching and no apology.

The story first broke in *The Oregonian*, Portland's hometown daily, after one of its reporters received a bizarre tip: a claim so outlandish that the tendency was to disbelieve it—a supposed plot by rival Harding to injure Kerrigan and knock her out of the U.S. Figure Skating Association national championships in Detroit.

It had every element a reporter dreams about—a vile scheme in a fairy-tale sport: beauty and betrayal, endorsements and indictments, tragedy and treachery. It was a new twist in the old story of competitiveness: An attempt—still unproved—by a top athlete to knock another out of contention by hiring a hit. From another, more rabid perspective, it was an attempt to steal the Olympics.

After *The Oregonian* broke the story on January 12, the stampede was on.

Reporters zoomed in from all over—New York *Newsday*, *Sports Illustrated*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Detroit News* and *The Free Press* and more. All the major networks invaded the City of Roses, as Portland calls itself.

Television, including crews from Japan, quickly set up camp. At one point satellite trucks filled most of the square-block parking lot by the Justice Center in downtown Portland where three of the arrested suspects were brought in handcuffed as a mob of cameras, soundmen, reporters and still photographers battled for position. The park-

ing lot attendant said he placed the satellite trucks according to the tips he got. Freelance photographers with broadcast-quality cameras were pulling in anywhere from \$700 to \$1,200 a day shooting "Skategate" although most of what they did was to wait around.

So hot was the story that cut-throat video competitors, Diane Sawyer of NBC and Connie Chung of CBS, both broadcast live about two weeks apart from Portland's suburban Clackamas Town Center, which contains the Olympic-size skating rink where Harding practices.

Sawyer took the preliminary with an interview with accused conspirator Shawn Eckardt. Afterward, a Chung minion chastised Eckardt's lawyer, W. Mark McKnight, saying, "Connie is very unhappy with you!," then pressed for a Chung interview with Eckardt. McKnight rejected it, but Chung later won the gold with an interview with Tonya her-

self while her Olympic skating fate was still uncertain.

The media invasion became so intense that locals began referring to the out-of-towners as the "swarm."

According to *The Los Angeles Times*, in the 24 days between January 7, the day after Harding's assault, and February 2, the day after Harding's ex-husband, Jeff Gillooly, pleaded guilty to racketeering in the injury plot, ABC, NBC and CBS averaged 16 stories a day, or a total of 377 stories. In the 21 days following the attack on Kerrigan, *The Oregonian* printed 265 stories, an average of nearly 13 per day, *The Times* calculated.

"*The Oregonian* became both news gatherer and newsmaker," *The Times* said in a Focus piece.

Some reporters in Portland, as days passed, became critical of what they considered *The Oregonian's* accusatory tone in its reporting. But the tone of



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those stories was not as egregious as reports elsewhere that Harding arrest warrants had been signed and on the street.

Peter Bhatia, The Oregonian's Managing Editor, disagreed that some of the paper's stories were accusatory in tone. "We have been very careful from the beginning to report only what we know. We have reported what we have been told by sources on and off the record.

"We have been very careful not to take a position," he said. "We may have stretched a little bit in that big Sunday [January 23] piece, but that was a profile of Harding, not a straight news story. We have been very straightforward."

As time went by, some reporters also became critical of The Oregonian for its extensive use of unnamed sources in reporting of fresh news in the unfolding drama.

"How else are you going to report it?" responded Dave Hogan, one of the lead Oregonian reporters on the story.

"We use unnamed sources only as a last resort and we use them only when it is necessary to convey vital information to our readers," Bhatia said. "Our sources were deep inside the investigation and our stories were proven right time and time again. We knew our sources were deep inside and we felt very, very comfortable. We never felt we were going out on a limb.

"I feel the (news) industry too often uses unnamed sources," he said, "but that is more common inside the [Washington] Beltway than outside it. There would be no nightly newscasts if they couldn't say, 'Highly-placed White House sources said....'"

One of the "foreigners" thrown willy-nilly into the Portland fray saw the situation this way:

"My impression is that the standards of what was a story dropped radically during the long days of stakeouts and FBI interviews," said Liz Willen, who normally covers the chaotic New York education system for New York Newsday. "There was a lull in the story and it's very bad to have a lull when there is a feeding frenzy. Many papers were forced to report unnamed sources second hand."

So, how did the "swarm" perform ethically in covering the Harding saga? Well, the competitive rush led to excesses that should raise eyebrows among reporters and editors.

The Oregonian had the home-court advantage—the source and knowledge of the lay of the land—so most of the other reporters, with a few exceptions, were reduced to chasing rumor and innuendo, reporting speculation or parroting The Oregonian. The normal reluctance to pass along gossip or conjecture all but disappeared. As a result, some stories were just wrong.

In Detroit, where the attack on Kerrigan took place, Bonnie DeSimone, a Detroit News reporter who since has moved to The Cleveland Plain Dealer as a sports writer, saw the basic problem as reporting misassignments.

"When the story first broke," she said, "the sports reporters assigned didn't have a news background and the news reporters didn't have a sports background. Those departments frequently don't work well together. So, we had sports reporters writing about the law, which they knew nothing about, and news reporters writing about Harding's Olympic chances, which they knew nothing about."

The result of this sudden scrambling of roles was that the more restrictive rules governing hard news reporting became blurred by the wider latitude given sports writers to speculate, project and guess.

"More than any story ever, this one had the media relying on third-hand sources," DeSimone said. "Early on, a Boston television station reported that there was an arrest warrant out for Tonya. The Boston Globe reported [what] the station [said] and everyone else reported The Globe."

The offending station was Boston's WCVB-TV/Channel 5, an ABC affiliate, where Ed Harding reported that a sealed arrest warrant charging conspiracy to assist in aggravated assault had been issued January 13 against Harding and four others. That immediately was denied by prosecutors in Portland, but the initial story outran the denial for at least one full news cycle.

During the initial feeding frenzy, The

Boston Globe, The Arizona Republic, The Detroit News, NBC News and others ran stories reporting unproved allegations as facts.

On one evening newscast, Portland's KGW-TV, the NBC affiliate, switched live to Detroit where a report quoted "sources" there as saying four people were about to be charged in the attack, an event that never occurred.

The view was further blurred by the television tabloid shows, which were willing to pay anyone who claimed to know Harding, from ex-boyfriends to her father, Al Harding, who at first refused, succumbed for \$5,000, plus another \$10,000 after the Olympics. Harding told a neighbor that he didn't have anything to say and that if "Inside Edition" wanted to pay him for saying nothing, well, that was just fine.

There also was an irresistible temptation to hype, to tweak up the significance of what should be footnotes. A blatant example of tweaking occurred February 7 when Portland's KATU-TV, the ABC affiliate, broadcast a teaser at the beginning of its "5 O'Clock News." KATU, which otherwise did a solid job reporting the story, urged viewers to stay tuned for "Tonya's Brush with the Law." What viewers saw was Harding rushing barefoot from her apartment to save her pickup truck from being towed from where it had been illegally parked.

"The standards changed because there was such a frenzy for news, such a hunger," Willen said. "There was such a demand that on some days that was all there was to report. The news became distorted because there was a real dearth of news except for The Oregonian," Willen said. "The local press had the sources locked up and trash TV had the cash. One of the bad things was the television tabloids' coming in to pay for interviews."

At one point, DeSimone said, she came to distrust even Associated Press stories and relied only on things attributed to The Oregonian. NBC was another news source that came in for repeated criticism by reporters on the scene in Portland.

Reporters staked out for hours of unproductive tedium tended to view Harding either as a fiend on blades or



the victim of outrageous media attention. There was general agreement that most of the principals in the evolving morality play had about as much credibility as Oregon's other nationally known figure, Senator Bob Packwood.

Reporters on the story also tended to view it with an arched eyebrow, as not quite real news. It was as though the characters—Harding and Kerrigan—were make-believe, beauty without substance, which is the view many news reporters and sports writers hold of figure skating.

"The fun of it was that there were two kewpie doll figures, you know, top-of-the-wedding-cake figures," said DeSimone. "The froo-frooness of their sport was such a hysterical contrast to the attack that it became like Fergie's lover nibbling on her toes."

"The thing that made me abashed 48 or 72 hours later was when it turned out there actually was some discussion of killing her, which to me kind of elevates it to a whole other level," DeSimone said. "Yet, it was just like it was fair game to abandon all standards of reporting. The lousy reporting went on unabated."

There is no question that the attention was excruciatingly focused. Locales in Portland such as the FBI office, the Multnomah County courthouse and the Justice Center became circuses simply due to the mass of camera and sound men, reporters, still photographers and radio reporters competing for floor space that could comfortably accommodate only half of their number.

More than 30 video cameras and at least 150 media representatives from as far away as Japan daily crowded the Clackamas Town Center ice rink.

One freelance photographer, Jim Watt, a network news veteran shooting for ABC News, told *The Oregonian* that the only equal of the media crush had been in Cairo, "the only place I can think of that's this tough."

On the sixth floor of the Multnomah County Courthouse where the district attorney is located, a dozen or more reporters and cameramen perched on benches or sat on the hallway floor waiting for someone in authority to give them a "no comment."

A smaller contingent waited in the

## 100 Peek Into Harding's E-Mail

In Lillehammer, Norway, another ethics problem popped up on February 25. As reported by John Husar of *The Chicago Tribune*, more than 100 American journalists broke into Tony Harding's electronic mailbox at the Winter Olympic Games.

They contended that they did not read any of her 68 unread messages or use any information from her mailbox. Michelle Kaufman of *The Detroit Free Press* was quoted as saying, "It was a spur-of-the-moment thing after we got back from having pizza at 2 a.m."

Husar went on to report that the news gatherers gained access to the double code-protected mailbox after figuring out that the codes were Harding's accreditation number, which they got by blowing up a photo of Harding's Olympic ID card, and her birth date, easily located in publicity material.

Miami Herald columnist Dave Barry, one of the admitted snoopers, professed outrage that anyone would question the ethics of the 100 prying journalists, saying their actions were no different than reading someone's mail upside down on a desk.

Electronic snooping is a crime in many American jurisdictions.

Olympic officials said that the peeking was an ethical matter for journalists to resolve.

Historic observation: Roughly the same thing happened at the 1984 Olympic games in Barcelona. There it was part of the dating scene. ■ —John Painter, Jr.

cramped corridor outside the grand jury room one floor up from the DA's office.

Lawyers—prosecutors and defense alike—were pursued in court-house hallways, chased down back stairways, hectoring on sidewalks and heeled on by phone. Part of the problem occurred because Multnomah County District Attorney Michael D. Schrunk refused to establish any regular method of communicating with the media, despite press requests for twice-a-day "no comment" pseudo-press conferences.

So immense was the media pressure for any snippet of news that Schrunk said his office simply "threw away" phone messages from non-Portland media. "We would have spent all our time returning telephone calls," he said. "Everyone was calling. So, we just threw away the ones from out-of-town reporters."

When the defendants were arraigned before Multnomah County Presiding Judge Donald H. Londer, he allowed one TV pool camera and six still cameras in the courtroom. Outside, an army of photographers negotiated "rules of engagement" with edgy court guards. The final accord was that every cameraman took a fixed position, with no chas-

ing after the in-custody defendants. Any violation would result in the "halls being cleared," guards said.

But there was no such accommodation for the prosecutors and defense lawyers. Norman Frink, the chief Deputy District Attorney handling the Harding investigation, was once ambushed coming out of the FBI office and was bombarded by questions from the "swarm" the whole eight-block walk back to the courthouse.

Harding's house was staked out around the clock, as, early on in the case, was Shawn Eckardt's, the admitted middle man in the alleged conspiracy. When Harding moved in with her friend Stephanie Quintero and her husband, John, their apartment was watched around the clock, too. An ABC News crew rented the apartment next to the Quinteros. The landlord explained that the odd rental "wasn't about ethics, it was about money." John later was arrested and released after a scuffle with the landlord over the media crush outside the apartment.

News crews attempted to follow Harding to her practice sessions at the Clackamas Town Center, where more news teams waited. They tried to follow her after her skating practices, but more

often than not she ditched them in high-speed highway chases. Reporters at the rink said Harding and Quintero enjoyed playing hide-and-seek with the press at 70 miles-an-hour on the freeway.

The interest in the Harding drama was astonishing. A January 27-30 survey by The Times-Mirror Press Center in Washington showed 45 percent of Americans were "paying close attention" to the Harding-Kerrigan story.

That, says the center's director, Andrew Kohut, was "shocking." The drama received the "highest level of attention ever paid to a story about an individual" since the twice-monthly surveys began in the mid-1980's.

Events like the Persian Gulf War or major earthquakes typically get 70 percent ratings, Kohut said. A 45 percent rating for Harding means "nearly 90 million people are very interested in this story." By comparison, the Menendez brothers murder trial in California got a 12 rating and the Bobbitt penis amputation show got 26 percent.

The pressures of pell-mell journalism did not automatically mean unethical conduct. Some of the major flaws in reporting from Portland were exactly as DeSimone suspected in Detroit. Major inaccuracies resulted from out-of-state reporters failing to understand Oregon criminal laws, proof requirements for prosecutions, grand jury proceedings and so on.

One reporter from Detroit wrote a story explaining that Harding could not be prosecuted in Multnomah County because she made allegedly incriminating long-distance telephone calls from her home in adjoining Clackamas County and that those phone calls could not be used in Multnomah County courts. The story baffled the local lawyers who heard about it, mainly because the information was so blatantly inaccurate they could not figure out where or how the reporter obtained it.

The legal end of things, then, gave outsiders fits. Particularly puzzling was an Oregon law that says a defendant cannot be convicted solely on the testimony of an accomplice or co-conspirator. Such testimony must be buttressed by independent, outside evidence, a

concept many reporters found hard to fathom. Many reports filed from Portland contained the assumption that the confessions of the four men were sufficient to convict Harding.

Then there was jump-to-conclusion journalism. DeSimone wondered how certain sports columnists could ethically cover Harding in Lillehammer.

"Within 48 hours of the story breaking, you had sports columnists weighing in on whether Tonya should skate," she said. "Now, many of these people are in Lillehammer purporting to cover her. How on earth are they going to columnize or report on her performance—or anything leading up to it, her practices, her press conferences—when they said a month ago she shouldn't be there?"

The dearth of solid information also served as a catalyst for supposition and rumor. Save for The Oregonian's sources, there was little solid for reporters to chase. Prosecutors resolutely said, "No comment" or some variation of it. Wayne County Prosecutor John O'Hair, during a visit to Portland, was surrounded by the swarm as he walked through a downtown park, talking for about 20 minutes and saying absolutely nothing. Likewise, most of the lawyers for Harding and company remained silent most of the time.

So the media went bottom fishing, seeking out friends, relatives, ex-boyfriends, school chums, former teachers, childhood playmates and neighbors. They poked through driving records, checked for criminal rapsheets, inspected gun purchases and looked at any other official or semi-official document they could lay their hands on.

The result was that every scrap of information was subject to intense scrutiny and speculation about its significance. It was not until February 2 when ex-husband Gillooly pleaded guilty to racketeering and the FBI released summaries of his interrogation that reporters got a clear picture from official documents of how the conspiracy was hatched—according to Gillooly as filtered by the FBI.

Significantly, one of the overlooked stories was the FBI's continuing involvement in the case. They entered the case

initially in Detroit after Kerrigan was attacked January 6 and the FBI in Portland joined in after the alleged conspiracy was revealed. But federal prosecutors in the District of Oregon (Portland), Eastern District of Michigan (Detroit) and the Department of Justice in Washington decided early on in the investigation that there would be no federal prosecution because no federal law had been violated. That decision was reported in The Oregonian and elsewhere, but no media pursued it further, forcing the FBI to justify its involvement in a state case where it had no jurisdiction.

Then, there was television checkbook journalism. The "say-for-pay" TV tabloids were swiftly on the scene. It has become the norm in high-profile cases these days and checkbook journalism now colors the editorial decisions made by the mainstream news organizations.

Aside from Shawn Eckardt's giving gratis interviews to Sawyer, The Oregonian and almost anyone else who happened by, the first score was by Hard Copy. Smith and Stant appeared on three Hard Copy segments for a reported \$50,000. Gillooly was corralled by A Current Affair for about \$175,000. Then Harding hooked up a long-term deal with Inside Edition for a reported \$300,000.

Although it happened less in the Harding case than in rock superstar Michael Jackson's, checkbook journalism has fundamentally changed the playing field in many big stories by changing the nature of the truth itself. By paying for "scoops," the scoop itself becomes suspect, for, in that marketplace, exaggeration is the handmaiden of the seller. The better the story, the bigger the bucks.

Tom Lennon, producer of the PBS special, "Tabloid Truth: The Michael Jackson Story" on Frontline, said he could see how TV tabloid money changed the information in the Jackson story.

"There is an absolute incentive to change your story according to the market conditions in which they operate," he said. "It taints not just the journalistic process, but the legal pro-

## Packwood Case Tests Oregon Papers

BY PATRICK A. YACK

Editor

Register-Guard, Eugene, Oregon

cess as well. I would not like to be a D.A. trying to sort out the truth in the Jackson case because it's very muddy about what you can say is the truth."

The tabloid reporters also have another nice trick, observed Michael Cucek, an assistant producer from TV Asahi, who was sent to Portland from New York to bird-dog the Harding story.

"The tabloid reporters always will follow behind the subject so they will appear on camera to be doggedly tailing him," he said. "They never will be in front out of camera range. And they'll yell outrageous questions, like, 'Tonya, did you plan to cripple Nancy for life?' They know it never will be answered, but the show can then say its man asked the tough questions."

Cucek spent hours and hours loitering in hallways and moving from office to office with nary a camera crew in sight. "My bosses are interested in only one thing at this point," he said. "They want Tonya in handcuffs. That's all."

Although The Oregonian's press run increased and local television ratings climbed during the feeding frenzy, many members of the public tired of the unrelenting, often unsubstantiated hyperbole.

Perhaps Roland Finch of Southwest Portland summed up the soap opera best in an angry letter to The Oregonian on February 2: "I have never been a particular supporter of Tonya Harding, but I am appalled by the irresponsible innuendoes with which much of the media are relentlessly building a wall of guilt by association around her.

"She may or may not be guilty of immoral or criminal actions, but to this point, absolutely no reliable evidence has been offered to the public that would support such charges....It is not an adequate defense to say that all views should be published. That is true only if such speculations are based on fact, not supposition....Guilty, without charge or proof."

Or, as one Norwegian reporter said in Lillehammer, "The American press keeps boiling the same potato."

—0—

Exactly 19 days after Harding skated to a sorry eighth place in the Olympics

Bob Packwood said he frankly had not gotten it. What he had not gotten was what several women had not appreciated and in fact, had been threatened by—his unwanted sexual advances. Recently re-elected to the United States Senate, the Republican said he was sorry. Sort of.

Then he eventually returned to Oregon to say that in effect, well, there were certain circumstances that should be taken into account and that possibly there was nothing to be sorry for. The inference being that the women, whose experiences with Packwood had become a national news story, were being somewhat disingenuous.

More than a year has passed and since that time, Packwood has embroiled his colleagues in a embarrassing debate about what to do about his extracurricular activities, and has wrenched a federal court into this off-and-on nationally televised spectacle.

Almost immediately after Packwood was pulled into the spotlight, so was the media, especially Oregon newspapers. The question being asked of us—even among ourselves—was what did we know about Packwood and when did we know it?

It's impossible to answer for the entire Oregon newspaper community. However, it's a safe guess that a number of reporters and editors had perhaps "heard something" about Packwood, but they did not have enough facts to prompt a serious and dedicated inquiry into Packwood's sex life.

Once the story of Packwood's harassing women broke, the second-guessing began. Why hadn't we done more to nail down the story? Why had this story been left to The Washington Post? Why were we protecting Bob Packwood?

The easy answer for many newspapers in the state was that they did not

have the resources to pursue such a story. But casting the question of resources aside, the question of whether it was a story worth pursuing, given the skimpy evidence, the lack of corroboration and the high Packwood stakes, remained.

The answer is yes because readers want to know as much as they possibly can about the makeup—the moral, not just the political, values—of their elected representatives. In short, private behavior often can be a reflection of public character.

The problem, of course, is writing about it. Americans genuinely dislike the notion that the press, especially their hometown newspaper, is snooping into the private lives of politicians. At the same time, as *Newsday's* sage columnist Murray Kempton once put it to me: Americans hate wiretaps but they love the transcripts.

Even so, the propriety of the press's digging into private lives must be governed by a sense of relevance, timeliness, importance, fairness and gravity. In Packwood's case, Oregonians probably care as much about whether he sexually harassed women as they care about his position on log exports.

Bob Packwood would argue that his private life has no real bearing on how he conducts the public's business, either in fact or theory. The real test of Packwood's view would come during an election, a vote in which the senator would almost certainly lose. ■

*Patrick A. Yack, until recently Managing Editor of The Register-Guard in Eugene, is now Editor of The News & Record in Greensboro, N.C.*

*continued on page 52*

# Michael Jackson Scandal

*Edited Excerpts of Frontline's 3-Part Report, 'Tabloid Truth'  
Broadcast by PBS on February 15, 1994*

## CHAPTER ONE

**NARRATOR**—The roar of the Jackson scandal began as an anonymous whisper, on a quiet morning last August, in the San Fernando valley.

**DON RAY**, a free-lance television reporter—I was laying in bed on a Sunday morning, dead asleep and the phone rang very early in the morning. This voice said, "A search warrant has gone down. In fact, two of them have gone down." And I, 'Okay, like what, *where?*' And he said: "Neverland." I said, "What, MTV, Michael Jackson? He says, "Yeah, that one. Something having to do with child molestation." That woke me up. He said: "Well, I understand they had to use a locksmith to get into some of the places there." At this point, now I've got to find the locksmith. So I started going down this list. The first one was disconnected. It was the one that was seemingly closest. The second one, I actually scored on. And he says, "Yeah, this is Duane." And I said: "I understand you were in Neverland this morning." He says: "No. No, I wasn't." I said, "Oh, well I've dialed . . ." and he interrupted and said: "It was yesterday." "Oh yeah, yeah, yesterday, right. Yeah, yesterday."

**NARRATOR**—Don Ray took his story to [Los Angeles] Channel 4, KNBC. The L.A. police would only confirm they were investigating Jackson. Nothing about the charges. No matter: just the promos were enough.

**DIANE DIMOND**, Hard Copy senior correspondent—I was sitting in my cubicle at work and I was working on a Heidi Fleiss story. I'd been doing the Hollywood Madam story and my boss came to me and tapped me on my shoulder and said, "In about seven minutes Channel 4 is going to run a story about Michael Jackson. I... I don't really know what it is, but come to my office. Let's watch it. You're on the Michael Jackson story. I watched the original story and I didn't get it. I knew that they had issued two search warrants. I knew that the police were looking for something. I knew there was a locksmith named Duane they had taken

along with them to open up every closet door, shed, that they could find. But I didn't know why.

**DON RAY**—Nowhere did we say anything about child molestation. And I did get that message from the very beginning that that was what it was all about. Nowhere. That was courtesy of Michael Jackson's camp at 6 o'clock. Mr. Pellicano was nice enough to come in and deny the allegations of child molestation... I think at that point there must have been 747's in London, Heathrow, lining up with money bags being poured on and fleets of Fleet Street people flying to Los Angeles to to buy whatever they needed to buy on this story.

**CAROLINE GRAHAM**, London Sun correspondent—Phone rings. 8:20. A tipster of mine, a friend of mine and very reliable source says, Michael Jackson's been arrested on child sex abuse scandals... charges. So first thing is ring the office, say, look, enormous story breaking. Basically hold the front page. And the decision was taken by the news editor at the time that we had to splash on it. In other words we had to put it all over the front page which we did, thank god.

**NARRATOR**—Of course it had to be The Sun, the beast of British tabloids. If you want to know about scandal, you have to start in London with the Fleet Street hacks, who are hungrier, faster, more relentless than anything home-grown in America.

**GRAHAM**—And we ran the story about 10 to 2 on the Monday night, which got into the last edition, which got about 650,000

copies on the street. We were the first paper anywhere to carry the story on our front page.

**NARRATOR**—It's the British who invented the modern tabloid, papers where a sick child is "brave little Timmy," politicians are news only if they're bonking some man, woman, or beast; every policeman is a foot-tall headline: "HERO COP." In fact, a story is just a headline, a headline that has to sell. Private lives sell—the more private the better.

**KEVIN SMITH** of Splash News [a gossip news service]—The British newspapers are very clever at knowing what the public wants and giving it to them. The Jackson story [was] the biggest story at the time. It was front-page news on every English paper, but if you picked up The L.A. Times you'd have to search around to find it in there.

**LESLEY-ANN JONES**, British tabloid reporter—We will fly stories. We will take a shred of fact and go with it like a great footballer with a ball. We will spin down the field with that and try and score a goal with it and maybe we will and maybe we won't. But we'll take a shred of evidence and try and turn it into a story.

**NARRATOR**—British rules—after the police search, anything on Jackson would be fair game—whatever you could get people to say . . . or pay 'em to say.

**ALAN HALL**, Daily Mirror correspondent—Five o'clock in the morning I was called by my office. I was on a plane. I knew that this was going to be one of the biggest stories I'd ever covered, you know. I saw a guy I'd seen on the L.A. riots from Paris-Match bursting and pushing these old people in wheelchairs out of the way to run off the plane. You had a sense that people were flying in from all over the world, as indeed they were.

**GRAHAM**—This is a story, if not of the decade, well certainly of the decade, but probably one of the great stories of the century.

**NARRATOR**—The big guns [of A Current

### Credits

Producer: Thomas Lennon  
Correspondent: Richard Ben Cramer  
Writers: Richard Ben Cramer and Thomas Lennon  
Field Producer: Michael Epstein  
Narrator: Richard Ben Cramer

Affair] are all imported: Brits, or Australians. They all brought the craft from Fleet Street. America turned it into TV. Six tabloids in a daily jungle war in London created the killer-journal style. Now, with a score of news shows every day, American TV needs those same skills—it's eat-or-be-eaten. When the Jackson story broke it was a feast...but meat for a morning is gone by noon. A hundred outlets—and each has to have a new headline, a screamer. Twenty-four hours after the Jackson story broke, the L.A. police raids were stale news.

SMITH—The big question then is, who is this kid who's accused Jackson of molestation? You had to have a name behind it, although you couldn't print it in America, you wanted to know who this kid was. And that was what everyone was going flat out for.

MIKE WALKER, National Enquirer columnist—None of us in the news media knew who this boy was.

NARRATOR—The National Enquirer, the most notorious paper in America, is also the largest, and one of the richest. It threw 20 reporters and editors at the Jackson story, plus detectives, and a web of paid sources.

WALKER—From sources inside the police (I mean we do have sources inside police department in L.A.) we got a street name. And so we sent out a team of reporters. But in the meantime Steve Coz remembered a story about a new family that Michael had adopted. So he got property records relating to the boy's father and did a search and found a property on the same street where we were out knocking 500 doors. That gave it to us and within moments, literally, Jerry George, our L.A. Bureau Chief, was going knock-knock-knock, hello sir, I'm from The National Enquirer—can I talk to you?

RICHARD BEN CRAMER, PBS correspondent—So nobody had a picture of the father at this point.

ANDY O'BRIEN, Splash News photographer—That's right. The difficulty was this is a man that nobody's seen. Nobody really knows other than a baseball cap with glasses and a car phone. We didn't really know what he looked like. I basically needed a reaction. I had to go confront him with the camera. He had two briefcases and it was a bit like a helicopter. He came, he came swinging in. I was running backwards at this stage with the camera, ducking and diving. I got the one frame that I needed and then he ran into the building.

DIMOND—I got a call from someone who said meet me at a bar in Santa Monica at 8:30. So I went to the bar at 8 and was presented with the damndest documents

I've ever, ever read. I saw the extremely graphic detailed narrative of this child. Right down to the sexual acts. It was either going to be superstar being falsely accused, or it was going to be superstar perhaps guilty of one of the most heinous crimes we know. So either way, I couldn't lose.

NARRATOR—The city social worker's interview with the child—as confidential a document as the American court system can produce. Legally, it was stolen property. But it would become common chit-chat—from Bangkok, where Jackson was performing, to the playground of the boy's school. The principal finally had to plead with all the students to stop asking the eighth-grader about his sex with Michael Jackson. As it turned out, when Dimond broke the story, she was just hours ahead of the pack. Splash News, for example, had its own copy of the report, and was faxing it to all comers—\$750 a pop.

ANTHONY PELLICANO, Jackson's private investigator/spokesperson—It's very interesting that we in the Jackson team were given copies of this by members of the press who had purchased them.

NARRATOR—Pellicano bills himself as Detective to The Stars. His job for Michael Jackson was to shut this scandal down.

PELLICANO—I'm a serious guy. I have a very aggressive approach to whatever I do. And I'm unrelenting.

SMITH—He hinted that we were working here illegally, which we're not. And at one point he said, "Hey, I don't want to hurt anybody in all this."

CRAMER—There's this theme in the coverage of you, which is that this is a tough guy. That this is a guy that knows, and knows how to use the information.

PELLICANO—That's right. I always try to start out as a gentleman. It's only when people won't listen to reason that I have to go to unique investigative techniques.

NARRATOR—But the detective had a problem: his client was getting slaughtered. And network news had the same problem—they were getting slaughtered by the tabloids, too. CBS, for one, was desperate for a piece of the Jackson story. So CBS and Pellicano, suddenly, found use for each other.

SANDRA HUGHES on CBS—CBS News has obtained a taped phone conversation. The voices are purportedly the father of the 13-year-old boy who is accusing Michael Jackson of abusing him and the boy's stepfather. The conversation was taped in July before the police began their investigation.

FATHER'S VOICE ON CBS—This man is going to be humiliated beyond belief...he is not going to believe what is going to happen

to him, beyond his worst nightmares. He will not sell one more record.

NARRATOR—CBS had rushed to air its exclusive with Tony Pellicano to explain the tape's significance.

PELLICANO on CBS—It spells out everything to me, this was an extortion attempt from the beginning. It was all planned.

NARRATOR—Apparently, there wasn't time on the air to say where the tape came from—which was from Tony Pellicano. CBS was embarrassed by the next day's L.A. Times. It, too, got the Pellicano tapes, but pointed out that they didn't prove extortion at all. The network rushed onto the air again.

HUGHES ON CAMERA—CBS has obtained a taped phone conversation purportedly between the boy's father and stepfather. It [was] recorded in July. Although Michael Jackson's private investigator says the tape illustrates the claim of extortion, nowhere on the tape is money ever mentioned.

FATHER'S VOICE ON CBS—I love him so much that I am willing to destroy my own life to protect him. As bad as my life is, I'm willing to let it get a lot worse...

NARRATOR—Confused? The confusion would keep building. With the need for a fresh lead every few hours, every straw in the wind became a new Jackson story. By the time the Jackson family gathered—one week after the story broke—there were hundreds of reporters packing the hall, and 40 TV cameras up front: crews from Mexico, China, Japan, Germany, England, France, all the U.S. networks, of course, even us from PBS. Almost every news outlet in America was there...following the lead of the tabs.

## CHAPTER TWO

SMITH—It was slowing down. After the frenzy at the beginning the police and Jackson's people had successfully plugged all the leaks.

SMITH—But the public was still curious. So what we were looking for then was a buy-up. You want graphic inside details of what it was like inside Jackson's ranch—how he behaves with the children.

NARRATOR—The second great wave in the Jackson scandal—former employees who tell their stories. A servant always sees, and sometimes tells. But there's always a story behind these stories...once they've run through the tabloid mill. Just three days after the Jackson story broke, ABC's Prime Time sent a freelance producer to Manila to talk to the Quindoys [former Jackson servants]. She was greeted warmly, and given a guest room in their home. But the network

was offering only star-power—a chat with Diane Sawyer. That left the door open for the British weekly, *News of the World*. For this kind of story, money talks.

STUART WHITE, *News of the World* feature writer—Anybody who doesn't pay money, it's like cavalry riding into machine gun fire. It's anachronistic; journalism cannot be done today at our level without, at some point, somebody getting a check out and going to one of the principals who will be demanding this money, and hopefully presenting them with the best offer.

DIMOND—The Quindoys at first wanted \$900,000. Where they got that figure, I have no idea. It came down to half a million.

WHITE—But when they negotiated with us, I think they were asking something in the reason of a quarter of a million dollars.

NARRATOR—A tabloid auction is a delicate sort of strip-tease: the sellers have to give away some details of their story to demonstrate its worth, and hold back other details until they get their money. For the tabloid reporter, it's also a delicate business.

WHITE—It's almost like, in Hollywood terms, you're bidding for a hot property. It's like bidding for a screenplay, for a novel. You have to go in there and convince the people that you'll pay the top dollar, and also you'll treat their property the best possible way, and treat them the best possible way. But I think it's not a secret that first of all the Quindoys, unfortunately, were not acting totally in good faith.

NARRATOR—In the middle of negotiations, White's London office suddenly ordered him home. *News of the World* splashed the Quindoys big-time—three pages—without any payment. The lawyers said there was no need to pay—the Quindoys and the company already had a history.

GRAHAM—We had our first dealings with the Quindoys two and a half years, three years ago.

NARRATOR—The London Sun and the *News of the World* are owned by one company—Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.

GRAHAM—We did the original buy-up with them, or rather the original story with them. Alan Hall my predecessor interviewed them.

HALL—I was working then for The Sun. The Sun drew up a contract of \$25,000, and I spent some time with them in Los Angeles doing the Life and Times of Michael Jackson, which was all, hey, isn't he whacky! He's got, you know, speakers in the hibiscus plants that play Beethoven's Fifth in the morning, and he doesn't get up before midday. He's got dollar bills that he tears up and throws in the air like confetti. What a

great, what a gasp—but nothing anti. It was very, very high, upbeat. Didn't have a had word to say about the guy, not one bad thing. That he was just a kind man with children, basically. They had signed a contract to say they would tell the full and frank account of their lives and clearly from what later transpired and they didn't, if what they're telling now is the truth. They're two people whom I wouldn't trust at all. And I think they really have gone to town to do Michael Jackson down for the mighty dollar. Now, they see money again being offered around and they want some more. I think they're greedy people.

QUINDOYS—I swear I saw MJ fondling the little kid, like his hands travelling from the kid's face, his thighs, legs.

JONES—It all boils down to cash. And you'll now have housekeepers go to work for celebrities who keep diaries and who take pictures and who make a living out of this.

WALKER—We have maids and we have housekeepers, and we have chauffeurs, and we have personal managers and, if you look [at] trade papers in Hollywood, you'll see ads—"do you know a lot about the stars? Is there something in your job or the people you know that makes you an expert on show business? If so, we'd like to talk to you." We practice a form of checkbook journalism—but so does everybody else in this business, almost without exception.

NARRATOR—Another couple, Stella and Philippe LeMarque, would emerge as key witnesses in the Jackson investigation. Their stories of child abuse reached the cops by happenstance—as a spinoff to a tabloid story. This French couple worked for Jackson for two years, until 1991. When the scandal broke, they turned to their friend, Paul Barresi, a former porn star who claimed he'd once made a hundred-grand selling a story to *The Enquirer*.

PAUL BARRESI—My interest in helping them was that they promised me a percentage of what they got. I was not on any kind of crusade to bring anyone to justice; and whether Michael was guilty or innocent at that point was inconsequential. My interest was strictly for the money. As was their interest too, I might add.

SMITH—Our job was to go to our various markets around the world and say, look, we have this couple. They are willing to say this. How much are you prepared to pay? Australia'll say we've got \$20,000. For them it's quite a cheap story. They've got a cracking story for \$20,000, but that's not enough alone to tempt someone like the LeMarques to sell their story. So then you go to Germany and you get another 20,000.

You go to Italy, another 20,000. And before you know it you're up at \$100 thousand or \$200 thousand. And that is enough for a family to come forward and talk.

WENDY HENRY of *A Current Affair*—When are they going to talk? How long are they going to hang on to this? I mean obviously more and more is going to come out and it's just going to steal their thunder and devalue the worth of what they have to say. You know, I mean already the Quindoys have somewhat stolen their thunder. The quality of the tape is awful, and because the couple have French accents, it's even more difficult.

SMITH—Originally, from what I understand, it was 100,000, and very quickly we managed to find a hundred thousand and said, okay, let's go. I think they must have thought well if that's so easy let's try it a bit more. And then it kept going like this until it got to a half a million dollars.

BARRESI—We met: Stella, Philippe, myself and this correspondent from *Inside Edition*. By then I had heard the story probably half a dozen times, and the only difference is this time I had a tape recorder in my belt. I wanted to seize an opportunity to sell their story myself. Monday morning I got up and I realized what I wanted to do with the tape. I wanted to take it to the District Attorney's office and turn it over to them as evidence. I knew that the D.A. would be happy to receive the information with open arms and two, I knew how to play the tabloids like a harp.

NARRATOR—If Barresi brought the tape to the D.A., he'd have nothing to fear for his illegal tape recording. Besides, it would juice up the story. If the D.A.'s working on it, that's action. That's inside information.

BARRESI—That was the edge that worked well. If my story appeared in the slightest innocuous, they would throw it out the window, so this was one way to do it with grand style, certainly. So I called the editor at *The Globe* and I said I have a tape. I'm on the way downtown to hand it to the district attorney. And his words were, "Let us come with you." And then I knew I had him. The next thought in my mind was I'm going to ask for \$30,000. You should always ask twice as much as what you hope to get. He put me on hold and within less than a minute he came back and he said well we can't give you 30, I'll give you 10. I said make it 15. He said you have a deal.

CRAMER—Could you see the headline coming?

BARRESI—Oh, yeah. Sure. I could see that money coming too.

NARRATOR—Barresi didn't stop with *The Globe*. When *Splash News* retailed his story

to London's Sunday Mirror, Barresi showed up at their office with a gun. Splash quickly arranged for him a \$1,000 check.

SMITH—A lot of people who claim to have witnessed Jackson doing this, that or the other, they weren't going to the police first. Their main interest was money and they would come to journalists who could give them money. So, in that circumstance journalists know more about what happened than the police do.

WHITE—Here you're talking about a city police force which is a big one, but against what? The resources of The National Enquirer, five British newspapers. So maybe after a while, the initiative passed to the tabloid newspapers and they then took over and started to make the pace and the police, I don't think any shame upon them, probably responded to that and followed up on those stories. So, I think it was just an organic process that just happened that way.

NARRATOR—After White's visit with the Quindoy's, News of the World gave its tapes to the L.A. police, who only then put two cops on a plane to Manila. Maybe these servant stories were true—but which version? And what would a courtroom lawyer do with a story which, for two years or more, was withheld from the law while it was teased and touted, edited, rewritten and finally turned to cash. In the end, the D.A. concluded the Quindoy's and LeMarques were both useless as witnesses.

BARRESI—The first time I heard the [Quindoy's] story about Jackson his hand was outside the kid's pants. They were asking a hundred grand. As soon as their price went up to 500 grand, their hand went inside the pants. So c'mon.

GRAHAM—When you buy a story, there's always the shadow of doubt: are they telling you the truth or are they telling you what you want to hear?

MAUREEN O'BOYLE, anchor of A Current Affair—Well, if they're lying, they should be worried. Because they're going to be in big trouble, if they're not telling the truth.

NARRATOR—In the tabloids, it doesn't matter if it's true—if you've got someone to say it's true everybody's happy—right?

### CHAPTER THREE

NARRATOR—America has a funny habit of demanding the truth about its fairy tales. With Michael Jackson, the line between fiction and fact has always been obscure. He was ever a confection, an entertainment for the nation. Reams of Wacko Jacko. But was he ever the tabloid victim he claimed to be?

OPRAH WINFREY [on her show]—I have

been in this house looking for the oxygen chamber. I cannot find the oxygen chamber anywhere in the house.

MICHAEL JACKSON—That story is so crazy, I mean. It's one of those tabloid things that's completely made up.

WALKER—I mean, we didn't lie. Michael gave us the pictures and when he gave us pictures he told our present news editor, Charlie Montgomery, that one condition was we had to use the word bizarre in the headline. I mean that was Michael's own condition. In fact he gave us Polaroids and the quality was so lousy we said we can't use this. We don't print Polaroids in The National Enquirer. So they went back and the reshot the pictures.

NARRATOR—Michael Jackson understood the carnival—when news and entertainment is all one business, there is no wall between fiction and fact as long as it's good commerce. A little fiction is required for celebrity junk food—and America rewards each season's snack with the nation's highest accolade: a movie of the week deal or, at least, a rock video, a ghost-written memoir, your shining teeth on a glossy cover or Geraldo live from your driveway. The newcomers in this trade are TV magazines—12 shows, at last count—all in business to make a profit. They're in a fight just as desperate as the tabs. In this league, too, it's win, or die.

HEIDI FLEISS, charged with being Hollywood madam, on Eye to Eye—You want names, you want juice, you want real Hollywood stories, is that it?

CONNIE CHUNG on CBS—Tonight, on Eye to Eye.

BARBARA WALTERS [on her show]—Well, next, perhaps the most provocative story that we have ever presented, the story of Lorena Bobbitt, the woman who sexually mutilated her husband with a knife and threw his sex organ out the window.

NARRATOR—In this competition a weepy interview will not suffice. The heavy artillery is dramatization, re-enactment, all the hallmarks of tabloid TV.

STEVE DUNLEAVY, Senior correspondent, A Current Affair—Seven years ago, the so-called upper echelon of television journalism kind of laughed and sneered at our style. They don't laugh and sneer at our style now. A. Because it's reasonably cheap to produce. Perhaps I should say, it's a reasonable cost factor to produce, rather than cheap. It has shown in the past high profitability.

LORENA BOBBITT on air—I saw that I have it in my hand.

TOM JARREL—You were still holding his severed penis in your hand?

LORENA BOBBITT, sobbing—Yes, Yes.

O BOYLE—I think what they did is they saw a good thing and they saw the ratings and they saw its popularity. You know it's very funny to sit around and look that we're now competing with the people who at one time were looking at us and going "Naughty, naughty."

DIMOND—I mean, I show up at people's front door, knock on the door, Hello. You know, I'd like to do this story with you. And they say, well gee, I'm sorry. It was between Diane Dimond and Diane Sawyer and I'm going with Diane Sawyer.

NARRATOR—Tabloid stories need tabloid talent: The Executive Producer of [an] ABC Diane Sawyer Special learned her trade at The National Enquirer. On the Jackson scandal, same story: ABC's Day One hired away a Hard Copy producer, and paid top dollar for him. Before moving on to ABC, producer Cabell Bruce was known for his ambush of the LeMarques. He assured them he wasn't taping—that was untrue and illegal. Even Hard Copy wouldn't air his interview. They didn't have a deal with the LeMarques, see . . . and the deal is always the bottom line now—lawyers, brokers, middlemen of every sort, haggling for their pound of flesh—even from the networks. Good airtime—that's as good as cash. And no one understood news as commerce better than Jack Gordon, the man who married La Toya Jackson. Jack Gordon came to the new news business by a path with its own curious logic. He once did time for bribery, and pled to a charge of running a brothel.

HALL—Well he's a Hollywood huckster essentially. He always wants to put himself at the center of the Jackson family when he quite clearly is one of major outsiders. He's about as outside the Jackson family as I am. You know, he just cashes in on that by being with La Toya who every time you see her has got a snake wrapped around her or is naked in Playboy. You know, sorry but you're not very talented.

NARRATOR—After the scandal broke, Gordon tried to flog interviews with his wife for a quarter-million dollars a pop. That deal fell through—but the tour wasn't a wash-out.

JACK GORDON on The Howard Stern Show—What did your mother say about Michael Jackson, tell me?

LA TOYA JACKSON—Oh, don't start that.

NARRATOR—The Jackson family reacted with fury to La Toya's publicity blitz—she and Jack Gordon were just trying to cash in. Michael's mother and father were standing by their son—they'd defend him to the hilt—and their broker told us we could have an interview with them—for just a \$100,000.

DIMOND—You try the family and every family member you talk to wants money. We had been very pristinely clean on this. We paid no money for this story at all. I'm not saying tabloids don't pay money once in a while, but on the Michael Jackson story, we did not. And I wanted to keep it that way.

NARRATOR—After her interview with us, Dimond's show went on a spree. For a hundred grand, they bought an interview with the guards who claimed they'd smuggled boys to Jackson. The show also did a buy-up on a story everybody'd been chasing: a Jackson maid who said her son had been abused. That was a bargain, about 25,000. And Hard Copy was killing A Current Affair in the ratings. Now, it was the cops who were furious: more prime witnesses were showing up on tabloid payrolls. In the world of entertainment, every story has its price—it's just a matter of terms, etc.

DUNLEAVY—While people often look to the press and the media to criticize, I think this town has a lot to answer for. This town, whether it be Hollywood or Los Angeles, because this is the monster that's demanding to be fed by the Michael Jackson bizarreness, by the movie deals. You know, it all comes down to one thing in this town, it doesn't matter if it's money, mayhem, murder or Michael Jackson, it's all to do with film. It's all to do with the deal.

NARRATOR—Jackson was good for The Enquirer—eight cover stories in just six months! But The Enquirer said no to the biggest buy-up: an entrepreneur who claimed he had the police photos of Michael Jackson's penis. The price: three million, cash. Brilliant was the success of the dad, the screenwriting dentist, who lightened Jackson's pockets by a reported 20 million. Of course, he and his lawyer dropped the stated goal—to prove the truth about Michael Jackson. And what about Jackson himself? Well, 20 million's a lot to pay—sure. But that's the business: When every story is up for auction, the guy with the deepest pockets bids last. Immense profit—everybody wins, except, perhaps, for one kid, who'll bear the mark of this commerce, for life.

RAY—It's a weird feeling to think that, while I didn't cause it, I didn't make it happen, I triggered it. This is the biggest story of my career to date and I'm really ashamed of it.

NARRATOR—And what about us? We snapped up every story, every word. Hey, it's great entertainment, except when we want, or need to know, truly. Jackson got his buy-up, the kid stays out of court. When every story is bought and sold, then tabloid truth is all we have and we'll never know anything for sure. ■

## TV Sitting on Stories To Improve Ratings

BY KARL IDSVOOG

**C**an you imagine having great information about a fabulous story and sitting on it? If you work in television, it's quite possible you've been directed to do just that. The reason: ratings.

A great story out of ratings isn't nearly as important as a great story that hits "in the book." News directors are under incredible pressure to make sure their staffs deliver during the sweeps, the period when viewership is measured. The result: reporters are being forced to sit on a story and save it for sweeps.

I've talked to friends in newsrooms across the country with the same complaint. One had a report on a government official ripping off public funds, another had documentation of corruption in a police department, still another had information on a medical clinic using questionable practices. The reporters wanted the public to know now; news management needed those reporters and the public to wait because those stories would make great "ratings" pieces.

The decision on when a piece runs is no longer determined just by asking is the report concise, clear, and well produced; is it fair, thorough and accurate? There are now more critical questions. What's the lead-in? Where do we place the promotion? Will it deliver better numbers on Monday or Wednesday?

And if a reporter questions the ethics of such a decision, too often they're told they simply don't understand the business or worse yet, "they're not a team player."

I'm not yet aware of a law suit where a station has been held liable for withholding important information from the public. But take the example of the medical clinic using questionable health practices. What if someone dies because of those questionable health practices? What if the attorney representing that family finds out your station had

the information but didn't broadcast it as soon as it could have because the station was holding it for ratings?

Juries are not sympathetic to the press. How would you like an attorney grilling your reporter about how long she/he had to sit on a story to make sure that it could be broadcast during ratings? What would that do to the newsroom image that your promotion department has spent so much time and money cultivating?

Generally, we don't reward news managers for holding high ethical standards.

We don't reward solid journalistic achievement. We reward those managers who are able to deliver the numbers. In the short term, that may work. In the long run, we're waiting for more ethical disasters which will hurt the entire profession.

I ran my own company for three years. I have a great respect for business, and I don't think profit's a dirty word. But customers aren't stupid (The Big Three auto makers learned that the hard way); nor are viewers.

You can promote on radio, TV, billboards, in the paper and on the back of the bus that you're the NEWS SOURCE, the 24-Hour News Station, or the News Leader. One good ethical lapse tells your viewers it's all phony. And most likely, they know that anyway.

Stations like WCCO in Minneapolis and WFAA in Dallas have learned that in the long run, good journalistic decisions make good business decisions. In the long run, adhering to a higher standard of ethics delivers a higher standard of performance. In the long run, making a significant investment in news (not flash and trash) will deliver a significant return on investment.

I'm optimistic that more stations will begin to realize that. All it will take is for a few more stations to self-destruct because of their lack of ethics.

It will happen. In today's business climate, it's only a matter of time. ■

*Karl Idsvoog is a two-time DuPont winner. He's presently a reporter/producer for the WCPO I-Team in Cincinnati, one of the few stations in the country that maintains a full-fledged investigative unit.*



# TV News With a Conscience

*Networks Should Find Air Time and Money to Put Issues  
In the Most Important Context—Human Rights*

BY DANNY SCHECHTER

When we first conceived a TV series focused on human rights, a Hollywood syndicator thought it sounded marketable. The pilot was hosted by a former network anchorwoman. It consisted of solid features and analytical stories drawn from all over the world, highlighting the real-life passions and ongoing abuses suffered by those crusading for freedom and dignity.

Much of the footage had never been seen on television. Some was shot with home video cameras. In part, it was a global showcase of "Rodney King" type videos. The video was hot. There was emotion and storytelling. The production values were impressive for a low-budget effort.

But the response from this well known program distributor was telling. He said he liked the project but "had to pass." The actual excuse: "We only do reality television."

We have it in writing.

Reality?

Years ago, George Orwell wrote with prescience about the perversion of language. But even he would have been astonished by this misuse of terminology. The television news magazine arena seems to have a new entry each week with every network competing for its share of the profitable "reality" market. With a tabloid sensibility increasingly driving story choices, network producers are mesmerized more by what their promos will sound like than what their journalism will say. To add a Tina Turner twist: "What's reality got to do with it?"

A recent book by Ian Mitroff and Warren Bennis actually dissects television as "The Unreality Industry," explaining that "with very few exceptions,

most issues on television news are presented in a completely ahistoric context or no context whatsoever...the overall context is one of dazzling confusion. Little or no attempt is made to present a larger view in which the issues could be located in some coherent framework."

It is this critique that represents the ultimate ethical challenge to journalism. It is time for the ethics debate to confront the *content* of coverage as well as its form. It is not just *how* we report a given story, but *what* stories we are and are not covering. What are the ethics of endlessly assigning and producing stories that are known to be exploitative, trivial and without any redeeming merit?

The values of our work can't be separated from its content. Sadly, TV journalism has become for some a work of craft detached from consciousness or any sense of social responsibility; for others, just video games by another

name. A *ratings uber alles* outlook has given news magazines a market-driven trajectory: with DC rather than PC in command. For the uninitiated, DC stands for demographically correct, where story choices increasingly reflect the desire to target selected audience rather than serve the public interest. John Malone, who heads TCI, the country's first cableopoly, is very candid about the business of the media business. "Nobody would invest hundreds of millions of dollars for the public interest," he told ABC News. "One would be fired if one took that stance."

The media business qua business is driven by what sells not what informs. And it is often who's watching—not how many—that now matters the most. As the savvy media monitors at Variety explained in late January, ratings are no longer everything: "a show can be a Madison Avenue darling without the big numbers—as long as it delivers a



photo © Lewis Clapp

*Danny Schechter, Nieman Fellow 1978, spent eight years with CNN and the ABC program "20/20" as an Emmy award winning producer before co-founding Globalvision, producers of a wide range of programming including the award-winning "South Africa Now" series and currently "Rights & Wrongs."*

heavily targeted audience in a key demo."

This pursuit of those key demos is nothing new on entertainment television but it is now influencing television news, affecting what stories are assigned and how they are treated. The result is often tabloid infotainment where lowest common denominator diversion overwhelms substance. It's one thing for a business publication or a sports magazine to cater to certain specialized audience interests; it's another when widely watched newscasts that are thought to be serving the larger public spend more on promos and packaging than on news gathering.

The editorial cartoonist who recently lampooned the TV army with their satellite trucks, uplinks and minicams staking out the Lorena Bobbitt trial raised a key issue about priorities. "Why don't you people give this kind of attention to the tragedy in Bosnia," a passerby asks. A media minion responds: "Did someone there get his penis cut off, too?" (The answer is yes—but that's another story.)

Our company, Globalvision, is seeking a higher ground, creating programs that deal with important global issues that are increasingly being missed, marginalized and trivialized as foreign news bureaus are closed. We are trying to demonstrate that there are other—and perhaps more ethical—ways of covering the world.

News can be presented differently on television, although it is hard to imagine how when virtually all of the programs clone each other's look. Despite the plethora of channels, there is still very little choice when it comes to diversity of ideas, multicultural perspectives or global content.

When you flip the dial—or, in today's parlance, "channel surf" with your remote control—you only see a very few formats, and thus many believe that there are only a very few. The "virtual reality" is that there is only one legitimate and credible way of presenting information. We all know the news format: highly paid news stars "anchoring" broadcasts that look the same, sound the same, and feel the same. There are some exceptions, like "The MacNeil/

Lehrer NewsHour" and "Nightline," but they feature discussion segments and most newscasts do not.

Look at the structure of the newscast. Reporters "voice over" news "packages." Stories are short and self-contained, rarely linked to each other, only occasionally illuminating larger systemic problems. Sound bites and "infotainment" rule. The pretense is balance and objectivity, an ideology that denies that it is an ideology as if there is no point of view, no cultural framework, no institutional direction, no corporate interests, no business called the news business. News is only what they say it is. Full stop.

Our own TV series, "Rights & Wrongs: Human Rights Television" is attempting something different. We have built a television series around human rights as a prism for covering international events because we believe that in our post-Cold-War world, human rights has become *the* defining dividing line and challenge.

Bosnia, China and Haiti are now topping a Washington foreign policy agenda that for 50 years was obsessed with stopping "the Red menace." As ethnic conflict and wars within countries supplant ideological conflict and wars between countries, our television-driven democracy is being systematically under-informed about the real threats to the new global neighborhood. Having such a focus doesn't make us advocates because we do follow traditional journalistic norms and are even-handed and fair in our reporting. Nevertheless we have been accused of a pro-victim tilt. One can be open-minded without being empty-minded.

"Rights & Wrongs" aired for 34 weeks in 1993 in 52 countries with half-hour weekly programs designed to bring the world of human rights into the world's living rooms. We are now in the process of beginning a new season of 26 editions. We are carried on public television stations, VISN cable and a mix of satellite and terrestrial delivery systems. The nonprofit series is backed by the MacArthur Foundation and George Soros, among other funders.

The program's anchor is Charlayne Hunter-Gault, the most prominent fe-

male and African-American journalist in all of public television. A 15-year veteran of the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour, she brings credibility and experience to the program's editorial direction with a history of concern rooted in her own experience as one of two students who desegregated the University of Georgia in the 1960's.

Each week, "Rights & Wrongs" features a story exploring some major human-rights issue or theme and then follows it up with an interview or profile. We offer a news digest as well, only we call it a "RightsReel," featuring footage that comes in from human-rights monitors, independent journalists, and TV stations overseas. Much of it is shot on home video. Sometimes we also preview important documentaries that are not getting seen elsewhere. For example, we ran excerpts from "The Panama Deception," the controversial exposé that won an Academy Award but not one network showing.

We close each show with a cultural feature, usually music videos with a human-rights message. One week it's a rhythmic cry from Haiti for an end to military rule; the next, a rap salute to women from "Sweet Honey in the Rock." These are not antiseptic videos but songs that speak out on the issues of the day. We have also added snappy graphics and faster pacing to try to attract younger viewers who find most PBS public affairs programs out of date and boring. Perhaps that's why "Rights & Wrongs" receives more letters from its viewers. Carol Bridgwater, a California singer and songwriter, perhaps inspired by Bob Marley's dictum that "them that feels it knows it," wrote and recorded a song for "Rights & Wrongs" featuring the Oakland Gospel Choir. Some of the lyrics:

*Rights & Wrongs*

*Tellin' the News from the inside out*

*Rights & Wrongs*

*Speakin' the Truth—no we won't hold out*

*Rights & Wrongs*

*Showin the world what it's all about*

© Heart Connection Music (ASCAP)

Our editors then added pictures to the words—and poof—an original human rights music video.

What may be unique is that "Rights &

Wrongs" offers "video diaries," a form of first-person journalism, a kind of inside-out coverage that is so often missing in our personality-dominated news reporting. Video diaries encourage reporters or even amateur video journalists to explain how they feel about a story—weaving their own take on the issue into their segments. Some of these stories resemble personal essays which are crafted to illuminate a subject, make an argument, or share an experience. Unlike "on the one hand/on the other hand" reporting, these diaries try to engage viewers and involve them in the texture of the story. They are not offered as an alternative to hard news but as a provocative supplement.

We think the most compelling stories come from the people most directly affected, often in their own voice...be they rape victims in Bosnia, or brave priests in Brazil. We don't mind if our correspondents have a foreign accent because they have something important to say. One example: we carried short films shot under fire in Sarajevo. The film makers are a multi-ethnic team called SAGA who are documenting the horror of a modern city under mortar fire while the American TV public stands by cheering "Cheers."

Their work is extraordinary and powerful, the only authentic video coverage from the inside, the voice of those resisting aggression. Praised by The New York Times, it has been screened and hailed at film festivals from Cannes to San Francisco. But when Globalvision offered "Sarajevo Ground Zero," a TV Special based on SAGA's material, to television networks worldwide, not one responded positively. "We've already covered Sarajevo" and "doesn't fit our format," were the most common reactions.

Perhaps this group-think just reflects the larger sense of denial about the horrors taking place in Bosnia. Perhaps it is just more evidence that the major media usually march in lockstep with the government on foreign policy. When Washington went to war in Iraq, TV news carried nonstop coverage. When Washington *didn't* resort to arms to save Sarajevo, media coverage remained low key. In almost every case, the net-

works rely on their own roving correspondents, not usually better-informed locals.

There are no hard and fast rules here—much depends on the quality of the journalist. In South Africa, for example, newspapers like The Washington Post and The Observer for years relied on skilled South African journalists like Alistair Sparks. But few TV networks did the same. Black reporters and correspondents from South Africa (or for that matter African-Americans) were rarely heard or seen.

Ironically, Bosnia has been among the most covered foreign news stories even though its meaning has somehow eluded the public and many in the press. It's almost as if the more we watch the less we know. The news frame remains a confusing ethnic and/or religious war, a land dispute between Serbs, Croats and Muslims. The fact that a multicultural society is under assault by racist rightwing nationalist forces is rarely explained. The human-rights aspects of the war have been reported—but where is the continuing follow-up?

Perhaps there's something even more insidious at work. I was struck by a recent story in London's Independent, reporting that newly unearthed documents show that the BBC—our Western paragon of broadcast journalism—had an actual policy of *not* covering the Holocaust during World War II. The reason: fear of awakening anti-Semitism in Britain! There were even written guidelines prohibiting reliance on "Jewish sources." One doubts such guidelines exist today, but the first war in the post World War II period to be compared to a genocidal holocaust is hardly getting the kind of coverage commensurate with that categorization. To the Bosnians, however, the effect is not dissimilar. They are being killed...and silenced! "I used to think that if we had television during the Second World War, the world would have never have permitted the extermination camps," a Bosnian film maker told me. "Now I no longer believe that."

Globalvision's brand of television is clearly out of step in what Variety recently called "TV's Year of Living Cautiously." There's more news program-

ming now than ever, but what do viewers absorb from the headline hit parade, from all that crime and slime on local news, and from the mush of hyped-up storytelling on the magazine shows?

Public ignorance of the world seems to be growing in direct proportion to our need to know more about it. Only 4 percent of Americans now even say they care about international affairs even though our lives are increasingly shaped by the dynamics of an interdependent global economy.

Our schools are losing this global education battle to television, too. Kids are watching more, reading less. A National Geographic survey found that 60 percent of our high school students couldn't find Japan on a map. Twenty percent couldn't find the United States! How can these young people compete in a global age? When it comes to understanding world affairs, we are an undeveloped country.

Even as we ignore it, world culture is transforming America. There are now more Muslims than Episcopalians in our country while Hispanics and Asians represent a growing minority. But the TV news media still only pays lip service to this diversity, even on PBS. White males still dominate the "serious" talk shows, and the national debate follows along all too narrow and predictable lines.

In the case of "Rights & Wrongs," Charlayne Hunter-Gault told Francis Lear in Lear's magazine: "If you look at the schedule, everything on public television is hosted by white men with the exception of one show hosted by Tony Brown who has been on for many years—he's a black man. No black women, very few women at all. That's where your reality is."

She told the Columbia Journalism Review: "PBS had said it wanted programs that were exciting, that appealed to young people, and that were multicultural. Each week we have all the colors of the rainbow on our program. But I'm not saying run this program because it's got diversity. I'm saying run it because it's a goddamn good program that speaks to everything you articulate as a goal. It's solid, it's journalism, it's journalism with a heart."

But the chiefs of PBS have no heart for it. They seem to put fear of controversy and criticism ahead of faith in content and conscience. They declared that "human rights is not an adequate organizing principle for a TV series," declining support not on its quality but on its very concept. Thankfully, individual PBS stations have the option of programming their own stations and do air the series.

The absence of programming like ours may have been one of the reasons why popular singers like Bruce Springsteen write songs like "57 Channels (Nothin' On)" while the telecommunications industries map out ambitious multi-billion dollar plans for 500 channels to turn our homes into electronic shopping malls. More and more, viewers are being targeted as consumers, not citizens, as we enter the age of so-called "information superhighways." More could mean less. Move over McLuhan. Marketing, not media, is the message.

Promoting the ethics of democracy needs help in the media marketplace. Isn't it obvious that television has an important role to play in spreading a respect for the values of human rights? "Rights & Wrongs" is struggling for survival. We could keep the series on the air for five years for what that gangbang of prime-time lookalike Amy Fisher TV melodramas cost. Our society is in trouble when the tortured lifestyle of its Joey Buttafuocos gets more attention than the unspeakable torture being inflicted in the darkness in more than 50 countries. Shows like "Rights & Wrongs" can shine some light in—and perhaps even save lives—but so far we've found few funders with the guts to provide underwriting, and fewer networks with the gumption to put us on the air in an accessible time period despite critical raves and viewer support.

In government, a "need-to-know" criterion divides the informed from the truly informed. In our world, in this age, we all have a need to know about the limits of power and the desire for justice, about the complexities and nuances of change in a turbulent world, about those grass roots heroes who are defining the values of democracy in

countries where the freedoms we take for granted are not honored.

Many prominent journalists interface with human-rights activism by supporting the Committee to Protect Journalists, colleagues who defend reporters at risk and under fire. It is important work. But, in our era, the real ethical challenge may require the creation of a "Committee to Protect Journalism"—especially on TV.

Right or wrong? ■

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## Kovach

*continued from page 2*

Essays in this report are all written with a single purpose in mind: to offer insights into the context within which editors must now make decisions based on the experience and observations of others. In addition, the network of Nieman Fellows has provided rich observations from the field on ethical problems confronting journalists both here and abroad.

There is no effort to draw up rules or establish guidelines (although they are discussed). The committee believes it can best serve the members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors by calling attention to the changing nature of journalism and focusing on the ethical issues it encompasses. Members agreed that as chairman of the Ethics Committee this year, I should use Nieman Reports, the oldest journalism review in the United States, as a vehicle for dissemination of its report. This issue of Nieman Reports, then, is in the form of the report of the Ethics Committee of the American Society of Newspaper Editors at its 1994 convention. It is in some ways patterned after the highly successful publication of the committee 10 years ago. As befits ethical considerations there is a strong thread of continuity between that effort and this. Katherine Fanning, chair of that committee, is a contributor to this report. Robert H. Phelps, a contributor to that report, is editor of this one.

The good news, as you will discover reading this report, is that creative and dedicated thinkers in newspapers across the country are addressing these problems. And for the first time in the history of journalism they are not working alone. There are institutes that allow journalists in all phases of their careers time to contemplate the nature of their work and the impact of what they do. In addition to the journalism schools, which have existed for some time, there are now journalistic think tanks and similar institutes to study issues confronting journalism. Institutes like New Directions for News, the Poynter Institution, the Joan Shorenstein Barone Center at Harvard, the Freedom Forum Centers in Arlington and Oakland and at Columbia and Vanderbilt Universities, the Annenberg Center in Washington and the Media Laboratory at MIT and others provide unprecedented opportunities for disciplined research and careful study of issues of concern to journalists. Where once the Nieman Fellowships offered the only program for study by journalists in mid-career, there are now similar programs at Stanford and the University of Michigan. Programs for concentrated study in special issues and courses for specialized journalism are proliferating across the country. And a rich and thickening stew of journalism reviews and periodicals has emerged in the past decade. This growing network of centers of inquiry and journals of discussion offer the best hope that answers to the challenges of public interest journalism as varied and as complex as democracy requires may be possible. ■

# Presuming to Know the Truth

*Based on 3 Questionable Propositions, Journalists Treat Memories of Childhood Abuse as 'Hysteria'*

BY JUDITH HERMAN

About a year ago, I received a phone call from Lawrence Wright, a reporter who was working on a sensational crime story involving allegations of cult rituals and incest. He was seeking my opinion because of my professional knowledge of sexual and domestic violence. We talked about the issues in the case for about an hour. Or, rather, we argued, for Wright made no effort to hide the fact that he strongly disagreed with my views. I was relieved to find that he eventually decided not to use any material from our interview in his two-part story, "Remembering Satan," which appeared in *The New Yorker* in May 1993.

The facts of the case, briefly, are as follows: In 1988, Paul Ingram, a deputy sheriff in Olympia, Wash., confessed to sexually abusing his two daughters, corroborating their reports. Appeal courts have since ruled that this initial confession was properly obtained. On prolonged and repeated questioning, however, Ingram claimed to remember committing more and more horrific crimes. Police investigators, believing they had uncovered a Satanic cult, resorted to dubious methods of interrogation, pressuring Ingram, his daughters and other family members to come forward with increasingly grotesque allegations and to implicate others. Two men whom Ingram and his daughters named in their statements were arrested. The charges against them were eventually dropped when it became clear that the investigation was hopelessly muddled. Ingram, sentenced to prison after pleading guilty to the original charge of incest, has now recanted all of his confessions, contending that they were coerced.

"Neither of us will ever know what really happened in this case," I pointed out to Wright. (I paraphrase our conversation from memory, since I did not take notes at the time). "Ingram might be innocent. He might be guilty of incest. He might be guilty of additional crimes. There may or may not have been a sex ring or a cult. How can you pretend to know the truth?"

Wright acknowledged that the facts of the case were subject to more than one interpretation. But his mind was made up: some of the crimes that Ingram and his daughters described were so horrendous that he simply could not believe they might have occurred. Furthermore, Wright reasoned, if any of the allegations in this case were false, then all must be false, and if they were

false in this case, then they must be false in numerous other cases. To Wright, the Ingram case represented an archetype, a modern-day equivalent of the Salem witch trials. He was concerned about what he believed was an epidemic of false accusations made by men and women who recall childhood experiences of abuse. In *The New Yorker* article, he would write: "thousands of...people throughout the country have been accused on the basis of recovered memories," and that "certainly many [of the memories] are false (May 24, 1993, p. 76)."

"Thousands? Certainly?" I asked Wright. "How many cases of false accusation have you actually documented?"

After some hesitation, Wright admitted: "One."



photo © Jerry Berndt

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### Meaning Ingram.

One bizarre and equivocal case seemed like no evidence at all for an epidemic. Wright's sweeping generalizations would never pass as science. I didn't think they ought to pass as journalism either. As I hung up the phone in frustration, I wondered whether quaint ethical principles like accuracy and impartiality had become obsolete at *The New Yorker*.

Whatever Wright's story might have lacked in balance, however, it more than compensated in trendiness. Similar stories had been appearing with increasing regularity in the mainstream press. The Philadelphia Inquirer columnist Darrell Sifford led the pack with a column in January 1992, entitled "When Tales of Sex Abuse Aren't True." Other major publications followed with feature articles bearing titles like "What if Sexual Abuse Memories are Wrong?" (*Toronto Star*), "Childhood Trauma: Memory or Invention?" (*The New York Times*), "Cry Incest" (*Playboy*), "Beware the Incest-Survivor Machine," (*The New York Times Book Review*), "Buried Memories, Broken Families" (*The San Francisco Examiner*) and "Lies of the Mind" (*Time*).

These stories were constructed like nesting boxes from a set of three questionable propositions: first, that false claims of sexual abuse are common and increasing; second, that claims based on delayed recall are especially likely to be spurious; and third, that fictitious memories of abuse have been inculcated wholesale in a gullible populace by quack psychotherapists, self-help support groups, and religious fundamentalists. Since none of these points can be documented empirically, reporters relied heavily on anecdote, speculation, and the opinions of a small group of professional experts. The overall effect of these stories was to favor the position of those accused of sexual abuse, allowing them to claim the support of educated opinion, while relegating their accusers to the realm of "mass hysteria."

This outbreak of false-complaint stories coincided with the formation, in early 1992, of an advocacy group for accused parents called the False Memory

### **As I hung up the phone in frustration, I wondered whether quaint ethical principles like accuracy and impartiality had become obsolete at *The New Yorker*.**

Syndrome Foundation. The very name of the foundation revealed its sophistication in the language of public debate. It was catchy; it sounded scientific. Few reporters bothered to find out that no such "syndrome" has been shown to exist. The foundation further enhanced its image by recruiting a number of prominent psychiatrists and psychologists to serve on its advisory board. Some board members became zealous champions of the cause, giving frequent interviews to the media and testifying on behalf of accused perpetrators in court.

The foundation proved highly adept at promoting its point of view. Accused parents gave anguished interviews to reporters, who published their side of the story unverified and without reply from the accusing sons and daughters. FMSF advisory board members then offered their opinions, which reporters also tended to accept at face value. Each favorable story was quickly recycled to the media so that one piece built upon another. The story became "hot."

By March 1993, public controversy had become so intense that a distinguished group of psychology researchers issued a plea for "a more even-handed approach to this topic." "It would be fascinating," they wrote in a letter to the *American Psychological Society Observer*, "to understand the mechanisms involved in memories for traumatic events that never occurred. But a necessary precondition is unequivocal knowledge that the event did not occur. For the sake of intellectual honesty, let's leave the term 'false memory syndrome' to the popular press."

It seems particularly ironic that in a story that hinged on credibility, so many

reporters uncritically promoted the highly partisan arguments of the FMS foundation. In some feature stories inspired by FMSF advocacy, reporters failed even to identify their single most influential source. Lawrence Wright, in his *New Yorker* articles, cited the opinions of four FMSF board members without revealing their affiliation. Leon Jaroff, in *Time*, cited five, representing each as an independent expert. Even respected *New York Times* science reporter Daniel Goleman gave a misleading advantage to the FMSF position, first, by quoting two of its most outspoken board members without noting their affiliation, and second, by citing FMSF founder Pamela Freyd as a psychologist (which she is not), rather than as the wife of a man accused of incest (which she is).

It was not until January 1994 that the first in-depth investigative treatment of the FMS foundation appeared in the mainstream press: Stephen Fried's thoughtful and scrupulously balanced article in *Philadelphia Magazine*. By then, the organization's carefully cultivated image of respectability had begun to tarnish. One founding board member, Dr. Ralph Underwager, had to be retired as a prominent spokesperson and was eventually asked to resign from the advisory board after giving a sympathetic interview to a Dutch magazine called *Paidika: Journal of Pedophilia*. Another FMSF apologist, Clark University psychologist Joseph DeRivera, admitted a previously undisclosed personal stake in the controversy after he was publicly confronted with a signed statement of accusation from his daughter. Psychology Professor Jennifer Freyd, the daughter of the organization's founders, broke her silence, detailing an ongoing pattern of parental harassment in the present that lent plausibility to her allegations of sexual abuse in the past. At this writing, naive acceptance of the FMSF position appears to be on the wane. The question remains: What took so long?

Stephen Fried, of *Philadelphia Magazine*, gave the first and most obvious explanation: biased stories are easy and compelling. "If you've got a crying mom, you've got a story. If you've got a crying

dad, my God, you've got two stories! If you don't get the other side of the story, you've got to be swayed." Balanced stories, by contrast, can be intellectually challenging and emotionally wrenching. Fried described how difficult it was to maintain his equilibrium while researching the story: "I went through a month and a half of hell, feeling torn apart. You feel that all the skills you bring to journalism are inadequate. You want to know who is lying and you don't know."

Fried also thought that the personal views and prejudices of editors played an important role in shaping the story: "It comes down to who the editor is friends with. If he knows a victim he will do a pro-victim story. If he's friends with an accused parent he will do a pro-FMSF story." He believed that editors had greater latitude for personal bias in what he called "soft" stories because they are not taken as seriously as "hard" news.

In addition, Fried observed, the press had been easily manipulated because the rules for covering "hard" news were ill-suited to the "soft" realm of private life. In public, political disputes, he explained, journalists count on both parties to argue their side of the story aggressively, assuming that balance will emerge from a vigorous adversarial process. In family disputes, however, he could see that this process did not work fairly: it rewarded those who wanted to fight, and punished those who wanted to avoid conflict. He noted that most of the FMSF parents had not been publicly accused by their children, and very few faced formal legal charges; most often the children simply wanted to be left alone. When FMSF parents spoke to the press, they knew that their children would be unlikely to contest their statements, no matter how outrageous. Randolph Ryan made a similar observation in a column published in *The Boston Globe* (May 15, 1993): "Those accused of sexual abuse," he wrote, "have an overwhelming interest in discrediting the children and family members accusing them... They resort to war by public diplomacy. The other side—therapists, family, friends—cannot answer back in kind. For all those con-

cerned about the victim... maintaining privacy is crucial... No one who cares about the human costs of crime to the victim will lightly compound it. As a result, the message carried to the media is often heavily biased in favor of the perpetrator."

Without recognizing it as such, both Fried and Ryan had come to a basic feminist insight. They saw that the rules of journalism, like the rules of other major institutions, are made for the public world, the world of war and politics, the world of men. The rules are not made for the private world, the world of sexual and domestic relations, the world of women and children. The same principles that ensure a reasonable degree of equity in conflicts between men do not ensure equity in conflicts between men and women, parents and children. Rather, they guarantee an advantage to those who command status and power in the public realm; they favor men over women, parents over children.

In addition to this inherent, structural bias, I wondered whether overt antifeminist sentiment had played a role in the press response to the FMSF. The several journalists—male and female—whom I interviewed were divided on this point. Women generally perceived a backlash, while men did not. As members of the subordinate group, female journalists were more sensitive than their male colleagues to subtle manifestations of prejudice. For example, most women recognized the bias implicit in emotionally laden terms such as "mass hysteria" or "witch hunt." These terms call up the frightening image of packs of irrational women bent on destroying innocent people; their use evokes a stereotype of women as vengeful, suggestible, and prone to fantasize about sexual violation. Advocates for FMSF invoked the Salem witch trials as their central dramatic paradigm, and many reporters simply accepted this construct, unaware that they were perpetuating a sexist canard.

Of the women I interviewed, only Christina Robb, former staff writer for *The Boston Globe*, was willing to address the question of gender bias for the record. I asked her why she thought

the press had been so easily misled. She answered without hesitation: "Because editors are men."

How, then, did she account for the fact that several of the most polemical pieces had been written by women?

"This is Daddy's Girl," she answered, "the woman who will put forward the man's self-protective ignorance as her base of knowledge, the woman who will say: 'prove to me that she [the accuser] isn't lying.' She is the answer to the editor's prayers—but he doesn't even know he's praying." Robb went on to add that she thought most editors were well-intentioned and would feel insulted and hurt by any intimation of gender bias. "They [editors] are part of a dominant group. They do not have a body of knowledge and personal experience that validates the reports of victims. You can't say to a biased editor: you're seeing crooked. You can't say to a bent twig: be straight."

This is an old story, ever new. None of us is ever entirely free from our prejudices; the best we can do is strive to overcome them. That is one reason why we have codes of ethics, and why they are so often forgotten. A standard code of journalistic ethics (Associated Press) includes the following principles:

- Newspapers must be committed to the accurate reporting of facts. Safeguards to avoid error should include systematic verification of facts and corroboration of critical information.
- In matters of significant controversy, an honest and vigorous effort must be made to include reasonable opposing views.
- The motives of those who press their views upon journalists must be routinely examined and, where appropriate, revealed to the reader.

Application of these three basic principles might have saved the press from the embarrassment of having been so easily manipulated in this instance. It remains to be seen to what extent the press is either capable of embarrassment, or wishes to be saved. ■

# 'Iraqgate'—Stretching Beyond the Facts

*Some Writers Saw Conspiracy to Break the Law  
Lying Behind Bush Obstruction to Reporters*

BY ZACHARY KARABELL

Coverage of "Iraqgate" showed investigative journalism at its best. Unfortunately, it also exposed one of the worst aspects of modern journalism—going beyond the facts to leap to conclusions. The result was that despite some fine reporting, news of the sordid affair of Iraqgate and the Italian Banca Nazionale del Lavoro suffered from overstatements that enabled the Bush Administration to escape its responsibility for aiding Saddam Hussein.

The overstretching by the press can be traced to the Watergate syndrome, the conviction by journalists that behind erroneous government policies lies a conspiracy to break the law. In the face of an administration that obstructed attempts by the press to get to the bottom of American policy toward Iraq before the Persian Gulf War, the press became convinced that there was a cover-up at the highest levels of government. But while the Bush Administration did attempt to spin policy toward Iraq before August 1990, there is still little evidence that the Administration broke the law as reports insisted.

The more President Bush, Secretary of State James Baker, and White House Counsel C. Boyden Grey resisted efforts by Representative Henry Gonzalez and the House Banking Committee to investigate BNL, the more convinced Gonzalez and the press corps became that underneath it all lay a breach of law. This vicious circle has yet to be broken, and it appears that conventional wisdom has already decided that "Iraqgate" is another instance of a rogue government in the White House.

In 1991, Gonzalez began to publicize allegations that the Bush Adminis-

tration knew of the illegal loans extended to Iraq by the Atlanta branch of the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro under the direction of the branch manager, Christopher Drogoul. Over the next two years, Gonzalez made dozens of floor statements and read all or portions of hundreds of documents into the Congressional Record. Evidence mounted of extensive dealings with Iraq before the invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, and of a White House under Reagan and Bush which saw a strong Saddam Hussein as an asset to American policy in the Middle East.

Gonzalez and his staff also shared these findings with a select group of journalists, among them Alan Friedman of *The Financial Times*; Elaine Sciolino, Michael Gordon and William Safire of *The New York Times*; Douglas Frantz and Murray Waas of *The Los Angeles Times*, and Seymour Hersh, the independent investigative reporter, whose story on intelligence sharing between the United States and Iraq ran on the front page of *The New York Times* on January 26, 1992.

In February 1992, Frantz and Waas published a series of three articles in *The Los Angeles Times* tracing policy toward Iraq prior to the Gulf War. The articles were exhaustively researched and their tone was balanced. They demonstrated that the Bush Administration sought to moderate Saddam Hussein through a policy of constructive engagement. The policy entailed substantial agricultural and developmental loan guarantees underwritten by the federal government. Frantz and Waas showed that such a policy flew in the face of overwhelming evidence that Hussein was the antithesis of moderate and had

no intention of changing. They made a convincing case that the Bush Administration had been lax in its enforcement of controls on high-tech exports to Iraq, and Hussein had therefore been able to purchase components such as furnaces and computers that were used in armaments production. Finally, they demonstrated that as early as the fall of 1989, the Administration knew that Hussein was maintaining an offensive military force, with fixed missile sites under construction and an ever-aggressive nuclear and unconventional weapons program. Yet the policy of constructive engagement sputtered along until the day before Iraq invaded Kuwait.

Frantz and Waas were lauded for their work, but they were not the first to dig into the BNL story. In 1989, more than two years before their series, Friedman of *The Financial Times* began an investigation as a result of a raid by federal agents on the Atlanta branch of BNL. He spent considerable time in Italy and England, and without his articles Frantz and Waas, as well as Gonzalez, would have been at a disadvantage.

On May 18, 1992, as the presidential election campaign was heating up, William Safire wrote a column in *The New*

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York Times titled "The Crimes of Iraqgate." From that point forward, the swirl of allegations acquired a name, and that name signified conspiracy. On the same day, U.S. News & World Report ran a cover story titled, "Iraqgate: How the Bush administration helped finance Saddam Hussein's war machine with American tax dollars."

After those stories the term "Iraqgate" entered common parlance. The story was picked up across the country and on television. Time and Newsweek ran shorter stories; U.S. News kept hammering on the issue in June and July. The pace of Gonzalez's floor statements increased, and his allegations were regularly covered in The New York Times and The Washington Post. ABC's Nightline covered the allegations on two separate shows on June 9 and July 7.

By late summer, "Iraqgate" became an issue in the presidential campaign and was pushed by both Vice Presidential candidate Al Gore and Presidential aspirant Ross Perot. After the election Business Week carried an article by Michael Schroeder on November 9, entitled, "Iraqgate's smoking gun—and missiles, mines, and ammo: Did the U.S. arm Hussein? The iotas of evidence are piling up." However, the article concluded that there was no evidence of the Bush Administration's directly shipping weapons to Iraq.

There was not much addition to the substance of the story after the Frantz and Waas articles, although new details continued to emerge and in the fall an ugly squabble erupted between the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Central Intelligence Agency over who knew what when about BNL. However, as the months progressed, the packaging became increasingly frenetic, and Safire's rhetoric started to veer dramatically away from the evidence. For instance, echoing Jack Brooks of the House Judiciary Committee, Safire contended that the "the Administration's support may have gone so far as to involve violations of Federal criminal law."

Even before Safire sensationalized the story, it was heading in that direction. Gonzalez himself is not known for

his subtlety, and he sometimes made statements that he could not back with documents. For instance on July 27, 1992, he stated that "It was a written policy of the Bush Administration to help arm Iraq." The documents he cited though, do not say that. National Security Directive 26, signed by Bush in October 1989, spoke of closer relations with Iraq but did not mention the sale of arms. Other documents cited by Gonzalez explicitly rejected lethal military aid for Iraq.

Moreover, though the text of the Franz-Waas articles was measured, the headlines were not. The February 23, 1992 heading read:

**Secret Effort by Bush Helped Hussein Build Military Might Iraq: Even months before Kuwait invasion, documents show, the President OK'd \$1 billion in aid. Warnings from others in government were suppressed.**

In fact, the effort was far from secret, and the \$1 billion in agricultural credit guarantees had the support not just of most in the Administration but of many in Congress, particularly those from farm states such as Kansas (Bob Dole and four other senators went to Mosul in April 1990 with a message of goodwill from Bush to Hussein) and Arkansas (Bill Clinton supported grain credits to Iraq). Furthermore, all three of The Los Angeles Times headlines conveyed a different type of story from the one Frantz and Waas told. They interviewed some in the government who said they opposed the credits, but they never said that the opposition was "suppressed" (implying that there was a cover-up of sorts); they show only that the advice of the opponents was not heeded.

U.S. News & World Report went even further. In the June 22, 1992 issue, the magazine ran three stories on Watergate, including one on "George Bush's Watergate lesson." At the end of the three, there was a story on "Iraqgate," and the publisher of the magazine, Morton Zuckerman, concluded the issue with a piece paralleling Watergate and "Iraqgate" and calling for an inde-

pendent prosecutor to learn the facts. But if the facts were not known, on what grounds did Zuckerman make such comparisons?

It was Safire who pushed furthest beyond the evidence. On May 18, 1992, Safire wrote that "Americans now know that the war in the Persian Gulf was brought about by a colossal foreign-policy blunder: George Bush's decision...to entrust regional security to Saddam Hussein. What is not yet widely understood is how that benighted policy led to the Bush Administration's fraudulent use of public funds, its sustained deception of Congress and its obstruction of justice." In October, Safire asserted that "The Iraqgate cover-up is unraveling. In trying to conceal a blunder, real crimes have been committed."

More than a year later, on November 8, 1993, Safire treated his allegations as if they were already proven fact: "In Iraqgate, the Bush Administration arranged for billions in unlawful financing of Saddam Hussein through the Atlanta office of Italy's Banca Lavoro. To avoid embarrassment...our Justice Department conspired with Italy to obstruct the investigation of Saddam's bankers and Bush's top aides."

For proof, Safire pointed to Alan Friedman's just-published book, "Spider's Web." The day before Safire wrote this column, Friedman published an op-ed article in The Times summarizing the book's argument. He asserted that the Reagan Administration illegally armed Iraq and that the Bush Administration, including Bush himself, then covered it up. He wrote: "There is a tendency to shrug off Government malfeasance on the ground that we are so inured to such behavior that it almost doesn't matter. Yet the story of Iraqgate goes well beyond policy blunders; it is a story of flagrant disregard for the law at the highest levels of Government."

In his book, however, Friedman did not provide solid evidence of illegalities. He showed that there was unbridled cynicism coupled with severe miscalculations of Saddam Hussein, and he also made a case for the appointment of an independent prosecutor to investigate how much was known about

BNL's illegal loans and at what level. But Friedman never substantiated the allegations that the White House illegally armed Iraq or that it did more than look the other way. While willful ignorance of Iraq's attempts to evade proliferation controls might be illegal, it is a gray area. And while there may be agreement that the policies of the Bush White House toward Iraq and toward Gonzalez's investigation were immoral and unconscionable, that does not mean that criminal offenses were committed.

The distinction between immoral and illegal is important. There clearly is an American penchant for associating the two. However, though there is no doubt that policy toward Hussein was severely misguided and morally repugnant, a policy failure, even one of such significant dimensions, does not imply the underlying presence of illegalities. While there is strong circumstantial evidence that there were weapons transfers to Iraq in the latter days of the Reagan Administration—without Congressional approval and hence not legal—there is only the most tenuous evidence that such activities might have occurred after 1988. The willful obstruction (some of which might have been illegal) and obfuscation by the Bush Administration on all dimensions of pre-war policy toward Hussein raised suspicions that something even more damning than a major policy failure took place. But journalists cannot make the case based simply on the foolish defensiveness displayed by Bush and his advisers in the heat of an election campaign that was not going their way.

In addition to their failure to produce the "smoking gun" the proponents of the "Iraqgate" theory failed to provide a motive. The policy failure lay in the decision to make Hussein a bulwark against Iran and to support him in the hope that he would in return support U.S. aims in the region, including the American position on the Arab-Israeli negotiations. That decision entailed economic aid and a willingness to look the other way on human rights, proliferation and shady dealings with American front companies. That decision also entailed giving our allies, both Middle Eastern and European, a clear

green light on arming Hussein. Any request to Congress for military aid to Iraq would have been met with vehement protests from the Israeli lobby and the anti-Iraq pro-human rights coalition. Thus the Bush Administration did not have the option of arming Iraq legally.

Safire et al. contend that it proceeded, in Iran-Contra fashion, to arm him illegally through covert means. But what would the motive have been? The Administration knew that Hussein was getting high quality arms and components from the French, the British, the Germans, the Swedes, the Brazilians, the Chinese, and the Russians. With American economic credits combined with tacit acceptance of European sales, the Bush Administration was able to pursue constructive engagement with minimal effort and risk. Why would it have taken the monumental risk to arm Hussein illegally when that was being accomplished legally by our allies?

Friedman cites a former member of the National Security Council, Howard Teicher, who contends that for many of the covert activities between the U.S. and Iraq, there was no presidential finding as ordered by law. If so, that would indeed be illegal. But, had the finding been signed, the policy would have been identical; it would still have enjoyed the same support in both the White House and some on the Hill. Would a finding have made the policy OK?

There was a motive for Watergate: to counteract President Nixon's enemies. There was a motive for Iran-Contra: if Col. Oliver North had not set up a rogue operation, the Nicaraguan Contras would have collapsed. There was no motive for "Iraqgate."

But in 1992, Bush had a motive in allowing Counselor Grey to obstruct Gonzalez's investigation. The policy of constructive engagement with Hussein not only failed, it also failed in the most embarrassing way possible. The Administration had been in bed with Public Enemy Number One. Gonzalez and the press corps deserve our thanks for not allowing the Bush Administration to whitewash their pre-war policy. This should be remembered as one of the

great policy failures and a profoundly immoral one to boot.

Unfortunately, it may not be remembered that way, and for that, journalists are partly to blame. In the face of only circumstantial evidence and no motive, editors and reporters pursued allegations of conspiracy. That may have made good reading, but it also polarized the dialogue. By raising the stakes so high, by detaching the allegations from evidence, those pushing the story created a credibility gap. Those under the cloud of the accusations were able to deny the conspiracy theory as absurd and in the process deny the substantive policy criticisms that went with it. It was as if a thief had been accused of murder; he is acquitted of the more severe charge and in the process gets away with robbery.

Finally, the questionable ethics of the way this case was developed by the media also risks the "boy who cried wolf" syndrome. Conspiracies do occur, and when they do, they must be uncovered. Journalists are often instrumental in bringing conspiracies to light, but to do so, they must be credible. If allegations are hurled without care, people will be less willing to listen. There is a slippery slope between flashy headlines and *The National Enquirer*.

Those who pursued the story of Bush's policy toward Iraq before the Gulf War and his excuses about it after, particularly Friedman, Frantz and Waas, Hersh, and even Safire, did a valuable service. Their stories combined with Gonzalez's investigation made it impossible for the Bush Administration to whitewash its complicity in the making of Iraq's war machine and in flirting with Hussein. Unfortunately, the "Iraqgate" story was presented as something that it was never proven to be: a conspiracy, and that undermined the credibility of some very real and some very chilling facts. ■

# Mindfields in Mideast

## *Palestinian Self-Rule Creates Additional Problems —Will P.L.O. Permit Press Freedom?*

*The following article was written before a Jewish settler massacred Muslim worshippers at a mosque in the West Bank town of Hebron on February 25. Though the slaughter and subsequent unrest seemed to bring back the most violent days of the Palestinian uprising, efforts immediately began to renew negotiations on Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.*

BY JOEL GREENBERG

As Israelis and Palestinians enter a new relationship in the wake of the agreement they signed last September, journalists working here may find themselves facing a new set of professional dilemmas.

Until now, covering Israeli-Palestinian strife has been something like covering a war, albeit a low-level one. The cardinal journalistic rules were: strive to be fair and don't be drawn into the fray.

It hasn't been easy. In such an emotionally charged conflict as the Israeli-Palestinian struggle, reporting is fraught with minefields.

It starts the minute you begin putting words together. Is a Palestinian man with a gun a terrorist, a guerrilla, a commando, a fighter? Are the West Bank and Gaza Strip disputed, occupied, or administered territories, or should they be called Judea, Samaria and the Gaza District? Are Israeli soldiers dispersing Arab rioters, or shooting Palestinian demonstrators?

Every choice of words is minutely examined by leaders on both sides of the Arab-Israeli divide, and every reporter's formulation is immediately interpreted as a value judgment.

Moving between the warring communities means negotiating with a volatile environment, trying to gain the confidence of your subjects without being co-opted by them.

Driving into Palestinian towns and villages, we have to drape our car dashboards with an Arab head scarf, and sometimes even a Palestinian flag, to avoid being stoned. We accept offers of coffee and listen earnestly to stories of Israeli harassment and violence. Our hosts vent anger and pain, press us for support and expect us to be their advocates, testing our ability to be attentive but dispassionate.

Among Israelis there is a similar thirst for support which can turn to hostility and suspicion, especially among militant Jewish settlers who feel they have been unjustly pilloried by the press.

Then there is the problem of creating news. Palestinian gunmen in the Gaza Strip catch thieves, drag them out into a town square and, before news agency cameras, shoot them in the legs. Jewish militants in the West Bank invite television crews to military-style training sessions and to punitive patrols through Arab towns and villages, where they vandalize property and threaten Palestinians. How much of this was done for the cameras? How often does it happen when there are no reporters around?

As long as conflict persists in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, so will these questions, but if a new phase of Palestinian self-rule begins there in the coming months, journalists may face different sorts of problems.

Until now, a persistent obstacle to coverage has been the Israeli army, which many times has barred journalists from areas of tension and, most recently, arrested reporters trying to cover civil disobedience actions by Jew-

ish settlers.

At the same time, we have had to maintain a working relationship with the military in order to gain access to army operations, interview senior officers and get information on events in the field.

It has been both an adversarial and cooperative relationship. Reporters have often uncovered abuses by the army and embarrassed it into correcting faults. But the army has also used the media to great effect to convey its messages to both the Israeli and Palestinian publics.

Much of this could change in the coming months, if and when the Israelis withdraw and a Palestinian authority and police force take control of the Gaza Strip and areas of the West Bank.

Reporters will have to extend their critical gaze from the Israeli military occupation to the Palestinian self-government led by the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Journalists used to describing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians will have to examine more closely rivalries among the Palestinians themselves, particularly within the P.L.O., to understand developments in the self-rule areas. Investigative skills will have to be used to search for corruption and mismanagement in the Palestinian government, as well as for abuses by its secu-

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*Joel Greenberg has for the past two years been reporting for The New York Times bureau in Jerusalem. Between 1986 and 1990 he was the West Bank correspondent for The Jerusalem Post, covering the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories. He was a 1990-91 Nieman Fellow. Joel lives in Jerusalem with his wife, Rena, and children, Nadav and Tamar.*

# Bucking the Media Line on Breast Implants

BY ELINOR J. BRECHER

A colleague approached me in the newsroom recently, radiating anguish. Her sister had been diagnosed with breast cancer and was to undergo a mastectomy. The sister was adamant about two things: She wanted reconstructive surgery, and she didn't want an implant—silicone or saline. What did I think?

What I thought was: Here we go again. What I said was: Implants are just fine. Either kind. They're nowhere near as risky, expensive or complicated as the tissue-transfer method her sister was proposing. Go with the implant.

As usual, I got *The Look*. But...but...wasn't silicone dangerous? Hadn't the government banned implants because of all those women who'd gotten so sick from them? It was pointless to explain. I gathered up a bunch of clips, dropped them on my colleague's desk and let her draw her own conclusions.

There have been variations on this scenario more times than I care to count. It's my dubious distinction to be the resident breast-cancer maven at my newspaper. I was diagnosed with the disease in 1985. A year later, I had completed reconstructive surgery with a silicone implant, just in time to undergo a second mastectomy and another round of reconstruction. So when the implant controversy began brewing in the spring of 1991, it was natural for me to want to write about it.

That May a group of women appeared on a tabloid television show contending that their breast implants had caused debilitating diseases of the immune system and connective tissues. The show was one of the worst cases of shrill, one-sided sensationalism I had ever seen on a serious topic. But that was TV.

Still, I knew that the Food and Drug Administration would soon hold hear-

ings on the safety and effectiveness of the 30-year-old devices, so I was paying attention. After all, I'd had these things in my body for several years; if they were dangerous, I'd certainly want to know about it.

I never suspected that my skepticism—ok, revulsion—about that one program, and my dismay at the media feeding frenzy to follow, would make me and my reporting an ethics issue at my newspaper. It wasn't because I had anything material to gain or lose in the fray—I only wish someone had offered me free cosmetic surgery!—but because I declined to travel with the pack, that editors were uneasy.

The FDA proceedings devolved from a serious discussion about science and

medicine to a tabloid circus fueled by greed, politics and fringe feminist dogma. What should have been a methodical analysis of research and clinical evidence instead became a chaotic forum for "experts" with minimal reputations and dubious credentials; women seeking huge judgments from implant manufacturers on the ground that their implants caused everything from hair loss to strokes; and social philosophers decrying artificial, exploitative standards of contemporary female beauty.

There had never been any question that a certain percentage of implants had structural flaws—some broke, migrated, or formed capsular contractures—but no one had ever been able to demonstrate what, if any, organic health problems these flaws caused.

Such complications could be a nuisance, requiring more surgery and possible removal or replacement, and some people are allergic to silicone (just as some are allergic to aspirin). But silicone is used in hundreds of medical devices precisely because it's so compatible with human body tissue.

Instantly, the American media chose sides. Or I should say, side. The media offered this picture of the situation:

- The chemical and pharmaceutical companies were duplicitous profit mongers who hid and falsified crucial data, deliberately foisting on unsuspecting women dangerous devices that research had proven could injure them.
- The plastic surgeons who installed these devices were cynically conspiring with the manufacturers to coerce gullible, insecure women into disfiguring vanity surgery, for outrageous financial gain.
- Women by the thousands were being crippled by the leaking,



*Elinor J. Brecher, Nieman Fellow 1988, is a feature writer at The Miami Herald. She is writing a book about "Schindler's List" survivors in the United States.*

rupturing sacs of poison in their chests. After all, hadn't we seen them—accompanied by their malpractice lawyers and hired experts—on Jenny Jones, Geraldo, Hard Copy, and the pages of *The National Enquirer*?

All those suffering women made great copy, and even better television, but there was a distinct lack of hard science backing up their claims, and I was determined to report that.

It was true that there had never been large-scale, affirmative, safety-and-effectiveness studies on women with implants, of the kind the FDA now requires for all devices. But their real-world track record surely would carry substantial weight, I thought.

Surveys by the Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons' Professional Societies showed that 93 percent of implant wearers were satisfied with the products. Surely the media would note that rheumatologists and immunologists had never reported notable numbers of implant-connected disease, I assumed.

Boy, was I wrong.

As the FDA proceedings cranked up, our Washington bureau handled daily coverage. I concentrated on how the proceedings were affecting women in South Florida. Between May 1991 and June 1992, I wrote 16 stories related to the controversy. As I became more closely identified with the issue, even strangers began seeking my opinion and advice. That I had plenty of both made my editors increasingly nervous as the implant issue grew nastier and more emotional.

On Jan. 6, 1992, anticipating an FDA moratorium on the devices the next day, I wrote a commentary reminding readers that 25 percent of implants went to women who had lost breasts to cancer, and had nothing to do with vanity. It championed the right of rational, adult women to make their own informed choices about the placement of a long-used medical device in their bodies.

My editors had suggested I write it, and were pleased. This was considered point-of-view journalism at its most personal level, something my newspaper encourages.

But as the controversy evolved, management got nervous. Was I tainted by those opinions? As a newspaper, did we have a conflict? Could I separate my personal feelings from my coverage? I was sure I could.

As I see it, nothing gives a reporter greater advantage covering a subject than having experienced it. When there's high potential for manipulation by parties with a lot at stake, we serve readers best by assigning personnel familiar enough with the subject to gauge nuance, as well as report events.

Yet nothing worries an editor faster than a reporter's desire to cover a story precisely for that reason. There's a fear that being "too close" to a situation will skew coverage, that a writer will take sides. I did, in fact, take a side: the side of logic, sanity and common sense.

I'd had no problems with my implants, and neither had anyone I'd ever known (beyond a couple of cases of capsular contracture, the forming of a scar-tissue shell around the implant, a common structural complication easily remedied by replacing the implant. Doctors routinely tell women contemplating implant surgery that this is a predictable risk).

Obviously, this didn't amount to scientific proof of anything, but it made me disinclined to blithely accept, much less report as indisputable fact, some of the hysterical claims women were making in lawsuits against the manufacturers.

I called it balance. Others called it bias. Let's face it, bias attends every phase of putting a story before the readers: conceiving, researching, reporting, illustrating, headlining, designing and placing it on the page. Simply deciding what is a story, and what isn't, is the most fundamental exercise in editorializing.

With every one of these decisions, we subtly or overtly telegraph our institutional assessment of the story's relative importance: Who are the credible sources? Do we quote or omit what they say? How much of our time and resources do we invest in coverage? Should we run it out front, above or below the fold, or deep inside a section?

In nearly 17 years of reporting at two

of the country's most honored newspapers, I've developed opinions about a lot of people and things I've covered—as have we all. I've come to feel that journalistic objectivity, as it's popularly defined, is an inherently disingenuous concept.

Rather than pretending that I've no opinion about a story, I strive for fairness, accuracy, thoroughness and the right of all credible parties to be heard and represented. I've never been sued, nor gotten anyone expelled, fired, divorced or killed because I've failed to report a story fairly. As much heat as I took over the phone from women suing implant manufacturers, to my knowledge, no one ever wrote a letter to the editor about my coverage or complained to the newspaper's hierarchy.

I was deeply disturbed by the kind of "news" women were getting on silicone implants. It was pure horror, creating needless panic. After the FDA placed a moratorium on the use of silicone implants in January 1992, some women mutilated themselves trying to rip out the implants.

As a woman and breast-cancer survivor, I was furious that the government was once again dictating to me what I could and couldn't do with my own body. As a journalist, I was outraged that so few of my colleagues were inclined to sort out the junk science from the authentic. (Ann Landers, a *Wall Street Journal* editorial writer, and a reporter in Knoxville seemed to be the only other writers covering the "other side," as far as I could tell).

The media reported every heretofore unrevealed Dow Corning dog study; every heart wrenching "victim" sob story; every grandstanding news conference by FDA officials, Congressmen, consumer activists, malpractice attorneys, and memo-waving, disgruntled former Dow Corning employees.

"Support groups" that were nothing more than clearinghouses for attorneys seeking "injured" clients, sprang up nationwide, as a handful of obscure doctors—treated like Nobel laureates by anti-implant FDA officials—presented anecdotal reports of a few patients with implants and immune-sys-

tem disorders. However, no one was reporting on broad, conclusive, scientifically conducted research studies published in reputable medical journals proving a link between silicone and disease—because there were none.

Despite that, FDA Commissioner David Kessler, an implant foe, conceded to me that no more than 1 percent of all women with silicone implants might have related connective-tissue diseases. Still, he intended to take them off the market and keep them off (until he later decided to take them off the cosmetic market but keep them on the reconstruction market in clinical trials, thus begging the question: If they're too dangerous for one group of women, why are they safe enough for another?)

And despite THAT, at least 25,000 individual lawsuits have now been filed.

No one was investigating the researchers and doctors touted by the anti-implant activists as authorities on silicone—men and women raking in hefty expert-witness fees on behalf of plaintiffs. No one was exploring the relationships among FDA officials deciding the fate of implants, the radical consumer advocates pushing Kessler to ban them and the plaintiff's bar.

As a local feature writer in Miami, my scope was limited, so I concentrated on stories that might calm the troubled waters, cultivating sources among medical practitioners and scientists who had no vested interests, as well as plastic surgeons who did.

[A settlement of the suits, establishing a \$4 billion fund for women with implants, was announced as this issue of Nieman Reports went to press.]

On March 21, 1992, I reported that long-term follow-up studies on thousands of women with implants by three of the nation's preeminent cancer institutions, showed no evidence of a link between silicone and diseases like lupus and scleroderma.

A week later, I ran a three-story package: "Implant complaints concern immunologist; Symptoms hard to pinpoint but pain is real," "Patient blames ills on implants; files suit," and "Fear fuels implant issue despite calls for common sense."

My last effort on the subject was a profile of a University of South Florida rheumatologist who'd become the darling of the anti-implant faction because he believed some of his patients' implants had caused their connective-tissue diseases.

It was a story for which I'd been lobbying for months. Finally, after the newspaper's higher education writer was assigned to co-write it, it was published on the front page on June 22, 1992: "Critic of implants on hot seat; Plastic surgeons say he fed hysteria." There was a sidebar about the rheumatologist's lucrative expert-witness sideline.

Soon after, the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery awarded me its outstanding journalist of the year award.

Oh, about my colleague's sister: she decided to go with the implant. I'm told she's quite pleased with the results. ■

## Mindfields

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rity forces.

The big unknown is whether the P.L.O. will permit press freedom in the areas it will control, or whether it will try to stifle political expression and prevent journalists from talking to its opponents, particularly Islamic fundamentalists.

Will the P.L.O. allow reporters to cover the activities of its police and security apparatus as a check against human rights violations, or will it try to hide these in the interests of consolidating power? What kind of freedom of movement will reporters have in the areas of Palestinian self-rule?

Journalists will have to preserve their independence against possible pressure from the Palestinian authorities, who might use their power to accredit reporters and grant them access in order to steer coverage in directions they prefer, away from controversy. The same has been done by governments everywhere. ■

## Tonya

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and the day before her departure for the World Championships in Japan, she entered Multnomah County Circuit Court in Portland to admit guilt in a plea deal with prosecutors.

She pleaded guilty to conspiracy to hinder prosecution, a Class C felony.

As always, the swarm was present in force and out-of-town reporters, like Lester Munson of Sports Illustrated, converged on Portland that day precisely in the hope something would break in the case.

Their trips were not in vain, for many spent the morning and early afternoon of March 16 frantically trying to chase down rumors that Harding had been arrested and was salted away in the holding jail on the top floor of the county courthouse.

But by midafternoon, reporters—independently and by trading information—had learned the details of the plea bargain and that Presiding Multnomah County Judge Donald H. Londer was driving in from a vacation on the Oregon coast for a 4 p.m. hearing.

The Oregonian got the details of the plea bargain into its first edition, which hits the streets about 3:15 p.m.—more than an hour before the actual hearing started at 4:30 p.m. Other media were close behind.

The provisions of the plea left Judge Londer astonished—a \$100,000 fine, creation of a \$50,000 fund for the Oregon Special Olympics, \$10,000 to the district attorney's office for its costs (which included a meeting with Nancy Kerrigan at a swank hotel in California), three years supervised probation, 500 hours of community service, resignation from the U.S. Figure Skating Association, a psychological examination and treatment, if ordered by Londer.

The plea was widely heralded in the media as a "break" for Harding. Many reporters wrote that she got off easy; that a much worse fate—a significant prison term—awaited her if she had been tried.

However, that was speculation of the rankest sort. Londer's staff calculated that even if Harding had been tried and convicted of that charge, the harshest jail sentence she could receive was 30 days. Probation was far more likely.

News coverage of the long, dramatic saga was immense and intense, but it crossed the finish line limping badly. ■

# The Faith Healer And the Photographer

BY FREDRIC N. TULSKY

One basic tenet of American journalism is to play the role of detached observer. Reporters are expected to be objective and at arm's length from their subjects. So consider the dilemma faced at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* after reporter Ralph Cipriano and photographer J. Kyle Keener traveled to Israel with a faith healer named Benny Hinn.

As Cipriano would describe the incident in a December 1993 article, he went into the assignment as a skeptic, "an outsider who shuns organized religion," as someone with "doubts about wealthy TV faith healers."

Throughout the 10-day mission, Cipriano and Keener were in the midst of hundreds of followers constantly asking if the two were "believers." At one point, Cipriano agreed to be part of a mass baptism, as a means of gaining access to Hinn for an interview.

But none of that compared with the last healing service of the tour, where Benny Hinn was on stage in front of 1,800 people.

Cipriano would later describe the scene as "cartoon mayhem," with people in the audience staggering, falling, and twitching on the ground after Hinn would motion toward them, or even just blow into his microphone in their direction.

According to Cipriano's account:

"Now Pastor Benny is calling *The Inquirer* photographer up on stage. The man shoots one picture after another until Pastor Benny waves an arm at him and blows into the microphone.

**PhhhhhhhhhhhHHHHHHH!**

"The photographer falls back, a look of rapture on his face. On the ground, his hands tremble above his head. 'Halleluia,' Pastor Benny yells. Pandemonium. The crowd is on its feet, roaring."

An assistant pastor, then Hinn himself, took the photographer's camera and took pictures, Cipriano wrote. His account continues: "The photographer staggers up, but Pastor Benny comes by and grabs him lightly by the chin. He goes down even harder than

the first time, his legs and arms flapping as if a few hundred volts are surging through him."

As Cipriano wrote, "For me it's the last call." Sitting in the auditorium, his laptop computer running, the reporter thought, "I could be next." He closed the computer and told the producer of Hinn's own television production, "I've seen enough for one night, I am out of here," before rushing out.

Later, according to Cipriano's account, he would ask the photographer what had occurred inside. The answer was short: "Major buzz, man, major buzz."

Back home, the incident would cause internal consternation, as editors struggled to understand the incident and what effect it should have on Cipriano's coverage. Ultimately, Cipriano's account of the incident was woven into his article about Hinn's tour. The conclusion that Cipriano wrote: "I no longer wonder whether Pastor Benny's for real. He is for real to his followers, as real as their own powerful experiences."

The photographs that accompanied the article were credited to Keener, but the photographer's name was not included in the account.

The deputy editor of the newspaper, Gene Foreman, recently said that the incident remains "something of a mystery," since the photographer had not been willing to discuss the experience further. It was, Foreman said, "an extraordinary occurrence" as far as ethical situations go.

The incident occurred at a newspaper that has gone to great lengths to promote ethical standards and to warn its staff members to avoid situations in which their ethics could be challenged.

Reporters at the newspaper are expected not to sign petitions, or post partisan bumper stickers, or to march in most parades. And while the newspaper has not banned sports writers from taking part in writers' polls of college sports teams, Foreman said that issue is one that is under internal discussion.

At *The Inquirer*, Foreman helped spearhead the effort 16 years ago to draft a comprehensive ethical code, at a time when few news organizations had done so.

If anything, the incident in Israel demonstrates that despite seminars and written guidelines on ethics, not every ethical dilemma can be prevented. (The Hinn situation is particularly complicated, since it falls into a small category of situations when the journalist may be dragged into an event in a purely involuntary manner.)

Said Foreman, "We have tried to establish a tone for the staff, a frame of mind." He added, it "isn't a cure-all."

Even so, Foreman said he believes in such codes, saying that in a large newsroom it is impossible to make certain that ethical standards are understood if they are distributed only by word-of-mouth. Some editors worry that such a written code can be a problem in libel cases, where a sharp plaintiff's lawyer can make a great deal out of a reporter's failure to follow written standards.

Foreman said he is convinced that concern is misguided. He cited one presentation by ethics specialist Michael Josephson, who showed how easily a plaintiff's lawyer could benefit from the absence of a code. What editor, after all, wants to explain to a jury why he is unwilling to put his ethical beliefs into writing? And in the end, in those situations when *The Inquirer* finds itself in an ethical dilemma, Foreman said he believes the newspaper has to follow the same advice he gives to non-journalists: Full disclosure in print. ■

*Rick Tulsy, Nieman Fellow 1989, is Managing Editor, Center for Investigative Reporting, San Francisco.*

# Calling the Shots in a Small Town

*Concord Monitor Deals With Situations as They Arise  
On the Basis of Principles, Not a Written Code*

BY MIKE PRIDE

Last summer, in a small town in central New Hampshire, the local police conducted an undercover operation at a state highway rest area. The spot was known for gay trysts, and the police thought a few well-publicized arrests would discourage gay men from using it.

Thus began one of many incidents during recent months in which journalists at *The Concord Monitor* had to make ethical decisions with our readers' interests foremost. These decisions differ little from the ones faced by larger newspapers except in one particular: We are less insulated from our readership and thus face more pressure to withhold information that many readers perceive as negative, sensational or private.

The *Monitor* has no written code of ethics. We deal with situations as they arise, whether the issue is that of a staffer wanting to volunteer for a local organization or the photo editor's arguing that a picture, though likely to offend many readers, should be published because it conveys the news better than words.

The rest area sting raised particularly difficult questions. New Hampshire is a tourist state, and this was not the first time we had reported on gay activity at rest areas. Perhaps that is why we did not anticipate the problems last summer's arrests might cause.

The police press release listed the seven men arrested and the charges against them. The town where the arrests occurred was just outside our circulation area, but one of the men was from a *Monitor* town. He was charged with indecent exposure and lewdness.

The *Monitor* routinely reported the arrests, as did two or three other papers.

The day our report appeared, the man from our circulation area shot himself to death. He had told friends and work mates that there had been a mistake. He had merely been urinating in the woods when he was arrested, he said, but the stories in the newspaper were humiliating him.

The *Monitor* covered the suicide with a straight news story. Three days later, *The Sunday Monitor* ran a long front-page story on the victim's life. He was 58 years old, and he lived in a town of about 2,500 people. He had been a volunteer firefighter, an ambulance attendant, an exemplary employee at the local tannery, a good neighbor, a loyal friend, "the best father anyone could ask for" and a doting grandfather. He had killed himself, one friend said, because "he didn't want his family to stay in shame, whether what the police said was true or not."

No one quoted in the story believed the charges against this man. A man who had been his friend since grade school put it this way: "[He] did not live a double life, I'll tell you that right now. He was just in the wrong place at the wrong time...I've known him 50 years. There's no one straighter than [he was]."

The *Monitor's* duty at this juncture was clear but unpleasant. The man was dead, but his story wasn't over. We would have to go to the town where the man had been arrested, get the police report and tell readers in detail what had happened in the woods near the rest stop.

This proved to be more difficult than it should have been. Despite calls from a reporter and from me to the police

chief, the town selectmen and the town attorney, the town maintained that it was under no obligation to release the arrest report. The town had no legal grounds to deny public access to the report, but its officials had suddenly developed a respect for the privacy of the dead man and his family.

While we negotiated with town officials, the story stayed in the paper. Another of the men arrested claimed that he, too, had only been urinating in the woods. He requested that the state chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union enter the case on his behalf. The ACLU tried to decide whether the case raised a civil rights issue that it should address.

The paper pursued the story from another angle as well. *Monitor* reporters looked into the practice of busting gay men at rest stops. Often, it turned out, the police did not prosecute the people they arrested in such stings. Through word of mouth and publicity about the arrests, they hoped to discourage the use of rest stops for gay trysts. In 1990, at the rest stop where the man who killed himself had been collared, the police arrested four men on similar charges. They later dropped the charges against three of them.

Ten days after the suicide, *The Monitor* threatened to sue the town if it did not release the arrest report. The law was on our side, as it had been from the beginning. In New Hampshire, the police may withhold an arrest report if they believe its release might jeopardize an ongoing investigation. But this

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*Mike Pride, a 1985 Nieman Fellow, is Editor of The Monitor in Concord, N.H.*



investigation was over. Furthermore, the law contains no grounds for asserting the privacy rights of a dead person.

This case was not, however, about legalities. It was about public perception. By fighting to keep the police record secret, town officials could appear to be sympathetic toward the family of the dead man. They could also play to a public prejudice, painting the local paper as prying and insensitive.

Under threat of suit, the town gave up the report. In it, a police officer detailed what he had seen: The man, while masturbating, had approached a group of undercover officers. "He continued to do this as he moved closer to my location. I did not move towards him. I could see very clearly that [he] was masturbating and not going to the bathroom." When he was arrested, the man said only that he was sorry.

The Monitor published a story detailing this report. We played it below the fold on the local section front. There was no outcry over its publication, possibly because by putting to rest the comforting notion that the police had made a mistake in arresting the man, the story had given townspeople other issues to ponder.

Our editorial a few days later dealt with some of these issues: about how the good-hearted grandfather and volunteer firefighter can also be the man picked up in a gay sting; about how the stereotypes of small-town life mask a more complex reality; about the wisdom of arresting gay men at rest stops.

As an example of ethical issues at a small newspaper, the gay tryst story is typical in some ways, atypical in others.

The standard is to figure out how best to serve the truth and then to strive to keep to that path. Had we caved in to town officials on release of the police report, we might have saved ourselves from the criticism of those who thought we were subjecting the dead man's family to further distress, but we would also have damaged our credibility as a provider of the news.

Usually, however, the editor has the advantage of the bully pulpit, the chance to explain why the paper is pursuing a particular course. In this case, for two reasons, I did not write a column justi-

fying the newspaper's actions.

First, most readers would understand without my explanation that the newspaper had a responsibility to investigate the claim by the dead man and his friends that he had been falsely accused. Those who had followed the story would also know without my telling them that we had covered it from all angles, including a human portrait of the victim that townspeople would recognize as the man they knew. Intended or not, efforts to paint us as prying and uncaring would fool few people.

Second, this was a terrible tragedy for all involved. The family, the town and the larger community of Monitor readers had far more profound issues to sort through than whether town officials had unfairly characterized the actions of the local newspaper.

### Pictures Raise Problems

Few stories are as difficult for The Monitor as this man's, but tragic deaths often raise the ethical issue that is most common in our newsroom: whether or not to use a particular picture.

Some years ago, I accompanied a Monitor photographer, Garo Lachinian, now of The Baltimore Sun, to a session on photojournalism ethics. One specific he used in his presentation was a photograph of a drowning victim being pulled from the Merrimack River. The young man had gone swimming in a dangerous area, and the photograph showed "No Swimming" and "No Diving" signs. It did not show much of the body; it was as tasteful as such a photograph can be.

As I recall, we received only a couple of calls from upset readers after this photo appeared in the paper. But what struck me about Garo's presentation that day was not the picture we had used but the pictures we hadn't. When it comes to the words in the paper, we are staunch defenders of the truth, of showing things as they are, of not holding back. We have a different standard for pictures.

Before an audience of journalists, Garo showed perhaps half a dozen slides of the divers finding the drowning victim and pulling his body from the wa-

ter. The body was bloated, and it was obvious from the postures of the divers that it was dead weight. We would have given not a moment's thought to publishing any of these photographs.

But what about close calls? What standards do we apply? Well, we make subjective group decisions at The Monitor; that's the only way to do it. But I worry, at least in covering tragedies, that we are straying further and further from our truth-telling ethic.

This is a negative side effect of a generally good trend in journalism: We have become more sensitive to giving readers what they want in the paper. I do not believe publishing honor rolls and more news about charity drives and other community events forces us to abandon some high principle or to shrink from our duties as journalists. I am not troubled by the idea of finding a place on page one for a story that is frivolous by our old journalistic standards but will have high readership.

Behind this trend, however, is a tricky problem. How do we discern what readers want and give their desires the proper weight in news decisions? It isn't that readers are shy about telling us; it is that we can put too much emphasis on what we hear from a small segment of our readers. That is what I think is happening to our judgment on photo play.

Certain pictures always elicit a negative reaction, and sometimes the negative reaction elicits a backlash. I call this the dead moose syndrome. Our latest literal case of dead moose syndrome came last fall when, as lead art, we ran a color picture of a record moose and his proud conqueror. We got the typical letters of outrage from animal lovers and some return fire from hunters.

During summer, whenever we run a photograph of a youngster on a rope swing or a bridge over a local river, we hear from head injury doctors and parents. If we run a picture of a bicyclist without a helmet, cycling groups chastise us for promoting dangerous behavior.

These complaints have not fallen on deaf ears. Far more often than in the past, when we consider what photographs to publish, we anticipate public

reaction and discuss whether running a picture is indeed sending a message condoning dangerous behavior. Sometimes, when we decide to run such a picture, we note in the caption that the behavior depicted violates safety rules or even the law.

That anticipation of public reaction has an even more chilling effect on decisions about body pictures. The classic recent body picture was the one of the dead soldier being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu. Its news value was unquestionable, and most editors recognized this. The Monitor ran it large, in color, on the back page of the A-section and received only one or two complaints from readers.

The decision would have been harder and the reaction more voluminous if this had been a local picture. Stories in journalism magazines confirmed this in their accounts of how the picture played, or didn't play, in newspapers near the home bases of U.S. troops in Somalia.

An odd twist has occurred in public thinking about the media. As the images thrust before them by television and the movies have become more and more violent, readers are demanding a much purer standard of local newspapers like *The Monitor*. They view us as family newspapers, and they express an almost familial interest in the judgments we make. "How could a family newspaper run such a vile picture?" they write. "Didn't the victim's relatives suffer enough without having to wake up to a picture of their dead loved one?"

The good news for local newspapers in this trend is that for many readers we retain a special place. We are part of the family and, potentially at least, part of the solution rather than part of the problem. Readers differentiate between us and the networks, the metros and the media conglomerates.

Caution is in order, however. Local newspapers may welcome this embrace from their readers, but they must not do so at the expense of making the right calls on pictures. Here is an example of what I mean.

The day before Thanksgiving, a temporary steel bridge collapsed on a highway project in the town adjacent to Concord. Two workers were killed, one

injured. The Monitor sent several journalists to the scene.

For several hours after the bridge collapse, the body of one of the dead men lay in the wreckage, where he had died. One of our photographers took a picture of a county medical examiner inspecting the body where it lay. A white cloth had been draped over the body, which, in this photograph, was obscured by the bridge structure. If you did not know what had happened, you would not have suspected there was a body in the picture.

Later the same photographer shot a similar scene from above. This picture, at medium range, showed the body lying crushed in the steel wreckage with a group of investigators and company officials looking up toward it from the ground. It was the only picture that showed clearly how this man had died. There was no blood, the white cloth covered the torso, and it was by no means a close-up.

In deciding which pictures to use and how to use them, experience was not so much an asset as it was a hindrance. Readers had reacted negatively to several body shots in recent months, including one the previous winter that epitomized the issue. This was the picture of a diver in the Merrimack River holding the leg of a man whose body had just been recovered.

We played this picture, in color, as the lead photograph on page one the day after the body was found. The dead man's boot was all that was visible of the body, but many readers were outraged. They called and wrote to protest our insensitivity and to accuse us of sensationalism and of trying to sell papers at the expense of the bereaved family. This went on for days, developing the momentum readers often generate when they're pouncing on the local paper.

The other editors and I revisited the decision to publish this picture and, sitting as a not impartial jury, found ourselves not guilty of sensationalism. The excesses exhibited by our critics in flogging us helped us to reach this verdict. But subconsciously, we heard what our readers were telling us.

We carried this subconscious bag-

gage into our discussion of what to do with the bridge collapse pictures. The photo editor didn't even make a pitch for the shot from above that showed the body. A little voice in the back of my head said, "That's the picture," but when no other editor echoed my thinking aloud, I kept my mouth shut. Even if I had taken the lead and suggested we use this picture, I could easily have been argued out of it.

We made the right choices for page one. For the lead, we ran a large color aerial that showed the whole scene. The body was in this picture, but you needed a magnifying glass to see it. We ran a secondary page one shot, in black and white, of two coworkers grieving over the deaths.

On the back page of the A-section, our continuation page, instead of the medium-range shot with the body in it, we ran the color shot of the medical examiner out on the collapsed bridge looking at the body, which was obstructed from view. You had to read the caption to know what the medical examiner was examining, but even so, several readers complained. Their message: How could you run such an appalling picture on Thanksgiving? Didn't that family suffer enough without your sensationalism?

So we pulled our punch and got raked anyway. Which was good, because it got me thinking.

My conclusion: We should be aware of how sensitive readers are to local body pictures, but we should not allow a tiny but vocal percentage of overly sensitive readers to preempt sound news judgment.

That's the way it works in community journalism. Whether the issue is running a sensitive story or an explicit picture, editors must set a high ethical standard and abide by it. The product of that standard—what appears in the newspaper—will be scrutinized by readers who know each other and know the paper. If they also learn through columns and other attempts at explanation that the journalists at the paper struggle with ethical decisions it will help on those occasions when a reader's own moral compass points in the opposite direction. ■

# The Other Side: A Source's Ethics

BY CHUCK ALSTON

In the Washington information bazaar, reporters and sources bargain like merchants and customers, and no one ever states their bottom line. Reporters don't print everything they know and don't say what they're going to print, and sources don't always tell everything they know. But the role of buyer and seller isn't as straightforward as you might think. It's not always the source—be it an insider at the White House trashing a colleague off the record or a flak pushing a paper or report—who is doing the selling. Sometimes it's the reporter who sells his services, for instance offering to run a story in exchange for an exclusive.

Save civil suits, there is little to guide behavior in the information marketplace, not even, thankfully, the journalistic equivalent of the Better Business Bureau. The First Amendment has spared us this. So we are left largely to our own ethics to govern our behavior.

I have worked both sides of this transaction. As a journalist, my job was to tell the story. As communications director for the Democratic Leadership and Progressive Policy Institute, my job is still to tell the story (as distinguished from telling *a* story, or even *telling a story*, mind you). There are, of course, some differences: I have almost no control over what's printed or shown, and I am more likely to see the story from a limited point of view as opposed to the reporter's broader concerns.

Not surprisingly, the ethical issues that I weigh on a daily basis are often the flip side of those I faced as a journalist. Although certainly not a matter of life or death, one of the ethical questions we most often must resolve is how we get information out.

For example, last summer the DLC released a major study of Perot voters entitled, "The Road to Realignment," based on extensive polling and research by White House pollster and PPI fellow Stan Greenberg. Among the political cognoscenti, the report was considered something of a hot commodity and I oversaw its publication and release. On the Friday before the Wednesday release, a reporter from The New York Times, a colleague from my days covering Capitol Hill, called and said The Times would like an "advance" on the story. He couldn't

guarantee front page coverage; after all, news is news. But he felt certain that if The Times got a break on the report, it would make front page.

Now, I must confess that I used to get very frustrated as a reporter for Congressional Quarterly when stories on my beat were leaked in advance to bigger outfits. The reporter who called me was only doing his job haggling in the information bazaar. Certainly his best sales tool was dangling the possibility of front-page coverage in an influential newspaper. But my feeling then, and now, was that deliberate leaks of reports you plan to make public may help you get one story, but cost you many others as it breeds ill-will among others, particularly if it is a report that you want widely disseminated. So, the answer was no advance. The Times played the story on A-1 anyway.

Is this an ethical dilemma or just a business decision? I would argue that the two are inseparable, that the way you do business is the way you present your ethics to others. For instance, we made certain that on the registration form to our annual conference there was a way for reporters to designate that they wanted to pay for their own meals.

Another decision point I now face is what to do when reporters want to know something that you know but that you do not want to tell them for strategic reasons. And when reporters are exploring a topic about which I know things that they would be interested in and would tell them if they asked, although I am not of a mind to advertise.

For instance, in December the DLC served as an intermediary between Rep. Jim Cooper and Sen. John Breaux on the one hand, and Clinton health care reform czar Ira Magaziner and Deputy Treasury Secretary Roger Altman on the other. It was our hope

then, as it is now, to bridge the gap between Cooper-Breaux and the Administration on health-care reform.

During this same period during early December, reporters were writing advance stories about the DLC's annual conference. When we announced that both the President and Cooper would be addressing the convention, there was natural interest in whether they would clash. We faced an additional problem: We didn't know when the President was going to speak. Anyone who has ever worked with presidential scheduling, especially when it runs on Clinton time, knows the problem. You pretty much have to take the President on his terms, and when the White House commits only to "sometime in the morning" until the last minute, it puts the rest of the schedule on hold. So, at one point it became clear to us that we wouldn't be able to keep Cooper in his morning speaking slot because it raised the possibility that he would follow the President directly, which would be a diplomatic faux pas on DLC's part.

Not once, to my knowledge, did the White House ever ask DLC to take Cooper off our agenda, even though as much was suggested in one Washington Post story. What we did know was that some people in the White House wanted the President to use his speech to confront us on health care. What we weren't telling reporters was that we were holding talks to discuss how to turn down the rhetorical burner at the conference. No one had reported the health talks we were holding, even though a handful of advance stories all mentioned the potential clash on health care.

Finally, the day before the conference began, The Wall Street Journal called to seek confirmation that the talks were ongoing. I confirmed it. But I did not bother to tell other reporters who were working on similar stories. My policy in this case was, "You don't ask, I don't tell."

Now, is this scenario substantially different from the one I painted above, when a reporter called to ask for a leak and I didn't provide it? You tell me. The difference falls within my own sense of ethics. That's what makes life interesting in the bazaar: no two days are ever quite alike. ■

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# Canada Divided On Court Bans

By JOE HALL

An extraordinary spectacle has unfolded in recent months over attempted censorship in Canada. Journalists are divided by the resulting ethical dilemma.

Canadian publications subscribe to the sometimes conflicting notions of a free press and the right of individuals to a fair trial. In practice, this means that after an arrest is made, the media in Canada generally back off reporting details other than bare court appearances. Full coverage awaits the details that emerge at the subsequent trial.

If, in an extreme example, a journalist obtained the signed confession of an accused, or some other crucial evidence, no media outlet would publish it on the ground that it might prejudice a trial or might be challenged during legal proceedings. Publication bans are common at preliminary court hearings in Canada, although an accused can ask for the ban to be lifted.

While most Canadian journalists envy the enormous latitude enjoyed by their American colleagues, few would trade what they see as the overriding civic responsibility of helping ensure that a suspect gets a fair trial for the unfettered right to publish anything they can get their hands on.

Until now.

It started with a sensational murder case. Paul Bernardo and his wife Karla Homolka, an attractive, young "folks-next-door" couple, were charged in the slaying of two teenaged schoolgirls. Bernardo, who also faces 60 charges of sexual assault from a string of Toronto-

area attacks, will have a separate trial.

When Homolka, a 23-year-old veterinarian's assistant, went to trial last July, charged with manslaughter, the judge wanted to protect her husband's right to a fair trial—a trial that will not take place until later in 1994.

Judge Francis Kovacs's solution: The public would be banned. The American media would be banned. (Homolka's trial took place in St. Catharines, a 20-minute drive from the U.S. border). The Canadian media would be allowed in court, but would face severe restrictions on what it could report (even Homolka's plea was not to be reported).

The prosecution wanted the ban. When Homolka was sentenced to 12 years for her role in the deaths (she could be paroled in four), questions were immediately asked about the appropriateness of her sentence. What kind of a deal did the prosecution make with Homolka, who is expected to testify against her 28-year old husband? An informed public would be far more likely to ask difficult questions about any plea bargain.

The problem is the uncertain status of press freedom in Canada. The Canadian Charter of Rights, which protects freedom of the press, was approved only in 1982. But the legal justice system harks back to the centuries of protection afforded by English common law that gave judges the absolute right to protect the integrity of the court.

## Ethical Dilemma #1

Should Canadian journalists have gone along with a ruling that discriminated against their American colleagues and put them in the position of being hamstrung surrogates for the public?

The Toronto Star, the country's biggest newspaper, said in an editorial in

July: "The need to protect and preserve individual liberties has long been a hallmark of The Star's editorial tradition. The right of an accused to a fair trial is essential in any just society. It was within the context of this tradition that the paper opted initially to accept reluctantly the judge's rationale that a ban was justified."

But when the newspaper discovered that the gag order intended to prevent Bernardo's murder trial from being compromised was opposed by Bernardo's own lawyer, it changed its position. Along with other Canadian media outlets, it is appealing the ban to a higher court.

## Ethical Dilemma #2

Having been allowed in court on condition they followed the judge's limitations on their reporting, should journalists have nevertheless reported all the evidence they heard? Contempt-of-court charges would almost certainly have been laid against the reporters, their editors and publishers. Should that have restrained them? Newsrooms are still divided over whether newspapers should have broken the publication ban and reported the evidence.

Having found themselves in this invidious position, journalists watched with mixed feelings as the ban was repeatedly broken. The first breach came within minutes of Homolka's being sentenced to 12 years for manslaughter. Canadian Press, the country's wire service, inadvertently reported Homolka's plea. The story went to The Associated Press but was quickly killed. In the months that followed, more serious breaches of the ban appeared in newspapers in Britain, and in the U.S. by the tabloid TV show "A Current Affair" and by The Washington Post.

When The Post story was reprinted

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in *The Buffalo News* and *The Detroit News* and *The Detroit Free Press*, border police questioned Canadians bringing newspapers back from the U.S. Some copies were seized; some allowed through. Odious comparisons were made by columnists and libertarians with Soviet efforts to restrict Western publications.

The Ontario Attorney General's office is supposedly investigating scores of breaches of the publication ban, which has been looking decidedly Titanic. Five months after the Homolka trial, a poll showed 26 per cent of people in Ontario said they knew banned details of the Homolka manslaughter case. As to what they know, the pollster conceded that couldn't be tested.

The poll found that about four of every 10 Canadians (38 per cent) believe it is sometimes appropriate for a judge to impose a publication ban to protect an accused's right to a fair trial. One-quarter (25 per cent) said such bans should never be imposed. But those questioned were fairly divided on whether a ban should have been imposed in the Homolka case—42 per cent of people in Ontario disagreed with the ban while 36 per cent supported it.

The effect of the publicity about the ban has been to intensify interest in the slayings. Gossip is rampant and a mix of facts and rumor is still being circulated by an army of computer hackers.

The ban hit home for many Canadians when TV reports on the brouhaha from the major U.S. network affiliates along the border were blacked out. (Nine out of 10 Canadians live within 100 miles of the U.S. border). Canadian cable TV companies tried to follow the court order. But the drumbeat of publicity across the border could not be stanchied. Millions of viewers saw and heard details the court had ruled they should not have heard.

A *Washington Post* editorial commented: "Courts are public institutions, and their work is the public business. One day that business involves a horrible murder, but the next trial could be about public corruption, corporate shenanigans, tax scandals or the personal depravity of a government leader."

The four Canadian media outlets appealing the gag order are *The Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail*, *The Toronto Sun* and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Government lawyers, in documents filed with the Ontario Court of Appeal, argue that the ban should not be lifted and criticize media coverage of the case. In a 140-page legal brief, the Ontario government states: "The media have been responsible for unparalleled, dramatic sensationalization of the crimes with which Bernardo has been charged in terms of quantity and coverage."

Several lessons can be learned:

1. It is virtually impossible with today's technology to suppress information in the Global Village.
2. Any attempt at publication bans will likely backfire and fuel more interest than the original reporting of the one-day Homolka trial.
3. Fresh interest has developed into whether pre-trial publicity really hinders a fair trial. Several U.S. studies have been cited indicating jurors generally make their decision based on the testimony they hear in court rather than anything they had read or seen in advance.
4. Canada's jury selection system should be given more muscle to weed out those potentially biased.

A former Supreme Court of Canada judge, now chairman of the Ontario Press Council, recently joined the fray. Willard Z. Estey, believes the ban is "unenforceable." Estey says of Judge Kovacs:

"His overall assessment was: We've got to keep the potential jurors from knowing what goes on in this courtroom because it will contaminate their consciences and make them ineffective as jurors in the next trial. That's one view. The other view is: people's memory is about as long as a memory of a television tube. You turn the set off and it fades and is gone, bang."

Estey told *The Star's* ombudsman, Don Sellar, that he is aware of the ingenuity that went into U.S. media accounts about the Homolka case. "The persis-

tence in journalism will lay bare damned near everything because people gossip."

What could be the long-range implications of a publication ban like this one? Estey comments:

"It's like Darwin said, if it doesn't stand the competition, it'll die. It'll be snuffed out. I don't lose any sleep over Homolka. I think it probably is wrong for that simple, simple reason."

Because it's unenforceable? "Yeah," Estey replies.

The Homolka publication ban is only the latest in a series of moves to try to curb the media in Canada.

In January the Supreme Court of Canada heard an appeal against an even more sweeping publication ban imposed last year by a Saskatchewan Youth Court judge. He prohibited publication of all evidence from the trial of a woman, charged as a young offender, until the end of the trials of all other people charged in a sex abuse case. That will likely be in 1995, almost two years after the woman's trial. She was convicted of sexual assault and unlawful confinement in June, 1993, and sentenced to two years in jail. She is appealing the convictions. Prosecutors sought the ban out of concern the publication of explicit details of alleged sexual assaults on children could harm them and make it harder for them to testify at subsequent trials.

In two related cases, one judge imposed a publication ban; another lifted the ban. The different rulings caused so much confusion that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation published details and Canadian Press, the national news agency, refused, on legal advice, to disseminate details. An Alice in Wonderland world.

Across the country, the legal system seems to be fighting a futile rear-guard action to stanch the flow of information in an age of information glut. ■

# Connect With Community or Perish

*Without That Relationship Newspapers Risk Irrelevance  
That High Mindedness Cannot Overcome*

BY KATHERINE FANNING

When I was a newspaper editor in Anchorage back in the mid-70's, I once found myself sitting in a hallway with a group of reporters who had just been ousted from an Alaska Repertory Theater board meeting. As a member of that board, I had just walked out of the meeting with the rest of the working press, rather than remain inside while they were excluded. I felt the conflict intensely. How could I remain inside and refuse to reveal to my own reporters what was going on?

My paper, *The Anchorage Daily News*, was a tiny paper back in the 70's, about a third the size of the established *Anchorage Times*, and barely afloat financially. The editors of *The Times* were part of the power élite. We *Daily News* folks were the outsiders, cheechakos in Alaskan vernacular, looking in at Anchorage and uncovering its sins.

Theoretically that was fine. It guaranteed our independence. We launched a series of investigative efforts, one on the Alaska Teamsters Union that brought us a Pulitzer prize. But the business community didn't trust us. It wouldn't advertise in the paper, which meant fewer resources to cover the news. And news sources wouldn't give us stories.

They were too scared of the big, powerful *Times*. We were in touch with half the town and completely removed from the rest. As both the editor and the publisher of the paper, I decided I had to get involved with the community.

So I did it with a vengeance: As a member of the Chamber of Commerce Board where I spent a rather uncomfortable couple of years, a minority of one on most issues; as a member of the board of the United Way; as a gubernatorial appointee to the state Educational Broadcasting Commission; as a member of the steering committee of Operation Breakthrough, a community planning effort, and as a board member of the Alaska Repertory Theater. It didn't seem as if these were conflicts of interest. After all, we were the anti-establishment paper and we weren't holding back on any news or investigative efforts.

There were other ethical lapses, by today's standards. We accepted free plane rides to Prudhoe Bay with the oil companies because it was the only way we could afford to get there. As an environmentally sensitive paper, we remained regularly at odds with big oil, even while we rode in their airplanes. We even accepted a couple of free international trips from airlines as rewards to our staffers who were woefully underpaid.

Perhaps our most extreme travesty was allowing one of our writers to advise Senator Ernest Gruening in his run for re-election to the Senate while the same reporter was covering politics for us.

There. End of confession.

What do I think of all this now?

Mostly that times have changed.

Being on the Educational Broadcasting Commission may have been unwise, but it led to one of the best stories of those years. A state senator had made off with several small state-owned buildings in a remote village. He had transferred ownership to himself when no one was looking. The information came to me in a confidential session of the commission. I was in an ethical quandary. So I offered my resignation from the commission and ran the story.

Serving a term on the Chamber of Commerce board allowed me to con-



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sort with oil people, the builders of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline then under construction. And that led to inside sources on the criminal activities of the Alaska Teamsters Union during the pipeline building years.

Oh yes, after I walked out of that theater board meeting, it was painfully evident I shouldn't have been there in the first place. The Alaska Repertory Theater had been started as a low-budget arts organization. It seemed harmless to be involved at the beginning. But it had evolved into a controversial high-profile, high-budget consumer of public funds. I quickly resigned.

Indisputably we were often ethically incorrect in those days. Some of it I regret and would not repeat. But there was passion at our newspaper about what it stood for. We were fighting a battle of survival not only for the paper but for certain ideals. We reasoned that as long as we maintained the absolute independence and integrity of the paper's content, it was better to survive and provide an alternative to the pro-business, pro-development agenda of the rival newspaper.

It seemed to me then—and now—that the newspaper that makes public service its first priority, a paper that strives for excellence and daily demonstrates that its integrity won't be corrupted by any relationship with the community—will be the survivor. The important thing is that the paper have a relationship to the community. Without that connection we risk irrelevance, and all the high-mindedness in the world will not rescue us from oblivion.

The ethical rules have been changing over the 30 plus years I've been in the business. It wouldn't occur to me if I were a newspaper editor now, to take free trips, or to accept a government-related appointment, or a position with an organization my paper might report on. When I landed at *The Christian Science Monitor* in 1983, one of the first things we did was install strict rules about taking freebies. We even cracked down on free trips by travel writers, an area in which we discovered even the most pristine papers had looked the other way. So perhaps I earned absolution from earlier sins.

Multiple abuses from the anything-goes journalism of the 40's and 50's with its self-aggrandizing dominance of publisher-owned, publisher-dominated papers—the William Randolph Hearsts and Colonel Robert McCormicks—clearly demanded a changed ethic. So we had new rules that resulted in the objective, keep-your-distance culture of the 70's and 80's. As more newspapers were taken over by groups and were run by professional editors and publishers who typically moved from paper to paper without putting down deep roots in a community, relationships changed. Individual owners rarely ran newspapers, and greater distance between the press and the community became the norm. Many newspapers became businesses first and public servants second because stockholders demanded bigger profit margins. Newspapers became more alike. They redesigned, used more color and graphics, courted readers with soft news and features.

Whether these developments were good or bad, they had a major effect on the ethical principles that guided journalists. As newspapers became more professional, they lost some of their feistiness and their intimate contact with communities. Research began to show declining readership and in the recession of the late 80's, newspaper proprietors were inquiring why or how they had lost touch with the public. So they launched massive studies to discover what readers wanted. The market survey mania tended to show publishers how they could better reach the market. In some cases publishers and editors focused on how they could better serve the public, a subtle but significant distinction between a self-serving and a public-serving press.

Helping to kick off this third phase, organizations such as *New Directions for News* and the *Kettering Foundation* held seminars about the relationship between newspapers and the community. The pendulum began to swing back toward more community involvement—but with a difference. Now the emphasis was on a more bottom-up rather than top-down relationship.

At one of the early *Kettering Founda-*

*tion Public Journalism* seminars (in the interest of full disclosure, I'm on the board of the *Kettering Foundation*), Jack Swift, then the Editor of *The Columbus (Ga.) Ledger-Enquirer* told of his newspaper's foray beyond conventional journalism into community activism. The story has been often told (in the Winter 1993 *Nieman Reports*) but the essence of it was that the *Columbus* paper led an effort called *Columbus Beyond 2000*, holding backyard barbecues for grassroots representatives from the community, pushing its agenda in the paper, and volunteering staffers as task force members to achieve community change. My reaction at the time was that somebody ought to start a second paper in Columbus to report on *The Journal-Ledger's* community activism. But, even if it went too far beyond the rightful role of the press, it was a provocative effort that broke new ground. Whether the *Columbus* paper actually led the way or simply reflected a trend already underway to "reconnect with the community," there has clearly been something different going on.

Newspapers are convening town meetings, adding people from their community to their editorial boards, and seeking to promote rational public discourse in reporting on politics and elections. The *Wichita Eagle* and the *Charlotte Observer* have been notable leaders in their approach to covering politics in the interest of community dialogue. The *Boston Globe* now asks for "Reader Feedback" on a variety of issues—on page one!

Symbolic of this evolution, *The Anchorage Daily News*, now owned by *McClatchy Newspapers* and from which I departed 10 years ago, has come full circle. From the late 70's to the 90's *The Daily News* discouraged editors and reporters from joining organizations. But, according to Managing Editor Pat Dougherty, he and Editor Howard Weaver have been given specific objectives by management for 1994: to each join and become active in two community organizations.

There's a big difference in the kind of involvement. Where I was trying to get a toe into the power structure in the 70's, and where most editors and pub-

lishers of that day saw themselves as part of the community leadership, Dougherty plans to join a campaign for literacy while Weaver is engaged in activities with an organization that trains Alaska Natives for broadcast work. "The definition has changed," says Dougherty. "We aim to become more involved with community life, not with the elite."

Of course, simply encouraging editors and reporters to engage themselves in the community isn't all there is to this new wave. How we think, write about and relate to the community is under review. Professor Jay Rosen of New York University, Director of the new Project on Public Life and the Press, funded by Knight Foundation, says that it isn't enough to inform the public. The press must *form* the public. "The newspaper ought to become a support system for public life," contends Rosen.

I think a good case can be made for this position because so many of the institutions journalism covers today are in trouble: the public schools, even the political system itself. As the only constitutionally protected business, the press can't avoid a special responsibility. If democracy falters, press freedom is sure to stumble, too. So newspapers really do have to be more than informers; they must be citizens. And as citizens they can't be aloof and distant.

There are conflicting views in the news business on this issue. Howard Schneider, *Newsday* Managing Editor, expressed the traditionalist viewpoint in a Kettering-sponsored discussion. "We don't have to lead the parade to report on the parade," Schneider lamented, apparently yearning for the good old days. "Community connectedness is being driven hardest by the very newspaper chains that have alienated local communities through absentee ownership and musical chair management."

Perhaps. But newspaper chains are a fact of life, and those that have contributed their resources to search out ways for newspapers to be more effective citizens in the current real world environment should be commended.

"We can no longer afford to be value neutral," says Davis Merritt, Editor of

The *Wichita Eagle* and one of the leaders of the new wave. "Readers are not value neutral." Merritt sees the failures in public life as in part precipitated by the failures of the press. "I believe that fundamental cultural change is necessary in journalism before public life can be rejuvenated at a level that is needed to solve these problems," Merritt says. "This does not require abandoning fairness, balance and as much truth as we can come by. Rather it requires that we apply these virtues on the field of play and not from the far-removed press box, as a referee not as a contestant, not dictating strategy or outcome of action but as a fair-minded participant."

If newspapers are to assume a more activist role in the community, what does that portend for journalism ethics? Probably only some slight adjustments.

The most prominent traditional ethical principle under attack by the new wave is the standard of journalistic objectivity. Jay Rosen took on objectivity in the Winter 1993 *Nieman Reports*. Ellen Hume of the Annenberg Washington Project took a dead aim on it in a 1992 lecture at the University of Texas. "Objectivity gets in the way of truthfulness because it forces reporters to stop short of telling what they believe to be true. It denies the public a full discussion of the meaning of their leaders' public policy choices."

To me, what is good about the new thinking is the dialogue. The courage to talk about—and sometimes try—things that have been virtually verboten is healthy for the industry, even if some options are considered and then dropped—options like the Columbus experiment.

Some wild ideas were discussed at a *New Directions for News* "Democracy and Demography" Roundtable, in April 1991. Thirty five editors, publishers, columnists and journalism educators expressed frustration over newspapers' disengagement from the community. In an exercise intended to be provocative—and even outrageous—the group was asked to consider "the new ethics of journalism." Here were some of the suggestions offered by the participants with only a partial tongue-in-cheek:

- Journalists must be involved in the organizations or life of the community.
- Journalists must live in the sub-communities on which they report.
- Sources should be read stories and have the opportunity to offer corrections or disagreement.
- Statements of disagreement will be published alongside the story.
- Broad and deep community dialogue will be sought and published, with or without attribution.
- Every week each journalist shall spend at least four hours wandering through the community.
- Profiles of reporters and editors identifying their involvements, backgrounds, and accomplishments will regularly appear in the paper.

Whether any newspaper will adopt a code of ethics like that is doubtful, probably not even desirable. But newspapers that find ways to crash through the barriers of conventional wisdom may turn out to be the survivors in a time of technological change. After all, "interactivity" is the new hot button in communications. It had better apply in some form to newspapers and their communities if they are not to be left in the dust of the new technologies.

Ultimately the press is not an institution unto itself, separate from the community. If the community is dysfunctional, the newspaper is also likely to be dysfunctional. At a time when the press is under heavy attack for its scrutiny of public figures, it is all the more crucial for newspapers to cultivate their relationships with their own community and make themselves indispensable.

Ultimately, the basic ethical principles are unchanging: That integrity, independence, courage and quality will continue to be the hallmarks of the successful paper, and that putting service to the public as the highest priority, however expressed, results in healthy newspapers and healthy communities. ■



# The Joys of an Activist Editor

*Using Power of the Paper to Help Community Is Risky  
But Can Increase Circulation and Profits*

BY THOMAS WINSHIP

I have been labeled an "activist" editor—and worse—down through the years, and I'm damn proud of the rap. In most mainstream circles, "activist" is a dirty word that conjures up charges of slanted, unbalanced, biased, loaded reporting and editing. I admit to all of the above on occasion during my 25 years as an editor at The Boston Globe. The paper did survive me. It even posted substantial circulation and lineage gains and picked up a few journalism awards.

That sounds fat-headed, but I am at a loss to know how to make the case for activist editing without drawing upon my own experiences. If I were of a philosophical bent or more of an intellect, I could avoid relying upon my own sea stories. I apologize in advance.

The Washington Post was where I broke in as a reporter. The late Philip L. Graham was publisher, a neophyte himself and a dedicated causer, if there ever was one. He burned into my young, impressionistic head the idea that the license to print carried with it the obligation to give something back to the community. The concept stuck with me.

It has always been a given that newspaper editors have an ethical obligation to use the power of the paper to do what they believe is right for the community. This can lead to risky business. You find yourself in big trouble with your readers if (a) your targets are marginal or recklessly controversial, (b) if you beat the subject to death, to the point of boring your readers or (c) if you become arrogant and humorless.

I would go a step further. Editors have a commercial obligation to their publishers to deliver far more than a

reactive account of the previous day's news. In today's crowded information field, it has come to the point where to stay profitable a newspaper must be a major player in town, not a disengaged one.

I buttress my case for the activist editor with examples I know best.

Many years ago when corruption and mismanagement were rampant in Massachusetts state government, and Boston was flat as a smelt, The Globe stepped in with a massive study of the very structure of state government. The upshot was a three-year campaign calling for a Constitutional Convention to initiate several very basic constitutional reforms. All the strong forces in the state, both the political and the business establishments, fought The Globe's effort. It was an unrelenting campaign, but we prevailed. It paid off in major results. The size of the lower house in

the legislature was cut nearly in half. The Executive Council was rendered powerless. The terms for governor and lieutenant governor were extended from two to four years. These changes had a startling effect upon the state's political climate. They were won only after incessant investigative stories, news analyses and a drumbeat of shrill editorials.

Were we totally objective? Hell no. Were we factually accurate and convincing in our editorial arguments? Apparently so.

Some years later, in 1979, we turned our attention to the Metropolitan Boston Transit System, then wallowing in deficit financing, union-mandated work rules and weak political leadership. We CAT-scanned the system to death, citing individual horror stories about employer practices, absenteeism and comparative salary scales. Did we give the



*As evidence of how activism pays, The Boston Globe, during Thomas Winship's 20-year editorship, won 12 Pulitzer Prizes. In 1980 The Globe set a Pulitzer record by winning three prizes and placing second in two categories. After his retirement in 1985 Tom founded and became chairman of the Center for Foreign Journalists in Reston, Va., a job that keeps him flying to developing countries. He writes the Curmudgeon column in Editor & Publisher and, when he gets time, checks on the progress of the new house he and his wife, Liebe, the author of the syndicated "Ask Beth" column, are building in Lincoln, Mass.*

union's side as much attention, sympathy and column inches as we did the management side? Probably not.

We did not put people in jail. It was not that kind of enterprise; instead, an analysis of a sick system brought results and a nice bonus: a Pulitzer Prize for local investigative reporting.

More examples: We never let up on our favorite subject—political corruption. Our vehicle for keeping the heat on the scoundrels was a four-member investigative team we called the Spotlight team. We stole the idea. Tim Leland had been serving as a temporary exchange reporter with *The Times of London*, where he worked on its vaunted Insight Team. He returned to *The Globe* and promptly sold management on setting up a similar unit. The Spotlight Team, which operates independently of the newsroom, has been on the prowl ever since, tagging people in 122 separate investigative series and winning Pulitzers and sundry other awards. Name another newspaper investigative unit with such a longevity record.

Perhaps the most traumatic and most satisfying story was the Vietnam War. For us, coverage was on three fronts—in Southeast Asia, in Washington and on the college campuses.

Greater Boston has undoubtedly the largest concentration of colleges and universities in the world, and its students were in the streets. The student revolution had singular impact upon editors, particularly those lucky enough to have college age children. It was our kids who first caught on to the folly of the Vietnam War.

We covered the campuses like a blanket and did all kinds of extreme things. A Harvard professor, George Wald, one day delivered a passionate assault upon the Administration war effort. Several days later, we ran text. Shortly thereafter, *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker came to Harvard to preach to the faithful at Sanders Theater. Again, we printed text.

From Washington, we regularly printed the Southeast Asian country-by-country bombing tonnage figures.

Every Friday we printed on the front page the casualty figures, names and addresses.

Editorially, I believe, *The Globe* was the second U.S. newspaper to urge Washington to call it quits on the war. *The St. Louis Post-Dispatch* was the first.

This was a time when the Massachusetts economy was booming under the impetus of huge Pentagon contracts. Our early anti-war passion angered our Congressional delegation and the majority of our readers and rattled *The Globe's* front office. Yet, Publisher Davis Taylor, who at the time believed in the war effort, never touched a glove to his editors.

As a result of our early anti-war vigor, Daniel Ellsberg saw to it that *The Globe* received a piece of his Pentagon Papers, after *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* received their shares. These three papers were the only ones enjoined by Attorney General John Mitchell.

In the end, the Administration found its revenge where it hurt the most. When the White House selected reporters to accompany President Nixon on his trip to Beijing for the opening of China, *The Globe*, on the personal orders of the President and Henry Kissinger, was denied a seat on that historic flight. That missed plane ride remains a favorite badge of honor.

The textbook case for "activist" journalism, and one that is least assailable, was *The Globe's* coverage of busing in Boston during the forced integration of the city public school system in September 1975. That fateful fall was preceded by a 10-year stand-off between an enraged black leadership and the all-white Boston School Committee, which refused to end defacto segregation in the Boston schools.

Inevitably the Boston school impasse came under court jurisdiction. It resulted in a blueprint to integrate the school by means of extensive busing. School Committee intransigence was the chief factor that drove Judge Arthur Garrity to the busing solution. The plan was far from perfect, but backed to the letter by the resolute judge. *The Globe* felt morally bound to support the court decision because of a deep commitment to integrated schools and to the law. The paper became the lightning

rod for the busing critics. Was it ever! A *Globe* delivery truck was rolled into Boston Harbor. Tacks were scattered in the truck delivery area. We were picketed repeatedly. One night eight rifle shots were fired into *The Globe* building by drive-by protesters, one bullet narrowly missing a receptionist in the lobby. Management promptly installed bullet-proof glass. Cost: \$60,000.

Enter Robert Phelps, fresh from two decades of editing at *The New York Times*. Taking charge of *The Globe's* metropolitan desk, he dropped everything to concentrate on the school story. He placed 60 reporters and editors on the assignment. Massive and meticulously balanced coverage would serve the city best, he decreed. And that was what he achieved for several harassing months.

The day school opened that September, violence occurred at three of more than 80 neighborhood schools, in South Boston, Charlestown and Hyde Park. Inevitably, the headline across the country was "Violence Marks School Opening in Boston." There was widespread concern Boston might blow as other cities had.

The editorial page, under the unflappable direction of Charles Whipple and Anne Wyman, held to its pro-integration, hence pro-busing, position, much to the exasperation of probably the majority of the public and the paper's own employees.

It soon became clear that our staff columnists, on both sides of the issue, drew the most fire, far more than the news coverage. At this point, I took a choke and told the columnists that the school issue was off limits in their writing. My rationale was fear of inciting more community violence.

The town did not blow, for which everyone was grateful. Yet to this day, I have been plagued by my censorship. Short of unquestionably endangering human life, is there ever an excuse for censoring columnists except for bad taste? I think not. I'm ashamed of myself. Our coverage of the crisis won *The Globe's* second Pulitzer Prize for Public Service.

Another mea culpa goes to the matter of deceitful reporting techniques.

We once did an investigation of a policeman taking bribes from gamblers. The proof came from placing reporters and photographers inside a panel truck with a peephole cut out on each side to spy through. Another time we photographed and recorded a "no show" state employee from a barroom. These reporting techniques, so tempting to use in difficult investigative work, should be out-of-bounds.

A final confession, which is a big switch for this city room habitué. It goes to the heart of a paper's relationship to its readers and community activism. For many years as editor, I directed the editorial and op-ed pages, as well as the news operation. About five years before I quit, I became an advocate of the so-called separation of "church and state." Under this system, the editor worries only about news coverage, while the editorial page editor oversees the opinion pages and each reports separately to the publisher. It was verboten for either editor to second-guess the other.

I happily relinquished my hold over editorial for several reasons. It would be good to have the publisher involve himself more in the non-advertising interests of his paper. The incoming editorial page editor wanted more independence and felt he would get it by reporting only to the publisher. Finally, I was impressed that The New York Times, The Washington Post and Wall Street Journal were all church and staters.

I still think a fairly strong case for the "separation" system can be made for national newspapers because of the inordinate pressure they come under and the influence they enjoy. But it's not so for the big regionals and the community dailies.

I now believe that to set up this artificial barrier between editors on all but a handful of newspapers is unwise. Why is it any healthier to turn the daily direction of the editorials over to the business side than to the news side? Under either system, the publisher retains ultimate control.

The separation system is especially questionable now, when so many publishers no longer are owners. Furthermore, should not editors, by the nature

## **The flow of investigations, community crusades and caring journalism must be constant.**

### **None of this once-a-year stuff aimed at the Pulitzer deadline.**

of their work, have more useful backgrounds about an issue than a publisher whose mind is on other important matters and who is often traveling?

As for the argument that an editor who holds sway over both news and the paper's voice is too powerful, my answer is that any editor worth his salt knows when he oversteps his authority.

The classic example of a paper with co-equal editors is The Wall Street Journal. It is heresy, I know, but I seriously question whether The Journal's separate philosophical approaches serves the best interests of that great news institution.

Another point. When a newspaper is involved in a major investigative series or a community initiative, the two ranking editors may differ on the worth of the project. As a result, the public gets a blurred picture of the paper's stand. To take care of differing views, other areas of the editorial and the op-ed pages offer ample space. Only a really stupid editor would snuff out opposition views, even during a paper's strongest campaign.

Finally, it's worth noting that the church-state concept so nurtured by The Times-Post axis has not exactly swept the newspaper world. You can count other "separatists" newspapers on one hand. Let's let editors be editors and publishers be publishers.

And yet another cautionary note to fellow world savers. Once a newspaper or a television station becomes deeply involved in a local cause, its citizen promoters often assume they have earned a special relationship with the institution. In this situation, they often seek—and receive—advice from an edi-

tor. For some editors, it is an ego trip to advise a public figure. So there you are, in a big-time conflict of interest. Don't succumb. I know, I have on occasion advised a friendly politician, regretted it and usually lost respect all-around.

My summation on the matter of activist editing:

- Don't try it unless your publisher has a strong stomach and really believes in the importance of newspapers in free society.
- The flow of investigations, community crusades and caring journalism must be constant. None of this once-a-year stuff aimed at the Pulitzer deadline.
- Concentrate on issues that most editors would agree are right and ethically sound for the community. We're talking motherhood issues, even Herculean efforts to keep the local ball club from leaving town.
- Don't lose too many campaigns. Neither your boss nor your readers have a high tolerance for habitual losers.
- The luxury of rambunctious editing carries with it the obligation to enhance the bottom line. Have an understanding with your publisher that if your exuberance is costing circulation and lineage, you will go over the side even before you're pushed.
- You must convince readers that your newspaper is the most useful player in town.

Blandness is a cover for laziness and a lazy paper encourages public officials to also be lazy or manipulative. Laziness also breeds cynicism which, in turn, induces the rise of "gotcha" reporting we see too much of today. So, let's have it for vigorous activist editing, the surest route to more profits and more readers.

Can you think of a bigger kick in life than making good things happen? ■

# Balancing Bad News With Good

*Beyond the Horror and the Failures of Society  
Are Stories of Successes That Raise Hope*

Here are excerpts from a speech by Eileen Shanahan at Colby College, Waterville, Maine, on November 10, 1993, on becoming the 41st recipient of the Elijah Parish Lovejoy award.

I believe that the greatest threat to a free press in this country today is not from government at any level, nor from the radicals of the religious right or the "politically correct" left (though both are, in fact, enemies of freedom of expression in all its forms).

No. I think the gravest threat to a free press in America today is the erosion of the public's belief in the value of what we journalists do.

I see many causes of that erosion and I am by no means the first to comment on them. Our perceived arrogance and self-serving pursuit of "insider" status with the mighty, rather than with the concerns of our readers—a particularly prevalent disease in Washington, where I have spent most of my career.

Our lack of respect for the feelings of ordinary people, especially in times of grief: the front page picture of the young policeman's widow collapsing into her father's arms at the funeral. They hate us for that.

And—in our desperate attempt to stem the decline in our readership—the greatly increasing amounts of space we devote to what we call "news you can use": features on how to deal with your sweetheart, your divorce, your inlaws, your teens, your younger kids; when to refinance your mortgage; what to do this weekend; where to vacation; how to cook healthy. I don't have to go through the whole list.

Now without a doubt much of this is very well done and it does have value for the readers. I read a lot of it myself and surveys show that many people do.

Furthermore, I am certainly not one to

scorn efforts to bring in more readers, and with them, more advertisers. My husband was on a newspaper that died in 1972, a lively, scrappy tabloid, *The Washington Daily News*. I still miss it. And I was on a newspaper that died in 1981, *The Washington Star*, which was almost universally considered the nation's finest afternoon newspaper. I know we have to make a profit.

But is "news you can use" central to what journalism is, or ought to be? While much of it is, indeed, a service to the readers, does all of it together add up to something of such precious value that they would rally around in defense of a free press if that freedom came under serious attack again—as it undoubtedly will, some day? I think not.

We need to display a more serious purpose more often than we do today.

And what shall that serious purpose be? I think I know the exact words with which to state it. They are found in my favorite of all the admirable mottoes that newspapers carry on their front pages or editorial pages. They are the words of the Scripps-Howard motto:

"Give light and the people will find their own way."

That should be our creed, I believe, and our daily purpose. But I'm afraid that today, the light we journalists shine is, most often, of some hideous greenish-yellow hue that

makes everything it touches look sick.

Yes, there is sickness aplenty in our society. I am at one with Hillary Rodham Clinton who said she thought she could not bear to pick up her newspaper in the morning one more time to read that a small child had been the victim of a random bullet. Yet three more little children have died in Washington, D.C., in just that way, since she spoke, less than three weeks ago.

Of course, we must cover that. If the day comes when we do not consider such killings news we will know that we have lost our souls as well as our minds.

But what I am increasingly concerned about is my sense that we, in journalism, print and broadcast alike, seldom cover anything but the horror and the failures, fostering in our readers and viewers the conviction that there is no hope—no point in even trying to fix any of the things that are so terribly wrong in our country, or even improve them a little.

That is not to say there are never any pieces about community leaders or—more rarely, I think—government programs that accomplish something. We have, indeed, occasionally read of the tough welfare mother who organized the residents and drove the drug dealers out of her housing project. And got the trash cleaned up. And



photo © Frank Van Riper

*An oddity among journalists in the nation's capital, Eileen Shanahan, Washington bureau chief of *The St. Petersburg Times*, was born there, and went to college there, too, George Washington University. The mere highlights of her previous career, now approaching the 50-year mark, include these: reporter for *The New York Times* and a named plaintiff in the sex-discrimination lawsuit against same; Assistant Managing Editor, *Washington Star* and *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*; founding editor of *Governing*, a national monthly covering state and local government. Favorite extra-curricular: teaching in programs aimed at preparing more minorities for journalism careers and career advancement.*

created a neighborhood watch that kept the kids mostly out of trouble.

We have even occasionally read of successful governmental programs, like the one that paid unmarried teens who had one baby a couple of dollars a week as long as they did not get pregnant a second time. It is the second baby that almost always means the absolute end of any schooling—and of a self-reliant future for the mother.

But there are many small, important success stories like these that never get reported, even in the communities where they are happening and many more that are reported only in the communities where they are happening, because editors do not think to look for them, even at home—let alone seek out models and lessons from elsewhere.

One reason for this is the appalling decline in local news coverage. Travel around this country a bit and read the local papers. At first, you may be impressed with the amount of serious national and international news they carry. But then, as you go through the pages, you often will see very little local coverage. Those newspapers are saving money, and short-changing their readers, by filling up their columns with wire copy. You can buy a lot of wires for what one reporter costs.

Naturally, there are exceptions, and my newspaper, *The St. Petersburg Times*, is an outstanding exception. We cover the national and international news thoroughly and well with a number of wires, but also with a Washington bureau that includes a full-time foreign policy reporter and three of our own foreign correspondents. But it is local coverage that is our hallmark: daily zoned editions and a "B" section packed with staff-originated state news and the top of the local news.

Some might say *The St. Pete Times* can do this because we're a profitable paper. I say we're a profitable paper, in substantial measure, because we do this.

With diminished local coverage, we in journalism do not give the public sufficient information about either success or failure. And yes, I do recognize the existence of some areas in which the nation is failing that need more coverage than we are giving them.

One in particular must be mentioned: racial injustice. We cover today's pathologies in our minority communities, especially the black ones, but not the causes that foster their perpetuation. Education in this country is still mostly separate and unequal. How often do we go look at the copyright dates of the textbooks, library books and encyclopedias in the ghetto and barrio

schools and compare them with those in schools that serve the middle class and upper middle class? Or compare the equipment in the science labs?

And I am very sorry to say that I think there is still much unconscious prejudice in our coverage. When is the last time you saw a story or a TV program about welfare that included a white mother on AFDC? Yet as many whites are on welfare as blacks.

And why is it that we carry piece after piece, accompanied by pictures filled with African-American faces, about drug use and its horrifying consequences for the whole society (but especially our minority communities) but we hardly ever do the difficult, urgent investigative stories that would finger the banks and other respectable businesses, run mostly by locally prominent white men, who are laundering the money so it can make its way back to the murderous Colombian drug cartel, and keep them industriously selling here?

I do not suggest that there are easy answers, but is journalism even asking the right questions about racial injustice any more, as I think we once did, in the exciting early days of the civil rights movement, before we found out just how hard it was to reach equality—or even desegregation?

If we asked the right questions, we might find some answers, or prod others into finding them. In journalism, as elsewhere in life, we seldom find anything unless we look for it.

What we mostly look for and find today are the twice-told and thrice-told and a thousand times-told "ain't it awful" stories on crime, drugs, racial conflict, teen pregnancy, and all the rest of that galaxy of social ills—often doing big takeouts that contain little that adds to the readers' knowledge.

Let no one misunderstand me. I am not proposing a journalism of "happy talk," just the upbeat stuff. Nor am I in any way suggesting that we abandon the search for wrongdoing and failure.

But what about the cases of failure without wrongdoing? A government inaugurates a new program but it becomes clear, after a time, that it hasn't accomplished much and it's cost a lot. That is, in fact, a pretty good description of many of the federal government's worker retraining programs.

Should we journalists just yell for the scalps of those who wasted the taxpayers' money? Or do we try something much harder: to determine why a program, started in good faith by people who were honorable, and probably pretty smart as well, produced so little at such cost? Are there lessons to be learned for another program, another time?

Perhaps no such thing should ever be attempted again; that can be a valid lesson, heaven knows. But perhaps this year's failure, if examined by us in some depth, points the way toward next year's success.

Yes, I am arguing that we need more success stories in the papers and on the air.

Aha, I hear my colleagues in journalism saying, she wants us to be advocates. She thinks we have to run stories that say 8,000 children in this community walked to and from elementary school today and all returned home alive and unmolested. No. I agree that such a story does not fit any recognizable definition of news.

What I am saying is that in our lopsided choices of what we cover today, we are advocates now. Advocates of despair. Advocates of the view that nothing works.

In fact, many efforts to improve things work, and many of the most impressive are governmental programs.

Since 1986, the Kennedy School at Harvard and the Ford Foundation have been identifying successful, innovative programs at the state and local government level and, after thorough research, picking 10 winners and 15 runners up each year for their Innovations Award. I am astonished at how little publicity those awards receive, even in the very places that receive them.

If they are to be replicated on a larger scale, the task will almost always fall to governments, and it will require from public officials not only a substantial commitment of funds but a sustained management effort, as well.

I am convinced that journalism's unremitting coverage of the negative, and our scant coverage of the positive, discourages public officials from making the effort and taking the risks involved in replicating and expanding successful small programs—or attempting new ones.

Politicians will be emboldened to try only if the voters demand it.

And the voters will know to demand it only if the news they read, and see, and hear, informs them that everything doesn't have to be sick and futile, that some efforts to make things better do work.

I think most of us in journalism believe that our highest calling is to provide the information, and the analysis and insights, that will help our American democracy work better.

That is precisely what I am urging:

That we journalists shine a clearer, truer light than we have been doing, so the people can find their own way. ■

## Black, Proud and Selective

BY BETTY BAYÉ

She probably won't recall, but back in 1990-'91, when I was a Nieman Fellow, Ellen Goodman offered me advice about the column I planned to begin once I returned to Louisville and *The Courier-Journal*. Don't panic if it takes a while to find your voice, she counseled. And don't, she added, feel compelled to respond quickly to issues just because everyone else is.

Some three years later, I've found my voice. Funny. It's the voice I've always had. Mine is the voice of ex-Afro-wearing, so-called "black militant," who can't help but to embrace the concept of "power to the people," and who never apologizes for saying that I am black and proud.

I also love chittlings, watermelon and Gwendolyn Brooks.

I guess you could say that I am race woman. The persistence of racism is what compels me to write about race as often as I do.

Yet, I am selective. I don't buy the hogwash about objectivity, especially when it comes to matters of race. This is America, and I can't imagine anyone who has been here any length of time in or out of the media being neutral on the topic. And therein lies what could be perceived as an ethical dilemma for a black woman with my history who happens to write a newspaper column.

Because I am black and often write about race, must I, as many expect, write about race all the time? Must I approach racial topics in the time-honored media tradition of heavily emphasizing black pathology while paying little or no attention to the humanity and all the good that I know exists within the black race? Must I, because some people expect it, rush to comment on every hot racial topic of the day?

I don't believe so. However, I've been told that some people were disappointed that I didn't write about Los Angeles immediately after the riots broke

out; or immediately take Louis Farrakhan to task when he angered the Jews.

Well, sometimes, as Ellen Goodman says, my wisest course is to take time to think about what I want to say, instead of knee-jerking it. As a columnist, I believe I have the luxury of time to contemplate.

But the fact is that sometimes I don't write about some hot racial topic because I just can't. Sometimes I'm just too damned angry, or too damned disappointed with an individual or a group to write anything that is likely to be constructive. Outrage and disappointment can, of course, fuel great columns. But those feelings also have been known to produce thoughtless columns that incited people, but did little to educate them about issues that often are complex.

Sometimes I don't comment on the hot racial topic of the hour because every one else is. What, I ask myself at such times, can I possibly say that hasn't already been said, and quite well, by colleagues across the country? At times like those, I enjoy writing a column that gives my readers a break; that gets them focused on some other issue that's important, but hasn't made its way onto Ted Koppel's agenda.

And frankly, there are times that I deliberately do not write about the hot racial topic of the hour because I rebel against the idea that because I am black and often write about race, I am compelled to defend or repudiate some black person in the news. Unfortunately, some of us rush into print because we want to persuade readers of how black and bad we are, or to convince our readers, and possibly our editors, that we harbor no ill feelings toward other ethnic groups.

As I said, I am not neutral about racism. I've been touched by it. I have been harmed by it. It caused me to be

raised with the message that in order to just be considered on par with whites, I had to get up earlier, run faster and jump higher. The existence of racism causes this black journalist to write about race with a caution my white colleagues may never in their lifetimes have to consider.

I try to watch my language, knowing as I do that sticks and stones can break your bones, but that words can too.

I try to use my voice in the media to humanize black people. Is that an ethical dilemma? Is that pandering? Is that unfairly protecting black people who do bad things? Is that trying to put a good face on the negative?

Perhaps so to those who are used to seeing themselves depicted in the media as "whole" human beings. They may not consider how important it is for black people to show up in places in our newspapers and newscasts other than in the crime and sports round-ups. They may not know what a fight it has taken, and what a victory it is for black people, more often than ever, to appear in feature sections, style sections, food sections, business sections, travel and leisure sections, arts sections, book reviews, and yes, in positive columns about black people on editorial pages.

There are black columnists who will not agree with me; who perceive me as an apologist. They will say they have no ethical dilemmas; that they don't get paid to consider any potential consequences of what they write about race. They'll say their job is to just tell it like it is.

That may well be the way to a fabulous, high-paid career or even a Pulitzer Prize. For me, black life in America has never been that cut and dried. What's more, black people have enough demonizers in the media, do they really need yet another in me? ■

*Betty Bayé is a 1991 Nieman Fellow.*

# La Prensa Pushes Ethics in Panama

*Independent Paper Builds on Success With Program  
To Guide All Journalists in the Region*

BY I. ROBERTO EISENMANN JR.

**L**a Prensa, the independent Panamanian newspaper founded by inexperienced journalists, is moving to raise media ethical standards in Central America.

La Prensa not only drafted a code of ethics for itself, it also participated in the formulation of a voluntary code of ethics for all media in the region. Moreover, three La Prensa editors helped found the "Forum of Journalists for Freedom of Expression," which has five specific objectives, including a suggested code of ethics for all Panamanian journalists. The code calls for a yearly review of all ethical problems, with decisions to guide journalists through real-life dilemmas.

Not content to rest on academic approaches, the newspaper published a series by its four-person investigation team disclosing that journalists were accepting bribes, not only in the low-paying radio area, but also in high-paying television. The series was highly controversial. The dean of the journalism school at the University of Panama charged us with being the "Judas of Journalism." Another professor charged us with being "instruments of the CIA." Our young, university-trained journalists of the investigative unit went to the university and confronted the professors. We invited them to send their opinions in writing for publication. So far they have not.

Realizing that journalists would be less tempted to moonlight if they received adequate pay, we have instigated a policy to increase salaries on a regular basis. Today our wage structure is three times what it was when we started 12 years ago. We have also instituted a profit-sharing plan called "Fifty-Fifty,"

in which, after a predetermined percentage of profits is set aside for reinvestment in equipment, profits are split equally between employees and shareholders. Some employees are also shareholders so they participate both ways. Last year our lowest-paid employee received a profit-sharing bonus equivalent to six months wages, and our shareholders received a 20 percent dividend. Though high wages do not guarantee ethical compliance, they certainly greatly reduce needs that foster temptation.

In another move related to ethics, La Prensa editors were instrumental in organizing Panama's first presidential debates, hoping thereby to raise the standards of political discourse and consolidate democracy.

We at La Prensa were able to move vigorously on the ethics front because of the success of our experiment in multiple ownership of the paper.

We started in 1979, when the dictator Omar Torrijos Herrera ruled Panama, by forming a five-person core group of directors that included people from all democratic ideologies. These

included a Democratic Socialist, a Christian Democrat, two Social Democrats and one Independent. We wanted a truly independent press and wished to avoid any specific ideological party labels. At the same time these directors represented diverse disciplines; one was a poet, others were an entrepreneur, a criminal lawyer, a philosopher and a business lawyer.

These directors were asked to risk their lives, to give half of their work time and, should they decide to continue, to cement their commitment with \$5,000 in seed capital. For most, not being wealthy, this amount required raising money among many family members. Then we designed a "Pert Calendar," which programmed a year of work before start-up. Since none had been inside a newspaper plant, the first item on the list was learning about the business. With the aid of the InterAmerican Press Association, The Miami Herald and Carlos Castaneda, the Editor of *El Nuevo Dia* in Puerto Rico, we did things right, first world style, from the start.

In our feasibility study we included 18 months of operating losses, a deci-



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sion that later became a vital part of our success. The totally computerized newspaper required \$1 million in capital, an outrageous amount in a Third World country for a business with a 90 percent possibility of being shut down by the dictatorship.

As a measure of protection and total editorial independence, we developed a plan to raise small amounts of money from many people. For this we developed some marketing tools. A trial edition was printed in Miami and smuggled into Panama to show potential shareholders the first-rate newspaper we planned to publish. Our editorial board was made up of people from all sectors of society, from labor leaders to a priest. Most importantly, we limited maximum investment from individuals or groups to \$5,000 each; there was no minimum. Three months later we had the \$1 million, from 750 small shareholders, some investing as little as \$5. We also had close to 2,000 home-delivery prepaid subscriptions and 25 advertising contracts, including many from leading businesses.

When we tried to lease space we found no one willing to take the risk. Yet a bank, with a president who had profound democratic convictions, offered to finance a building. Construction was completed in four months. Our *Pert Calendar* was right on schedule.

Rumors started flying: the dictator would never allow us to open; equipment being unloaded would "accidentally" drop into the port. We worked as if no threats existed.

Sixty days before opening day we started to look for journalists. The dictatorship law required licensing and to be licensed required a university degree or five years experience. In effect, the licensing law meant that all journalists were working, directly or indirectly, for the regime. Our solution was to hire prestigious intellectuals—poets, writers, diplomats—and third-year journalism students. Thus it was difficult for the government to clamp down on us. We also brought in two international advisors to help us get started.

We decided that we would oppose the dictatorship from day one. The de-

cision was easy as no single shareholder had a big enough economic stake to fear closure.

The first issue was distributed August 4, 1980, the day specified in the year-old *Pert Calendar*. Although looking back it is hard to believe that we did it, the paper was an instant success.

Why did the regime allow us to publish? We found out that before we opened, General Torrijos held two meetings. He asked how much the four regime newspapers were losing and was told \$1.5 million a year. He laughed and said that if they were losing that much in spite of 100 percent of the government advertising, let *La Prensa* open, announce that Panama has a free press, and watch it run out of money. With 750 small shareholders they could not go back for more capital. "Let them open!" He did not realize that our plan called for 18 months of losses and that we had presold advertising and subscriptions.

When we opened with great success and with a hard-hitting style, the regime was at a loss as to what to do and reacted with threats, judicial proceedings, censorship, jailing and exile of editors, and physical attacks on our reporters and photographers. After every attack our circulation increased dramatically. The fact that we had no owner made it impossible to kill the project. The paper had one editor and four associate editors. When one was jailed another would carry on. Eventually, after General Manuel Antonio Noriega took over from General Torrijos, soldiers closed the paper and destroyed the equipment.

After Noriega fell, stockholders rushed to put up money again. The *Miami Herald* gave us an advance on printing their Latin American edition and we resumed publication. Today we have 1,300 small shareholders, including all our employees. Profits are 50 percent of capital. We are the leading paper in Panama, with 30,000 circulation seven days a week. We publish an average of 90 standard-size pages per day, with 70 percent of space in paid advertising.

All of which proves that high ethical standards can generate success—and profits. ■

## Coming In the Summer Issue

### Responding to New Technological and Economic Realities

Nieman Reports will carry a detailed discussion of the impact on public-interest journalism of the new electronic and communication technologies. The report will be keyed to a Nieman Foundation conference in Cambridge, Mass. May 19-21. The conference theme is *The New Journalists' Agenda: Responding to New Technological and Economic Realities*.

Because virtually all decisions about the new world of communications have been driven either by technological or economic considerations, those concerned with public-interest journalism need to identify their requirements and define their roles in helping to shape the system and its instruments.

Among journalists who will take part in the conference are working editors and reporters from newspapers, magazines, radio and television along with those conducting on-line experiments. They will be joined by some of the most thoughtful and articulate thinkers of the future multi-media world. The overall goal of this conference, which will be the first of a series for the Nieman Foundation, is to assure a secure place for public interest journalism in the exciting new future. ■



# Indians Struggle On in Battle for Fairness

BY TIM GIAGO

**B**unty Anquoe could not have been more shocked. As an American Indian serving as Washington bureau chief for Indian Country Today, America's largest independently owned Indian newspaper, she expected so much more from her fellow journalists.

The leaders of 17 Indian tribes had gone to a Senate hearing to voice their concerns on gaming in Indian country. They sat in the gallery, quiet and dignified, patiently waiting for their opportunity to speak. Although tribal leaders had traveled, in some cases thousands of miles, to be there, the senators, some traveling little more than across the hallway, had the floor.

After hours of testimony, and after a brief recess, the time came for the Indians to testify. Ninety-nine percent of the media covering the hearings packed up their cameras and notebooks and left. Bunty was astounded. For the first time in her young life she now fully understood why most of the articles she had read about Indian issues in the nation's capital were so one-sided.

When I first started to write a weekly column for The Rapid City Journal (S.D.) 15 years ago, I asked my editor if I could test the waters and see if any other newspaper in South Dakota would be interested in carrying the column. After all, west of the Missouri River, Indians made up nearly 25 percent of the population. Statewide we were about 10 percent of the population. Fifteen years ago, until my column started to appear in The Rapid City Journal, there were no Indians writing for any of the state's 155 daily and weekly newspapers. We didn't have a voice in our own state.

Most of the editorial page editors I

spoke to had never been approached by an Indian trying to sell the idea of carrying his weekday column. It was a new ball game for them. They, for the most part, were extremely hesitant to talk to me and very reluctant to look at my column. As a matter of fact, it took me three years to convince the editor of Gannett's Argus Leader of Sioux Falls, S.D., the state's largest newspaper, to carry my column.

One weekly newspaper in a border town near the Pine Ridge Reservation started to pull my column from The Rapid City Journal and run it each week. When I called and told them I would like to be paid for it, they dropped it.

The backbone of my column was writing about the things I grew up with as an American Indian. I drew from my boyhood days and my days as a student at an Indian mission boarding school. When I wrote about the abuse we were subjected to and about the attempted

destruction of our culture, religion and traditions by the Jesuit priests assigned to the mission, my editor at The Rapid City Journal accused me of Catholic bashing. He warned me that if I continued to write these kinds of columns, he would have to do something about it. Something? Such as? Well, I would have to submit them to him for a final edit and if he didn't like what I wrote, he wouldn't run the column.

I reminded him it sounded mighty close to censoring what I wrote. I told him that under the circumstances, I would have to pull my column from his newspaper. He said I would be hurting my own people by not letting it run, but I had to draw the line somewhere.

It was a hard decision to make, but under the circumstances, I saw no way I could allow this to happen. I knew my column was widely read on the Indian reservations and I knew many non-Indians read it and learned from it. I



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**Covering Indian country is difficult. It takes a knowledgeable writer with the patience to listen to a point of view foreign to most journalists. It takes someone willing to cleanse their mind of all the trash that has been dumped there by the mainstream media, admit they know little or nothing about Indians, and then start to re-educate themselves.**

received many letters stating this. But I could not allow my column to be censored by someone who didn't understand that I was merely trying to educate a portion of the state's population to the harsh realities of Indian life.

I then decided the only way we Indians could have a voice in South Dakota, the only way we could express our views from our own perspective, was to have our own newspaper. I founded *The Lakota Times* that same year. From that small start on the Pine Ridge Reservation, my newspaper soon grew to become the largest weekly in the state. We joined the South Dakota Newspaper Association three years after starting the paper.

The first newspaper convention my staff and I attended was a frightening experience for us. In the giant banquet hall, the night the major awards were given, our table was the only one with Indian people. The few articles we entered didn't even get an honorable mention. We decided to do better the next year.

It took a few years, but we worked hard to improve our writing and our layout and design. In a few years we started to win awards. We were entered in the large weekly category, newspapers with 2,000 circulation or more.

From 1988 to 1993, we took first place in General Excellence every year save one. And in that one year we took more awards than any weekly there, but did not get the General Excellence award.

The board of directors of the newspaper association came to call. He said we were being placed into a new category. From the date he set we would have to compete in the small daily category. "But we aren't a daily," we pleaded. "How do you expect us to take our one newspaper a week and compete against a newspaper that comes out seven days a week?" we asked.

Didn't matter. We were now a daily even though we were still a weekly. Success does create problems. We then withdrew our membership from the South Dakota Newspaper Association. Our major complaint was that when we were first starting we didn't expect our competitors to lower their standards to accommodate us. We worked to improve. Was it our fault that we surpassed our competition?

But I suppose one of the most frustrating situations facing a minority-owned newspaper is the lack of credibility given our news stories. We have broken story after story and after these articles were picked up by *The Associated Press*, they then became acceptable. Many newspapers have taken the AP stories and, of course, credited AP. I know that is to be expected because the same thing happens to all newspapers.

When our newspaper broke the story about banks redlining on Indian reservations, the U.S. Attorney's office began an investigation of the banks we named and eventually charged one bank, whose manager was fined \$50,000. The attorney general's office credited our newspaper with initiating the investigation. When the public relations officer of the Bureau of Indian Affairs did his weekly newsletter to Indian country, he credited *The Washington Times*. Now that is frustrating.

But the biggest source of frustration for me is picking up a nationally recognized newspaper and reading the totally one-sided articles about Indians. Andy Rooney's column reporting that Indians had no music, art, or religion was outrageous. If he had said the same

thing about any other race he would have been crucified. When he made uncomplimentary comments about African-Americans he was suspended for two weeks. Not a ripple when he attacked the very foundation of Indianness. Had he never heard of an R.C. Gorman, witnessed the New Agers usurpation of Indian spirituality, or heard the beautiful flute music of Nakai?

Covering Indian country is difficult. It takes a knowledgeable writer with the patience to listen to a point of view foreign to most journalists. It takes someone willing to cleanse their mind of all the trash that has been dumped there by the mainstream media, admit they know little or nothing about Indians, and then start to re-educate themselves.

Ethics in journalism comes from many directions. Writing half-researched articles about Indians containing erroneous information simply because of time restraints is unethical. Standing in front of a television camera like Morton Dean of ABC News and saying that Indian gambling casinos are rife with organized crime is not only unethical it is also, in most cases, a blatant misstatement of the true facts. And yet it is done day in and day out by the mainstream press.

Until there is a forum to educate those writers doing an occasional piece on Indians, I will continue to believe that the only way to report on Indian issues is through our own newspapers, radio stations, and, eventually, our own television stations. Not only can this be done, it is already happening. ■

# Ethical Codes and Beyond

## *Specific Guidelines in APME Proposal Stirs Debate —SPJ Offers New Handbook of Principles*

BY CLEVE MATHEWS

An exasperated reader captured the public's feelings about the ethics of the news media in a letter to *The New York Times* last Dec. 23. Cecil C. Hoges, Jr. of Port Jefferson Station, Long Island, termed the media "equal opportunity destroyers," as intent on going after President Clinton and Michael Jackson as President Bush.

"Stories," he wrote, "that in an earlier age would not have been covered until grounds for their validity were demonstrated are now instantly transmitted across the globe by the more salacious elements of the mass media. The more responsible news outlets are then drawn in to cover the story of the story."

Questionable accuracy? Distortion? Excessive coverage? Snap news judgments? Arrogance? Weak justification? All these ethical issues implied in one complaint.

Mr. Hoges' view reflects only some of the questions that are trying the journalistic soul. Those questions deal with more than ethics, of course, but the urgency behind them feeds on their qualities of right and wrong. The disturbing impact of press behavior seems clear to the public, although the issues may not be. The intensity underlying public feelings is prompting the profession to act.

The climate for taking action is favorable today. The mass media are working to make their coverage more fair for the diverse elements of society by increasing the diversity of their staffs and by broadening their definitions of news to include more coverage of minority interests. The rise in hate crimes has attracted attention to their causes. Journalists are paying new attention to the

effects of the language they use. The *Los Angeles Times*, for instance, is drafting a new stylebook designed to increase the precision of its usage and, thereby, avoid terminology that inadvertently contributes to prejudiced thinking.

The number of ethics courses in the nation's communications schools has doubled in ten years to around 120, although not many schools require these courses as part of a major. Seminars in ethics are offered to practitioners, educators and students by a variety of institutions. Ethical think tanks established for other professions are extending their attention to journalism. And organizations ranging from professional societies to individual companies are drafting or refurbishing their codes of ethics.

### **The APME Stirs Debate**

The code revision currently attracting most attention is that of the Associated

Press Managing Editors Association. It is attracting attention because the APME is attempting to convert a 1975 statement of general principles into a declaration of specific guidelines for applying those principles. For example, it would replace a general caution to guard against inaccuracies, carelessness, bias or distortion with a section of several hundred words that calls for, among other things, "systematic verification of facts and quotations, and corroboration of critical information." It would justify the alteration of quotations only for such purposes as correcting grammar that would make the speaker look foolish. It sets forth strict limits for the use of deceptive practices in getting stories. The draft also encourages individual newspapers to develop similar codes and to publicize them and apply them in their local communities.

The drive for making the code more specific responds to public criticism



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aroused by a range of ethical misplays by the media over recent years and by the discussions those cases have inspired. APME members are to act on the proposed draft at their annual convention in October. Meanwhile, the association is promoting a wide discussion of the issues involved.

Putting specifics into a code arouses fears among some of the more probing media and, even more, among media lawyers. They look at the number of malpractice suits against physicians and warn that statements designed as guidelines will be read by juries as commitments. Opposing lawyers will portray breaches of guidelines as "journalistic malpractice," say the critics, and win jury awards of punitive damages that could bring a plague of bankruptcies.

One influential critic of elaborate codes is the trade journal *Editor & Publisher*. In an editorial, it called on APME to adopt the narrower code of the American Society of Newspaper Editors, which goes back to 1922 and most recently was revised in 1975. Adopting that code, said E&P, would "eliminate the debate that APME faces concerning its detailed proposal."

Proponents of elaborating on codes insist that the devotion to ethics that inspires the codes in the first place demands that journalists honestly state in detail the rules that guide them. Journalists, who hold everyone else accountable for what they do, should openly be accountable themselves, the proponents say.

### Going Beyond Codes

The defenders of both narrow and elaborate codes are quick to admit the limitations of such canons. "They aren't much help when negotiating the vast foggy terrain through which journalists travel daily," in the words of a new handbook called "Doing Ethics in Journalism." That handbook was produced in 1993 for the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation and the Society of Professional Journalists. SDX/SPJ has been devoted to upholding journalistic ethics since its original code of ethics was drafted in 1926.

"Doing Ethics" represents a step be-

yond codes of ethics. It carries out a pledge by SPJ in 1987 to promote ethical journalism through an education program. The society made the pledge after a strenuous debate led to the deletion of a clause previously in the code to "actively censure" those who violated the code. The principal authors of the handbook are Jay Black of the University of South Florida in St. Petersburg, Bob Steele of the Poynter Institute for Media Studies, and Ralph Barney of Brigham Young University.

Professor Barney told Alicia C. Shepard for an article in the *American Journalism Review* that he opposed a detailed code and that journalists should "think for themselves on the basis of general principles." The handbook seeks to help journalists do that by showing how to "make ethical decisions that are morally defensible, and to base those decisions on justification processes that hold true from situation to situation, person to person, time to time."

The handbook, developed by dozens of volunteers under grants totaling \$47,000 from a variety of journalistic organizations, was published originally by Allyn & Bacon as a three-ring notebook handy for newsroom use. It is being issued by the Needham Heights, Mass., publisher this spring as a textbook. The textbook version includes material that Professor Black says is designed to provide insights to students who haven't yet had to grapple with many ethical dilemmas in journalism. The handbook has gone through four printings totaling more than 5,000 copies. Ten percent of the proceeds for the \$15 handbook go to the Sigma Delta Chi Foundation and from 12 to 15 percent of the money from the \$18.95 textbook will go to the foundation to support the society's work in ethics.

The doubt expressed by "Doing Ethics" that anyone pays much attention to ethical codes appears widespread. Their main impact on practitioners may well be mostly on those involved in drafting the codes. This is an argument for individual news organizations' writing their own codes and revising them regularly. This is also why this year's debate over the APME code is useful.

Michael Waller, editor of *The Hartford Courant*, told the APME meeting last year that "we're just kidding ourselves" in believing journalists will regularly heed vague or unwritten standards. E&P's account of that meeting also had Waller expressing doubt that a written code would be as harmful in court as some lawyers think.

Richard Winfield, general counsel for *The Associated Press*, stated the lawyers' view. The many adversaries of newspapers, he said, will use the details of the codes, particularly any language justifying exceptions from the code, as a blueprint for proving malice or negligence.

The details causing the controversy over the APME declaration of ethics elaborate on its short introductory section that states the mission of journalism and lists six standards "derived from core ethical values."

The code sees the journalistic mission as informing people so they can participate in democracy, scrutinizing government and other major institutions, constructively criticizing society, providing a forum for all views, editorially advocating the public interest and pursuing truth with unwavering vigor.

The six standards it sets forth are trustworthiness, fairness, respect, accountability, public service and diversity.

At that point the APME code is not very different from the ASNE code that E&P favors. ASNE also states six standards—responsibility, freedom of the press, independence, truth and accuracy, impartiality, and fair play.

Where they differ is that the APME code lists elements under each of these standards, which it later elaborates on in detail, while the ASNE code states general principles briefly under each standard, and lets it go at that.

### Highlights of APME Proposal

APME's proposed accuracy standard of systematic verification of facts and quotations and corroboration of critical information has drawn complaints from small newspapers whose limited resources limit their capability for extensive double-checking. Alicia Shepard,

in her article for the American Journalism Review, quoted Alice Neff Lucan, a newspaper lawyer in Washington, D.C., as saying libel lawyers would "challenge the absence of systematic verification" by a small weekly to show that it did not meet a standard that only big, wealthy publications could afford.

Under its honesty standard, the APME code deplores deception and then lists several "minimum conditions" to justify any use of deceptive practices. Some of the conditions are: the news value of the story must outweigh the damage to credibility caused by the deception, all other means of getting the story must have been exhausted, the decision must be approved by top editors, and the deception must be disclosed and justified in the story when published.

Similarly, the code sets forth conditions for using confidential sources and making promises to news sources about attribution or the use of information.

The code details a range of practices to be avoided in order to protect a newspaper's credibility, covering conflicts of interest, community involvement, and financial interests.

In addition to the usual stress on impartiality, the code's fairness standard offers guidance for assuring that news is presented in context and with appropriate completeness.

In the category labeled "respect," the APME code emphasizes the importance of being sensitive to privacy and weighing the value of publishing names, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, ethnicity and past behavior against the "relevance to the story and compassion for the individual." It calls for treating sources and subjects with courtesy and compassion.

Recognizing that ethical behavior is somehow tied up with competence, the code advocates the "pursuit of journalistic excellence," noting this means recruiting a high-quality staff and providing training. The code does not say anything about salaries.

The code mentions the value of self-restraint in recognizing "when significant harm can be reasonably anticipated with no equivalent countervailing public benefit." It also acknowledges the pressure that deadlines place on

ethical decision-making, and urges journalists to measure the good achieved by rushing to print against the harm inflicted by compromising other values.

### Ethical Consciousness

Will editors and reporters use such a code? Alicia Shepard found in calling around the country that most reporters rely on their own instincts. Most ethical questions arise in a newsroom after a story has been published and the damage has been done. The need is for some way to sensitize editors and reporters in the crush of putting out the paper or preparing the broadcast news so they can realize ahead of time when a story has ethical implications.

The solution increasingly offered by academics and practitioners is training that continues after schooling into the job. A written code can be incorporated into an employer's orientation program for new staffers. Discussions and readings on how to apply the code can be part of an ongoing education program, just as some newsrooms now offer regular seminars on libel. The "Doing Ethics" handbook is meant to serve such a program.

"Doing Ethics" starts with the code of the Society for Professional Journalists. This code resembles the narrow ASNE statement of principles, calling for showing responsibility, upholding freedom of the press, avoiding any obligations other than to the truth, striving for accuracy and objectivity, being fair, and pledging adherence to the code. From these standards, the handbook draws its own set of principles and guidelines, worked out with the help of the Poynter Institute. It states three principles: (1) Seek truth and report it as fully as possible, (2) Act independently, and (3) Minimize harm. It then offers 10 questions to ask to lead to good ethical decisions, all designed to make one clear about one's purpose and concerns, about professional guidelines, about who would be affected and how they would be affected, about alternative actions one could take, and about properly justifying the action to be taken.

The bulk of the book consists of case studies in which these principles and

questions are applied to situations that have been covered by the press in recent years. Among the many cases covered, one that illustrates the complexities and the emotional intensities that can arise from raising ethical questions was the coverage by The New Orleans Times-Picayune of the 1991 governor's race between David Duke and former Gov. Edwin Edwards.

The paper openly decided that Duke must be defeated and devoted its efforts to that end. The handbook quotes the paper's editor, Jim Amoss, to illustrate the quandary "at the intersection of personal belief and journalistic ethics." Amoss characterized it as a tricky "ethical morass covering a former Klan leader whose newfound rhetoric disguised his long-standing beliefs, whose following among one's readers is sincere and massive, whose election would mean social and economic disaster, but whose opponent is a scoundrel."

The paper's crusade included persistent editorial opposition to Duke and massive coverage of Duke, the ex-Klansman, as the story, although the paper did, of course, report on the election contest itself. The coverage aroused the public, and the paper several times printed a full page of letters, mostly from angry Duke supporters. In extensive newsroom deliberation, the paper decided the good of defeating Duke outweighed the harm caused to the paper's standing of independence by its deviation from standard election coverage.

The analysis of the case by "Doing Ethics" upholds the decision-making process followed by The Times-Picayune and its staff. It notes that the burden is on the news organization to explain clearly to the public why it diverges from traditional approaches. But the handbook recognizes the complexities of the Louisiana case by listing a dozen or more further questions that could provide the basis for additional analysis of the coverage.

### How the Codes Compare

One might compare how well the proposed APME declaration and the "Doing Ethics" handbook would guide jour-

nalists on an ethical issue like identifying the victims of rape. The handbook does not include this question among its cases. Professor Black explained that recent cases did not add any new angles to the question, but said that one should be able to draw on the handbook's models to come up with a good decision in any current case.

One recent rape case, prominently covered by Editor & Publisher, occurred in Spokane in which a man was convicted of raping his four young daughters as his wife videotaped the acts. The Spokane Spokesman-Review had a policy of not identifying rape victims. If it identified the man upon his conviction, it would be identifying the victims.

In seeking to apply the proposed APME declaration to this case, one could go to that section of the code's details that says, "Newspapers must be especially sensitive to the legitimate privacy concerns of ordinary citizens who are thrust into the news, such as innocent bystanders, witnesses, victims, heroes, whistle blowers and minors. The value of publishing such information as names, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, ethnicity and past behavior must be weighed against the relevance of the story and compassion for the individual." This section protects the privacy of the young daughters, but does not cover another question faced by the paper in Spokane—whether to inform readers about criminals in their midst, e.g., the rapist-father.

Another section says, "Honesty requires a good faith intent to be truthful and non-deceptive in all communications." Since that sentence leads into the code's specification of conditions justifying deception, it does not seem designed to cover the Spokane situation very closely.

To find the clearest guidance for the editors in Spokane, one must back up to the more general part of the code, which specifies that one role of a newspaper is to "inform readers of events and facts that are important to them and to their participation in a democracy." Knowing who has been convicted of crimes in the community is important information. This case would seem to support those who favor a narrow,

general code. To cover the intricacies of possible ethical thickets would require a massive elaboration of details.

Yet most cases are more straightforward, and using one with an unusual wrinkle might be considered an unfair test. The details of the APME code clearly state the ethical issue involved in identifying a rape victim. But they don't make it any easier to decide when the value of identification outweighs the value of compassion.

How would "Doing Ethics" help in handling the Spokane case? In its case-study chapter on privacy, it says, "Reports on crimes are necessary to inform citizens of both their own safety and to provide them with information on the performance of those responsible agencies of government" even though it is bound to cause some invasion of privacy. The handbook's checklist of questions on privacy includes these, "How important is the information? Does the public have a need to know?" Answering those questions, along with the others in the checklist that clarify one's purpose and awareness of the ethical issues involved, can help one to decide whether to identify the rapist-father. But, like the APME code or any other code, "Doing Ethics" cannot make the actual decision for the individual facing the dilemma.

Editor & Publisher reported on The Spokesman-Review's decision to name the father in its story on his sentencing, as well as the mother in a story on her conviction of failing to report a crime. The editor, Chris Peck, brought the readers into the decision by writing a column on the paper's obligation to monitor the judicial process and asking their views. By more than two to one, those who responded favored naming the father. In a subsequent column, Peck stated the issue involved: "It all boils down to which has the highest value: protecting the child's privacy or holding to our traditional responsibility of informing the community."

As often in such cases, not everyone on the paper agreed with the decision. That's the nature of ethical decision-making. It finally comes down to a single individual who has to make the hard decision, drawing on the best informa-

tion and advice available. This may be the big difficulty with ethical codes, especially in trying to enforce them.

Yet the lack of unanimity in ethical decision-making does not reduce the value of adopting codes of ethics. In one sense they are more important to journalists than to physicians. "Doing Ethics" explains this in commenting on the fact that the SPJ Code of Ethics is advisory rather than mandatory. This mean, it says, "that journalists, individually and collectively, have a greater need for an articulated sense of ethics than do the more regulated professionals."

The implication of this is that journalistic educators and employers need to work to instill an articulated sense of ethics in those who practice in the field. That sense has to be strong enough to flash a warning when a story raises the possibility of harm to someone.

A sensibility to ethical behavior is part of the practice of responsibility that characterizes the mass media at their best. The First Amendment does not include the words "responsibility" or "ethics," but an understanding of the freedom of expression it does protect is strained if it does not ultimately embrace them.

The operation of an instilled, articulated sense of ethics might head off letters like Mr. Huges, which started off this article. It would promote accuracy, moderation, good judgment and clear justification for stories that could cause harm.

Such is the essence of the guideline laid down in the Hopi Indian legend of the Spider Grandmother, who counseled, "Don't go 'round hurting people."

That's simpler than Immanuel Kant's "Operate by that maxim you would be willing to apply to yourself," but it partakes of the same ethic. That ethic can be summed up even more simply in one word—"Respect."

Show respect for the story you are doing, its truth and clarity. Show respect for your craft, your colleagues, your company. Show respect for the other person as a human being like yourself. ■

# Proposed Guidelines for Journalists Covering Ethnic Conflicts

The following guidelines are excerpted from a handbook prepared by Dr. Bruce J. Allyn, Program Director of the Conflict Management Group (CMG), and Steven Wilkinson, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Department of Political Science, for the Project on "Ethnic Conflict Management in the Former Soviet Union." The project is sponsored by CMG and the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences, and other partners in the former Soviet Union. Journalists from a dozen countries contributed to the project. The project is funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

There are several dilemmas that journalists face: Which kind of reporting encourages ethnic conflict, and which kind discourages it? How can they remain objective and reduce ethnic tensions when their audience may be prejudiced, when they are short on time and resources, or when their employers are urging them to bias their coverage? In this handbook of media guidelines we provide some answers to these questions. Although we have searched the academic literature for the links between ethnic conflict and the media, we have gone, more importantly, to journalists with extensive experience in reporting in the most difficult situations. Wherever possible in these guidelines, we use their words and statements rather than those of non-journalists, in the belief that journalists who have themselves reported on ethnic tensions and ethnic violence are best qualified to advise others who face similar situations.

We recognize that not all journalists work in an environment conducive to balanced and enlightened coverage of ethnic conflicts. When deadlines are pressing, resources are limited, or when the politicians who control the state media are insisting upon coverage biased towards their point of view, some journalists may be tempted to regard the guidelines in this handbook as inapplicable or unrealistic. Are "freedom of resources"

and "freedom of the press" prerequisites for good reporting on ethnic conflict?

On the issue of limited resources, we should point out that we have tried as much as possible to avoid recommending measures which cost a great deal of money and manpower. There is often a tendency in guidelines like our own to recommend that journalists or media "should" hire more cameramen, reporters, etc. in an effort to provide more balanced coverage. Our prescriptions are more modest, and, we believe, more attainable.

The view that "objective standards do not always apply to me because of the demands of my specific situation" can be heard worldwide, but the situation seems particularly acute in the FSU (former Soviet Union), where the new expectations about the enlightened role of the media clash so sharply with many of the old practices and mindsets. Valery Tishkov, Director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Russian Academy of Sciences, noted that not only have journalists in the FSU traditionally been trained to tell people what to think, the society has been trained to expect it.

...People have gotten used to certain axioms, to statements formed by the Center. It was the party elite who had the ideological power in its hands. They had the right to determine things: what is the stage of our development, what kind of society do we live in, where are we going, etc. And today we feel a nostalgia for these formulas and determinations. Even now, we hear this appeal, this cry for a concept, for a scientific theory, for someone to tell us where we are going and what we are building. It is ever present at the meetings of the Parliament and at all other levels. As a result it is very easy to manipulate the masses, first of all, through the media.

In the FSU journalists also have to face the Leninist legacy of being "Soldiers of the Ideological Front." Vladimir Pozner, Russian and American television journalist, referring to this period before 1990, commented:

Have we all forgotten about it? And a soldier of the ideological front should not be objective. A soldier of the ideological front carries out the order, and many journalists have gotten used to this attitude, and they do not think it is necessarily bad. There is an idea which is more important than the objective truth.

Pozner went on to list some of the ways in which the biases of individual journalists, taking their views in part from the nationalism tacitly expressed from the Soviet state, have influenced the reporting of ethnic issues.

...It is particularly difficult if we take into account what kind of country this is. Ethnic prejudices have always existed here, and for centuries they were approved of and supported. It was a definite policy in the Tsarist empire, and certainly the Russian people were above all other nationalities. This was in fact official policy. In the Soviet Union we talked a lot about friendship between the peoples. But we know very well that there was no such friendship, it existed only on the policy level, but on a personal level we heard enough spiteful comments exchanged between representatives of different nationalities—on the basis of ethnicity...You witnessed the campaign in Moscow against the so-called "persons of Caucasian nationality." There is no such nationality, but it did not matter. And there were no protests against it, neither in the press, nor on TV. It was repeated over and over again—typical ethnic prejudices.

The journalist must try, of course, to overcome his personal biases, but Pozner raises the crucial issue of tacit or open state support for a specific kind of reporting about ethnic issues. Kim Tsagalov, the Russian Deputy Minister for Federation and Nationality Policy, has stated the question clearly: "Can we demand that the journalist write the truth if the price he has to pay is the loss of his motherland and the contempt of his people?" Journalists in the FSU have expressed the fear that they will be branded a "traitor" if they report negative information about their own side.

The belief of the scholars and journalists who have worked to produce these guidelines is that the truth should come first, but that even if a journalist cannot report in an ideal environment, he or she can still play a valuable role in reducing ethnic conflict. To see why, consider the comments of Stovan Cerovic, columnist for *Vreme* in Belgrade, comments about the role of journalists working for the official Serbian media. Cerovic, despite being one of the few independent journalists working in Belgrade, does not condemn out of hand all those who work for the regime's media. He argues, in fact, that the more responsible journalists working in

this difficult environment are playing a valuable role.

In the official Serbian media there are two kinds of journalists. The first kind compete with each other in putting out the most horrific nationalist propaganda. Then there are those who might not sympathize with the regime, but know that their careers depend on not openly challenging those in power. They have a more difficult task, because they don't have the freedom to make the open editorial statements that can be made by those in the private media. But years of reporting the news under communism has trained them to say things by not saying things, to editorialize by using allegories, inflections, humor. They can cast doubt on the views of the politicians without directly challenging them or risking being called disloyal, for instance by showing why foreign journalists criticize the nationalist leaders running your country. This allows you to raise the arguments against these politicians without allying yourself with this "disloyal" point of view. Some people might argue that these journalists are compromising their values, and this is true, but we have to remember that many more people get their news from the state media than from the private media. Only about 10% of Serbs have access to satellite television, and only a minority read the private news magazines. Surely it is better that the more responsible people in the official media should be the ones reporting on ethnic conflicts than those who are prepared to say anything to win the favor of those in power.

Cerovic makes the important point that journalists do have some freedom to moderate reports on ethnic conflict even in the least promising environments. The guidelines which follow, in other words, should apply even to those journalists working in environments where the media is under state control and where it appears as if their continued employment depends on adhering slavishly to government positions.

## The Guidelines

### 1. Cover Each Side to the Conflict

The first guideline in covering national and ethnic conflict is a standard rule in any general code of conduct for journalists: provide accurate, fair and balanced coverage of all sides of an issue—in this case of the ethnic conflict. If there appear to be more than two sides, an effort should be made to get the story as told by the additional major parties to the conflict. If a media representative is in contact with only one side, there is the danger of becoming that group's information agency.

At a conference in March 1992, Mikhail Komissar, president of Interfax news agency,

spoke about the challenges facing his staff in seeking to provide accurate and balanced coverage of all sides in a conflict.

I can offer many examples when one of the warring sides tried to serve their own interests by feeding disinformation into the mass media, knowing that our information reaches a world-wide audience. There have been many very complicated cases when it was difficult to clarify what was going on because the disinformation was prepared very professionally and fed into our agency very professionally. Often it comes from government officials. Sometimes the President's Press Secretary offers you a complete lie. You feel that something is wrong, you check it out, find out that it was a lie—but it came from the President's Press Secretary. Journalists face the problem of what to do with this kind of information...We know that if we publish the information in the form we received it, it will provoke new bloodshed, new conflict. Moreover, the other side often puts pressure on us. They tell us: "Do you want to cause more bloodshed?"

So imagine the situation: Journalists understand that publishing this information will lead to bloodshed, but if we do not, we might as well cover the weather reports. What should we do? We face these problems daily. And I do not think anyone will tell you how to resolve them. We try to find a way in every specific case. The only thing we understand is the necessity to present the most objective coverage of the news, not to add anything, and always to present two points of view, especially in such conflicts as between Azerbaijan and Armenia, between Chechnya and Russia, in Moldova, almost everywhere.

As we have noted, it is often difficult to get a clear picture of what we term "the truth," "the facts," the "objective situation." Because these are often ambiguous notions, the journalist should present, or at least refer to the different perceptions, explaining why he or she is more persuaded by one interpretation over the other. This is not to say that the journalist should give equal time to all the different views of the parties to a conflict, no matter how mistaken their views, or distasteful their actions. Objectivity, as Valery Tishkov pointed out, means more than just reporting the points-of-view of the different sides.

What is interesting is that the central media chooses the following way of overcoming this involvement [with one side or the other], a very useless one: let both sides say something, for two or three minutes each. So we hear a two-minute report of the Abkhazian side, two minutes from the Georgians and so on. This is supposed to be the height of objectivity, freedom of information and independence. Maybe this is necessary, but we need another way of presenting objective

and full information.

Emil Payin, advisor to President Yeltsin on nationality affairs, and Director of the Center for Ethno-Political Studies, Foreign Policy Association, Moscow, has also noted this problem: "Often the information on both sides of the conflict presented to us by Ostankino (Central) television turns out to be a double lie. Both sides report false information. As a result, the majority of viewers gets completely disoriented. What should be done? Apparently, it is not enough to cover both sides, it is necessary to find journalists who are objective from the beginning." A practical suggestion when seeking to provide accurate coverage of all sides of a conflict is to cover those people who know both sides of the conflict—historians, and specialists who speak both languages or who have studied the different cultures and ethnic groups involved in the conflict.

What else can journalists do to achieve more objective coverage? One suggestion that journalists often make is that news organizations covering ethnic conflicts should try to hire cameramen and stringers from all the various groups involved in the conflict. Eileen O'Connor of CNN described how CNN had both Azeri and Armenian cameramen taking pictures in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, because they were concerned that viewers should receive pictures of all areas, and from all points of view. Mikhail Komissar's rule of thumb for Interfax's reporting on military movements was widely supported by other journalists.

If Azeri officials tell us that Armenian troops are moving into their territory with tanks, that a battle is being waged with hundreds of casualties, we have a rule: never publish this information without double-checking it. We call the CIS armed forces, Armenian sources, and we try to balance out our information, presenting two or three sides. Even if we do not have specific information, we still say, for instance "the Armenian side denounced this claim," so that our readers understand that the information of the Azeri side is not necessarily the ultimate truth.

And for those media organizations without the resources of CNN or Interfax, without the money to hire more cameramen, there is always the opportunity to use the telephone to contact ordinary people from all the affected areas, as well as nonpartisan specialists on the conflict who can put the events in context.

### 2. Present People as Individuals, Not as Representatives of Groups

The comparative study of ethnic conflict shows us that the perception of other groups as solid, threatening entities, and of one's own group as weak, persecuted and diffuse,



plays an important role in preparing ethnic populations for conflict. If members of an ethnic group believe they are threatened, they will be much more prepared to believe rumors and to take pre-emptive violent action to "kill them before they kill us." Most ethnic violence is justified in defensive, not offensive terms, and journalists have an important opportunity to play a role in breaking down this sense of threat.

There is a danger that the need to cover both "sides" in a conflict might unwittingly help to strengthen damaging perceptions of solid ethnic groups. The wish to cover both points of view may turn into the false presumption that each group has a recognizable point of view. This wish may encourage journalists to seek out "group representatives," such as individual politicians or self-appointed "ethnic leaders," whose comments can be used to represent the feelings and point of view of "the group." Reporters often subconsciously make the actions of specific individuals represent those of the ethnic group, by using phrases such as "The Ingush want this, the Ossetians want that," "The Azeris attacked the Armenians," or "The Azeris were attacked by the Armenians." The stereotypes such reports encourage are extremely damaging.

At the local level, before conflict becomes widespread, the perception of other groups as solid and threatening is often conveyed through reports on crimes. Jaroslav Veis, chief editorialist and head of the investigative department, Lidové Noviny, related how in the Czech Republic, "you never hear a report that a '22-year-old Czech' attacks his neighbor, but the ethnicity is always reported when it's a 22-year-old Gypsy who attacks his neighbor. And when you challenge the reporters on this, they say, 'This is the way the police issue the reports to us.'" The reporters in this case, in other words, were compounding the anti-Gypsy bias of the police, rather than challenging it. There may be times—such as racially motivated crimes—when reporting the race or ethnicity of the perpetrator or victim is an intrinsic part of the story, but in general it is not necessary to mention ethnicity in every report on politics, crime or business. To do so encourages the perception that certain communities have criminal propensities, or are bent on taking political or economic control of the country.

Breaking down perceptions of groups as solid entities requires journalists to be very careful in their presentation of the facts. The key is for journalists not to assume that an individual politician or subset of an ethnic group represents the wishes and interests of the ethnic group as a whole. As Stovan Cerovic has argued:

You should always make the distinction between people and regimes...It's a matter of

life and death. You're trying to win people over, stop them from following the nationalist hatemongers who offer them "protection," not frighten them by making them feel they're held personally responsible for bad acts by members of the "other group," so make sure you limit responsibility when assigning the blame for an atrocity. Remember that individuals committed these acts, not the whole group. If you don't, then many people will say "I am a Serb. I don't like Milosevic, but he is President of Serbia and all the other groups are against us because they think we support his actions. Therefore we have to support Milosevic because only he can protect us from the other groups."

Try to show—wherever the facts justify the conclusion—that blame lies on both sides; otherwise the tendency will be for nationalist politicians to use your piece to demonstrate that only one group is responsible for the violence.

### 3. Provide Context, Not Just Coverage of Events

Ethnic conflicts often emerge against the background of complex historical grievances with widely differing interpretations of group identity and the legitimacy of claims to territory. In Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenians and Azeris hold very different views of the past histories of both groups with each other, and with the Russians and the Turks, as well as over the rights and wrongs of Stalin's 1923 decision to place Karabakh within the boundaries of the Azerbaijani Soviet Republic. In reporting on this conflict, as on any other, it is essential for the journalist to report on the wider historical context behind what may seem to outsiders to be inexplicable events of violent savagery.

It is important to clarify what we mean by context. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's book, "The Invention of Tradition," reminds us that most ethnic histories are comparatively recent in origin, and that different views of the past are put forward by different individuals within a group to justify their present political, social or economic agenda. Therefore there will be many different "historical contexts" available from which a journalist might choose. Wherever possible a journalist should recognize in his articles that these different historical understandings exist (and are driving the conflict) and that very often key tenets of group ideology may be only recent in origin. For example in ex-Yugoslavia the attempts of Franjo Tudjman and other Croats in the late 1980's to rewrite the history of the region during the Second World War, and portray the Croats as having suffered as much as the Serbs, was a major factor behind the declarations of autonomy by the Serb minorities within Croatia. But

many journalists in the West ignored the impact of this recent historical revisionism by Croats and maintained that the conflicts between Croats and Serbs were the product solely of "age-old antagonisms." Journalists should recognize that the use of this kind of phrase does nothing to illuminate the reasons behind a conflict and encourages a sense of fatalism on the part of the audience.

Where resources allow, programming should be developed to show the way in which conflicting historical views have emerged and explore the ways in which history is manipulated by those who try to inflame ethnic passions to bolster their own support. Basing such programming on current examples in the FSU might be politically dangerous for journalists, but the same basic points could be emphasized by showing a television program on the misuse of history by Croat nationalists or South African whites to justify their political agendas. Programmers could in this way encourage skepticism among the audience about the claims of "ethnic leaders."

It often seems inexplicable to members of one group, or to foreign observers, why members of another group seem to hold such "mistaken" views about the rights and wrongs of a conflict. This belief that a certain community cannot think rationally is especially dangerous, because it encourages the false belief that ethnic conflicts themselves are irrational, primeval, and hence unavoidable. Stovan Cerovic has recommended that only by exposing all sides to the media interpretations which support the positions of the other side can any real understanding be achieved. "You'll understand everything if you see what people in Yugoslavia are told by the government reports in TV Belgrade and TV Zagreb." Journalists should focus on the manipulation by nationalists, rather than on the misguided beliefs held by those who are fed this diet of misinformation.

### 4. Will Censoring Myself or Others Reduce Ethnic Violence?

Where reporting on instances of ethnic conflict seems likely to inflame passions and provoke even more violence, what should the responsible journalist do? Can self-censorship or government censorship of potentially explosive news ever be justified? Is the only way to avoid conflict to censor out the most inflammatory facts? Supporters of censorship point to the vast literature about the media and violence in the United States and Western Europe. This literature shows that at certain times, reports in the media, and especially live reports on television, do seem to have sparked off acts of violence or intensified acts of violence which were already occurring. Examples would include reports during the

conflicts in Northern Ireland, the Brixton riots in London in 1981 or the riots in the USA in the 1960's. Indeed, the very presence of the media at protests or political events, (or the possibility of future media coverage) often encourages dramatic displays of violence by crowds, unions, political parties, and ethnic group representatives. Most recently in India, the Bharatiya Janata Party's demolition of the Ayodhya mosque was directly related to the party's need to have a media success after several disappointing political setbacks.

Reports in the media have the power to magnify conflicts by making faraway threats seem near, to connect one's ethnically different neighbors with an immediate threat to one's community, home and family. The destruction of a mosque in a remote town in Northern India became a wedge dividing Hindus and Muslims in towns and villages throughout the sub-continent. Because they realize that media coverage often has an effect upon the level of conflict, supporters of censorship imagine that removing the media reports will reduce the level of conflict.

They are very much mistaken for two reasons. First, the issue is not whether the reporting of the facts about ethnic conflict will sometimes lead to violence—it will—but whether introducing censorship will have even worse effects. Journalists can only be forces for moderation if they have the trust of their audience, and therefore attempts by governments to censor accurate reports, or attempts by journalists themselves to suppress facts in order to reduce conflict are misplaced and counterproductive. We know that suppressing news about conflicts only creates a greater public appetite for information. Ithiel de Sola Pool and Wimal Dissanayeke have shown—in the cases of Eastern Europe under communism and Sri Lanka during the 1971 rebellion—that citizens of countries which restrict news about sensitive subjects are more likely to believe alternative news sources such as propagandists and traditional rumor networks. If the responsible news media either chooses not to satisfy the appetite for information about ethnic conflicts, or is prevented from doing so by government, others who are less well-intentioned will fill the void.

Second, those who would censor underestimate the extent to which the balance of technology has shifted away from them and in favor of individuals and organizations who wish to put out ethnic propaganda. At least since the Iranian Revolution, when the Ayatollah Khomeini's use of taped sermons and daily faxes helped him overcome censorship and direct the overthrow of the Shah, it has become obvious that censorship of the facts not only has bad results, it does not work. Within every community there are extremists

and moderates. By censoring the facts, journalists do not hurt the hotheads, for censorship only makes their interpretation of the story and statement of "the facts" (in print, audio and video cassettes) seem more credible. Censorship hurts the moderates, by taking away from them the information which they need to convince others in their community that the outside threats are not so bad as to warrant the extreme policies advocated by the extremists.

The best journalists have realized that they do have a constructive role to play in reducing the level of ethnic violence, but that they can only play this role if they are consistently honest and frank with their audience. Richard Francis, the controller of BBC Northern Ireland in the 1970's, is an excellent example of a journalist who understands why censoring facts not only conflicts with free speech, but also represents bad public policy. Francis was criticized for a BBC news report which broadcast the information that four Protestants had been shot in East Belfast while at the same time a riot was taking place in West Belfast. Responding to critics who argued he should have delayed the broadcast, Francis correctly argued that "In a town like Belfast, which is like a village, rumor can travel faster even than radio. If we had not announced unequivocally that four Protestants had been shot, the rioting crowds would likely have made it not four but fourteen, not shot but dead, and the riot could have been very much worse than it was."

There is a further argument that can be put forward to argue that the censorship of the facts is counterproductive: the inherent tendency of censors to expand the scope of material and views they can prohibit. Bill Kovach, a former journalist himself, and now Curator of Harvard's Nieman Foundation, put this issue succinctly.

One model before us relies on John Stuart Mill's scenario. And that is that a person who expresses an opinion in the marketplace that grain dealers are thieves who starve children should be left alone. But the same person expressing the same opinion to an angry mob gathered before the grain dealer's house should be punished for incitement to riot. As a general principle it is hard to imagine any thinking person arguing with that proposition. And as a rough guideline to the concept of self-censorship in times of riot or warfare it is as good a rule as I have heard.

But what happens when even a good rule is codified; is put into the hands of a censor? We have a record of what happens. In one of his celebrated and much quoted opinions, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court ruled that the right of free speech did not carry with it the right to shout fire in a crowded theater. A

logical extension of Mill's concept and, again, one with which few people would argue.

But what was the speech which was now being suppressed by this logical application of a laudable principle? It was the speech of those who opposed U.S. entry into World War I and tried to arouse a public debate over the question of the forcible draft of American citizens for war. Hardly the incitement Mill had in mind, but a handy tool when speech challenged a government decision with which Mr. Chief Justice Holmes and the other members of the court agreed and one which they were prepared to forbid their citizens to argue against.

Censorship is corrosive. Simply its presence begins to undermine the single most important thing an objective press has to offer in the pursuit of a peaceful resolution of conflict—credibility. If there is no credible source of information the social engagement is driven by rumor and fear. Rumor and fear are the oxygen on which the flames of hatred and violence feed.

The majority of journalists—including those from conflict-ridden countries such as ex-Yugoslavia—agree with Kovach's arguments and the broad conclusions stated above: censorship is wrong and counterproductive. But it is important to recognize that some journalists, acting with the best of intentions, disagree with this view and have chosen to censor both their own reports and those of others.

Andrei Cherkizov, for instance, was appointed to head the Russian government press center in the North Caucasus during the outbreak of mass violence between the Muslim Ingush and the Christian North Ossetians in late 1992. Hundreds were killed in several days of fighting. Cherkizov, a firm supporter of the role of the investigative reporter in the stages before and after the eruption of major conflict, felt that unrestricted reporting of the violence in Ingushetia and North Ossetia would have caused more deaths than it averted:

There is a price for freedom of speech. That price is bloodshed. Censorship is a violation of all laws. But it saves the lives of people. It helps begin a process. The level of hatred must be lowered a bit, before you can get people to sit down at a negotiation table. Then they can talk to each other. Hatred increases not without our participation, not without the influence of journalists. We put one person in Nazran [the capital of Ingushetia] and one in Vladikavkaz [capital of North Ossetia] and simply said "take everything off the media of it has the element of moral extremism." And immediately an Ingush told me how the tone had changed markedly in Ossetian television. It was noticeable the next day.

[Because of] my experience, inside this conflict, all democratic conversations about freedom of speech were finished for me. Freedom of speech—yes, in a normal situation. No question. Freedom of speech in an abnormal situation of extreme violence is excluded. Maybe I am not right. But people are alive because of this position.

Of course there is no way to tell whether Cherkizov's argument that his actions saved lives is correct. Most journalists who have been in his position agree with his arguments that statements of blame, the rights and wrongs of a conflict, should be handled with great care, but express greater faith in the ability of journalists and editors than in that of the official censors in carrying out this task. Stovan Cerovic has argued that what is needed is not censorship of the facts, as Cherkizov has advocated, but rather a greater effort in explaining the facts when conflict is being reported. "Where you do assign blame, you must always put this in context." When news breaks quickly, when information is scanty, or when column space or airtime is limited, it is impossible to completely avoid simplifying group antagonisms. "This is unfortunate, but unavoidable." Cerovic says "But what you must never do is assign blame without supplying the context. Never say Armenians killed Azerbaijanis or Serbs killed Muslims without reporting the specifics of the case."

#### 5. Focus on Processes, Not Just on Events

It is an unfortunate fact, as William Ury has pointed out, that "It is much more telegenic to cover violence, and it is quite boring to cover negotiation, which is just talking." The media have a tendency to focus on events rather than the processes of negotiation and mediation. Much of the pressure comes from editors who want coverage of the "big event" rather than a less visible process which may be just as important. Dan Sneider of The Christian Science Monitor, speaking about his experiences covering the political turmoil in South Korea in 1987 and 1988, said that many foreign correspondents received calls from their editors saying:

"Well, the AP reported today that there was a demonstration and people were fighting with the police. Why aren't you covering this? What's going on? We saw it on TV, pictures of these demonstrations. We say: 'This is only happening in this one little spot. The rest of Seoul is completely quiet, other things are going on.' And this was OK for me, but for all my colleagues this was almost a daily event of trying to convince your editors that what they were seeing or hearing was not in fact the total reality, and was in fact not a very important part of the reality.

Reporters agreed that more time should

be given to exploring mediation and negotiation rather than assuming that violent events represented an accurate measure of the state of group relations. There are some examples where media have sought to provide special coverage of the process of ethnic conflict management. India Today has reported on the successful process of trust-building between the police and local authorities and the local religious groups and leading individuals in the city of Bhiwandi. This local negotiation process allowed the community to avoid the violent ethnic riots in which hundreds were killed in Bombay and other Indian cities during the unrest following the destruction of the Ayodhya Mosque in December 1992.

#### 6. Seek to Educate About Ethnic Diversity

Many people advocate "more education about ethnic diversity" as a way to improve understanding and ultimately improve group relations. The news media are clearly a prime way in which such educational programs or articles can be disseminated. But a key question often not addressed is what kind of education is appropriate? It is important to stress that in our desire to promote ethnic diversity and understanding, we do not create images of solid ethnic groups and give power to cultural elites who develop an interest in promoting a political agenda based on ethnic particularism. If the example of ex-Yugoslavia is anything to go by, the creation of national historical institutes (such as Serb or Croat institutes) does not encourage a sense of inter-ethnic understanding so much as fund a vested cultural elite which tries to distinguish the history of its "own people" from that of other groups. It is these new national intelligentsia which have most to gain from ethnic nationalism.

It is important not to assume in our efforts to educate that conflict exists or is inevitable just because of the existence of ethnic diversity or scattered references to "ethnic differences" in the press. Valery Tishkov noted that the newspaper Moscow News had committed just this sin when it published a map identifying 164 "ethnic conflicts" in the FSU. Tishkov pointed out that when he and his colleagues studied the map, "...we thought: these conflicts do not exist. But when the peoples identified on this map look at it, they will think: they know better in Moscow, we must have a conflict here." The map was subsequently reprinted by another newspaper, Poisk, thus increasing the danger that the "conflicts" it detailed, such as the "Russian-Karelian conflict," would assume a reality in peoples' minds that was greater than the level of conflict on the ground.

The key to educating about ethnic diversity is to demonstrate that ethnic diversity

exists not only between groups, but also within them. Broad generalizations about a group's history or aspirations can be made, but they should always be accompanied by information about different opinions within the group.

#### 7. Remind the Audience that Ethnic Problems are Global and that Conflict Management is Possible

The process of dissolution in the former Soviet Union has seen the emergence of many violent ethnic and nationalist conflicts. Many people in the FSU are confused as to why, when it seemed there these conflicts had not existed for decades, they now seem to be a permanent and dangerous feature of the new states. Emil Payin has suggested that one way to tackle what he sees as a growing "sense of fatalism and apathy" which can allow conflicts to emerge, is to "insert the problem into the system of historical analogies: to show the people that it is not a unique problem, that we are not the first ones to face it." It is important to remind the FSU audience that these new ethnic problems are not unique. Ethnic conflicts exist throughout the world—in Canada, Ireland, Sudan, Malaysia, and the United States. To overcome a sense of fatalism and apathy among the inhabitants of the FSU the media should focus on the fact that ethnic conflicts have often been effectively managed. The experiences of Switzerland, Senegal, Belgium, and Malaysia show us that ethnic heterogeneity does not have to lead to ethnic conflict.

Journalists should not just focus on the ethnic "problem cases," such as ex-Yugoslavia, but should also give the inhabitants of the FSU some grounds for optimism about the future by pointing out that effective political management has allowed countries such as Malaysia (after 1969) to step back from the brink of ethnic conflict. One way to accomplish this is through tapping into the work of the many specialists who work on ethnic issues, and making their work accessible to a wider public. For example, the paper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* has established a weekly column to give specialists on ethnicity and conflict a chance to inform the public of their work. Emil Payin has pointed out that these reports have not only increased comprehension of ethnic movements; they have also encouraged a healthy skepticism about the long-term value of what might initially appear to be "quick solutions" to ethnic problems. ■

# Can Militant Minority Reporters Be Objective?

*Question Is Reversed From Days When Blacks Covered  
'Black' News and Women Wrote for 'Women's' Pages*

BY CYNTHIA TUCKER

**L**inda Greenhouse. Jeffrey Schmalz. Randy Shilts. Those are high profile journalists who have found themselves under fire for allegedly violating the sacred journalistic tenet of objectivity.

As news organizations seek staffs which reflect a range of ethnic and social diversity, news managers are more frequently confronted with the question of objectivity: Can a reporter from a segment of society which has long been discriminated against resist the temptation to become an advocate?

An irony of the recent controversies is that news organizations long had policies that acted to discourage that objectivity in women and members of ethnic minority groups. Until changes began slowly during the 1970's and sped up in the '80's, female reporters and editors were generally segregated in the "women's pages." Black journalists worked for black press or not at all. And when they did join white-owned papers, African-American reporters were restricted, in large part, to "urban" (read "black") beats.

Back then, did news managers see any ethical implications in assigning reporters based on gender or ethnicity? Probably not, says Jim Carey, visiting professor of journalism at Columbia University. If black reporters had initially been allowed in newsrooms because white managers believed white reporters lacked the awareness to successfully cover black issues, it may have seemed natural to assign black reporters to cover those subjects.

"I don't think they [white news managers] thought of it as presenting any

ethical considerations," Carey said. "That was an aspect of the panic [at discovering they were out of touch with black readers]. They just thought, 'Black reporters will go and understand this and they will report about it sympathetically, and that's what we need now.'"

Looking back, it may have been the controversy that engulfed Washington Post assistant managing editor Milton Coleman during his coverage of Jesse Jackson's 1984 presidential campaign that first triggered a general unease with the attitudes that had guided news organizations in their assignments of black reporters. It was then that white news managers were forced to deal with an ethical quagmire they had helped to create.



A Post reporter in 1984, Coleman, who is black, helped write a story which stated that Jackson had referred to Jews as "Hymie" and had called New York "Hymietown." The Jackson camp reacted with outrage and more, but it was the reaction from many African-American journalists which was more troubling. At the 1984 convention of the National Association of Black Journalists, many black reporters publicly berated Coleman for publishing Jackson's remarks.

White news managers around the country reacted with dismay to the reaction of those black reporters, who had acquired a vested interest in Jackson's success. But few of those white managers paused to consider their own roles in creating conditions that allowed

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that atmosphere to develop.

Few African-American reporters at major news organizations had ever covered a presidential campaign before Jackson ran for president. By putting black reporters into a news ghetto, where they covered only black politicians and "black" issues, white news managers helped create an environment in which too many black reporters were protective of those politicians. The widespread practice of restricting black reporters was not only racist but also poor newsroom management.

"It tends to ghettoize everyone to

**By putting black reporters into a news ghetto, where they covered only black politicians and "black" issues, white news managers helped create an environment in which too many black reporters were protective of those politicians.**

automatically assume a black reporter, just by virtue of the color of his skin, would have insights into certain communities," Carey said.

Phillip Dixon, city editor for *The Post*, maintains that good journalism dictates that news organizations move past the old notions. Even when it would appear that a white reporter might encounter difficulties in covering a certain politician or organization—say, the Nation of Islam—Dixon argues that news managers should not give in to the inclination to send a black reporter just because he or she is black.

"In the first place, I don't think you ever know that [a black reporter will automatically provide better coverage]. On top of that, there is a power thing here: Who assigns reporters? Do we assign reporters or does the world as-

sign reporters?"

Sometimes, questions of propriety and objectivity are dealt with simply enough. In 1989, several women from major news organizations participated in a pro-choice rally in Washington, including Linda Greenhouse, whose Supreme Court beat includes coverage of abortion rulings. Many newspapers responded by restating old policies, which prohibit reporters from those and similar activities.

But news managers don't find it so easy to judge all ethical issues that arise from the need to have multiple points of view represented in newsrooms. In fact, as newspapers make increasing space for analyses, news-behind-the-news, "notebooks" and other interpretations of the news, some of those ethical issues have become more complex.

Perhaps one of the best examples involves gay reporters—particularly those who are HIV positive—who cover the AIDS epidemic. The late *New York Times* reporter Jeffrey Schmalz, who died last year of an AIDS-related illness, was criticized in some circles—as was his employer—for violating standards of objectivity in his stories about AIDS victims and government's response to the crisis. San Francisco reporter Randy Shilts has been similarly criticized.

Schmalz himself acknowledged that his journalistic posture was delicate. He once wrote that he "used my affliction to advantage, to obtain interviews and force intimacy. Does that make me

**Times publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr. derides the notion that a reporter with AIDS should be prohibited from covering the epidemic. "That's a no-brainer. That's like saying a reporter with reproductive organs can't cover abortion."**

feel guilty? You bet. But to have AIDS is to live with guilt and shame." *Times* Publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr. derides the notion that a reporter with AIDS should be prohibited from covering the epidemic. "That's a no-brainer. That's like saying a reporter with reproductive organs can't cover abortion. The question that needs to be raised is whether the personal situation is interfering with the journalistic mission. And that has to be decided on a case-by-case basis."

Sulzberger says making those decisions "places a much greater burden on editors."

But are editors still harboring blind spots that keep them from making those decisions fairly? Carey thinks so.

"I think a far more interesting question than the Linda Greenhouse situation would have been raised by a woman reporter who is militantly pro-life, who has contacts in the pro-life community, who is a good reporter and wants to cover the pro-life movement. In general, newspapers tend to be progressive enough that reporters are accepting of pro-choice views. Are reporters and editors as accepting of views that are not as progressive?" he asked.

Dixon says black reporters are still subject to more scrutiny on the question of objectivity than white reporters are. "I think there is a higher level of suspicion of us and a higher level of scrutiny because we are still new to this and a lot of white people who run newspapers are still new to us."

It is hard to imagine that a white male reporter would be asked whether he could objectively handle a report on the disaffection of white males in the workplace. ■

# Errors Press Ignores

## *Media Willingly Confess Misstatements of Facts But Avoid Corrections of Misleading Passages*

*Many newspaper reporters are lazy, careless, cynical and inclined toward exaggeration, speculation and sensationalism.... These criticisms were made by many of America's top newspaper editors (and other prominent journalists). The basis of their criticism? Their own experience as the subjects of interviews and stories by other journalists.—David Shaw, The Los Angeles Times.*

BY GILBERT CRANBERG  
AND BETTY LIN

**O**uch. But anyone who has been on the receiving end of coverage is apt to know the feeling. It's trite but true that if you are knowledgeable about a subject and read about it, chances are you'll spot one or more mistakes.

Miscues can be minimized but they will continue to plague the press so long as humans are part of the editorial process. After all, people, manufactured as they are by unskilled labor, don't come defects-free and they can't be recalled.

Defective journalism, however, can be repaired. Confronted with a complaint that a name, date, address, age or similar fact is wrong, virtually every publication will admit this kind of objective mistake. Seldom, though, will a news organization confess to what usually is described as subjective error: that readers were misled by an account that was distorted because it was incomplete, took things out of context, misplaced the emphasis or otherwise created a wrong impression. The true-but-false story—the story that's lit-

erally true but false because, taken as a whole, it led the reader astray—is the kind editors more often say they stand behind rather than concede that they stand corrected.

We recently examined 777 corrections published in a three-month period by five newspapers—The Chicago Tribune, The Des Moines Register, The Milwaukee Sentinel, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal. Ninety-eight percent of the corrections—761—set the record straight on such factual or objective errors as the use of wrong names or numbers. Typically, The Chicago Tribune confessed that a photograph that accompanied the obituary of Robert A. Platt was “of a man incorrectly identified as Mr. Platt,” and that the reported Thursday groundbreaking for a warehouse in Roselle did not occur on Thursday but had been postponed.

Only 16 of the corrections concerned non-factual or subjective mistakes; these related to stories that had implied something that was untrue or were incomplete or otherwise misleading. The Wall Street Journal, for instance, admitted that its article in September about the Rent-A-Center chain gave the wrong impression when it said that “an employee training manual doesn't instruct employees to quote the total cost of a rental item.” The Journal conceded that the manual says the “last step in closing the agreement is to handle all the finishing details,” which include “telling the customer what the grand total payment will be for all his/her agreements.” The Journal's correction also noted that the article said “if Rent-A-Center employees fall to meet sales targets, they are fired with extraordinary speed. The ar-

ticle,” the correction added, “didn't mean to suggest that every employee who fails to ‘meet plan’ is fired.”

Does the press make that many more objective than subjective errors? Studies in the 1970's and 1980's by William B. Blankenburg of the University of Wisconsin, William A. Tillinghast of San Jose State, Philip Meyer of the University of North Carolina, and others, have shown that when news sources are queried about the accuracy of stories in which they figure, the sources most often allege what amount to subjective mistakes. That may happen because a story really is off-base; then again, accurate stories may be disputed simply because sources regard them as unfavorable. In any event, the studies find that reporters are apt to acknowledge factual flubs but to challenge claims of subjective error.

Which underscores one reason that admissions of subjective error are so

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few and far between: To run such an admission, an editor is likely to have to override objections by those who did the story. Moreover, while it's usually fairly simple to verify facts, ascertaining whether a story is biased or unbalanced can be troublesome. As Gerry Hinkley, managing editor of *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, told us, "It is harder to prove something was wrong if it was subjective." In addition, to admit a factual error is to admit no more than that accidents do happen; on the other hand, to confess that a story was slanted implies that it may have been deliberate, which raises questions about professionalism. And as Allan M. Siegal, an Assistant Managing Editor of *The New York Times*, says, it's "a bruise to the feelings of a colleague."

Once upon a time, news organizations had a hard time admitting any mistake. Not until 1967 did *The Louisville Courier-Journal* become the first newspaper in this country to establish a standing corrections box. Norman Isaacs, then executive editor, complained at the time about the "paranoid...infernally defensive" press attitude toward correcting errors. That attitude has shifted, at least with regard to factual errors. And a few papers have institutionalized the correction of errors of judgment and other subjective slip-ups by more or less routinely dealing with non-factual lapses.

*The Boston Globe*, for example, under the heading "For the Record," runs not only corrections of factual errors, but also clarifications of fuzzy and misleading passages, acknowledgements of important omissions and explanations of questionable practices. *The New York Times* bunches all explanations of mistakes under "Corrections" but occasionally adds an "Editors' Note" conceding judgmental lapses. *The Wall Street Journal's* box embraces "amplifications" as well as corrections.

Still, candid confession of journalistic malpractice is so exceptional that the mea culpas are regarded as newsworthy. When *The Denver Post* in a front-page correction in 1986 declared that an article about fuel-saving by Continental Airlines "was seriously flawed in several respects and failed to meet

*The Post's* journalistic standards for fairness and accuracy," Editor & Publisher ran a lengthy story about the action under the head "Denver Post corrects story on Continental Airlines."

*The Post's* correction laid blame on the reporter, for not having "dived deeply enough" into the subject, and on editors, for "deciding to publish the story while it needed further reporting." It concluded that the story, "taken as a whole," misled readers.

Similarly, the American Journalism Review recently noted *The Greensboro (NC) News & Record's* fulsome "retraction and apology" to the city's mayor for statements in a series of land-sale stories. "Upon further investigation, reflection and analysis," the paper wrote in its 23-inch correction on the front page of the Metro section, "The News & Record has determined that these statements conveyed a false and misleading impression..."

Editors who search for guidance on how to deal with subjective errors get precious little help from journalistic codes of ethics. The American Society of Newspaper Editors in its Statement of Principles calls on editors "promptly and prominently" to correct only two kinds of error—"significant errors of fact, as well as errors of omission." The Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics merely cites the need to correct "errors." For all of its detail in other respects, the recent draft of the proposed updated Associated Press Managing Editors Declaration of Ethics says editors are obligated to correct no more than "errors of fact and to clarify errors of omission and context."

Be that as it may, codes of ethics tend not to be consulted much. Harder to ignore are statutes. The proposed Uniform Correction or Clarification of Defamation Act, a product of the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws, should powerfully concentrate the minds of editors on the corrections question. The measure seems likely to be introduced in a number of states with backing from the press bar.

Under the proposal, defamation actions must include a request for correction or clarification. If the courts con-

clude that there was a "sufficient correction or clarification," the plaintiff is barred from collecting punitive damages; in fact, the only damages allowed would be for provable economic loss, which could be mitigated by the correction itself. Drafters of the measure say the act "anticipates that any loss caused by the publication can be significantly reduced by publication of the correction or clarification."

To qualify as "sufficient," a correction or clarification would have to set the record straight not just on factual errors but on any defamatory meaning "which arises from other than the express language of the statement." This would cover the kind of subjective errors that now go largely uncorrected.

They often don't get fully corrected when a libel suit looms because of well-founded worry that any admission by a news organization that a story was unfair, biased or misleading would be especially damaging and could be used against it in court. Under the proposed uniform act, however, no evidence concerning a correction could be introduced except to reduce damages. The proposal amounts to a huge incentive for the press to be forthcoming about mistakes. By the same token, the complainant who gets the record set straight would have almost no incentive to pursue libel litigation.

Of course, news organizations should not backtrack simply to derail defamation suits. Nor should they have to fear that a frank confession of error would get them in legal hot water. In other words, the press should be free to do what's right. If nothing else, the proposed libel reform act could do much to make that possible.

And, who knows, given the green light to openly admit mistakes in libel disputes, the press just might begin to rid itself generally of the "paranoid...infernally defensive" mindset that makes candid correction of subjective errors so rare. ■

# The Ombudsman as Ethicist

*Readers' Representative Finds Privacy and Unfairness  
Are Issues Foremost Among Complaints*

BY GORDON MCKIBBEN

For those thousands of readers, bless 'em, who complain to The Boston Globe ombudsman about the newspaper's journalistic misdeeds, ethical is one of several words that's prefaced with "un," as in unethical, unfair, unbalanced. To readers, the term unethical covers an astonishing range of unmeasurable sins, including religious, ethnic and political bias, invasion of privacy, lack of balance, "tabloidism," the urge to conspire, sexism, political correctness and other outrages that can't be codified in a briskly written code of ethics.

The classical "ethics" issues that concern academics and editors of journalism reviews, such as conflict of interest, don't seem to agitate readers much at all. I almost never field a call complaining about football writer Will McDonough or any of the many Globe sportswriters and political pundits who show up on local and national TV. For their part, editors who once frowned on print stars crossing over to TV no longer fight it, though at The Globe, at least, there are clear conflict rules. McDonough, for example, is not allowed to write about television-football politics in The Globe.

When readers get excited about ethics, it's usually about a perceived lack of ethical standards in handling the news, resulting in "unfair" and "slanted" stories, intrusions of privacy, and the powerful beating up on the powerless. Some notions, such as The Globe's perceived unfairness to the Catholic church, is entrenched in certain readers who do not want to hear any counterarguments.

No offense to code writers, but written tomes that forbid reporters from holding political office or limit the price

of an acceptable business lunch are not likely to change widespread public cynicism about media ethics. Granted, the occasional spectacular conflict of interest outrage, like TV reporter Sam Donaldson's \$30,000 lecture fee from an insurance group, does make it even tougher for ombudsmen to convince readers that there is such a thing as media ethics.

The most consistent and frequent ethical concerns of readers in the last couple of years have revolved around privacy issues. These run the gamut from naming rape victims as in the William Kennedy Smith trial (The Globe didn't), to needlessly identifying victims of crime and thus putting them in harm's way, to re-hashing in obituaries long-forgotten misdeeds of the newly dead. The ethical judgment call in privacy complaints usually boils down to this—does the public "need to know" override the hurt and sometimes danger rendered to the subject of the piece?

Consider photographs, which even

in the television era retain surprising power to help or harm. An incident that began with an anguished call one morning to the ombudsman from the mother of a three-year old makes the point. She'd had a sleepless night. Why, she asked, did The Globe have to print her daughter's name and nursery school in a caption under a generic "all's well with the world" playground photo used as a filler? It seems she had received a suspicious call from a man who said he was a lawn service salesman and wanted to know whether the family had a fence and a dog, and didn't have much else to say. She understandably feared he was a child molester.

An ethical issue? Sure, and it raises further questions. Why did The Globe accept the information from the nursery school without checking with the mother? Why name the school? Was the potential harm worth the specificity? The privacy issues raised by this mother in a jittery age won't go away. There's



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not much a newspaper can do to assuage her fears. But it can't hurt to have an ombudsman to listen patiently and then raise her concerns to busy newspeople in the hope they might think twice next time.

The phone rang another day and a woman spilled out a tale of deception by a reporter that would have raised my hair if I had any. He had attended an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting without permission, and when asked by a woman to identify himself, had lied. What's more, he used her actual first name, and others too, blowing the anonymity of vulnerable people who thought their privacy was protected. Given the strength of her complaint, it took me only a few seconds to get The Globe editor's attention and of course the reporter eventually was disciplined and The Globe ran a rare apology.

Interestingly, in his defense the reporter raised an ethical issue of his own, which I tried, not very successfully, to raise with editors. The reporter said he was under such great pressure to deliver a story on Alcoholics Anonymous, with names if possible, that he felt compelled to deliver and he thought he had an understanding from his editor that real first names were okay. The editor involved disputed the charge, and said he felt that anyone mature enough to write for The Globe ought to know right from wrong.

In this case, the seriousness of the ethical breach surely would have reached the editor's attention no matter who took the first call, but having an ombudsman and his phone number listed in the paper made it easy. I wrote about the issue in a column, unwelcomed by some at the paper who thought it should remain an internal matter, so the issue of misrepresentation did not drop without further airing.

There's no link, but now, years later, the Managing Editor for administration, Alfred Larkin Jr., and a Globe lawyer are conducting a series of mandatory newsroom seminars on libel, privacy and ethics. Every reporter and editor will be required to attend.

Larkin said he thinks privacy and ethics issues are always on the edge of

the newsroom, with legal questions overhanging, and editors should be aware of the interrelationship of these issues more than ever before. He shares my perception that privacy issues are becoming more important to readers, and he adds, to lawyers.

If ombudsmen have any value to newspapers in an age of reader cynicism about media ethics, it's the ability to frame issues like those raised by the child's photo and the lying reporter, inside and outside the newsroom, and to rub the noses of editors in subjects they'd rather not face.

The 40 or so ombudsmen who toil for U.S. and Canadian newspapers—that's no more and no less than 20 years ago so this is hardly a growth industry—hear about these perceived ethical breaches all day, every day. In the last four years at least 20,000 complaints have come through The Globe's ombudsman office, mostly by phone.

Some of these complaints are ridiculous, some are predictable and petty, but a lot are sincere and appropriate. Even given the skewed sample of unhappy readers that an ombudsman hears in his role as the newspaper's complaint department, legitimate ethical issues turn up with alarming frequency.

I've mentioned the privacy calls. Another serious ethical issue that appears with distressing frequency is failure to follow through. Does a paper have an ethical obligation to run a final story that clears the name of someone who was earlier accused of some crime or misdeed? Of course, but any ombudsman will tell you it's an obligation often breached, with voiceless people failing to get an editor's attention. Ombudsman can be effective advocates for the wronged in situations where there's minimal news value but an ethical imperative to set the record straight.

To illustrate: the phone rings and an unhappy father rips into the paper. His son, a young athlete from a Boston area town, had been accused of attacking a woman at the out-of-state college they attend. His name appears in The Globe in an Associated Press dispatch. Later, at a scheduled late night meeting, he's exonerated by the school's disciplinary board. School authorities say they will

not pursue the charges further.

There's not a word about his exoneration in The Globe.

It turned out after checking with editors that the AP missed the hearing at the school, although that didn't stop Globe competitors from getting the story. A query from the ombudsman to the AP office eventually triggered a catch-up story that the Globe ran, but it was late and anyway, readers who called didn't want to hear about a procedural excuse for what they considered an ethical blunder.

The failure to follow through happens too often and needs to be considered an ethical problem, not procedural. I've had to deal with unhappy relatives regarding a teenager falsely accused by Boston police of having participated in a racial mob attack, a taxi driver falsely accused of a hit-and-run fatality, and the sister of a young man killed in an accident that he was falsely charged with causing. Usually it took months or years for these men to be cleared and the newspaper had long forgotten about the incidents, which were no longer newsworthy.

In fact it took persistent prodding by unsophisticated relatives, who were confused at first by the bureaucracy of a big newspaper, to get the exonerations into print. There's no foolproof system I know of now that will ensure follow-up stories, but the ombudsman mechanism at least presents a means for the wounded to latch on to a sympathetic ear. It's up to editors to work on what should be an ethical priority—restoring the good names of subjects accused of misdeeds in our papers.

Most ombudsmen write columns, often criticizing but sometimes defending their papers from reader allegations. If nothing else, these columns serve the value of letting readers know that newspapers can take a hit or two as well as dishing it out.

At best they should frame broadly ethical questions based on issues raised by readers: Are women cheapened when the crime of rape is covered on the sports page, by sportswriters (the Mike Tyson trial)? Is the public well served when supposedly secret grand jury deliberations are leaked? The readers are

not always right—I thought our Tyson coverage was appropriate—but they ask questions that deserve consideration.

Another ethical or fairness issue I hear a lot about is overkill, which readers define as excessive coverage on a pet story or, worse, a vendetta against some hapless target. Often, and wrongly, readers are convinced a unfair conspiracy is at work.

In long-running stories, while readers often are unreasonably impatient, they tend to ask the right question which gets passed on to editors via the ombudsman: is there new information to justify new stories or is the work degenerating into re-hash? It doesn't hurt to ask.

How does an ombudsman make a difference in how ethical issues are resolved, if he does?

Some ombudsmen, like Louis I. Gelfand of the Star Tribune in the Twin Cities, sit in on the daily afternoon news conference attended by senior editors. Gelfand briefs the editors on his daily log of reader complaints, one way to make sure that editors realize what's upsetting readers, whether it be ethical lapses or a foul-up in 51 across in the crossword.

Other ombudsmen pass on daily or weekly memos citing reader complaints and (rarely) praise but don't attend news meetings, preferring to approach each day's paper as the reader does, without knowing all the decisions that went into the paper's making. Ombudsman, called reader advocates at some papers, have the power and responsibility to investigate complaints on behalf of the reader as well as alerting editors to reader complaints. In the end, the ombudsman often makes a judgment on how the newspaper handled problems, sometimes challenging the paper in his column. There's no guarantee that this is a breakthrough for ethical behavior, by the way—ombudsmen can get it wrong, too.

It's worth noting in an article dedicated to ethics that The Washington Post's ombudsman boasts probably a unique background in journalism; she is a certified ethicist. Joann Byrd, after many years in executive news jobs at The Herald in Everett, Washington,

**Sometimes I think the most valuable service we provide is ability to listen to people who believe they or their cause have been misinterpreted or maligned but can't really make a case that stands up to the exacting demands of an editor who is asked to make a correction or concede mishandling of a story: tell me again exactly where this is wrong.**

owned by The Post, took a leave to get a master's degree in ethics at the University of Washington and then moved east to the other Washington as Post ombudsman to practice her profession, much like a graduate leaving West Point to take up arms in combat.

Charles W. Bailey, former editor of The Tribune in Minneapolis-St. Paul, now an author living in Washington, D.C., has long been on the record as championing the ombudsman role. Bailey believes the ombudsman's internal role is more important than the column or public role. The effectiveness of ombudsmen varies greatly with his or her clout and courage, he adds. He notes it's not a job for someone unwilling to make a few colleagues unhappy.

At The Seattle Times, Editor Michael Fancher eliminated the ombudsman job a couple of years ago, for both budget reasons and because he felt it was the right time to try something else for a while. He said recently he hopes someday to restore the job because "I believe the ombudsman role is critical in a newspaper's ability to analyze itself."

Fancher says when the time is right he'll probably once again hire an out-

sider on a contract basis rather than pluck a veteran from the newsroom. That would distinguish The Seattle Times from most papers employing ombudsmen, which typically assign a long-time staffer to the job, guaranteeing him or her independence of action and freedom to criticize the paper without censorship. Fancher, who's seen both insiders and outsiders handle the role at The Times, says he thinks the credibility of having an outsider challenge the paper is a plus as long as that person commands the respect of the staffers. In the meantime he writes his own "Inside the Times" column but he concedes it lacks the credibility of the independent ombudsman.

In the end, ombudsmen have power to frame questions about ethical behavior, to give a voice to readers, to challenge the way their paper goes after the news. Sometimes I think the most valuable service we provide is ability to listen to people who believe they or their cause have been misinterpreted or maligned but can't really make a case that stands up to the exacting demands of an editor who is asked to make a correction or concede mishandling of a story: tell me again exactly where this is wrong.

I recall two very long, anguished calls from a father who thought a columnist had hurt him and his boy in a column about child custody battles. There was nothing to be done for him. The columnist and her editor stand behind her work, which she defends correctly as her comment on the public policy issue of judicial decision-making. There are no overt mistakes, no corrections to be made, no slaps to be delivered in an ombudsman column. It boils down to tone. The father doesn't want to write a letter to the editor.

"I guess I feel better talking to somebody about it," the father finally concluded, a comment familiar to all ombudsmen. But in the end, he's an unhappy reader, convinced the paper is unfair to him, that he's been done in by the powerful and unfair ethic of "he who has the ink and the press has the last word." At least he got a hearing. ■

# Voice of the Privileged

## *Op-Ed Pages Rarely Give Ordinary Citizens Opportunity to Speak Their Minds*

By JOSEPH SELDNER

Public estrangement from the news media is nothing new, but the major media organizations have failed to pick up on a lesson even politicians have learned: average citizens sometimes have insights the experts lack.

The noble experiment of the Op-Ed Page, designed in part to afford those outside the media an occasional chance to speak their minds, has become little more than another forum for the connected, the credentialed and the politically correct. It has become a dusty forum, turning at endless tiny angles the "big" stories, from NATO to the Chiapas rebellion to health care, while ignoring countless smaller issues entirely.

As for television, forget it. Unless it is footage of your child hitting you in the privates with a baseball for "America's Funniest Home Videos," or the rare and heavily stage-managed "Nightline" town meeting or Larry King call-in, the airwaves and cable lines are off limits for that quaint anachronism—the average person with an above-average thought or idea.

Yes, newspapers, news magazines and television are almost always private enterprises with minimal obligation to present the views of their readers and viewers, but the media would be wise to consider opening up to the public a little more lest their neck-and-neck race with politicians for most untrustworthy and out-of-touch institution becomes a runaway.

An examination of two months' worth of Op-Ed articles from The Los Angeles Times and The New York Times (March 1992 and January 1994) and a smaller sampling from The Washington Post

provides some clues about how credential/affiliation-conscious big newspapers are.

These are not, of course, your small local papers. But then, most of the talk about political disenfranchisement is directed at federal and state government, not town councils and school boards.

The time periods chosen are random, but the results indicate a highly predictable pattern.

Of the 180 or so Op-Ed articles in The New York Times about half were from their in-house columnists. Of the rest, only three were written by people who lacked establishment "expertise" in the broad topic addressed or had some other type of celebrity or prominence. One of those exceptions was by the father of a boy who died in the Jack-in-the-Box tainted meat tragedy, another about the perils of "caller ID" telephones—a subject apparently light

enough for the analysis of a regular person.

Otherwise, the articles and their authors shared a common bond of proper affiliations and profound subjects. Some examples:

- A Bush National Security Council member, on North Korea.
- An ex-ambassador to Syria on, well, Syria.
- A black history professor, on racism.
- The CEO of an investment bank, on funding the arts.
- A piece on public land in Montana by Bob (The Times called him Robert) Weir of The Grateful Dead.

Virtually all fit into this general category. Some connections, like Weir, stretched the imagination, such as the Johns Hopkins professor opining about



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deadbeat dads, or the Georgetown linguistics prof, whose "remarks at Renaissance Weekend in Hilton Head, S.C." about public argument in the media were published.

The latter included such unique insights as, "It is a myth that opposition leads to truth when truth does not reside on one side or the other but is rather a crystal of many sides." Or, "In a society where people express their anger by shooting, the result of demonizing those with whom we disagree can be truly demonic." Maybe it sounded better at Hilton Head.

Though a guiding principle behind The Times Op-Ed page, started in 1970, was "to give a voice to people outside the paper...to be provocative and origi-

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**The New York Times's Levitas says his page receives 150 unsolicited Op-Ed manuscripts every day, so clearly even those awash in credentials face an uphill battle.**

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nal," according to current page editor Mitchell Levitas, in practice most voices aired are familiar. In fairness, The Times has run poetry, even fiction on the Op-Ed Page, but it is rare, and usually written by established writers.

Levitas argues that all submissions are given a fair shake, though, "If an electrician had an idea on how to break the Israeli/PLO deadlock, I'd be inclined not to run it." But on "social and cultural issues," he says, he remains open-minded, noting that he once ran an "excellent" piece from a suburban Detroit mailman on the Presidential campaign—an exception that makes the rule, to be sure.

During the same period, The Los Angeles Times ran but one Op-Ed article that could even charitably be called "from the general public," a father describing bureaucratic insensitivity in the

wake of a sexual attack on his daughter by schoolmates.

The L.A. Times will occasionally run a letter to the editor on the Op-Ed Page. It runs no opinion pieces on Saturdays, and unlike The New York Times, has no in-house Op-Ed columnists, but does rely heavily on a combination of syndicated columns and a tiny group of frequent contributors with strong establishment ties.

Some examples from The Los Angeles Times:

- A Caltech literature professor, and frequent contributor, on exercise.
- A director of an East Coast think tank and ex-federal bureaucrat, on the information superhighway.
- Separate pieces by two rabbis on "Schindler's List."
- The ex-wife of Ernest Hemingway, on the death of her most recent husband.

Here, too, if you pay attention to what these experts actually say, it is even more depressing to think about the tight-knit culture of the Op-Ed page.

A piece on the Lorena Bobbitt by writer Sabine Reichel contained the gems, "Living with men without getting beaten up or put down is about survival tactics..." and "Life with men, married or unmarried, can be hellish, messy and challenging." While the article ultimately did not champion Lorena Bobbitt's Jim Bowie impersonation, it met all the requirements of political correctness while simultaneously failing to crash new literary barriers.

Los Angeles Times editorial executives deny either a reliance on affiliated experts or a politically correct bent, but remember that this is a newspaper whose voluminous in-house guide to prohibited words included "burly" and "deaf," whose Op-Ed page is called "highly policy-oriented" and credentialized by New York Times Op-Ed editor Levitas, and one of whose frequent contributors, Caltech literature professor Jenijoy LaBelle, says she was recruited to write for them because the paper "was accused of not having enough women writing for them."

The Washington Post relies even more on a mucilage of inhouse and syndicated columnists and a phalanx of official and quasi-official commentators. In a brief survey, we managed to find a contributor identified as "photographer" among the lawyers, senior institute scholars and professors.

Several Op-Ed editors are quick to point out that the place you will find John Q. Public's views is the letters to the editor page. That page "really belongs to our readers...it allows people out of the mainstream to have their say," offers Mark Hornung, editorial pages editor of The Chicago Sun-Times.

All right. Even here, The Los Angeles Times and The New York Times' letters to the editor during the period examined were slightly more than half from people with identified, "subject-relevant" affiliations.

Even if these media giants wanted to publish more opinion from the public—and they don't—the odds of breaking into print are daunting.

The Los Angeles Times estimates it receives 1,100 letters to the editor each week, using perhaps 80 of them (seven percent.) It publishes at most 15 of the more than 300 Op-Ed submissions it gets each week, but subtracting the frequent contributors and commissioned pieces, the open trade in public opinion is far more restrictive.

The New York Times's Levitas says his page receives 150 unsolicited Op-Ed manuscripts every day, so clearly even those awash in credentials face an uphill battle.

The major news magazines make even less of an attempt to include readers' full-length opinions. Newsweek features its "My Turn" column, which is often written by big names. Time and U.S. News don't even go that far. And television is even more credential-adjuncted for its scarce opinion time than print. "Nightline," "Crossfire," and the others tend to fish in the same small pond. The daytime talk shows go to the opposite extreme, scaring up folks whose neighbors don't even know them—or their odd habits—but few people are out to make a name for themselves as Oprah's resident pundit.

It is interesting that Op-Ed editors

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first reaction when asked about contributors is to insist that theirs is the one paper really reaching out to find new eloquent, passionate, clever ideas from average citizens.

"Much of our best material comes from non-credentialed people," says Sacramento Bee Op-Ed editor Bill Kahrl. He cited the example of a piece run last year by a man about selling an old bicycle. It qualifies as one of the few truly "independent" op-ed articles around.

Mark Hornung of The Sun-Times trumpets the fact that his paper is looking to create a stable of local contributors. But this junior columnist stratum still is not the same as acknowledging that there are many folks out there with one, two, maybe three essays per lifetime that deserve to be read by a broad public.

"Most people who are John Q. Public don't write as well [as columnists] and aren't inclined to write these pieces," suggests Levitas, though he admits that many of the 150 manuscripts he gets every day are in fact from this lethargic Mr. and Mrs. Public. And, as the line about the 103-year-old man goes, "Gee, you look good for your age. But then, who'd know?" It is probably a point of pride for an editor to *think* he is aware of the great mass of good writers and thinkers out there. A Hollywood studio executive once said to me that he personally knew of every good screenwriter in America. Except, of course, I noted,

the ones he didn't know.

The big media's exclusion of thoughtful, articulate regular people with something to say would be bad enough on its face, but it is made worse when one takes the time to hear what the experts say.

During the 1992 Presidential campaign, Columnist and everybody's darlin' of Things Texan, Molly Ivins, declared on "Nightline" before the Southern Super Tuesday primaries, "Bubba will go for Paul Tsongas." As we know, Bubba—that amalgam of the Good Ol' Boy—didn't go for Tsongas.

Ms. Ivins is certainly entitled to be wrong, but it might be nice to hear someone else's wrong call on Texas and related matters now and then.

Also during the campaign, Elaine Kamarck, a "senior fellow at the Progressive Policy Institute," wrote a horrifically condescending article on The Los Angeles Times Op-Ed page about how Bill Clinton, like other Arkansans before him, "couldn't manage to transcend" his lowly little state.

Her picture of Arkansas, written from her perch in New York, was just short of one long nightmarish scene from "Deliverance."

So we get that noted pharmacologist Meryl Streep on spraying apples with pesticides, CEO's, lobbyists, law professors and Congressmen who vent early and often. And we even get that environmental sage Robert Weir on public lands in Montana (after all, didn't he

sing the words, "Drivin' that train, High on cocaine" or was that Professor Jerome Garcia?)

Perhaps on dry policy matters, Levitas is right: they should be left to people who spend their every waking moment trafficking in these things. Perhaps.

But clearly on such juicy topics as Michael Jackson, Tonya Harding, the Menendez Brothers, or even gun control, crime in the streets and certain aspects of, yes, health care, to name but a few in the early 1994 headlines, a witty, thoughtful man or woman down the street has just as much to offer in the way of insight as Ellen Goodman, Mike Royko, Frank Rich, or anyone else who has tried out these topics.

The double standard doesn't permit it, however. Affiliated or syndicated, no matter how slipshod, virtually always beats unaffiliated, no matter how poetic.

The Op-Ed world hardly seems ready to throw its doors open to its public, no matter how many editors insist that "good writing" beats credentials. Levitas concedes that "there is more of interest in the world than public policy," but stops short of suggesting that interest should be given voice too regularly on the nation's op-ed pages.

The disturbing conclusions one can draw from this is that non-experts are perceived as having nothing to say; or, its more chilling converse, that only experts are thought to have worthwhile opinions.

For everyone's benefit and enjoyment, Op-Ed pages should be less policy-oriented, if only because there *is* more of interest than policy out there. And they should be more open to solid, well-reasoned, funny, charming, angry pieces from the public, if not because of the wisdom of what people out there have to say, then at least because, as some politicians have discovered, it doesn't hurt to respect the people who keep you in business. ■

# Editors as Lobbyists

## *Is It Ethical to Twist Arms of Legislators To Win Votes for a Press Bill?*

BY DAVID DUBUISSON

**A**n editorial page editor of a metropolitan newspaper grows accustomed to calls and letters from perfect strangers shopping for editorial support. You get them from acquaintances as well. But it's rare to pick up the phone and hear an editor from another newspaper say "We need an editorial..." In fact, it's only happened once that I recall.

At The Greensboro News & Record, we enjoy a high degree of editorial page independence. I report directly to the publisher and, needless to say, am ready to respond to the publisher's thoughts on what the voice of the newspaper—the unsigned editorials—should be saying. In my experience, this has not included instructions to take or not to take any particular editorial position. Nor would any newsroom editor get involved in framing editorial philosophy under our system.

Given these circumstances, it is slightly amusing to get a communication from the American Society of Newspaper Editors' counsel laying out the party line on, say, the cable TV bill pending in Congress. But, like the ton of other lobbying mail that crosses my desk in a year, that request is easily disposed of. A little less so was a call last spring from Rich Oppel, editor of The Charlotte Observer, saying that the time was right for an editorial on pending revisions to the North Carolina Open Meetings Law.

Oppel was president of the North Carolina Press Association (NCPA) at the time. The association had drafted the legislation—quite properly, I think—and was actively pushing it. So riddled with 20-odd categories of ex-

ceptions was the law that it more properly could be called the Closed Meeting Law. No newspaper could help but support the changes, either as self-styled surrogate for a citizenry craving knowledge of how its taxes are spent (so we like to think), or out of unapologetic self-interest. Obtaining, organizing, analyzing and delivering information is what we do. It's our role under the First Amendment and it's our role in the marketplace.

So no one could fault Rich Oppel for working in the interest of open government. Our paper had already editorialized enthusiastically in favor of his bill. What made the moment a bit strained was that we were about to part company on the devilish details. In committee negotiations, backers of the bill had made some compromises, notably on how broad the Open Meetings exception for consultations with lawyers

should be. Our editorial line favored sticking closer to principle. If the press association's objective was a solid editorial wall of support across the state, we were going to have to let our comrades down.

That was a little awkward, but nothing more. What pushed the situation beyond awkward was the discovery that editors of some of the state's larger papers who were members of the NCPA Public Affairs Committee were actively twisting legislative arms. Did this not collide head-on with the customary policy of most larger newspapers of discouraging (or flatly prohibiting) news employees from getting involved in the news? As Forrest "Frosty" Landon, Executive Editor of Virginia's Roanoke Times & World-News, puts it, "We ask them to be an observer of the scene, but not a player on the stage." In Landon's view (and his counterparts at most other



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newspapers would concur), this clearly precludes a reporter, say, from lobbying a state legislature—even for a good cause and even on his or her own time. Was there a different set of rules for managing editors?

Since the mid-1970's, the North Carolina Press Association has retained a Raleigh lawyer to provide, among other services, legislative representation. Over the years, by and large, his efforts had been defensive. Never had there been any success to speak of in promoting an affirmative agenda. But as the 1993 General Assembly approached, NCPA President Oppel proposed a full-court press to tighten up the Open Meetings Law. At his urging, the Public Affairs Committee hired Ken Eudy, a former Observer political reporter. Eudy had crossed the line to become executive director of the state Democratic Party and subsequently had moved into public relations and lobbying. But even his efforts apparently weren't enough. As the press bill moved through the legislature, members of the Public Affairs Committee were asked to approach key members of their legislative delegations on its behalf.

Our own managing editor (now associate editor), Ned Cline, was a member of the committee and feels he succeeded in swinging two Greensboro legislators behind the bill. The idea, he says, was to "simply explain the merits of our proposals and stress they were for the public's benefit, not just for the editors' benefit."

Was this not the editor becoming "a player on the stage," in Frosty Landon's words? Most editors I've talked to (including Cline) admit to a certain discomfort about this kind of political activity. But most also draw a large distinction between lobbying on "access" issues, such as the Open Meetings Law, and getting involved with issues on "the business side." An example of the latter would be the trendy state laws mandating a minimum recycled paper content for newspapers. Publishers have not been reluctant to lobby on behalf of their own financial interests in such matters, nor should they be, but editors seem to agree that those of us on the news and editorial side ought to stay far

away.

(One paradox in all this is that the stake of "the business side" in certain economic legislation makes it difficult for someone on our side to write an editorial on one of those issues. For example, although there are aspects of recycled content legislation that raise legitimate concerns, it is impossible to say anything critical about such legislation without it seeming to be self-serving.) Landon mentioned his own discomfort, and that of his publisher, Walter Rugaber, over a request from the publishers' association that they lobby their Virginia congressman, Rick Boucher, a Democrat, who was seen as a key vote on the Baby Bells legislation. Eventually, they declined rather than become "players on the stage" on an issue in which they and their newspaper had only an indirect economic interest. Nevertheless, Landon feels there are times when a newspaper holds back on principle at its peril. There is so much more legislative mischief afoot today than there was a decade or two ago, in Congress and in the state houses. He 's convinced that if editors aren't willing to jump in now and then, much might be lost.

Ron Cunningham, editorial page editor of The Gainesville Sun, disagrees. "We shouldn't be involved in it," he says. "We have our own forum" on the left side of the editorial page. Of course that forum ultimately belongs to the publisher, he hastens to add, so it's the publisher's choice whether to use it for self-serving purposes. Certainly in our more optimistic moments, editorial page editors would argue that if we are truly good at what we do, we ought to be able to mobilize public opinion effectively enough to affect legislation with our words alone.

No one that I've spoken to has offered a persuasive rationale for allowing a newspaper's top editors to get involved in politics in a way that other newsroom employees are not allowed to do. Newspapers disagree on whether a reporter has some fundamental right to, say, march in a gay/lesbian rights parade on her own time. But none that I've polled would extend that freedom to include testifying before the City

Council on the same issue. Where does one draw the line? Is it the issue, or is it a question of rank? What if a reporter, acting on his own conviction and his own time, lobbies legislators on a question of censorship?

Surely, no one would argue that a top editor is sufficiently removed from the action of news reporting to be able to be active in politics without corrupting the news columns. If anything, common sense tells us that the editor is more able to skew the news than the reporter, whose biases have to get past the editors.

From the perspective of the editorial page, political involvement by a reporter is probably less problematic than lobbying by an editor. The former runs the risk of damaging the newspaper's credibility as an objective reporter of the news. Assuming that our readers still credit us with any ability to set our biases aside in reporting the news (a large assumption these days), it can only undermine that credibility when front-line people are visible as advocates for one cause or another. But that is mainly a problem for the news people.

When an editor, even a newsroom editor, on the other hand, lobbies a politician, no matter how circumspectly, there is the inescapable insinuation of an editorial quid pro quo. Politicians are people accustomed to going before the editorial board periodically and asking for an election endorsement. Even between elections, many of them regularly seek our support for legislation. How can we ask for their votes without at least tacitly implying that their decisions will be, if not dispositive, at least weighed when endorsement time comes around? Or, to put it another way, when it comes to election endorsements, how can we even pretend to be objective about someone whom we've asked for political favors? The fact that the editorial page may not even have been aware that an editor from another part of the building was lobbying may carry great significance for us, but it means nothing to anyone outside the newspaper.

When, even by pure coincidence, we endorse the legislator who voted our way on the Open Meetings Law amendments, how can that politician help but

assume, in her heart of hearts, that our support at election time was a reward for playing ball? And what about the unsuspecting reader? How can we insist with a straight face that our election endorsements are what they seem when we have what amounts to a secret legislative agenda?

Some would argue, and rather persuasively, I think, that candor is the best tonic. In direct dealings with politicians, Frosty Landon counsels, "You've got to make sure they know you can't be bought." Ultimately, he adds, it "goes to the issue of owner's conscience." And toward that end, I suppose, you cure the credibility problem by leaving nothing to the reader's imagination. If the candidate you're endorsing played ball with the press association, say so. And explain why that vote was in the public interest as well as in the economic interest of newspapers. Or if it wasn't particularly in the public interest, say that.

If it were only so simple.

How can we be sure, once the barrier has been breached, that even perfect candor can cure our damaged credibility? How can we be sure that we've disclosed all that the reader needs to know? The effects of a political relationship with a politician may be so subtle or so indirect that we are not even aware of them. Kay Simeon, editorial page editor of *The Ann Arbor News*, recalls a dilemma that her editorial board found itself in at election time. The paper had brought a freedom of information suit against the University of Michigan, and the verdict had been appealed to the state supreme court. The appeal was pending there when candidates for the court began arriving at *The News* in search of editorial endorsements. "How could we endorse a challenger?" Simeon asked, knowing that if an unendorsed incumbent won re-election, that might well be a hostile vote in the FOI case? And, having followed that thought through to its conclusion, how could *The News* trust itself to make any Supreme Court endorsement? Even where the underlying issue was non-economic and of clear public interest, the possibility of bias confounds the editorial process.

Having to wrestle with court endorse-

ments with a lawsuit pending is something most of us, thankfully, will never have to endure. The incompatibility of lobbying, at the local, state or congressional levels, with credible, disinterested journalism is a much more likely dilemma. Fellow editors can be very persuasive when they argue that newspapers can no longer afford the luxury of holding themselves above the political fray. (Not that all of us ever did. The philosophical spectrum on the point of political involvement is broad. I have heard colleagues from around the country brag about their backroom political entanglements, and I have listened amid general disbelief as an editor insisted

that merely voting in a local election raised a conflict of interest.)

I do think that newspapers must maintain a wall of isolation between the editorial page and "the business side" on economic issues. And where it is appropriate to lobby on matters of press freedom, it should not be editors doing the lobbying. A paid lobbyist working for a generic press association maintains a minimum distance between the request for support and the ability of any one newspaper to offer anything in return. As always, there must be an arm's length between politicians and those of us who cover them and editorialize about them. ■

## Crossing the Line Into Commentary

BY RON MEADOR

**T**he line between reporting and commentary is perhaps the holiest of ethical boundaries in our business: separate functions, separate staffs, separate pages.

But it is a fuzzy line and always has been, shifting with times and tastes, continually tested by the best writers, wisely mistrusted by the brightest readers.

The *Star Tribune* has erased that line in a new venture called "News With a View," a thrice-weekly page of substantive reporting where writers' attitudes, experiences, perspectives and values share an equal footing with the facts.

Here a police reporter plumbs the public's hunger—and that of his editors—for a daily fix of salacious crime news. A foreign correspondent pens a moving memoir of a bombed bridge in the Bosnian town of Mostar. The Washington bureau chief dissects the press frenzy over possible presidential trysts. A feature writer takes on the current bestseller in America's black bookstores, a nasty and misogynistic treatise with a barely printable title. A metro reporter examines the intolerance of 1960's radicals toward those who carry the same civil disobedience techniques to the abortion clinic's door.

The page also makes liberal use of

nonstaff material: freelance pieces, excerpts from important new books, articles reprinted from a wide range of U.S. and foreign magazines.

Why take this step? The more we've come to know our readers, the more we understand that they want a newspaper of substance and depth. They want to be engaged in the great debates, not just fed the data.

Our theory, confirmed in market research, is that our most sophisticated and loyal readers are impatient with *just-the-facts* reporting. As one of our editors put it, "They find facts without arguments uninteresting, and arguments without facts unconvincing."

These readers make up somewhere between one-quarter and one-half of our audience, and the new page has been a huge success since its debut last September. It's getting a lot of attention from colleagues around the country.

And it has been a big hit within our staff, conveying as it does the key message that being attentive to reader appetites doesn't necessarily mean lightening up or dumbing down the news. To the contrary. ■

*Ron Meador is Assistant Managing Editor/ Special Projects for The Star Tribune in the Twin Cities.*



# SPRING READING

## Opinionated Ethics as Drawn by an Old Master

**Herblock: A Cartoonist's Life**  
By Herbert Block  
Macmillan. 372 Pages. \$24.

BY BRUCE WHELPLE

In the spring preceding the 1988 presidential campaign, *The Washington Post's* political satirist, Herblock, drew a cartoon depicting then Vice President/presidential candidate George Bush as the leader of a crusade for ethics in government. Proudly holding a placard proclaiming his cause, Bush rallies four scruffy bagmen, all cohorts from the Iran-Contra scandal—Edwin Meese, Oliver North, John Poindexter and Robert McFarlane—urging them, in the cartoon's caption: "Be alert, men—let me know if you come across anything amiss."

Herblock's delicate irony, of course, was that these very officials were responsible for much that was "amiss" in the political ethics of the Reagan era, and the least likely to become whistle blowers in a system which had served their own private interests so admirably. The cartoon's caption, however, sums up Herblock's journalistic philosophy: for nearly 65 years, he has felt responsible for revealing the dissonance between what politicians say and what they do. Like a good theater critic, he is driven to listen and look for the hallmarks of the bad actor and implausible script: the hollow words delivered with histrionics, the gestures that are, in that oddly anachronistic phrase, "amiss."

Because cartoonists work with both words and images, and draw on the richness of popular culture for their metaphors, they can suggest ethical foul

play on multiple levels. In the cartoon described above, for example, Attorney General Meese is a W.C. Fields cardsharp complete with battered top hat and spats, while Lt. Col. North is depicted with slightly simian brow, strong jaw, and a trail of shredded documents. In other cartoons, Herblock depicts Ronald Reagan as a two-dimensional cutout figure put in place and moved about by others, a reference to Reagan's Hollywood origins. In Herblock's renderings, Washington itself became an elaborate stage, set with the flimsy scenery of agencies and bureaus, peopled more by buffoons than heroes.

### HERBLOCK: A CARTOONIST'S LIFE

By Herbert Block

Self-portrait and  
views of Washington  
from Roosevelt to Clinton



WITH 200 ILLUSTRATIONS

This is ethics with an artistic bite. Jefferson wrote, "A lively and lasting sense of...duty is more effectually impressed on the mind by reading King Lear than by all the dry volumes of ethics...that were ever written." A modern update of that sentiment might extend to reading Herblock cartoons. The man behind them is Herbert Block, who has published 11 annotated cartoon anthologies since 1952, the latest of which is "Herblock: A Cartoonist's Life." Born in 1909, Block published his first work 20 years later in *The Chicago Daily News*, followed by 10 years as daily syndicated cartoonist in 700 papers of the Newspaper Enterprise Association and its parent Scripps-Howard chain (1933-43). Since 1946, he has been the political cartoonist of *The Washington Post*, a job that assures him the readership of the nation's policy makers, and which, in extensive syndication, has allowed him to educate and influence voters throughout the country for almost 50 years.

Although bookstore shelves are loaded with yearly collections of many political cartoonists' work, Block is the only practitioner whose 10 previous books regularly combine the cartoons with a running account of the artist's perception of politics and his own aesthetic decisions about how to depict unfolding events. He has been shrewd enough to write his own history. These books offer homespun rather than analytical insights to the cartoonist's work,

but taken as primary documents, they can be instructive. This new volume is rich in anecdotes and reminiscence, and includes more than 200 cartoons, some of which are familiar from earlier chrestomathies, allowing the reader to watch Block's treatment of politicians evolve over time.

Neither Block's drawing style nor his philosophy has changed abruptly. Younger cartoonists—Mauldin, Conrad, Oliphant, Auth, MacNelly, Danziger, Toles—have adopted different graphical means, but in 1994, Block is the acknowledged master of the school of editorial cartooning which traces its artistic roots to the life-drawing training of early 20th Century art institutes (Block attended the Art Institute of Chicago), and the tradition of lithography as a reproductive medium (like Daumier, Herblock uses a shaded crayon technique ignored by most of his current contemporaries). Coming of age as an editorial cartoonist in the early years of the 20th Century, Block was well aware of Thomas Nast's (1840-1902) heritage through the 1904 biography by Albert Bigelow Paine, and he writes that he idolized the work of J. N. "Ding" Darling (1876-1962), influential cartoonist of *The Des Moines Register* and *Tribune*.

The unabashedly liberal Block (a label he considers to have become meaningless) thus employs a currently unusual style to express unusual opinions with unusual tenacity. One of the most important contributions to the political education of his readers is the lesson not to take politicians at face value. Block is at once both old-fashioned and wry enough to refer to his work as reflecting "our love for our fellow men by kicking big boys who kick underdogs," adding, "The effort is to promote fairness."

Block is earthy and pragmatic, and makes no effort to intellectualize his work, but his energetic delight in the good fortune of being clever at visual presentation of his opinions, and being *paid* for it at the same time, fairly shines through the description of the early years of his career. "The thrill that comes once in a lifetime" occurs when the young Block peers over the shoulders

of fellow bus riders reading *The Chicago Daily News*, and "one of them nudged the other and handed across his folded paper, pointing to something in it—my cartoon!" Since then his long-haul strength has been a position of opinionated and ethical views and a unique means to deliver his message. He has been a bulldog on issues that gripped his interest.

The nature of editorial cartooning is to lampoon and lambaste, and Block's strongest work has been seen during periods when the life of the republic was most threatened by internal dissent—the McCarthy era, government denial of civil rights, Vietnam, Watergate and the Reagan-Bush administrations' depredations. Those issues continue to echo in national life.

Assaults on freedom of the press have been vigorous in the early months of 1994 as, for example, in former Defense Secretary designate Bobby Ray Inman's diatribe against several syndicated columnists' alleged "new McCarthyism." On another front, Reagan, Meese et al., whose Iran-Contra-inspired attacks on the Constitution and the American people have been voluminously documented by Special Prosecutor Lawrence Walsh, took to the airwaves by proxy and in person on release of Walsh's much-delayed final report. With the self-interest of pit bulls, former Reaganites endeavored to make Walsh himself appear to be a criminal. After all, it was he who spent more than \$35 million on his investigation of the Reagan gang, wasn't it?

As with most complicated and cerebral issues, it was newspapers and not television that best laid out Walsh's documentation. But Block had long since nailed down the official lies and evasions in repeated cartoons of the "arms payoff for hostage release," and he reminds us also that "much time [and expense] could have been saved if high officials had not continuously stonewalled."

The astute Maureen Dowd of *The New York Times* has suggested that, in addition to the sure-fire resonance of press-bashing with the public at large, the media-wise Inman "chose to prey on the moral insecurity of journalists

[b]y casting himself as a victim of a 'new McCarthyism'..." It is safe to say that as Block rounds out his 65th year of daily cartooning, he at least is immune to any such moral insecurity. Cartooning is opinion, which is per se not susceptible to balance, and will always be perceived as unfair by self-interested holders of antipodean opinion. But if a political cartoon is grounded in words or actions of public officials, then it is fair material from which the wise produce truth through artful interpretation.

Indeed, Block seems, in the course of carving his journalistic niche, to have intuited the old Henry Adams aphorism that "politics consists in ignoring facts." In exposing that which is "amiss" he juxtaposes inconvenient facts with audacious allusions to discomfit politicians and bureaucrats. As January drew to a close, and the Iran-Contra report finally hit the street, Block was once again able to draw upon his own tenacious skills in a two-panel cartoon of the Reagan-Bush crew. In the first panel six former officials angrily wave clenched fists: "That terrible, vicious Iran-Contra prosecutor! Sullied our reputations! Wasted taxpayers' money! Outrageous!" And in the second panel, they cheerily high-five and back-pat each other: "Hey! The pardons and immunity and all our stonewalling paid off! We beat the rap!" As indeed they did in the strict legal sense. Fortunately for our posterity, however, none of them beat Herblock's rap. ■

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## Bok's Fugue and Disparity in Journalism Salaries

The Cost of Talent

How Executives and Professionals Are Paid and How It Affects America

Derek Bok

The Free Press. 342 Pages. \$24.95.

BY WILLIAM B. BLANKENBURG

After retiring from the presidency of Harvard University in 1991, Derek Bok immersed himself in think tanks to study the earnings of professionals and executives. The result is a book that denounces excessive incomes in law, medicine, and business and deplors low salaries in education and government. His comments could just as well have applied to journalism.

These views may seem odd from a man whose university has bred a goodly share of the nation's fat cats, but he points out that Harvard does have a Puritan heritage, and indeed a streak of neo-Puritanism is one of the book's charms. He could also have mentioned that his wife, Sissela, is a prominent ethicist, and that his grandfather, Edward, was the immigrant editor of *The Ladies Home Journal* who preached the

virtues of fairness and thrift.

Bok recalls that when he graduated from law school in 1954, he could have taken a job with a Wall Street firm for \$4,200 or served as a government attorney for almost as much. Or, he could have become a teacher for a few hundred dollars less. Three decades later, wages were askew. A beginning teacher could expect \$16,000, a Justice Department attorney \$25,000, and a beginning lawyer on Wall Street could fetch \$65,000.

By the 1990's, the highest echelons of business executives had prospered beyond fantasy. The chief executive officers of Fortune 500 companies averaged \$1.4 million a year in salaries and bonuses and another \$1.4 in stock options and other long-term incentives. Bok estimates that the real compensation for top CEO's doubled during the 1980's and they now earn 100 times more than their average workers. The ratio in Japan and Europe is in the twenties.

Partners in large law firms and physicians in leading specialties also won big. But the 1970's and 1980's were less kind to lower-level executives, doctors in general practice, lawyers in solo practice, school teachers, professors, and civil servants. In real dollars, their compensation held steady or declined. And so business school enrollments tripled, law schools doubled, and education majors fell by half. The quality, not just quantity, of students in education also declined. Good teachers became harder to find and keep. Applications for civil-service jobs dwindled.

How come people with such interesting and prestigious jobs make so much more than those who toil at dis-

agreeable work? The answer is that they short-circuit the market system to pad their pockets. CEO's, law firms, and medical specialists control information about their own value, and they routinely buffalo their directors, clients, and patients. At somewhat tedious length Bok cites research that shows high salaries have scant relation to performance, scarcity of talent, or responsibility.

The evil of a distorted compensation system and unjustified wealth "is that it weakens the public's faith in the fairness of the economic system," and this faith is essential to maintaining the social order, Bok argues. Thus remuneration of certain professionals and executives poses a "most vexing moral question."

The only journalist to turn up in "The Cost of Talent" is Dan Rather, who gets a dose of indignation on page two: "Could a television anchorman actually be worth more than \$3 million a year?" Unfortunately for Bok, Rather is not a good illustration of his thesis. Like stellar athletes and entertainers, anchors can be measured for worth, more or less, by their following.

A better example might be Peter Kann, chief executive officer of Dow Jones & Company, publisher of *The Wall Street Journal*. He became CEO in 1991, and for his labors receives a salary, bonuses, incentives, contributions to his retirement account, stock awards, and stock options. Excluding stock options, his compensation in 1992 was \$1,951,726, according to Media Industry Newsletter. (Graef Crystal, a Berkeley professor and compensation gadfly, added in the value Kann's stock options and came up with a 1992 total of

Derek Bok

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\$2,185,000.) As is customary, Kann is not a member of the compensation committee that sets salaries, but he is on the nominating committee that selects the directors who are.

According to the Dow Jones 1993 proxy statement, executive compensation is based on both long- and short-term performance. Financial return to stockholders is one measure, and Dow Jones has struggled recently. From 1987 to 1992 this return was only 5 percent for Dow Jones stockholders, while the return of Standard & Poor's 500 Stock Index more than doubled. Against the average of six large newspaper companies in the S&P Publishing/Newspapers Index, Dow Jones lagged throughout Kann's tenure as CEO. Even so, his 1992 total compensation increased 156 percent over 1991. Kann's good fortune is not unique. In 1992 Lee Enterprises, Inc., a media company one-eighth the size of Dow Jones, awarded its CEO \$1,519,716.

In December 1990, as revenues declined and employees were laid off, CEO-designate Kann announced in a company newsletter that top managers would suffer a 20 percent pay reduction in 1991. He beat the odds with a 35 percent increase in salary and bonuses. His wife, a Dow Jones vice president, won a 15 percent raise.

Early this year the Conference Board, a business research group, reported that median 1992 CEO compensation in communications was \$885,000, the highest among eight industries it analyzed and \$110,000 greater than the runner-up, manufacturing.

The incomes of CEO's in the S&P newspaper index are shown in a nearby table. In an analysis that appeared in the November/December 1993 Columbia Journalism Review, Graef Crystal included the value of stock options and came up with remunerations substantially above those shown here—\$4,731,000 for John Curley, for example. In 1992 many executives contrived to take year-end bonuses early to avoid an expected income-tax hike.

Life in the trenches was less affluent. The accompanying figures for journalists are based on a survey of about 500 dailies of all sizes. With 2.9 percent

inflation in 1992, rank-and-file journalists lost ground.

As pay disparities widened, the morale of American journalists declined. A 1985 Associated Press Managing Editors survey found that 26 percent of journalists were dissatisfied with their newspaper jobs. In 1993 the number rose to 36 percent, and almost half said they wanted to be at a different paper within five years. One-fifth hoped to be out of journalism altogether. The young, the minorities, and the best educated were among the most disgruntled.

Most of their complaints were about dim prospects for advancement and indifferent management, not pay. Bok makes a similar point about teachers—who are something like journalists in all this—that money isn't everything, but it counts for something: there is a threshold of compensation, not just for subsistence but for recognition. The greater the discrepancy in pay between newsrooms and executive suites, the greater the discount to the worker's worth.

As for CEO's, money can't be their greatest satisfaction, either, or even most of it. They have power, perks, and, if they're any good, respect. Then why do

they need so much money? Bok says it's because Americans confuse wealth with worth and assume private leaders earn their keep and public employees do not. These attitudes go back to the 19th Century, but they became doctrinal in the 1980's.

Bok is hard-pressed to find cures for a malaise so rooted in American values. He rejects legal limits on pay as impractical. He likes the fuzzy notions of expanding opportunities for advancement, providing a better distribution of talent, and enhancing motivation beyond monetary rewards.

He wants boards of directors to drive harder bargains with executives, but CEO's usually dominate their boards. Recently some stockholders have acted up, to little avail. In early 1993, a Knight-Ridder stockholder proposed that the directors cap the total compensation of top executives at no more than 20 times the pay of the average employee. In a huff, directors urged shareholders to vote down the resolution, and it failed. Last fall two shareholders who are members of the union that represents 2,000 Dow Jones employees offered similar resolutions to their company. The union president, Ron Chen, says the corporate legal office immediately stonewalled the initiative.

To rectify this economic injustice, Bok wants executives and professionals to rethink their values. He advocates a "culture of commitment," a sense of purpose in work that exceeds remuneration. To induce moral rehabilitation, Bok would make income taxes more sharply progressive—something government can do "to set examples of what is publicly honored and what is not."

Would this work? The trouble with successful sinners is that they decline to repent. In the end, Bok is left holding a bag of admonitions and improbable tax policies. No wonder the old Puritans cut right to the hellfire and brimstone.

William B. Blankenburg is a professor of journalism and mass communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

## A Comparison

### How Some CEO's Did in 1992

	Compensation*	% up
John Curley, Gannett	\$2,505,494	32.4
Peter Kann, Dow Jones	1,951,7261	55.6
A. O. Sulzberger, New York Times	1,098,198	16.3
Charles Brumback, Tribune Co.	1,253,157	32.9
Robert Erburu, Times Mirror	879,365	.5
James Batten, Knight-Ridder	696,764	3.8

\*Salary and other cash compensation. Source: Media Industry Newsletter.

### How Journalists Did in 1992

	Compensation*	% up
Publisher	\$118,000	5.2
Editor	68,147	2.5
Managing editor	51,584	1.1
Senior reporter	30,420	1.2
Entry-level reporter	18,900	2.1

\*Median total direct compensation as of Jan. 1, 1993. Source: NAA Newspaper Compensation Survey.

## A Political Role the Media Is Incapable of Playing

Out of Order

Thomas E. Patterson

Alfred A. Knopf. 242 Pages. \$23.

BY JOHN HERBERS

After the 1992 presidential election, much of the analysis of press performance in the 10-month campaign was positive. Following a disastrous record in the 1988 race that set off soul-searching in newsrooms across the land and subsequent changes in coverage, the conclusion was that despite mistakes the news media had performed reasonably well in its role as arbitrator of presidential politics.

Not so, says Thomas E. Patterson, Professor of Political Science at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University. Not that the performance was not better than that of 1988. It was. But in Patterson's view the American news media is simply not capable, and never will be, of properly carrying out the role that the political sector unintentionally dumped on the press in the 1970's. In the absence of strong political parties, which had traditionally served as organizer and arbitrator of the elective process, the presidential primaries were made the chief instrument for nominating candidates in the belief the system would be more democratic. Instead, the change created a vacuum in the complex process, which the press quickly filled to the degree that it is now the chief player in deciding which state primaries and which candidates prevail.

"The thesis of this book is that the United States cannot have a sensible campaign as long as it is built around the news media," the author writes. He says his thesis is in no way anti-press. "My argument is that the problem of the modern campaign lies beyond the press, in the electoral system, which asks the media to fill a role it cannot play.... The problem is that the press is not a political institution. Its business is news, and

the values of news are not those of politics."

His view is widely shared by a number of journalists and students of politics. What he offers is extensive documentation of what is wrong with the press role and a remedy that seems achievable without putting shackles on the press.

Patterson points out that the United States is the only democracy that organizes its national election campaign around the news media. "Even if the media did not want the responsibility of organizing the campaign," he says, "it is theirs by virtue of an election system built upon entrepreneurial candidates, floating voters, freewheeling interest groups and weak political parties. It is an unworkable arrangement."

The many media abuses, he says, make it worse. For example, political coverage on the evening news consist largely of editorials posing as straight newscasts. He opens the book with the transcript of a CBS broadcast of August 21, 1992, on Bill Clinton's statements on the economy. In what was labeled a "reality check" the reporter accused the candidate of "statistical chicanery," of "stalling" on taking a stand on the North American Free Trade Agreement and of being a "conveniently slow learner" on the trade issue for a one-time Rhodes scholar with a reputation for soaking up details like a sponge.

"This was not the Republican George Bush calling the Democrat Bill Clinton a huckster," Patterson writes, but a journalist presented as an impartial analyst.

Nor do newspapers and news magazines escape Patterson's indictment. He presents statistical studies by political scientists showing, among other things, that in recent years there has been a steady increase in negative stories over

positive ones to an extent that feeds public cynicism about politics and weakens the office of the Presidency. There is nothing malicious about this, he suggests, just journalism's purported need for immediacy and the interesting story.

There is a lot in Patterson's findings that journalists can fault. Political science studies that classify the complex coverage of politics are often suspect. And Patterson throughout the book quotes Walter Lippmann's 1920's analysis of journalism to illustrate current conditions. While Lippmann is still right most of the time, his observations are not always valid today. For instance, on Lippmann's conclusion that the press ignores developments of deep social and political significance, Patterson says the urban crisis was never a big story until the 1968 riots. Dead wrong.

But it is hard to argue with his conclusion that the news media for the past two decades has been wearing a yoke it never asked for and needs to shed.

His remedy is surprisingly simple and seems at first glance too simple: shorten the campaign. Elaborate reform, he says, might bring more unintended bad consequences. His first suggestion is to eliminate the New Hampshire and Iowa contests and start with six states at once in May or June. The rest would be held in stages of six each. This could be more important than it seems because most of the mischief occurs in the early primaries, which are not representative of the nation and often eliminate the best candidates.

But whatever is done, he concludes, should strengthen the political parties which are desperately needed to bring order and fairness back to the process.

*John Herbers, Nieman Fellow 1961, was for 24 years a reporter and editor for The New York Times.*

# A Radical Vision of the Newspaper's Proper Role

A Sacred Trust

Nelson Poynter and The St. Petersburg Times

Robert N. Pierce

University Press of Florida. 426 Pages. \$34.95.

By JAMES V. RISSER

**T**he saga of Nelson Poynter and The St. Petersburg Times is unique in the annals of American journalism. More's the pity.

Had more newspaper owners shared Poynter's fervent belief that a newspaper should be the strong voice of an individual and taken steps to protect their publications from corporate media sharks, the current state of newspaper journalism might well be one of vim and vigor instead of blandness.

Under its feisty and quirky leader, The Times became a pioneering force—in news coverage where it was an early practitioner of in-depth reporting, in socially progressive editorial policies in which it became the first major newspaper in the South to oppose racially segregated schools, and in the use of color, innovative section design and other technological advances.

As author Robert N. Pierce notes in his readable and instructive book, *The Times of London*, upon Poynter's death in 1978, lauded him as "one of the most remarkable of American newspaper proprietors" although he operated in what The Times found "an unremarkable town."

Poynter, an ardent civic booster, would have enjoyed the tribute and been annoyed by the slur.

Today, Poynter is best remembered in the journalism business for the steps he took to safeguard his beloved newspaper beyond his death. He created an educational institution and, in effect, willed the newspaper to it.

Thus, journalism is blessed today not only with the continued existence of a solid, independent newspaper in St. Petersburg but also with the presence of the Poynter Institute for Media

Studies and the first-class programs it operates for print and broadcast journalists.

Also under the same ownership umbrella is Congressional Quarterly, the Washington-based reference service that Poynter created in the 1940's and shepherded to success with the aid of Henrietta, the second of his three wives.

Less known today perhaps, but an important part of Poynter's legacy and of what made him tick, is the set of ruling guidelines he imposed upon The St. Petersburg Times in 1947 as his "Standards of Ownership."

They were, Pierce writes, a kind of Declaration of Independence and a Constitution for The Times, a guidepost for his successors, and in many ways an original and radical vision of the proper role of American newspapers.

The first of the 15 "Standards" defined ownership of a publication or broadcast property to be "a sacred trust and a great privilege." The last said: "A publication is so individualistic in nature that complete control should be concentrated in an individual. Voting stock should never be permitted to scatter."

In between were 13 other rules that defined a news organization's duties to the public and to its community, barred any "compromise with the integrity of the news," called for a high-quality staff with good pay and benefits, and declared that a chain owner could never do justice to a local publication because its loyalty "is bound to be diluted or divided" because of other properties held by the chain.

In a preamble, Poynter said that upon his death, his news properties should be sold only to someone who would

## A SACRED TRUST



carry on the Standards and not necessarily to the highest bidder. Later, of course, he made sure they wouldn't be sold at all.

This is strong stuff, and few news organizations today could say in good conscience that they adhere to even half of Poynter's rules.

Pierce clearly admires Poynter and his paper. For one year a staffer at The Times's companion paper, The Evening Independent, Pierce now teaches journalism at the University of Florida. He was asked by Eugene Patterson, the distinguished journalist who succeeded Poynter, to write this book.

But Pierce manages to give us Poynter's warts along with his virtues. He "drove his staffers mercilessly, maddened them with unclear instructions, paid too little to keep the best of them, and sometimes brushed aside astute and devoted aides," Pierce writes. And

he feuded with family members, especially his mother and his sister, in ways that at times threatened the future of *The Times*.

Still, most of Poynter's faults came from what Pierce calls "a fixation for excellence" that his domineering mother, Alice, gave him.

Nelson was born in 1903. The family's connection to Florida began in 1912 when his father, Paul, an Indiana newspaperman, bought *The Times*.

St. Petersburg, on Florida's west coast, was just beginning to flourish, but still was a provincial town inhabited by Northerners trying to get warm.

Pierce chronicles the rise of the paper under Paul Poynter, but the focus of the book is on Nelson. He graduated from Indiana University, sailed the world as a cabin boy on a freighter, sold freelance articles along the way, and returned home to earn a master's degree in economics at Yale.

Poynter joined *The St. Petersburg Times*, and married the daughter of a prominent local family. But he soon went back north to run his father's paper in Kokomo, Ind., and to sell it in 1930 when the national economy collapsed.

Then began a checkered association with several papers. Poynter's switch from the business side to the editorship in Columbus proved disastrous, and he was fired. He was hired by *The Minneapolis Star*, lost that job after six months, and returned to St. Petersburg after a decade away.

It had been the most difficult period of his life. Unsuccessful in their attempt to have children, he and his wife adopted two girls, but later, in 1942, they were to divorce, largely because of Poynter's workaholic and inability to devote time to his family.

During World War II, Poynter headed the Washington office of the Foreign Information Service (later the Voice of America), then went to Hollywood as a government liaison official to the film industry.

It was back in St. Petersburg after the war that Poynter most effectively put *The Times* on a path toward excellence.

He and his chief lieutenants pushed *The Times* into physical redesign that

included departmentalized news sections, into probing reporting of government and social conditions, into editorial leadership on race issues, and into various civic crusades such as the construction of the Sunshine Skyway bridge across the entrance to Tampa Bay.

He could be tough and demanding on his employees, but he opened the way for women and for black staffers, and he instituted a far-reaching pension plan with early vesting.

Throughout the 1960's, *The Times* increased its circulation by nearly 50 percent and in 1971 passed the neighboring Tampa Tribune in subscribers.

Poynter had the vision to bring in good people at the top. Besides his successor, Eugene Patterson, they included Alvah Chapman, who later went on to head the Knight-Ridder chain, and Robert Haiman, now the president of the Poynter Institute. Patterson himself hired Andrew Barnes from *The Washington Post*, and Barnes later followed Patterson at the helm of *The Times*.

Patterson, who had won a Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing at *The Atlanta Constitution*, pushed successfully for better writing at *The Times* and continued the paper's commitment to tough investigative reporting and a progressive editorial agenda.

*The Times* was awarded a Pulitzer in 1964 for an exposé of the Florida Turnpike Authority. Reporters Bette Orsini and Charles Stafford won one in 1980 for their investigation of the Church of Scientology. And Sheryl James won for feature writing in 1991.

Pierce's book is laced with anecdotes that bring Poynter and his paper to life. He notes that "typos infuriated Nelson Poynter." One day, when the paper contained several, Poynter seriously proposed installing a red ball on top of *The Times* building that would light up anytime the paper contained a typo, a signal to staffers as they arrived at work that someone had fouled up. Cooler heads talked him out of it.

Determined to protect his newspaper after he was gone, Poynter rejected the idea of leaving it to his family because "I've never met my great-grandchildren, and I might not like them."

Furthermore, the paper had increased enough in value that he feared his heirs would have to sell it to pay inheritance taxes.

He planned to give the paper to a foundation, but new tax rules blocked him. Finally, he and his lawyers came up with the educational institution idea. He decided to found the Modern Media Institute, and in his will give his newspaper stock, Congressional Quarterly, and a printing house to the institute. Poynter would choose his successor to run *The Times*, and the successor would do the same. The person in charge would vote the newspaper company shares held by the institute.

Don Baldwin, a former editor of *The Times*, was brought aboard to head the new institute, and he hired Roy Peter Clark to teach writing, one of the institute's great strengths ever since.

Five years after Poynter's death, Patterson named Bob Haiman, then executive editor of *The Times*, to take over the institute. Haiman has presided over a major expansion of its activities, the move to a splendid new building facing Tampa Bay, and the renaming of the institute for its founder.

Today, with nationally renowned programs, the institute no doubt would please even the demanding Poynter.

Nelson Poynter was not a good manager in the conventional sense, says Pierce in summary, and he often seemed obsessed. But his better obsessions included journalistic excellence, high ethical standards and enlightened civic leadership. Many of Poynter's rules for excellence have "become almost commonplace across the country," according to Pierce.

"Not only did he create a great newspaper during his lifetime; he also conceived a schema for a totally unique journalistic institution—one that would in many ways be reborn with each new chief executive who succeeded to absolute control of it, albeit challenged with the ideals that Poynter maintained." ■

*James V. Risser directs the John S. Knight Fellowships for Professional Journalists at Stanford University. A two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize for national reporting, he is a member of the Pulitzer Prize Board.*

## Still Another Look at the Old Gray Lady

Behind The Times  
 Inside the New New York Times  
 Edwin Diamond  
 Villard Books. 424 Pages. \$23.

BY MURRAY SEEGER

On January 15, 1994, The New York Times carried an "Editors' Note" tucked in a corner of page 2, under the daily index. The note said that The Times eight days before should have checked a quotation by U.S. Senator Bob Packwood that referred to the publisher of The Oregonian, the leading newspaper in that state.

The note was neither an apology nor a correction. As usual, the note used the plural possessive because it was an admission that The Times as an institution—not a single editor or reporter—had fallen short in journalistic performance.

A. M. Rosenthal initiated "Editors' Notes" during his reign as executive editor as part of wider effort to make his newspaper more responsible. As every journalist knows, there is a never-never land where gaffes and goofs occur in every edition, hopefully without damage and hopefully not to be repeated.

Arthur O. Sulzberger insisted that The Times maintain a unique standard of ethics and responsibility and Abe Rosenthal was always anxious to anticipate the publisher's concerns. "Editors' Notes" was one answer.

Edwin Diamond describes in great detail the difficult struggle the managers of the great newspaper conducted to maintain its ethical and reportorial standards while generating a healthy bottom line. At the same time, the traditional Times audience was dispersing farther and farther away from Manhattan.

The Times takes its unique position in American journalism with ultimate seriousness and some arrogance. The

# Behind the Times

INSIDE THE NEW  
 NEW YORK TIMES

Edwin Diamond

layers of editors have great authority, but in this crucial period President Walter Mattson was at the publisher's alternate ear so that the high and mighty dreams of Abe Rosenthal never got too far from the balance sheet.

Diamond begins his engrossing examination by describing how Max Frankel, Rosenthal's successor, dealt in 1991 with one of the paper's most traumatic ethical lapses, the premature identification and rough profile of the Palm Beach woman who accused William Kennedy Smith of rape.

The Editors' Note in that case served only to anger much of the staff and give sanctimonious outside critics an opportunity to beat up on editors who were just settling into their new chairs.

For Frankel, the incident was not only a wake-up call but also a serious setback in his drive to make The Times friendlier to its readers and staff. With a

relatively short tenure available, and a new Sulzberger at the helm, Frankel has had to move fast with his changes.

Diamond delves into nearly 30 years of The Times's dirty linen, relating far more than what the best informed outsiders knew about the battles on 43d Street. He has talked to all of the players great and small.

The publisher gave him unusual access to the internal archives, perhaps because it was better to admit a known critic than one who would be less friendly. Diamond, a former Newsweek editor, has made a second career as an analyst of all forms of media in books, in New York magazine and at New York University.

While focusing on the campaign to keep The Times profitable while it sought a wider audience, Diamond does not make clear what alternatives The Times' publisher and editors had. He is disappointed that the paper went over the Hudson and above Westchester for readers.

On the other hand, he acknowledges that the readers abandoned the city first and took advertisers with them. Bloomingdale's went bankrupt, as did Macy's, but Diamond keeps his focus on the narrow confines of The Times's offices and overlooks the wider world out there.

In these same decades, other major papers were struggling against the same frightening changes in American habits that has reduced advertising lineage, stagnated overall newspaper circulation and lowered reading habits. The rule that customers will read only one paper a day has been replaced with a question: will younger people read any newspapers?



The Times went too far from its economic base in seeking a national audience, but that is part of the paradox of Rosenthal's career that Diamond overlooks. Instead of starting his tale with Abe's tenure as managing editor, Diamond should have gone back to 1963 when the famous foreign correspondent arrived from Tokyo and announced he would be the best metropolitan editor The Times ever had.

Rosenthal scratched and clawed to get more city news on page one against the more traditional, gentlemanly national and foreign editors. That was the beginning of the Abe and Artie Shuw, when Arthur Gelb left Culture Gulch to try to learn what was happening in the streets.

It was then, not later as Diamond has it, that the two close friends created a tense newsroom atmosphere that never relaxed until Rosenthal struck the immovable barrier of age.

Faced with that daunting prospect, Rosenthal still attempted to confuse the succession process so that he could extend his tenure. Diamond tells this story very well with all the delicious personal details.

Punch Sulzberger, always underestimated, was not diverted. He chose Max Frankel to succeed, gave Rosenthal a column and stepped aside for his son. Frankel immediately started to create a new line of news-side succession.

Now, The Times is back where Rosenthal started, trying to do a better job in reporting on the changed city while also satisfying home delivery customers 200 miles away. The writing is sharper, the stories more personal and the graphics more revealing.

The Times has only occasionally been the first to make major journalistic innovations. Still, ever slow and monolithic, when The Times does make changes, it usually makes them better than others.

Unfortunately, the new guard is also producing the Sunday "Styles of the Times" section that tries to appeal to a new, young, hip audience but reads more like a society section with all of the same beautiful snobs raising all that money for all those wonderful causes.

Diamond has an easy, glib style, but

for all of the inside gossip he misses the inside flavor that would make the story more authentic. He steers away from some big issues such as the female discrimination suit and the loss of great talents that marked the Rosenthal era—no one at The Times is likely to be angry at Diamond.

By staring so hard at the New York scene, he ignores the strategies other big city publishers and editors were following in comparable hard economic times with mixed results.

The Sulzbergers showed that family ownership can be maintained through

generational changes and wide economic dislocation. They made mistakes but stayed the course, like the Grahams in Washington, but unlike the Chandlers in Los Angeles who surrendered control to professional managers, as did many other publishing families who took the chains' money and ran. ■

*After his Nieman year (1961-1962), Murray Seeger worked on The New York Times metropolitan staff before moving to the Newsweek Washington Bureau. He is now special advisor on external relations for the International Monetary Fund.*

## Jesus, the Bible and the Journalist

The Five Gospels:

The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus

Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover and the Jesus Seminar

Macmillan. 553 Pages. \$30.

**W**hat in the world is the relevance of this new translation of the first four books of the New Testament and the recently discovered (49 years ago) Gospel of Thomas to journalism?

More than most of us might think. The Gospel writers were the reporters of their day, proclaiming the "Good News" that Jesus brought to the world.

Unfortunately, the biblical reporters, whether inspired or not, did not follow standards accepted by the responsible press today. They felt free, according to the Jesus Seminar scholars, to put into Jesus's mouth words he did not say, to embellish stories to appeal to certain audiences and to make up events that never occurred. These were common practices 2,000 years ago, when communication was primarily oral.

In light of these loose ways, plus the difficulty of writing decades and sometimes over a century after Jesus's death,

the problems with translating documents and the absence of punctuation, there is no wonder that scholars have been arguing over Jesus's message since he died.

There is a wonder, however, why so many of today's journalists, armed with tape recorders to catch spoken words and with the availability of a multitude of documents for fact-checking, feel as free as the handicapped Gospel writers to alter quotations, to put even accurate quotations in the wrong context, to move events from one place to another and to use other dubious methods to "improve" stories.

The scholars concluded that Jesus probably uttered only about 20 percent of the 1,500 sayings attributed to him. Undoubtedly reporters today, with the facilities available to them, have much greater accuracy. The sorry truth, however, is that too often reporters believe in altering the facts for better readability. ■—rhp

## Telling It Like It Is, With Bombs Bursting Around Him

Live From the Battlefield

From Vietnam to Baghdad: 35 Years in the World's War Zones

Peter Arnett

Simon & Schuster. 463 Pages. \$23.

BY JACK FOISIE

In 20th Century warfare there has been no more aggressive and uninhibited reporter than Peter Arnett. His talent for being close to the action and getting the news out rapidly and graphically has also made him a most controversial journalist, especially now that modern communications make it possible for front-line news and pictures to be almost instantaneously shown on television screens.

The advanced planning and ingenuity of Arnett and other personnel of Cable News Network made it possible for him to broadcast from the enemy capital of Baghdad at the onset of the Persian Gulf War. He described—live—the impact of bombs and rockets exploding around his hotel. It was dramatic stuff, and a huge American audience watched and listened as Arnett, sometimes for hours at a time, continued to report the destruction by the American aerial armada. Realizing that he had a good thing going in allowing CNN to show his embattled nation under attack, the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, let Arnett and CNN be the only television crew that remained. Arnett was restricted in where he could go and had “minders” to censor his copy before he began to read.

As a counterbalance, CNN, for its part, warned viewers before each transmission that Arnett was under Iraqi restraint and his output was controlled by an enemy. There were many American presentations from Allied headquarters in Saudi Arabia and from the Pentagon. The Allied news was also subject to limitations by military security, CNN notes.

Although uneasy about Saddam's propaganda coup, the Pentagon found

some value in Arnett's reports—an assessment of the punishment being inflicted on the foe. But when his broadcasts began to report that some of the bombs had missed military targets, as will always happen in war, and were causing extensive civilian casualties, Washington officials were outraged, and so were a lot of viewers.

Once again, Arnett's “telling it like it is” was getting him into trouble.

The now 59-year old naturalized American (he is New Zealand born) was only doing what he had done during his 13 years of reporting the war in Vietnam. The difference was that in Vietnam he had been with The Associated Press, a “print” newsman with his working equipment a pencil, typewriter and telex. In Baghdad it was a mike, electronic gadgetry and pancake makeup.

Just making the transition from one end of the journalistic spectrum to the other reflects Arnett's savvy and his unquenchable determination.

But his unbridled zest for undermining the official version of events in Vietnam, and giving solace, even though unintended, to the Iraqi cause does raise questions about journalistic ethics.

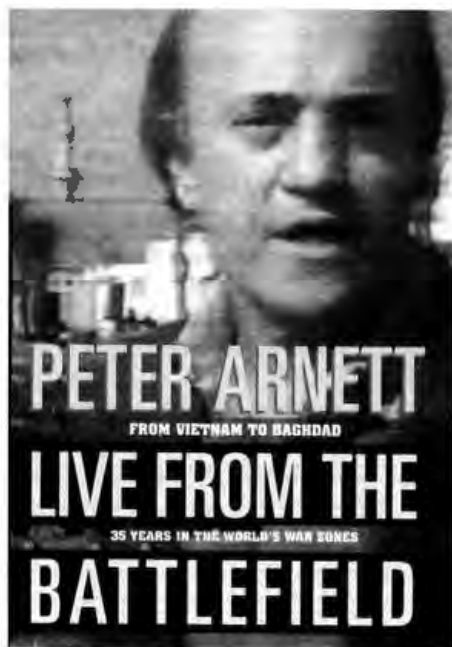
Does he sometimes overstep reasonable military security—a judgment call when there is no formal censorship, as was the case in Vietnam? Does he fail to appreciate the sometimes diplomatic or political necessity for government authorities to be less than candid on delicate issues?

“Live From the Battlefield” is Arnett's answer to critics, and a lively memoir to boot. He does not reply defensively but sticks to this simple assertion: “I only reported what I had seen and heard.”

There are a few who would challenge that, but certainly not his colleagues. Some of us were long stayers in Vietnam but none longer than Arnett, nor did any of us come close to matching his time on the fringe of combat except possibly Arnett's AP photographer buddy, Horst Fass.

It was in the field where Arnett gained the liking and confidence of the young soldiers and Marines, and the young officers who commanded—and died—with them. (Casualty rates of infantry lieutenants and captains in Vietnam were four times higher than those in similar units in Korea.)

Their views Arnett expressed in hard-hitting analysis pieces in the disciplined terms of wire-service reporting. Other AP reporters covered the military and embassy briefings, so there was balanced output. It was up to American



editors to use what they wanted.

During Arnett's years in Vietnam, there were many stories that particularly angered General William Westmoreland, the Pentagon generals and Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon. Arnett covers them all in the book and summarizes:

"The military authorities wanted us to paint an image of Vietnam as a valued, threatened ally. But that did not square with what we were seeing: corrupt, irresolute leaders..."

And: "U.S. authorities wanted to fight the war in secret and we wouldn't let them..."

Arnett writes about his run-ins with the military brass and civilian chiefs and, to his credit, he includes some in which he did not emerge with roses. One such encounter was with Barry Zorthian, who for years was the chief American spokesman in Vietnam and a very competent person.

"Peter, you have got to get our [official American] viewpoint in your war analysis, you owe it to us," Arnett quotes Zorthian as saying. "We know more than you do about what's going on." Arnett was not deflated, replying: "I gather my information in the same places the government does, and my assessment is as valid as yours."

On one story, Arnett violated security and risked lives, at least it seems so in hindsight, although he does not acknowledge the fact.

Arnett had written that the First Air Cavalry division was putting small infantry units into the jungle as bait to attract a sizable North Vietnamese force. When the decoy unit was under fire the main First Cav assault group was supposed to come to its rescue and annihilate the foe. It was a new tactic to locate a sizable enemy force "before he cocks his real punch," the First Cav general told Arnett.

After two "bait" units had been severely mauled in a test of this new tactic, Arnett wrote about it in some detail, including the losses—a complete wipeout of one decoy platoon, and 50 men killed or wounded in a somewhat larger decoy unit.

The outraged First Cav general acknowledged that Arnett had the facts

right but insisted he had provided the enemy with tactical information of great value. There was little doubt that the Arnett story had been picked up by the North Vietnamese. There were plenty of enemy informers in Saigon, including, it was learned after the war, one in the AP office in Saigon.

Formal military censorship of the kind established in World War II, and belatedly during the Korean War, would have stifled such excess of "telling it like it is." A censor's blue pencil does sometimes save the lives of endangered American servicemen.

As to why this censorship was not initiated in Saigon, Arnett in his book is back on target. He quotes Secretary of State Dean Rusk as explaining that full-scale censorship would have created "a national hysteria, and probably required the proclamation of a state of emergency." It is usually enacted as a follow-on to a declaration of war, and there was no such declaration in the Vietnam conflict.

(In Korea it was the United Nations declaration that provided the basis for formal censorship, and that only occurred after General MacArthur tried voluntary censorship among correspondents. It utterly failed. In the fierce competition to get the news out first, headline-grabbing war correspondents need a starting gate, like race horses, and no fouling in the stretch. That is what wartime censors provide—and it is remarkable how leniency improves when a war is being won.)

By 1970 Arnett was the star of the AP stable of correspondents. In the book he confesses he felt his detachment toward the Vietnam struggle cracking after the Cambodian invasion expanded the war. He writes:

"I feared that I would no longer be an unbiased observer, that my reporter's values were swamped in the bloodshed. I felt angered that the war seemed impervious to solution, that the reporting and terrible sacrifice seemed to do so little to end it. I wanted to leave."

And so he did and was welcomed in New York by AP chief Wes Gallagher, who had so stoutly supported Arnett in his superlative but controversial reporting role. But domestic reporting, even

of the top news stories, did not appeal, and within 18 months Arnett was temporarily back in Saigon when the news there was riveting. Again a year later he was back. And again in 1975. In fact, he was one of the few journalists who risked staying on after Saigon fell, and continued to file reports to New York until communications were cut and he was ordered out.

Later he joined CNN, learned electronic journalism and practiced it in Latin America, Moscow and elsewhere. Then came the Iraq war.

As Arnett waited in a nearly deserted Baghdad hotel for the start of the American aerial bombardment, he sought to assure his CNN colleagues:

"The key to me is that I do nothing for fun, and what I do I do carefully. I've weighed the situation here. We can survive it." ■

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*Jack Foisie's first tour in Saigon for The Los Angeles Times lasted two years. For the next seven years he returned for six- to nine-month stretches to support his colleagues. He is a 1947 Nieman Fellow.*

## A Rewrite of the Clips on Ted Turner

It Ain't as Easy as It Looks

Porter Bibb

Crown. 468 Pages. \$25.

BY PETER M. HERFORD

**T**ed Turner is one of the more interesting figures of the communications revolution of the late 20th Century, a prime target for a biography. A target Porter Bibb has put his sights on and missed.

"It Ain't As Easy As It Looks" is an apt title to describe Ted Turner's entrepreneurial life; it is also an apt verdict for this biography.

Bibb's material, judging from the 31 pages of source notes, was limited to previously published articles in newspapers and magazines. The bibliography is rarely referred to in the source notes. Bibb trumpets the fact that this is an unauthorized biography. That is usually good news, but not in this case. Ted Turner was not available to the author. Most of the central figures in his life and his corporation seem to have been equally unavailable. The personal interviews are preponderantly with people who were peripheral in Turner's life. Where does that leave the reader?

Anyone who follows the communications and film industry will find little that is new in this biography. It's a clip job, pulling together other people's work. Moreover, the insights are often clichés. For example, from Dennis Conner's autobiography: "His kind of aggressive leadership works well when times are tough....But it can be counterproductive when things are going well."

The introduction says the book is the result of 200 interviews. A check of the notes reveals that only 48 of those interviews made it into print. There is no list of the people interviewed. Whole chapters are a pastiche of newspaper and magazine articles. The author has an artful way of making the reader believe he had access to his subject: "Turner

took his feet off the desk, walked to a window overlooking the Progressive Club golf course, and, assuming his version of a statesmanlike pose, put down his Havana and stuffed his hands in his pocket." A careful reading of the source notes reveals that this description was part of a story in either *The Atlanta Constitution* or Hank Whittemore's 1990 book "CNN: The Inside Story," not the result of the author observation.

There are errors of fact: Professor Andrew Stern was not a "director of the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of California at Berkeley," he was a lecturer. Intervision was not "the official Soviet international television agency." It was a cooperative television news and program exchange including all Eastern European broadcasters and the old Soviet Union. The author suggests that Peter Arnett's broadcast coverage from Baghdad during the Gulf War put him: "...well on his way to another Pulitzer Prize." The Pulitzer prizes are offered for print, not broadcast journalism. "Ernest Leiser took early retirement shortly thereafter, assuming a senior teaching post at the Columbia School of Journalism." Leiser did not assume a senior teaching post at Columbia, he was chosen to be a Fellow at the Freedom Forum where he worked on a book.

Bibb calls himself an investment banker and media specialist but he also seems to feel himself qualified to offer us his medical diagnosis. He contends that Ted Turner is a manic depressive who has been treated with lithium. Bibb's diagnosis is derived from secondary source quotes from Turner's former pilot and companion J.J. Ebaugh woven together with quotes from doc-

tors who have studied depression. There is no indication that any of the doctors quoted ever treated Turner. The author then cements his case with the following sentence, for which there is no attribution: "Turner himself agrees the lithium has put him on a relatively even keel."

Turner's love life is prominently displayed in words and pictures. Liaisons are tossed about in knowing fashion: "Turner's extraordinary libido often led him into odd extramarital liaisons..." This caption heads a page which shows six women and leaves the reader with the distinct impression that Mr. Turner had extramarital affairs with all of them. The evidence presented runs the gamut from shreds to hearsay to none.

The shortage of sources includes no access to papers, letters, or memos. We are left with a troubling effort at biography which has little to add to what has already been in print.

Ted Turner has been a major player in shaping the current communications universe. His empire includes five major cable channels, a radio network, and the largest television news-gathering organization in the world. There is every reason to believe that an autobiography would be fascinating. Surely his personality will compel him to give us his version of the many Turners we have come to know. Bibb has produced little more than an edited version of the work of others. He has not been generous in attributing his book to the original work of reporters and authors who preceded him. ■

*Peter M. Herford spent 30 years as a broadcast journalist before assuming his current position as Associate Professor of Journalism at the Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University.*

## Power Feminism, the Media and Government

Fire With Fire:

The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century

Naomi Wolf

Random House. 373 Pages. \$21.

BY JACK KAMMER

There is much for the egalitarian mind to like about "Fire With Fire," but the admirable parts of Naomi Wolf's new book make the less commendable sections all the more disappointing.

The author displays courage and candor in expressing sentiments she surely knew would bring stinging reproach from her feminist allies. She speaks lovingly of male energy and sexuality. She challenges the duplicity of some feminist tactics. She offers a sincere and thoughtful acknowledgment of the difficulties of the abortion issue.

Perhaps the most admirable part of "Fire With Fire" is its analysis of "victim feminism." Wolf paints a grim picture of a rape crisis center she served as a volunteer. With purposely bare walls, intentionally glaring, shadeless light bulbs and devoutly depressed staff, the agency is Wolf's potent metaphor for the ideology that insists the movement for women's equality must be gaunt, pathetic and joyless. Her antidote for this "hierarchy of miserable saintliness" is "power feminism"—robust, creative and fun.

Such freshness raises the anticipation that Wolf might provide a breakthrough in feminist thought. But that hope is dashed by her stale analyses of male power in government and the media.

To support her presumably straight-faced claim that "the mainstream media leave out women in general, and the women's movement in particular," Wolf cites the Journal Graphics 1992 index of public affairs programming. "The entire category for women..." she tells us, "took up 12 pages—one page less [her emphasis] than the amount of space

devoted to the single category 'H. Ross Perot.'" Apparently she thinks that eccentric Texas billionaires running for president fairly represent "men" as a basis for comparison with "women." On the other hand, perhaps she chose purposefully not to disclose that the actual category "men" occupies only three pages in that same Journal Graphics list.

Furthermore, while complaining of men's "75-25 advantage in the struggle for recognition in the press," Wolf never considers the likely possibility that female journalists and women in the news speak of women's issues far more often than prominent males give voice to the concerns of their gender. Can there be any doubt that Ellen Goodman does more for women's issues in a week than David Broder, George Will and William Safire do for men's gender-based concerns in a year?

The closest Wolf comes to offering a plan for dealing with the media is to urge, "If you don't like your group's image in the media, decide on another image and seize control of the means of producing it." The implicit element of the plan is that the seizing must be done by feminist journalists who are committed more to feminism than to journalism. "[W]hen enough women are in place and the winds shift," she says approvingly, "we see that women do indeed promote their own interests." Ordinary female journalists, on the other hand, will not serve Wolf's purposes because, as she acknowledges, they don't cite female sources any more frequently than male writers do.

Her analysis of government is similarly shallow. Like most feminist rhetoricians, she points to the number of



men in Congress and concludes that males have too much political power. But this is like counting women in supermarkets and deciding they have too much food. The last thing traditional women think about having for dinner is what they themselves want; they are far more concerned about fulfilling the appetites and nutritional requirements of the people they love. So it is with men in government. Whether liberal or conservative, they are traditional in the important sense that they have had to break no new gender ground to be where they are, and the last thing on their minds is what they or other men want or need "as men." (Does Wolf believe that Congress is pursuing a "masculist" legislative agenda? If it were, would research into breast cancer be budgeted at \$8,639 for each of the U.S.'s 46,300 annual deaths from that malady,

while each of 35,000 yearly prostate cancer fatalities warrants only \$1,114? Moreover, would Congress be able to look at the monumental fact that men have seven years less life than women and still fret about a "crisis in women's health"?)

Indeed, Wolf spends considerable time helping us look through the eyes of young women at the heavy burdens and scant rewards of political power. She asserts repeatedly that "the female psyche...harbors great ambivalence about claiming power." Her point here is to urge women to overcome their reluctance to enter politics, yet she attributes women's failure to rise to the opportunity not to women's own cost/benefit analysis, but rather to a vague notion of "the opposition," which she describes as "those men and male-dominated institutions that are actively resisting women's advancement."

After listening to Wolf's timid young women fretting that running for political office is "just not worth it" because of the contention and public criticism entailed, it seems unfair, to say the least, to blame men for women's absence from the trenches. And since Wolf herself acknowledges that "generations of female college students opt for humanities studies that guarantee them the lowest professional salaries while 80 percent to 90 percent of undergraduates in the high-paying hard science, engineering, and math fields are male," it makes even less sense to blame men for the earnings gap.

But blame she does. And vengeance she seeks. Female fantasies of retaliation and retribution against men constitute one of Wolf's major themes. "Looking at how easy it is for women to treat men in cruel ways is oddly liberating," she says.

Wolf's delight in retaliation fantasies is childish, a point she unwittingly makes abundantly clear in her discussion of how little girls lust for power before they are told that "being nice" and "being popular" are more important. Her interviewees speak of childhood "fantasies of being rulers, queens and empresses; memories of harboring grudges and wishes for retaliation that had elements of cruelty and domination." Wolf

reports that "Many women remember being convinced in girlhood that they were secretly descended from royal blood, and would soon be revealed in all their aristocratic splendor to abash those who had humiliated them." It is here that she inadvertently shows the connection between immaturity and "power feminist" certitude: "Every molecule of the child seeks every pleasure. She is sensuous, grasping, self-absorbed, fierce, greedy, megalomaniacal, and utterly certain that she is entitled to have her ego, her power, and her way."

Wolf urges women to seize their power and pursue their interests as a majoritarian voting bloc. She stipulates the need for "absolute fairness to men, ... consciousness of women's own capacity for oppressive deeds, and ... a cogent set of ethics," but she seems unable to suggest a code of principles more influential than her repeated phrase "more for women"—with women as the sole and self-absorbed arbiters of what they should take and how much is enough.

It seems necessary to ask how "power feminists" like Wolf can be trusted to

put aside their fantasies of revenge and govern fairly for both genders. After all, Wolf acknowledges that "girls do not learn from their societies what fairness or victory feel like....In contrast to the ethos of boys' sports teams, girls' social organization is profoundly subjective and undemocratic."

Moreover, we should ponder whether, for instance, the Senate would be more or less balanced between women and men if it comprised 50 traditional males like the ones who are there now and 50 "power feminists" like Naomi Wolf.

Some feminists, believing they have been treated like children by that ubiquitous and all-purpose bugaboo "the patriarchy," apparently feel justified in acting like children—and therefore have a lot to learn about the responsible, selfless use of power. ■

*Jack Kammer's first book, "Good Will Toward Men: Women Talk Candidly About the Balance of Power Between the Sexes," was published in February by St. Martin's Press.*

## Electronic Sources of Ethics Information

The electronic information highway does have an ethical side. Actually there are several sources of information about ethics for journalists and others.

First the US Office of Government Ethics (OGE) has a free electronic bulletin board system that covers ethics regulations and ethics training. The bbs is open to the government ethics community and to those members of the public interested in government ethics. It provides Informal Advisory Letters, Memoranda, and Formal Opinions of the OGE as well as a list of international contacts who are involved in ethics training. To reach The Ethics Bulletin Board System, which is available 7 days a week, dial 202-523-1186 from your computer modem.

On the Internet there is a Usenet newsgroup "alt.politics.media" for discussion about media political coverage and ethics. Messages in a Usenet newsgroup are available on many bulletin boards, Internet access sites, and commercial information services. Readers can also contribute their own opinions via e-mail.

For discussions of biomedical ethics, including issues such as the right to die, abortion, suicide and drug legislation, join the Biomed-L mailing list. To participate send an e-mail message to [LISTSERV@VM1.NODAK.EDU](mailto:LISTSERV@VM1.NODAK.EDU) and include this line "SUBSCRIBE BIOMED-L <your full name>" in the body of the message.

One final mailing list that deals with topics of interest to journalists and journalism educators is *Journet*. To join in send an e-mail message to [LISTSERV@quecdn.queensu.ca](mailto:LISTSERV@quecdn.queensu.ca) and include this line "SUBSCRIBE JOURNET <your full name>" in the body of the message. —Lewis C. Clapp

## TV, the First Amendment and the Death Penalty

Pictures at an Execution

Wendy Lesser

Harvard University Press. 288 Pages. \$24.95.

BY BRETT ALEXANDER

I must admit, at first I was reluctant to read Wendy Lesser's "Pictures at an Execution." Who wants to spend their free time reading an essay about the demerits of televising executions? My weekend speed is more like John Grisham. And, anyway, how could "Pictures at an Execution" possibly be pleasant reading for someone who earns a living working in the television industry?

One chapter in and I was ready to send the book to sleep with the fishes. But, as I stayed with it, I found my reluctance unwarranted.

Lesser does take some nips at television. But, her bite is evenly spread across a wide spectrum of American culture. Her book is as much an ethical exploration of the writings of Dostoyevsky and Norman Mailer as it is about Jeffrey Dahmer and Geraldo Rivera.

Reading Lesser one realizes how crazy a society we have become. We complain about violence in the streets and nauseam while lining up at bookstores for the newest true-life murder novelization. Lesser blames our voyeuristic nature for this, and she is right. We complain about too much violence on television, then we tune out a PBS documentary about whales in favor of not one, but three Made For TV Movies about Amy Fisher.

Speaking of Amy Fisher, Lesser's chapter on The Sleaze Factor stands out. She clearly despises author Joe McGinniss for his dealing and double-dealing with the murderer Jeffrey MacDonald. And she is no fan of Janet Malcolm, whose book about the McGinniss/McDonald publication partnership turned double-cross Lesser finds just as unethical as McGinniss's

"Fatal Vision."

Now the editor of a literary review, Lesser developed her macabre interest in the cultural interpretations of deadly violence when she taught an adult education course on the subject at the University of California at Berkeley in the mid-seventies. Fifteen years later she taught a similar course at the University of California at Santa Cruz. Between there had been tremendous growth in the art industry of murder, including the publication and distribution of a third of the works she uses as source material in this book, works like Mailer's "The Executioner's Song," Joan Didion's "The White Album" and Errol Morris's film, "The Thin Blue Line."

"Pictures at an Execution" leaps across a wide landscape of aesthetic images and issues, leading us on a sometimes frustrating, but always eye opening and entertaining tour through the author's vast warehouse of knowledge: from King Lear to Hannibal Lecter, from Bigger Thomas to Ted Bundy, the reader is steered along by Lesser's steady, clear prose and often dead-on wit. And always there to secure Lesser's insights is the well-chronicled case of KQED v. Vasquez.

KQED v. Vasquez was a 1991 San Francisco trial in which a public broadcasting station sued the warden of San Quentin for, mainly, the right to televise a coming execution. Because of its potential long-term implications, the trial drew national attention, further fueled the on-going death penalty battle, and made media stars (at least briefly) of many of its participants.

The central question in KQED v. Vasquez was: Is the television news representation of an execution justifi-

able on First Amendment grounds? The details of the case were simple, if nothing else about the trial was. KQED requested from San Quentin permission to videotape the execution of Robert Alton Harris. Warden Daniel Vasquez refused. KQED sued, arguing among other things that an execution was an extension of the criminal trial process and should be included in the decisions that allowed for the videotaping of trials in California.

The state, in arguing against KQED's position, raised a host of security issues, including the seemingly ludicrous fear of riots inside and out of the prison if an execution were broadcast. In the end the judge agreed with most of the state's arguments, finding against KQED.

In her presentation of the trial, not surprisingly, feeling as strongly as she does against the death penalty, Lesser seems to believe ethical considerations outweighed any legal ones in this case. Often belittling television's side in the case, she pooh-poohs the strongest testimony on KQED's behalf, reducing a First Amendment argument to what is apparently in her mind one of greed, sleaze and voyeurism.

In the most convincing argument for the inclusion of television cameras at an execution, CBS News Producer George Osterkamp testified that the television camera was "simply a tool, but a wonderful tool" that, as Lesser paraphrased, "can give us more evidence than we've ever had before, and thereby help us know about things that previously seemed insoluble mysteries."

But Lesser buys none of this. To her

*Continued on page 111*

## Grace Under Pressure—A Lesson for Complainers

### Death Beat

A Colombian Journalist's Life Inside the Cocaine Wars

Maria Jimena Duzan

Harper/Collins. 288 Pages. \$22.

BY ELAINE SHANNON

In 1982, Maria Jimena Duzan, then 24, plunged into the Andes with a toothbrush and a tape recorder, located the high command of Colombia's ferocious and elusive M-19 guerrillas and spent a month trudging with them through the malaria-ridden jungle.

Upon her return to Bogota, she discovered that her newspaper, *El Espectador*, was headlining her disappearance and probable death. She went straight from the airport to the paper, embraced her stunned colleagues, sat down at her typewriter and started banging out what would become a path-breaking series on the rebels. Near midnight, she finally began to succumb to fatigue and headed for home to shower and sleep.

"I started to climb the stairs," she writes. "Suddenly, I had the hellish feeling of being torn apart, hurled into the air, and slammed to the floor as if a catapult had suddenly seized me....I was not badly hurt, but I could feel that my back was bleeding, that splinters of wood from the door had dug into me like projectiles....The whole entrance to the house had been ripped apart. The bomb, I was sure, had been timed for my arrival."

Just then, the telephone rang. "The bomb was set by MAS, bitch," the caller growled. "The next time, we'll kill you." The Medellin drug cartel used the *nom de guerre* MAS—Muerte al Secuestadores, Death to Kidnappers—to attack the leftists and anyone who helped them.

This terrifying episode taught Duzan two lessons which now seem obvious but which have eluded many Colombian and U.S. authorities: first, Duzan

was marked for death by the drug traffickers merely because she had interviewed M-19 leaders. The logical conclusion was that Colombia could not remain a democracy if it reached a political accommodation with the drug cartels.

In 1982, the traffickers were tolerated socially, politically and legally. Even today, many Colombians and some Americans argue that the Colombian government should let the traffickers be and that the U.S. government should legalize drugs. But, as the attack on Duzan showed, the cartel leaders were not content with economic power and protection from arrest. They wanted to control what the Colombian people thought, which meant dictating what journalists wrote. They had no concept of liberty in general and intellectual liberty in particular. If they had a political ideology, it tended toward fascism. Duzan had known, before she set off for the jungle, that the cartel leaders did not want journalists to write about themselves and their friends. Now she saw that they meant to prevent her from writing about their enemies as well.

Their determination to deny the press and all Colombians freedom of speech and action became even more manifest during the 1980's, as the cartel's MAS death squads, which often included right-wing military officers, massacred leftist peasant leaders and human rights activists.

The second lesson from the bombing was that the Medellin cartel had an intelligence network far superior to that of the government. The government, like her friends, had given her up for dead. But the cartel knew, within hours of her emergence from the jungle, pos-

sibly even before, that she was alive and that she intended to write about the M-19. Her mother and sister, who were in the house, had not tripped the bomb. That meant that cartel had known just about exactly when she would cross her threshold.

The cartel forced Duzan into hiding and, for a period, self-exile in the U.S. In 1986, cartel leaders ordered the assassination of her beloved mentor, Guillermo Cano, the crusading publisher of *El Espectador*. They truck-bombed The *El Espectador* offices in 1989. The next year, a right-wing death squad with probable cartel links assassinated her sister Sylvia while she was making a television documentary called "The Veto Power of the Drug Dealers in 1990 Elections."

But for all its power, the cartel could not stop Duzan, a 1992 Nieman Fellow, from writing. All through her personal tragedies and the sorrows that afflicted all Colombians—the assassinations of presidential candidates, cabinet ministers, journalists, police officers, judges, political activists and countless innocent bystanders—she forged ahead, reporting lucidly and incisively about the drug traffickers, the guerrillas and, most importantly, the poverty, hopelessness and oppression that permitted them to flourish.

Duzan's autobiography, "Death Beat: A Colombian Journalist's Life Inside the Cocaine Wars" should be required reading for all journalists and not just those starting out in the business.

Duzan's cool-headed, thorough reportage and analysis and her grace under unimaginable pressure serve as a lesson and a reproach to every one of us who has ever complained about a busted computer or a rejected expense account



or a bad meal in Port-au-Prince. Duzan did not outfit herself in Banana Republic khaki, dip in and out of fashionable trouble spots and then hold court at Elaine's or P.J. Clarke's, regaling her fellows with journalistic war stories. She remained committed to her place and her purpose and never lost her head or her heart.

Duzan's frame of reference is the drug issue, but her book is valuable for more elemental insights into how people react to extraordinary stress. Some people lose their commitment to abstractions like truth and justice. For others, those values become supreme.

For instance, Duzan writes that after Guillermo Cano's murder, journalists from a number of Colombia media outlets formed a group called "the Kremlin" and began collaborating on stories about Colombia's underworld. Duzan says the cooperative effort fell apart when the group discussed whether to report on the Cali cartel, the Medellin cartel's chief rival.

"Cali's operations were less bloody, more businesslike, therefore less obviously 'newsworthy,'" Duzan writes. "In addition, the members of the Cali cartel were (and still are) part of the traditional wealthy business class, owners of major businesses and even media outlets in Cali and thus had seemed untouchable.... Nobody wanted to be the first to point the finger at the Cali dealers, whose lawyers were always ready to threaten lawsuits and to lobby with publishers against reporters' efforts to 'defame innocent businessmen.' Suddenly, those of us who were left in the Kremlin realized we were a minority."

With the power to remain largely invisible inside Colombia, the Cali cartel would become the most powerful organized crime cabal in the history of the world. By 1991, Cali's "caballeros"—gentlemen—had shoved the crude Medellin bunch aside and had acquired control of most of the wholesale cocaine market in North America and virtually the entire European and Asian cocaine trade, its tentacles extending as far as Russia and Tokyo.

Duzan could not prevent Cali's supremacy—who could?—but it is to her

credit that she sensed Cali's growing influence at a time when nearly all the press was focusing on Medellin kingpin Pablo Escobar as the Great Satan of the drug trade. By the time Escobar was killed by Colombian police in December 1993, he was a historical relic.

Duzan's book contributes much to our understanding of the cultural and political forces at work in Colombia, where the drug trade is merely a symptom of deeper problems. She ties the origins of the outlaw culture to Colombia's civil war, La Violencia, which ended in 1957 with an armistice between two privileged and selfish factions, the Conservatives (roughly, the old, landed rich) and the Liberals (the new, urban rich). The peace agreement created an oligarchy that ignored the misery of most Colombians.

"The people of my generation saw no ideological differences between the two parties, which they believed had coalesced into a single power structure," she writes. "The other Colombia, the Colombia of teeming slums, marked by exile from the land and no escape from poverty, was neither cared about nor heard from. Despite the National Front, new forms of violence were emerging, a product of the social injustice that was not being addressed by the traditional parties and that served as a breeding ground, first for the guerrilla movement and then for the drug dealers, both of whom capitalized on the people's discontent." ■

*Elaine Shannon, 47, Nieman Fellow 1975, is a correspondent in the Washington bureau of Time Magazine, where she covers criminal justice and national security issues. She is the author of a best-selling book, "Desperados: Latin Drug Lords, U.S. Lawmen and the War America Can't Win." (Penguin Books, 1988, 1989.) "Desperados" served as the basis for two NBC docudramas, which won an Emmy in 1990. "Drug Wars II," broadcast in 1992, was nominated that year for an Emmy.*

## Death Penalty

*continued from page 109*

Osterkamp's argument is reasonable but television is not: "It insists on its own specialness, its own near approach to the truth."

She raises some other engaging points, doubts the objectivity of the camera as well as the motives of the people behind the camera, assumes to advocate for the general viewing public and moralizes about audience effect with sweeping statements like: "I'm thinking of what it would mean about us, the audience, if we allowed someone's actual murder to become our Theater of Cruelty, our self-reflective murder film."

But as thought-provoking as Lesser's book is, it takes a leap of faith I'm not ready to take, to accept her passionate assertion that penal execution is murder. Murder is by definition (in my dictionary, at least) an illegal act that leads to death. Thus, by strict definition, as long as the courts uphold state-run executions, though they may be immoral and unethical (that is another story), they are not illegal.

This does not diminish what Lesser has accomplished: a smart work of art and media criticism that provides plenty to think about for anybody interested in our values, as a society, and as individuals. ■

*Brett Alexander, Nieman Fellow 1990, is a producer at CBS News/48 Hours.*

## Nieman Notes

Contributions to Nieman Notes are being included in the rest of the magazine for this issue, which is being devoted to a discussion of ethics. Regular Nieman Notes will be resumed in the Summer Edition. Please write us.

## Nieman Deaths

1950

**John McCormally**, 71, died of cancer last December 22 at his home in Burlington, Iowa. He was the former Editor-publisher of *The Hawk Eye*.

On his retirement in 1989 he had been with the Harris Group newspapers for 39 years, a journalist for five decades. In 1965, while he was editor, *The Hutchinson News* won a Pulitzer Prize for public service.

Bill Mertens, now Editor-Publisher of *The Hawk Eye*, said of McCormally, "He struck a model the rest of us never could, or will, match. But he helped make many of us better journalists, and better people, by setting standards for passion and compassion that were unequalled at newspapers of any size."

McCormally is survived by his wife, Peggy, five sons, two daughters, one brother and 10 grandchildren.

1966

**Howard Kahn Spergel**, who wrote, produced, and directed educational programs for WGBH-TV, in Boston, died in Norwood, Mass. last December 29 after a long illness. He was 56.

He was also director of educational programming for the Eastern Educational Television Network.

Spergel served two terms on the Newton, Mass. School Committee, and also served on a financial advisory committee for the town of Amherst.

He is survived by his wife, Dancy Spergel, of Norwood, his daughters, Lisa Spergel-Macomber of Wrentham, Mass. and Kathryn McManus of Honolulu, and his mother and father of New York City.

1971

**Jerome R. Watson**, 55, the Washington bureau chief of *The Chicago Sun-Times*, died of a brain tumor in Potomac, Maryland last December 19.

Watson had been in *The Sun-Times* Washington bureau since 1977. He became White House correspondent in 1981 and bureau chief in 1987.

A friend and Nieman classmate, John Pekkane, said of Watson, "All of us who witnessed him undergoing his long ordeal were awed by his fearlessness, and his fierce will to survive." Dennis A. Britton, Editor and Executive Vice president of *The Chicago Sun-Times* said in that paper's obituary, "Jerry Watson was the consummate journalist," who "cared deeply about his readers....He was regarded by other Washington journalists as the model correspondent..."

He is survived by his wife, Jerilyn, two sons, Corin and Miles, his mother, a sister, and a brother. ■

## Nieman Reports

### On Electronic Newsstand

Readers who can access the Internet from their computers will soon be able to find Nieman Reports on the Electronic Newsstand. In addition to information about the current issue of Nieman Reports, a complete table of contents and excerpts from some of the major articles, there will be electronic archives of information from past issues. The Electronic Newsstand can be reached on many gopher servers. If you need further information please contact Nieman Reports for details. ■

### Internet and E-mail Directory Of Nieman Fellows

The Nieman Foundation is compiling a directory of the electronic addresses of former Nieman Fellows and major journalism organizations. We invite all fellows to send their Internet and E-mail electronic addresses to us either by snail mail (i.e. conventional mail) or electronically to [nreports@husc.harvard.edu](mailto:nreports@husc.harvard.edu) (our Internet address). The completed directory and timely updates will be sent electronically to each person on the list. ■

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